

## Neighborhood Forum

### South Cherokee

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on March 19, 2009 in South Cherokee County, at the Woodstock Community Center. 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 higher quality of life through decisions we make about land use? Sixty-two people participated in the South Cherokee 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 make diversity a major asset.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 309 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- **Transportation plays an important role in shaping land use and one of the key missing elements is public transit.** One group said there was a need for "integrated public transit throughout metro Atlanta." Others suggested specific transit projects: "elevated high-speed rail," "light commuter rail" and a "rail system to connect the airports."
- Another important element is **walkable, mixed-use development** designed to create a sense of community. One group wanted "Peachtree City" developments (after the planned community in Fayette County) and suggested things that would be in such developments: "community centers, blocks, day care, shopping, family areas/bonding, concerts." Another group suggested the region learn to "use air space," meaning, it said, to "build up, not out." Yet another group suggested the aim should be to create "better connected families and communities" through land use choices.
- Better land use means **greater attention to the environment**, several groups said. "More greenspace trails and recreation" are good land use choices, one group said. But others wanted more – a new infrastructure that reduced the region's impact on the environment. One group suggested that with better "awareness of how we create our own carbon footprint," the region could create demand for "hybrids (and) alternate energy forms." Another group said the region needed "infrastructure to support green technology" such as "places to plug in electric cars."
- Several groups thought none of these things would happen unless **citizens were enlisted in the effort in new ways.** Several pointed the finger at government for blocking progress. The region needs "more sensible government," one group said. But others were broader in their critique of what might prevent the region from moving forward. The Atlanta Region will become a leader in land use, one group predicted, when it learns "to just get the job done." That involves "less government, more people power," it went on, but it also involves focusing on "values" that the region and its communities "realize, define (and) communicate."

### Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by Myles Smith, executive director of the Civic League for Regional Atlanta, 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 higher quality of life through land-use decisions. 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 accommodating growth and improving its quality of life through choices made about land use in its neighborhoods, cities and counties.*



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 could accommodate growth and a higher quality of life through land-use decisions, 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 Quality Land Use for the Atlanta Region**

Here are the vision ideas – the things that participants felt iMag would focus on, if it were writing about the Atlanta region as the ideal or model community in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Parks/open space
- Flying cars
- Cross-regional transportation
- Public transit - alternative transportation
- More mixed-use development
- Flying surfboards and boats
- Improved communication
- Regional wireless network
- Floating houses
- Fresh water and better quality (reservoirs)
- More green space trails and recreation
- More tourism (local) and lodging
- Less traffic
- Better land-use planning
- Historic preservation/revitalization
- Solar powered cars - Less oil dependence
- Better air quality
- Telecommuting
- Affordable/quality housing
- Renewable resources
- State parks
- Arts
- Economic stability/health
- More schools/improved education
- More sensible government
- Local quality jobs
- Better, more affordable healthcare
- Better roads
- Reduced crime
- More libraries
- Flying shoes, bikes, cool flying stuff
- Holographic imaging and no Darth Vader

Small Group 2:

- Better public transportation
- Green space - trails, environment, recreation, walking

- Arts
- Shopping - better quality
- Water quality, availability
- Jobs - Windward
- Housing - corporate work centers, low density
- Waste management - better use of resources - recycle - non littering program
- Education - regional model with better technology and new funding
- Revitalization
- Education - school vouchers - specialized, community based - job-based training
- Community centers - blocks, day care, shopping, family areas/bonding, concerts, Peachtree City model, community focus
- Transportation – connectivity

Small Group 3:

- More telecommuting
- HOV Lanes
- Trolley
- Rail/subway - monorail
- Increase in hybrids personal cars
- Green buildings
- Family friendly businesses
- Increase in schools/universities
- More leisure time
- Bicycle lanes more defined
- Community parks within walking distance
- More superhighways and access points
- Golf cart trails
- More planned developments
- Conservation communities
- Individuals more conscious of conservation
- Increase in technology
- Water reuse - gray water
- Fewer landfills
- Use of recyclable materials
- Less stressed population
- More trees, less asphalt
- Retooling old buildings/reclaim brownfields
- Historic preservation
- Reduction in crime
- Better educated population
- Better connected families and communities
- Night sky light ordinance

Small Group 4:

