

Neighborhood Forum

Clayton County

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on Oct. 8, 2009 in Clayton County, at Clayton State University in Morrow. 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 make the Atlanta Region the healthiest region in the country? Forty-eight people participated in the Clayton forum. In the course of two hours, participants worked in small groups of 8 or so on a series of questions that helped them think about how the region can become the nation's healthiest region.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 231 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- **Encourage walking, biking and other forms of exercise by making them easier to engage in and more inviting.** Every group cited policies to encourage exercise as an important strategy, from "more sidewalks" and "skate parks for after-school exercise" to "walking communities" and "walking and bicycle trails."
- **Encourage people to eat healthier foods by making fresh vegetables and other healthy foods more available.** Five groups urged there to be more community gardens, another wanted "greater access to organic foods." Several wanted healthier lunches in schools.
- **Enact public policies that promote healthy living.** These ideas ranged from "more walk-in clinics (including) for mental health" to "free medical benefits for all."
- **Educate people about maintaining good health.** The preferred place to do that, several groups thought, was in the public schools, including "physical education programs in all schools" and "early child education in health, nutrition (and) exercise." One group urged there to be "more teen workshops to prevent STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)" and "personal hygiene workshops for females."

Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by Trey Ragsdale, board member 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 or so 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 accommodating growth and improving mobility. 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 the healthiest region in the United States.

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 become the nation's healthiest region, 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 Health 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:

- Green, smoke-free environment
- Walkable, safe communities
- Healthier restaurants
- Air quality - reduced car and airplane emissions
- More mass transportation, commercial and public
- More telecommuting
- Strong health education in schools, with mandatory physical education
- Great medical facilities
- Very low unemployment (0%)
- Greater access to organic foods
- Energy efficient households
- Legislation restricting adverse behaviors that impact public health - examples: texting while driving, cell phone usage, smoking
- More biodegradable products
- Preventive health education in communities
- Less crime
- Higher high school graduation rates
- Education
- Environment
- Behavioral Modification

Small Group 2:

- Smoke-free areas
- Health care for all
- Gang-free communities
- Healthier restaurant food
- Strong, enforced anti-pollution laws
- Eliminate additives to food and water
- More teen centers
- Need more sidewalks
- Provide more accommodating senior residences
- To see less or no obesity in our children
- Laws to enforce no use of steroids or additives
- Going back to nature - grow our own vegetables
- More outdoor physical education - daily, weekly
- More effective method of disposing of waste material
- Policemen to be more friendly to children and more involved in the community

Small Group 3:

- Walkable community
- Healthy lunches at school
- Skate park for after school exercise
- Green space and playgrounds
- Exercise location in businesses
- More community gardens
- Mass transportation
- Continue to have the best water system in the nation
- That the state will copy the political procedures as Clayton County has with regard to the water system, including sanitation
- Mandated exercise for everyone
- Smoke-free and green environment
- Tax incentives for healthy living
- Everyone to have paid sick days
- More walk-in clinics, even for mental health
- Tax incentives for sick days for businesses
- Regional health coalition - community, health care providers, pharmaceutical companies, etc.
- Every child graduates high school with a skill
- Educational centers
- Recycling incentives and programs
- No fast food
- Healthier quick food choices
- No bottled water
- Farms that we use no pesticides, etc (animals, dairy)
- Mandated paid vacations
- Dietary classes from pre-K through college
- Hygiene classes from pre-K through college
- Cost benefit for making the change
- Get buy-in from all involved to switch thought process from sick care to wellness care through education, incentives and community involvement
- Mandatory financial education (WIC, welfare, other assistance programs)



- Mandatory health and wellness classes

Small Group 4:

- Skate park
- Gardens for food
- Walking communities
- Healthy restaurants, Whole Foods
- Regional planning
- Tasty, healthier lunches in schools
- Good public transportation, fewer cars
- Alternative energy sources
- Recycling stations
- More interactive, social neighborhoods
- Physical education K-12 - engaged students and teachers
- After-school recreation facilities that are free
- Tax benefits for companies with healthy employees
- Support for elderly and sick, shut-ins
- First child support system
- Higher taxes for fattening foods
- Military support mechanism
- Small business in neighborhood, involved community
- Two-hour siesta during the day
- Mental health
- More information on nutrition
- Tax incentives for going green
- Public policy fixes for water, transportation
- Long-range plan for public policy and implementation
- Less pesticides in food
- Shorter work week for more time with family
- Free medical benefits for all
- More money for research
- Invest in unique methods of health care
- More police involved with the community
- Civic engagement
- Accessible child care
- More arts in the community

Small Group 5:

- Public transportation for cleaner air
- Better streets and sidewalks
- Walking and bicycle trails
- Increase urgent care clinics
- Employers supported exercise on site

- Availability of nurses and nutritionists in the schools
- On-site child care, after-school physical activities
- Community gardening, co-op
- Better monitoring of water, food and pharmaceuticals
- Preserve and develop wetlands
- Affordable health care
- Early child education in health, nutrition, exercise
- Self-sustaining power sources, eg methane gas from landfills
- Environmental initiatives, recycling, biodegradable products

