

## Neighborhood Forum

### Chattahoochee Hill Country

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on July 7, 2008 in Chattahoochee Hill Country, in Fulton County. This forum was in support of the Atlanta Regional Commission's Fifty Forward visioning initiative and was focused on a major question facing the region in the next 50 years: How can we have growth and a clean and healthy environment? Fifty-three people participated in the Chattahoochee Hill Country forum. In the course of two hours, participants worked in small groups of 8 to 10 on a series of questions that helped them think about how the region can accommodate growth and a better environment.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 203 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- Support for **public transit**, including rail transit. One group said there was a need for "significant mass transit." Others suggested light rail, expansion of MARTA and "transit-centered development." But support for public transit was not unanimous. One small group said it believed, in 2058, there would be no need for public transit; that communities in the region would be intensely walkable.
- Support for **greater density in some parts of the region** so that other parts could remain mostly undeveloped. One group suggested that the region could become a leader by developing a land use plan similar to Chattahoochee Hill Country with "70 percent green space, 30 percent structure." A necessary by-product of preserving so much land, another group said, was "high-density and high-quality residential and business development."
- A desire for "**walkable**" communities, which feature mixed-use developments. Every small group cited walking, biking or services close to home as important for a healthy environment. One group offered a list of things that would be needed in these walkable communities: "conveniences of the city – close proximity to doctor, grocery, shopping, telecommuting".
- Interest in **creating and supporting "green" industries**, such as alternative energy companies, and in **existing industries adopting "green" technologies**. One group urged the region to "focus on specific industry . . . clean power, medical/life sciences (and) current corporations going green." Another group suggested tax incentives for alternative energy.

- Support for **protecting Atlanta’s water supplies**. One way the Atlanta Region could become an enviable place to live, one group said, was by conserving and preserving our watersheds. Another group was specific: What was needed was “stopping or controlling pollution (that’s) running off into Chattahoochee river; limiting impervious surfaces so useable water is cost-effectively enhanced.”

### Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by Jeff Breedlove, executive director of the Civic League, who turned the program over to Jon Abercrombie, the meeting facilitator. Jon explained that participants would work in small groups or “circles” of 8 to 10 people and would be asked to think about, discuss and come to consensus on several questions. Each group selected a “moderator” to act as facilitator and write the group’s comments on a large flip-chart pad.

The first question Jon asked was part of a scenario. Its purpose was to help the groups imagine how the region would look and work in 2058, if it were successful in creating growth and a healthy environment. Here’s the scenario:

*In 2058 iMag, the leading news web site of the 21st century, comes to our region to write about how the Atlanta Region has become a model for growth that does no harm to the environment.*

Here’s the question Jon posed to the groups:

*What does iMag photograph, videotape and write about? What lessons does it find that other regions could learn from?*

Jon gave the groups 50 minutes to work on this question. As they were finishing, Jon asked the groups to look over the ideas and images they had listed and highlight the ones they felt most reflected the rough consensus of the group – and also place a mark next to the one or two that they thought might be their most visionary ideas.



In the remainder of the meeting, Jon asked the groups to consider two other questions:

- *What do we need to preserve among things that already exist in the Atlanta Region today for the iMag article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*
- *What do we need to change in the Atlanta Region for the iMag article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*

The results of these three group discussions (a general vision of how the Atlanta Region can have growth and a healthy environment, the assets that should be preserved and things that should be changed) are in the following three sections of this report.

### Small Group Results: A Vision of Sustainability for the Atlanta Region

Here are the vision ideas – the things that participants felt iMag, the leading news provider of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, would focus on, if it were writing about the Atlanta Region as model metro area for sustainability in 2058.

#### Small Group 1:

- Here (Chattahoochee Hill Country):
  - Balanced growth
  - Quality development
  - Villages "tucked away"
  - Transit between villages and hamlets
  - Self-sustaining villages
  - Alternative energy
  - Tax incentives for alternative energy
  - Services close-by
  - Incentives to work at home - less dependent on cars
  - Transit-centered development
  - Thriving farming community here
- Atlanta:
  - Rapid transit
  - How we applied our density and green space values to Atlanta region
  - Tax incentives that helped us become more sustainable
  - Standardized solar or wind energy
  - Required "smart design" in homes and businesses
  - How we can walk to services
  - Incentives to work at home - less dependent on cars
  - Excellent schools
- Protecting the environment by:
  - Ending sprawl today
  - Commitment to planning
  - Transportation options
  - Alternate energy
  - Water - conserving
  - Leadership & education for change
  - Taking responsibility
- Atlanta region has prospered by:
  - Water & sewer
  - Planning
  - Transportation
- We have created partnerships of:
  - Industry
  - Government
  - Residents
  - All regional governments

#### Small Group 2:

- Lots of green space
- Preserved most scenic farms, forests, streams & historic sites
- Small hamlets throughout - emphasis on family