- Integrated public transit throughout metro Atlanta
- More sidewalks, trails, alternate routes
- Places for leisure activities
- Sense of calmness and order
- Sense of health, well-being
- Modernization that respects our heritage
- Greater appreciation for the arts
- Smaller neighborhood schools
- Facilities and activities for all ages
- Neighborhood work and play areas - live where you work
- Clean air, water, land (environment)
- Those who work at home stay connected to the region
- More local hospitals
- Fabulous senior housing
- Strong, well-designed infrastructure - roads, sewers, etc.
- More higher education options
- Through awareness of how we create our own carbon footprint - use of hybrids, alternate energy forms - locally created
- Solar homes, etc.
- We make lots of money by being environmentally sound
- Globally connected education in schools
- Less government - more people power
- We learned to just get the job done
- Efficient use of tax money
- Water management - control/quality
- More community volunteers
- More northern infrastructure
- Less crime - more safe streets
- New built areas have a grid system
- More locally grown, quality food
- Healthy population and happy - content



- Attracted (green) good industry to area

Small Group 5:

- Connectivity - East-west freeway
- Maglev train - rapid transit
- Informed and engaged public
- Improved water resources
- Plazas
- Movement from horizontal to vertical development
- Visionary, cooperative leadership
- Senior development, affordable
- Linear parks
- Town beautification
- More neighborhood banks, community centers
- Well-funded infrastructure
- Cohesive strategic planning
- Bike lanes
- Commuting options
- Think green
- Integrated activity centers - efficiently connected, conveniently located, one-stop shops
- Planned housing
- Economic integration
- Abundant education opportunities for all ages and levels
- Diverse employment
- Better use of technology to minimize commute requirements and maximize opportunities for community and efficiency
- Easy access to quality, affordable healthcare
- Recreation facilities
- Culture opportunities
- Infrastructure to support green technology - places to plug in electric cars
- Transportation dollars on need and value, not politics
- Variety of housing types
- Integration of housing costs
- Housing closer to work, vice versa
- Variety of parks - active/passive use
- Neighborhood parks - different sizes
- Values - realize, define, communicate
- Education - for global economy, quality schools, variety of methods, life-cycle learning - every age still engaged
- Engagement, leadership – spirit of cooperation - engage all ages
- Communication - look beyond own walls and borders - can't act in isolation

Small Group 6:

- Elevated high speed rail
- Planned use communities
- Recreation space, parks
- Build roads before buildings
- Compact central community core
- Community focus
- Preserving water
- Meaningful urban design
- Multi-access - footpaths, trails
- Greater connectivity - communication
- Freeway
- Recycling - better use of reusable products
- Preservation - preserving community/parks
- Local feel
- Light commuter rail
- Better college and more higher education options
- Better parking options
- Managed growth
- Use air space (build up, not out)
- Alternate sources of power

Small Group 7:

- Low taxes
- Outer interstate loop, alternate transportation, light rail system
- More public parks
- Revitalize the older town centers
- Better management of land management
- More water reservoirs, better use of water and cleaner water
- Bring business into the community
- Better accountability for government officials to the public - strict law enforcement
- Safer environment
- Greener technologies for business centers
- Conserve wildlife - conservation parks - people to interact with nature
- More colleges, university choices, vocational
- Freer choices of schools - vouchers, charter, out of your district - more communications taught
- Better management of infrastructure
- Our own hydroelectric power source - wind power, solar power
- Build more energy efficient housing, green materials
- Local food sources, more farmers markets
- Universal Medicaid - reform the system - less government involvement
- More hospitals

Small Group 8:

- Green space
- Business - employees jobs in community
- Transportation system - rail system to connect airports - ground service for aging population
- Education system - world class
- Taxes and infrastructure
- Public services
- Communication system - work from home - flexibility
- Planned parks - sports, recreation for all communities
- Green space trails that connect to commercial, bus, schools - secure, safe, law enforcement present - lighting
- Preservation, conservation
- Regional land use plan

**Consensus Ideas**

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

- Cross-regional transportation
- Fresh water and better quality (reservoirs)
- More green space trails and recreation
- Historic preservation/revitalization
- Better air quality
- Telecommuting
- Affordable/quality housing
- State parks
- Economic stability/health
- More schools/improved education
- More sensible government
- Local quality jobs
- Better, more affordable healthcare
- Better roads
- Reduced crime
- Green space - trails, environment, recreation, walking
- Education - school vouchers - specialized, community based - job-based training
- Community centers - blocks, day care, shopping, family areas/bonding, concerts, Peachtree City model, community focus
- Family friendly businesses
- Community parks within walking distance
- Better connected families and communities
- Integrated public transit throughout metro Atlanta
- Sense of health, well-being
- Greater appreciation for the arts

