

Observations, Considerations and Recommendations by Engage Gwinnett work groups

Community Services Work Group

Divided into specific areas: Health and Human Services, Library, and Parks and Recreation

Health and Human Services

Observations

- Benefit: Safety net for those at risk and most vulnerable
- Benefit: Information, education, awareness
- Benefit: Early intervention before a situation gets worse (or before government services are needed)
- Losing ground on positive indicators Gwinnett County has seen in the past – looking more like urban centers
- Privatized in a sense – no personnel costs
- Leverage is very important – coalition and coordination
- Research and data are being used to prioritize and focus on needs in community
 - Also used for grants from outside of county
 - Coalition has created strategic plan
- Big difference between subsidies: Hospital, DFCS, MH, BOH; vs. Ch Shelter, BF Gw, Coalition, etc.
- Senior population growing greatly
- Haven't done adequate planning for senior growth – not just community services, but also transportation, planning, etc. – we're just playing catch-up now
- Senior services funding is based on census (change in funding will come in approximately 2012) – mainly work with seniors ages 80+; very few services are available for 60 to 80 year-olds.
- More needs than funds
- Granting system is not working
- Losing ground on Health and Human Services indicators
- Outsourced in a sense – no personnel costs
- County is mandated to provide senior services – need to identify
- Leverage provided by subsidy funding is important
- Public health money is based on 1970s population
- Cannot afford to lower funding for Health and Human Services
- Senior population growing greatly
- All County Departments need to consider the great senior population increase in planning for future senior services and needs
- Seniors are living longer
- Approximately 50% of children in school are on free or reduced lunch
- County is mandated to provide Senior Services

Considerations

- Subsidy process broken
 - Can't not provide health and human services funding
 - Revise process – Gwinnett Coalition for HHS (or another central agency) be a re-granting agency to address specific needs and leverage capacity
 - Can ill afford to reduce funding
 - Basis of funding shouldn't be "because we always have"
 - May not be addressing biggest needs today
- How do you prioritize?

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- Create fees for some services
 - Out of sight, out of mind concern
- What group should be involved in planning senior services? (study)
 - Coalition sub-committee
 - Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services
 - Planning Department
 - ARC
 - Non-biased
- Why are Public Health dollars based on 1970s population?
- What would be the possible consequences of the coalition being charged as the re-granting agency?
- Want more agencies considered for subsidy funding
- Consider having Coalition (or another existing group – not a new one) assume responsibilities for regranting subsidy funding
 - More efficient
 - Certain subsidies (hospital system and public health) may need to be treated differently from smaller ones

Recommendations

- Advocate state funding for public health based on current census
- Revised process for results-based strategic (accountability, process, needs assessment, strategic plan) subsidies funding for coalition to take on this responsibility – Commissioners would set the dollar amount annually
- Level of funding not be cut any further
- Maintain current level of subsidy funding
 - Establish more efficient granting process that meets current needs, without creating a new entity
- Implement 1997 Board of Commissioners resolution empowering Coalition and requiring subsidies to address needs in comprehensive plan and opening the possibility of funding to other non-profits that are addressing pressing needs
- Don't cut senior services – need is greater than we're addressing and is going to increase dramatically
- A study of senior services be commissioned to assess needs and what is already being done (cost)
- Advocate for an increase in public health funding based on current population rather than based on Gwinnett's 1970 population

Library

Observations

- Budget has been constant for last three years
- Only change Hamilton Mill branch
- It is a well-run organization
- Current staffing model is very rigid – may be a structural defect that needs to be addressed with need to cut budget
- Quantify savings of regional model – need thoughtful presentation of what it involves (recommendation)
- After several decades of growth in the county tax digest, in 2009 Gwinnett County experienced a decline in the tax digest. 2009 was a wake-up call for the government and the citizens of Gwinnett County. We anticipate further declines in the tax digest before it

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begins to increase again. We should make recommendations that take this volatility into account while still providing some predictability. If the tax digest declines or increases by more than x% (10?), then the Board of Commissioners should revisit budget recommendations.

- Public library supports pre-kindergarten through 12th grade education – public, private and home schooling

Considerations

- Potentially degraded services
- Hours stay the same, services may be different
- Might promote efficiency and creativity of how to address future funding decline
- Technology changes in five years may be enormous
- Maintain high quality of service with more flexibility
- There is a need for meeting space