- Keep accessibility of parkway
- Strong sense of community and knowing and respecting neighbors
- Lots of mixed-use areas
- No big box stores
- Easy access to necessities - goods and services - grocery store
- Lack of auto congestion
- MARTA rail - access to Atlanta
- Communities that are not designed around the auto
- We conserve and preserve our water and river
- Low levels of air pollution
- Parks along the river
- Tax incentives given to people for reducing carbon footprint - region-wide
- Education re: sustainability mandatory in primary, secondary schools

Small Group 3:

- We can live and work within our community
- Preservation of green space, preferably with government funding
- Development will pay its own way
- High-density and high-quality residential and business development
- Green businesses, or technologically oriented businesses
- Water quality, preservation
- Development of self-sustaining sewer system with new development
- Atlanta becomes a leader in the region by developing a land use plan similar to Chattahoochee Hill Country - 70% green space, 30% structure
- All players (government, community, developers) work together in partnership
- Stopping/controlling pollution, running off into Chattahoochee river - limiting impervious surfaces so useable water is cost-effectively enhanced
- No need for trains or public transportation - "walking" community or bicycles or horseback

Small Group 4:

- It finds us as we are now in CHC - preserved, just a few houses, infill, green space and traditional farms preserved
- A two-lane road with bike - like it is today
- Parks with a new nature building, with school kids
- Committed to:
  - The residents - listening and partnering with the residents
  - Encourage preservation - whether farm or undeveloped
- Incentive green
  - Conservation reserve, recycling (without recycling center here), water resource protection, set aside development for green space (workable, consistent land use plan)
- Preserve history of area
- Invest in areas with infrastructure and preserve areas without infrastructure
- Transportation investment that's appropriate for area

- Policy infrastructure to incentivize sustainable activities - safer ponds, hydro, recycling, encourage green business (no heavy industries)
- Maintain green space infrastructure
- Community-based educational infrastructure
- Citizen partnership to maintain infrastructure
- Citizen-cooperative partnerships - citizen-owned businesses, ie biofuels, stills - energy production de-controlled

Small Group 5:

- It writes about Serenbe - cluster development with hiking trails - live, work, play
- Make sure protected green space is really protected, as stated in overlay - overlay strengthened
- It can't all look like Serenbe - no "one size fits all"
- Permanent green space is needed to make a difference
- Needs of farmers must be taken into consideration (property taxes, etc.)
- Healthy wildlife habitat - Including for long-lived species
- Connectivity of wildlife habitats for healthy, sustainable meta-populations, less habitat fragmentation
- Frogs, turtles and bunnies
- In Atlanta there are:
  - Gardens, community gardens
  - More people walking - amenities should be accessible by people on foot
  - A mix of ages living in an area
  - Redevelopment of brownfields and abandoned buildings
- The Atlanta Region is a leader in:
  - Sticking to a plan, not changing it every few years
  - Green space, green development
  - Planting trees, especially when you cut them down
  - Educating people about environmental protection
  - Wetlands, preservation and conservation
  - Protecting water and watersheds
- Infrastructure:
  - Traffic/transportation must be addressed
  - Emissions
  - Truck traffic needs to be transferred to other means of transport - trains
  - Light rail, for public transit
  - Wetlands, watershed protection
- Innovative partnerships:
  - Medical
  - Faith/stewardship
  - Engineers
  - Scientists
  - Developers who are part of the community and are eco-friendly
  - Academia - universities and students

Small Group 6:

- There are untouched and environmentally protected areas

- 70% and land is green space, which is low-impact, self-sustainable
- Significant mass transit - transformational forward-thinking
- Regional master plan - zoning, transportation
- Conveniences of city - close proximity - doctor, grocery, shopping, telecommuting
- Focus on specific industry - corporate identity - clean power, medical/life sciences, current corporations going green
- Telecommuting - communication superhighways
- Locally grown produce - community farms
- Communication between public (government) and private sectors
- Dedicated bicycle paths for every road
- Being comfortable in our neighborhoods
- Telecommuting infrastructure and sustainable, green energy

### Consensus Ideas

Here are the ideas, from those listed above, that the groups felt reflected a consensus of their thinking:

- Villages "tucked away"
- Transit between villages and hamlets
- Alternative energy
- Thriving farming community here
- Rapid transit in Atlanta
- Standardized solar or wind energy
- Lots of green space
- Strong sense of community and knowing and respecting neighbors
- Easy access to necessities - goods and services - grocery store
- MARTA rail - access to Atlanta
- Live and work within our community
- Green businesses, or technologically oriented businesses
- All players (government, community, developers) work together in partnership
- No need for trains or public transportation - "walking" community or bicycles or horseback
- Incentive green
- Citizen-cooperative partnerships - citizen-owned businesses, ie biofuels, stills - energy production de-controlled
- Make sure protected green space is really protected, as stated in overlay - overlay strengthened
- Needs of farmers must be taken into consideration (property taxes, etc.)
- Healthy wildlife habitat - Including for long-lived species