- Clean air, water, land (environment)
- Strong, well-designed infrastructure - roads, sewers, etc.
- Through awareness of how we create our own carbon footprint - use of hybrids, alternate energy forms - locally created
- Less government - more people power
- We learned to just get the job done
- Water management - control/quality
- Less crime - more safe streets
- Infrastructure to support green technology - places to plug in electric cars
- Transportation dollars on need and value, not politics
- Values - realize, define, communicate
- Elevated high speed rail
- Greater connectivity - communication
- Light commuter rail
- Managed growth
- Use air space (build up, not out)
- Outer interstate loop, alternate transportation, light rail system
- Universal medicaid - reform the system - less government involvement
- Transportation system - rail system to connect airports - ground service for aging population
- Communication system - work from home – flexibility

### **Visionary Ideas**

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

- Flying cars
- Night sky light ordinance
- Efficient use of tax money
- Better accountability for government officials to the public - strict law enforcement

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

Here are existing community assets that participants felt should be preserved, if the Atlanta Region is to become a model for quality land use 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:

- Historic Buildings
- Georgia history - museums, art
- Cultural aspects of Atlanta and GA mountains

Small Group 2:

- Landmarks
- Greenspace

- Rivers
- Parks
- Trees
- Small town feel
- Heritage - civil rights
- Regional identity

Small Group 3:

- Waterways and lakes
- Building and historical landmarks
- Forest preserve parks
- Family
- Family values
- Responsibility
- Jobs
- Human contact
- Heritage and culture
- Religious beliefs
- Global community
- Opportunities



Small Group 4:

- Institutions of higher learning (eg Emory)
- Historical landmarks
- Local culture (Towne Lake Arts Center), arts
- Land, lakes, rivers
- Parks, green spaces
- Sense of place
- Positive values - to reduce crime and increase faith values
- Diversity
- Individuality

Small Group 5:

- Small town feel
- White zinfandel
- Balanced development and community
- Southern character
- Warmth [heart]
- Community involvement and volunteerism
- Wildlife, natural resources, water, values

Small Group 6:

- Tree canopy
- Historical buildings
- Waterways
- Chattahoochee
- National state parks - mountains
- Small community
- Cultural, art institutions
- Local business
- Monuments
- Native American historical sites

Small Group 7:

- Water sources
- Landmarks
- Open spaces
- Farms
- Parks
- Southern culture

Small Group 8:

- Faith based organizations
- Community colleges
- Non-profit organizations
- Promoting small businesses
- Culture and history
- Waterways, supply
- Natural resources

**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 a model for quality land use in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Less time demanding jobs, which would give more time for community
- Government taking a bigger role in education and cultural integration of immigrants
- Embrace diversity
- High-paying professional or high tech jobs in the community - which would allow less commuting
- More colleges
- Improved transportation

Small Group 2:

- More appreciative of diversity
- Counties cooperation
- Specialized education
- Less urban sprawl

Small Group 3:

- Smaller billboards
- Sign ordinance
- Forward thinking building
- Air quality
- Level of care for the most vulnerable citizens
- Better community outreach
- Education system
- Recycling policies
- Pay to public safety officers and teachers
- Level of citizen involvement in local government
- Make customer service human
- Respect diversity

Small Group 4:

- Government (smaller, more efficient)
- Division of the region (ie Cobb vs Cherokee)
- Remove 'slum' housing - provide better alternative
- More arts funding
- Negative values and attitudes
- Air quality
- Transportation modes

Small Group 5:

- Car mentality, attitude
- Overpopulation
- Better integrated development
- Change your focus to change your future
- Better informed citizens - citizen driven decision making (engaged population)
- Encourage diversity
- Stop making same mistakes - focus on your future using what you've learned from your past

Small Group 6:

- Transportation
- Highways
- Massive schools
- Strip malls
- Redistricting of schools

- Governance structure
- Cooperative growth management
- Money

Small Group 7:

- Infrastructure management
- Governmental accountability
- Land usage, zoning, permits, density
- The way we use resources
- Communication between government and public
- Entire county is represented

Small Group 8:

- Better local representation in community
- Transportation system
- Education - more life exp classes - less exposure on grct tests
- More four-year colleges to choose from
- Gearing education system to regional assets
- Alternative energy sources
- Dry plumbing

**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:

<b>Gender</b>		
Male		50%
Female		50%
<b>Age</b>		
Under 18		5%
18-24		4%
25-44		43%
45-65		46%
Over 65		2%

**Race/Ethnic Group**

Black or African American	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%
Hispanic/Latino	4%
White or Caucasian	93%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%
Other	0%

**Zip Code**

Home: 30317	34%
Surrounding	48%
Other	18%

*\* This is the ZIP code where the meeting was held*

*\*\* These are the ZIP codes adjoining 30066*

**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.