Small Group 6:

- Gang-free communities
- Smoke-free regions
- Mandatory recycling
- Physical education programs in all schools
- Community gardens
- More physical activities outside
- Prevent domestic violence in schools
- More teen centers
- Focus on preventive health program
- Free membership to recreation centers
- Mandatory healthy lunches for students
- Affordable health care
- Walking and bike trails, sidewalks
- Nutrition workshop
- More parks, recreation centers, outdoor activities
- Keep the homeless sheltered
- Free activities at recreation centers
- Free healthcare
- A chill grill for teens
- Study time in high schools in a quiet, comfortable place
- Clean water fountains, bathrooms
- Personal hygiene workshop for females
- Teaching environmental issues in schools
- Enforcement of littering and dumping laws
- Healthy snacks in vending machines
- More healthy snacks at the front of stores
- Prevent burglaries
- More teen workshops to prevent STDs
- More community awareness events for everybody
- More churches
- Get along with different races

- Develop a coalition of non-profits and philanthropic organizations and incorporate it into the school curriculum

Consensus Ideas

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

- Education
- Environment
- Behavioral Modification
- Health care for all
- Gang-free communities
- Policemen to be more friendly to children and more involved in the community
- Continue to have the best water system in the nation
- Mandated exercise for everyone
- Tax incentives for healthy living
- Alternative energy sources
- Long-range plan for public policy and implementation
- Free medical benefits for all
- Walking and bicycle trails
- Early child education in health, nutrition, exercise
- Environmental initiatives, recycling, biodegradable products
- Community gardens
- Walking and bike trails, sidewalks
- Free activities at recreation centers



Visionary Ideas

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

- Legislation restricting adverse behaviors that impact public health - examples: texting while driving, cell phone usage, smoking
- Gang-free communities
- Regional health coalition - community, health care providers, pharmaceutical companies, etc.
- Get buy-in from all involved to switch thought process from sick care to wellness care through education, incentives and community involvement
- Higher taxes for fattening foods
- Two-hour siesta during the day
- Self-sustaining power sources, eg methane gas from landfills
- Develop a coalition of non-profits and philanthropic organizations and incorporate it into the school curriculum

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 transportation 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:

- Greenspace
- Exercise Facilities

Small Group 2:

- Trees, greenspace
- Fine arts
- Public transportation
- Rivers, lakes

Small Group 3:

- Clayton County Water Authority
- Recreation Centers
- Health department - hospitals, health care providers
- Parks
- Airport
- Churches (values)
- Pride in Clayton County
- Improvement of educational system
- Preserve Kaiser's health care program

Small Group 4:

- Airport

- Interstate system
- Parks, natural environment
- Community diversity
- Individual cultures
- Accreditation for our school system
- Increase and preserve home economics
- Family consumer sciences
- Arts in schools
- Recreation centers
- School libraries
- Jobs
- Science in schools

Small Group 5:

- Jobs
- Trees
- Wetlands
- Education
- Values
- Community
- Affordable housing
- Hospitals

Small Group 6:

- Trees, forests
- Animals
- Lakes and rivers
- Health departments
- Hospitals
- Strong partnership
- Community based non-profits
- Organizations
- Shelters

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 transportation in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Trees - cut less, plant more
- Community involvement
- Community values

Small Group 2:

- Insurance regulation
- Public transportation system
- Change interaction between policemen and communities
- Zero-tolerance on bullying
- Decrease dropout rate in schools
- Increase funds for grandparents raising grandchildren

Small Group 3:

- Increase senior centers, recreation centers, health department
- Environmentally friendly parks
- Mass transportation
- How we travel
- Health check-up at airports
- Provide more services
- More churches throughout the region
- More greenspace
- Reduce crime
- Increase business and entrepreneurial business

Small Group 4:

- Clayton County to receive more taxes from airport
- Transit system
- More parks, greenspace
- More activities, awareness
- Protocol for public safety
- Community schools
- Crime statistics
- Test drivers (schools)
- Add an alternative education option
- Expand family consumer sciences
- Make recreation centers affordable

Small Group 5:

- Gun laws
- Right to work laws
- Attitude toward each other, elderly, homeless
- Prison system
- Mental health system - longer treatment time and care

Small Group 6:

- Recreational centers
- Clean up cities
- Increase amount of money for health and environmental issues
- Teachers attitude change
- More supportive teachers
- Schools need higher standards
- Increase involvement in faith based organizations
- Hate crimes

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 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	27%
Female	73%

Age	
Under 18	13%
18-24	2%
25-44	18%
45-65	53%
Over 65	13%

Race/Ethnic Group	
Black or African American	86%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic/Latino	0%
White or Caucasian	9%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%
Other	5%

Zip Code	
Home: 30260	2%
Surrounding	43%
Other	55%

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

*** These are the ZIP codes adjoining 30260*

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.