Recommendations

- Level of expertise/education – does there really need to be the three required, degreed personnel at the library at all times?
- Alternative personnel/staffing patterns at library
- Different services at different times
- More centralized responsibilities for some things
- Better leveraging of volunteers (community service, seniors, youth, etc.)
- Each library facility should be viewed as a branch of a central library system
- Revisit regional/tiered system – cost savings
- Inappropriate to assume “one size fits all”
- Defer/suspend new sites (renovations okay)
- Reconsider replacement facilities
- Consider implications of online access: hours of operation, staffing, cost (impending technological changes)
- Continue with state funding
- Reduce library staffing budget by 5% in 2011 and an additional 5% in 2012. This level should be maintained through 2014. The staffing budget reductions may be absorbed at management’s discretion, except that hours of operation should remain at 71 hours per week. We strongly encourage the library board and leadership to explore alternative staffing models, including but not limited to:
 - Aggressively increasing volunteer staff at all libraries
 - Re-engineering the model of maintaining multiple degreed personnel to accomplish tasks that could be completed by non-degreed staff or volunteers
 - Limiting availability of non-core services to certain times or days at some locations
 - Engaging Friends of the Library to muster a volunteer recruitment, training and placement campaign
- Fix five-year budget at 2010 levels – quantify savings on regional/tiered system
- Meeting space should be made available for homework, study, independent team problem solving during afternoons, evening and weekends

Parks and Recreation

Observations

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- Eliminated 18 full-time positions in operations and one full-time manager position
- Reduced facilities' operations hours
- Reduced recreational programs and services, and special events
- Deferred capital projects

Considerations

- Community may benefit from county and Board of Education to work together better: communications, coordination of facilities, planning

Recommendations

- Use SPLOST money to renovate parks that will result in future costs savings (in lieu of additional/new parks) (i.e., artificial turf, diff lighting, natural landscaping, etc.)
- Honor system parking fees
- Fees raised to cover real costs of athletic activities (staffing, lighting, use of facilities, etc.)
- Active recreational facilities – recoup more of their costs, evaluate potential for this (including EHC)
- Potential for privatization of some/all(?) facilities, i.e. courthouse
- More natural landscaping requires less upkeep
- Analyze coordination with GCPS – comm. Schools, use of ball fields, pools, etc., could Parks and Recreation leverage school fields more/better?
- Sell golf course – needs more discussion
- Online process to reserve fields, park, etc.
- Staff should explore potential financial benefits and other concerns related to charging user fees at parks and report to the Board of Commissioners

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Development and Infrastructure Work Group

Divided into specific areas: Planning and Development, Transportation, and Water and Sewer

Planning and Development

Observations

- Can permits and inspection be combined with license and review (consideration)
- County is perceived to be more pro-residential and anti-business development
- Conflicting policies in planning and development
- State responsibility of all roles of planning and development, Board of Commissioners and planning commission
- Planning and development department is and should be about generating revenue
- Planning and development is tasked with the future of Gwinnett County
- No near-term demand for outsourcing

Considerations

- Consider opportunities to combine departments (cross-train)
- Policy and procedures should be business friendly because businesses generate revenue. Our tax base is too heavily weighted to residential vs commercial.
- Review of services being provided that have nothing to do with permitting and planning (Matthew's efficiency report of Planning and Development)

Recommendations

- Board of Commissioners to maintain current permitting, processing and plan review service levels – keep us competitive when growth returns
- Department evaluate policies and procedures to ensure that they align with a pro-business environment
- Do not outsource any matters that have an effect on the future of Gwinnett County
- Fast track renaming the Planning and Development department to Planning and Economic Development
- Do not outsource any essential Planning and Development functions

Transportation

Observations

- Public transportation system serves less than 0.5% of population in Gwinnett
- Roads: SPLOST is capital only, not for operating
- Great strides in efficiencies and cost-cutting (maintenance)
- Centralized facility functional and efficient
- Everything stops at the county line – no coordination with the other counties

Considerations

- Will stimulus funds save costs on traffic lights? How much, now and in the future?
- 21st Century traffic control training (more efficient) – need more training
- The department of transportation has managed well within the box – time to consider a new box.
- Do a better job of marketing transit service

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- What role would technology play if starting a department from scratch?

Recommendations

- Ensure we're maximizing our use of technology
 - Staff trained and knowledgeable in its use
 - Develop plans and strategies
 - "Smart" technology
- Third party review of county's use of technology and facilitate integration across functions (e.g., traffic lights, public safety)
- Third party facilitation/review of inter-departmental coordination

Water and Sewer

Observations

- Goal is to pay as you go and reduce debt
- No more bonds
- Pays for itself through user fees
- Costs more to treat sewer than water (60% more)
- Water and sewer enterprise is on water bill
- Storm water is on property tax bill – funding is approximately 50% of what's needed

Considerations

- How do we address the storm water infrastructure failing? (cost)
- Shortfall in revenue from fees

Recommendations

- Re-state current policy

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Fire and Emergency Services

All departments are grouped together to take a “whole system” approach.