- Connectivity of wildlife habitats for healthy, sustainable metapopulations, less habitat fragmentation
- Green space, green development
- Protecting water and watersheds
- Traffic/transportation must be addressed
- Wetlands, watershed protection
- Significant mass transit - transformational forward-thinking
- Focus on specific industry - corporate identity - clean power, medical/life sciences, current corporations going green
- Telecommuting - communication superhighways

### **Visionary Ideas**

Here are the ideas, from those listed above, that the groups felt were their most visionary or “out of the box” ideas:

- Apply our density and green space values to Atlanta region
- Tax incentives given to people for reducing carbon footprint - region-wide
- Education re: sustainability mandatory in primary, secondary schools
- Maintain green space infrastructure
- Communication between public (government) and private sectors

### **Small-Group Results: Existing Assets That Should Be Preserved**

Here are existing assets that participants felt should be preserved, if the Atlanta Region is to become sustainable in 2058. These things could include physical assets, organizations or institutions, public policies or decisions, or positive traits or skills of the people who live here now.

Small Group 1:

- Physical Beauty
- Green space
- Community involvement
- Vision
- Living close to "the earth" – farming

Small Group 2:

- Overlay
- MARTA
- History of area
- Incumbent population
- Natural resources
- Rural landscape
- Sense of community
- Sense of partnership and collaboration between community, government and developers
- Citizen involvement
- Farms

Small Group 3:

- Transparency in government
- Citizen involvement in government
- Trees
- Rural ambience
- Community support groups
- Keep rural roads

Small Group 4:

- Sense of community
- Youth organizations
- Individuality/self sustainable
- Preserve history and sense of place
- Open communication between citizens and government

Small Group 5:

- Smith's Grocery
- Heritage
- Historic sites need protection
- Green space
- Farms
- Trees/habitat
- TDRs - transfer of development rights should be strengthened and expanded
- Community center
- Small communities within the region

Small Group 6:

- Young, great minds / students
- Strong, diverse economy
- Diverse population
- A lot of green space - regional
- Keep and maintain community identity / culture

**Small-Group Results: Things That Should Be Changed**

Here are things that participants felt would need to be changed if the Atlanta Region were to become sustainable in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Underdeveloped transit
- Underdeveloped infrastructure
- Lack of communication between government, businesses, community
- Unresponsive representation
- Sprawl
- Change short-sighted mindset

- Improve schools
- Development "power"
- Weakness of zoning

Small Group 2:

- Develop alternatives to auto transportation
- Excellent public schools
- More green communities
- Water conservation plan for region
- Sustainable infrastructure - sewage, water
- Establish area as a leader in organic farming (certified)

Small Group 3:

- Water quality in river
- Lack of willingness of governments in region to work together
- Get rid of developers who are only in it for profit and don't care about the community

Small Group 4:

- Get out of Fulton
- Fewer cars, more paths, trails
- More parks
- Health care - improve
- No landfills / reservoir
- Dominant sprawl growth pattern / change land use patterns



Small Group 5:

- Development as usual - people need other options - it should consider people's live-work-play needs
- Raise the bar in planning
- Government structure
- Better communication between municipalities
- Put ecology on the agenda

Small Group 6:

- Regional plan
- Funding
- Strengthen k-12 education
- Find ways to bring green space into urban areas
- Change the cookie-cutter concept
- Hold on residential building (restrictors) and commercial for one year
- Regional transit system (and integrated) that is mandatory
- More visionary leaders

**The Civic League Lineup**

As a final exercise, Jon asked participants to line up across the meeting room according to how hopeful they were that the Atlanta Region could achieve the things they had talked about that evening. On one wall, he posted a “1” and on the opposite wall, he posted a “10.” Those who were very pessimistic should line up near the 1, Jon said; those who were very optimistic should line up at the 10. Others should line up at a point reflecting degree of optimism and pessimism. A large majority lined up in the 7-10 part of the line.



**Snapshot of Participants**

The Civic League collected demographic surveys of the participants in this forum. Here are the results:

**Gender**

Male	49%
Female	51%

**Age**

Under 18	0%
18-24	2%
25-44	21%
45-65	52%
Over 65	25%

**Ethnicity**

Black or African American	10%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%

Hispanic/Latino	0%
White or Caucasian	88%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	2%
Other	0%

**ZIP Codes**

From 30268*	65%
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*\* This is the Chattahoochee Hill Country ZIP code.*

**About the Civic League**

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta is an organization that builds the knowledge, involvement, voice and power of metro Atlanta’s citizens. As part of the Civic League’s work, it convenes Neighborhood Forums where citizens can listen to one another and offer their own ideas for improving the region. The Civic League gathers and documents the citizens’ ideas and brings them to the attention of state, local and regional leaders.

In 2008 and 2009, we are working with the Atlanta Regional Commission on its Fifty Forward visioning initiative. Our role is to help bring the citizens’ voice to this effort to plan how our region will look and work in the year 2058.

In the years ahead, we will host other kinds of citizen gatherings, including forums on pressing regional issues and overlooked problems. Our format for those meetings will be similar to the Neighborhood Forums: facilitated, open-ended discussions aimed at gathering the citizens’ thoughts on important issues.