Observations

- These cuts have already been made:
 - Human resources from 3 to 1.5
 - Reduction in overall headcount – countered by new hires (need exact figures – we have them, and will find them)
 - Consolidation of warehouse (police warehouse added) – centralized inventory
 - Overall reduction in support personnel
 - Consolidated Fire Marshall, etc., in headquarters
 - Plan review has had cuts in Planning and Development
 - General Operating a/c's have had to cut certain percentages – more cuts than capital with personnel – example, fuel costs
- Gwinnett County has ensured that we have adequate staffing at each site – deliberate cross-training – Fire/EMT
- Interconnection of total system as it relates to service – not just your local station
- Very flexible/dynamic system and process
- Very well trained, professional staff that is well-equipped
- Outsourced some – fire hydrant inspection, EMS billing and collection
- Response time does not meet national standard
- Openness of fire chief and staff – very good attitude
- High morale and team spirit – team-based approach – morale high despite challenges
- Maintain an ongoing process of consistent interpretation of various codes
- Outsourcing was looked at – example: warehousing
- Improvement in relations between fire and hospital system
- Have tried to hire diverse staff – identified current staff and volunteers to promote education

Considerations

- Response time does not meet national standard
- Aging population in Gwinnett
- Impact of road system and congestion (response time), density, development types, redevelopment (CID)
- Halt in new development gives Fire Department time to catch up
- Gwinnett County strives to exceed the national standard
- Water delivery system affects ISO rating
- SPLOST must do what was voted on – result: unmanned stations, which must be staffed
- Georgia Gwinnett College's new dorms
- Cultural/language diversity
- Effectiveness and efficiency of 911 affects Fire/EMS
- First, do no harm – don't make it worse

Preliminary Recommendations

- We don't want to do any harm – don't want to go backwards
- Additional emphasis on citizen education and outreach for purposes of risk reduction – consider volunteers (expand CPR to include choking and other first aid)

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- Code adjustments – example, residential sprinklers (consideration) cost must be balanced with return (including maintenance costs) – example: dense single-family dwellings pose a different challenge for fire coordination with cities as well for interpretation
- Outdoor burning – education issue vs regulation issue? Tie in to HOAs, insert in water bills?
- Inspect fire hydrants more frequently

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Law Enforcement and Judiciary

All departments are grouped together to take a “whole system” approach. A numbering system is used to track Observations, Considerations and Recommendations that are related to one another.

Observations

- Police training facilities may be underutilized with current budgeting constraints
- Information is available online – general public is not aware of resources
- (1) Constitutional fees (not updated) outdated – does not reflect actual costs or cost of living
- (2) Justice system components are complex, interrelated and interdependent
- (3) Justice system could benefit from implementation of new technology

Considerations

- Explore partnership with NCR to automate court, fee and filing processes
- Consolidate all facility maintenance
- Expense of whole GJAC security
- Goal: create a world class justice system that is cost-effective, innovative across all platforms
- Use of police training facilities (after officers currently authorized by revised budget are trained) for outside agency training as revenue stream
- (1) Analyze and determine potential revenue with updated fee structure
- (2a) Greater efficiencies and client outcomes can be achieved by interdepartmental consultation
- (3a) Expedite implementation of Criminal Justice Information System – recognize investment in Criminal Justice Information System
- (2b) Assess cause/effect relationship between components of justice system
- (3c) Determine cost efficiency of online payment systems

Recommendations

- Ask county to reevaluate state mandated fees/price for service and court fees; advocate legislative action
- Privatization of collection of remaining unpaid fees/fines at end of probation period; recommend legislative action
- Explore indigent defense funding, fee per case vs. hourly defense
- Expedite “paperless” system for courts, filing fees, permits
- Use innovation to streamline all processes/implement technological advance to increase efficiency
- Explore outsourcing for / consolidation:
 - Corrections (privatizing)
 - Courthouse security
 - Building maintenance
 - Animal control
 - Process servers
- Re-examine basis for 2030 unified plan recommendation of 1.3 police officers per thousand population – use composite numbers of county and city police and population to determine current ratio and current ratio with sheriff’s department

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- Examine staffing of animal control and number of animals per household
- Recommend independent review of each judicial system department and the inter-connectivity/cause and effect/interaction of their budgeting, staffing and processes (possible task force of consultant/staff/citizen members)
- Education/community building to prevent code enforcement calls
- Solicitor's office explore level of charges not requiring jury trial (less than 6 months jail)
- "Summit meeting" of municipalities and county courts on fines and binding costs
- Explore state reimbursements for county services
- (1a) Support legislation to update Constitutional fees
- (1b) Recoup court costs
- (2a) Adopt a coordinated and strategic approach to justice system service delivery
- (3a) Expedite implementation of Criminal Justice Information System
- (3b) Explore private/public partnership for self-service or paperless delivery of services
- (3c) Implement online payment systems