

Neighborhood Forum

North-Central Gwinnett

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on March 3, 2009 in North-Central Gwinnett at Georgia Gwinnett College. 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? Fifty-eight people participated in the North-Central Gwinnett 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 267 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- **Transportation plays a critical role in shaping land use and one of the key missing elements is public transit.** One group said there was a need for transit of all kinds ("high speed, trolley, monorail"), another mentioned the need for a "commuter train and bus system". The same group pointed to transit's importance: its ability to create "interconnectedness" among communities to the benefit of the entire region.
- Another important element is **walkable, mixed-use development.** One group said it foresaw "live-work-play" communities, where "urbanism meets suburbanism." Another added that the communities must be walkable with "schools, parks, doctors, stores" accessible on foot. These shouldn't be just new developments, participants made clear. They wanted older developments to be redeveloped as walkable, mixed-use communities.
- **Schools are important not just for educating children but for tying together communities.** There were two thoughts on schools: First, that smaller schools were better at building a sense of community than large. "Build more schools in neighborhoods, not megaschools," one group urged. The second thought was that schools could help connect surrounding communities. "Existing schools (could) become (a) community magnet, serving community needs for all residents – e.g., community theater, rehabilitation," another group said.
- Several groups saw **water availability as a key to the Atlanta region's growth and quality of life.** What's needed, they believed, were new ways of conserving – and maybe even creating – water resources. One group saw both a change of attitude and practice, in which "water is valued,

conserved, reused." Another saw the need for a water "grid" that could "redistribute water to where it's needed" in the region. Yet another group was thinking boldly: Why not create new sources? Its idea: "artificial water."

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:

- Cleaner outdoor spaces that are pedestrian and bicycle friendly (encourages healthy, mobile living)
- Autos that do not burn fossil fuels
- Re-purposed structures
- Retrofitting residential lots for geo-thermal heating for new structures
- Smart houses - energy, lighting
- Aesthetic standards on signage - height, design
- Holographic signs
- Signs powered by solar energy
- Reduce the need for landfills through more composting, recyclable materials
- Street lighting with LED lights
- Impressive cultural facilities - libraries as learning centers, museums
- Interactive centers for families of all generations
- Schools use technology even more
- Water is valued, conserved, re-used
- Small nuclear generators to power neighborhoods
- Outer space adventures, jobs, vacations, limitless space
- Metro Atlanta is the high speed rail hub for passengers and goods (ATL to DC in 2 hours)
- More satellite use - reduce need for towers
- Include aesthetic design in land use planning
- Lots of people out at night - safe
- WiFi across the region, especially all public space
- Not a lot of skyscrapers - want to see the mountains
- Better use of underground - earth shelters
- Nanotechnology in building supplies - modular homes that can be re-configured, moved
- Inter-generational neighborhoods
- Cool living spaces for seniors - independent to nursing home
- Premiere health care
- Wearable smart fiber technology
- Great jobs in attractive facilities - technology
- Live-work-play complexes
- Theatre troupes rotate through the many community theatres

- Diverse, international cultural center - mature community
- Built on a grid - easy to get around - fewer Peachtree Streets
- Micro cemeteries - conserve land - shrink the deceased
- Improve/fix old structures before new development - green redevelopment
- Convert some old Wal-Marts to public park space

Small Group 2:

- Redeveloped downtown - walkable, proximity of necessities (groceries, etc), arts & culture
- Managed growth - not on top of each other
- Sidewalks
- People movers - trolleys
- Transportation - train lines, convenient mass transit
- Neighborhood schools - smaller
- Walkable communities - businesses, housing all together
- Medical facilities
- Long-range planning of communities - consistency
- Greenspace - community parks
- Rehabilitating dead shopping centers - recycling
- Ban on cars or road tax - ban on older automobile technologies
- Incentives for ride share or using transit
- Dispersed work centers - satellite offices
- Telecommuting, work from home, flex time
- High rises - building up
- Manage water consumption
- Mixed-use housing
- Housing based on family size or other criteria, possibly government owned
- Renters vs homeowners - same standards of care - in same community
- Car-free society
- Sense of community



- Homogenous (people)

Small Group 3

- No smog - air quality
- Intelligent traffic control
- Public transportation - feeds into MARTA
- Better transit coverage throughout county, including park and ride
- More solar energy on top of houses
- Incentives for energy self-sufficiency
- Water "grid" to redistribute water to where it's needed
- Second airport in the north, not controlled by one airline
- More mixed-use development, like Suwanee Town Center
- More up-do-date scenery in town centers
- Clean version of Chicago
- We cannot have efficient transportation system without density to support it
- Go vertical
- Money for toll lanes used to pay for infrastructure/transit
- Traffic control system, like in "I-Robot" - controls speed, lane changes
- Build more schools in neighborhoods - not megaschools
- More efficient emergency response system (In Portland, light rail system doubles as EMS)
- Reduce carbon footprint
- At 18 years of age, must volunteer/community service before getting driver's license
- Free classes to learn Spanish
- Residents open to change
- Developers required to engage in sustainable development
- Residents lead green energy initiatives
- Local governments serve as a check against overdevelopment
- Affordable housing for recent college graduates
- Expand hope scholarship program as incentive for students to stay
- Telecommuting - more people work from home or kiosks close to home
- Region-wide broadband
- All buildings can be converted to other uses
- Elevated expressway

Small Group 4:

- Sidewalks - wide, friendly
- Solar powered commuter trains
- Bike friendly
- Live-work-play area - urbanism meets suburbanism
- More recreational parks
- Innovative mixed-use areas - business/residential/commercial

- Garden spaces
- Smart water plan that promotes efficient water usage
- Citizen action community
- Better mass transit
- Interconnected within 17 county area
- Transportation minus the necessity of automobiles
- Regional government cooperation
- Underground wiring, electrical, all utilities
- Buildings that are retrofitted
- Social life centered around greenspaces
- Sidewalk cafes
- Cultural arts - smaller scale theaters
- Underground parking - parks on top
- Larger number (odd) for governing bodies - citizen impact, influence on public policy
- Less sprawl
- Plans made and adhered to
- Held elected officials accountable
- Land use policy - greenspaces mandatory
- No new building until existing structures have been utilized
- Focus on live-work-play
- Increase of state funds provides interconnectedness in Atlanta region
- More corporations to bring more employees (professional) - mass transit mixed high speed, trolley, monorails, reduce # of cars and parking
- Hub-walkway-hub - mass transit to connect area
- Shopping centers focus on regional area - no need for downtown commute
- Tunnels underground usage for pedestrians and bicycles
- Tax breaks for bio- or any green corporation
- Hub: transportation, shopping in one area - not strip mall, but "double-duty" focus - play areas included in plan (skating, etc) - no Wal-Mart within hundreds of miles of hub
- Civic atmosphere - interconnected builds revitalization but keeps uniqueness of area, civic involvement, regional board of citizens
- High speed transit to surrounding cities - Chattanooga, Charlotte, etc.
- Energy efficiency - solar panels - water conservation - recycle efforts increased - reduce waste - reuse existing buildings - biodegradable products

Small Group 5:

- Accessible/walkability/golf carts
- Regional airports
- Less cul-de-sac and more connectivity of street grid
- Regional commuter train - different options
- Multi-use paths for transportation alternatives
- Weatherized/climate controlled resort

- Public art - no graffiti
- More playgrounds, small community parks
- Mixed-use development - clustered retail, office and housing - more high rise
- Suwannee town center
- Affordable housing component in mixed-use
- Ethical public officials - transparency
- No crime
- Group senior housing for different price points
- Well-maintained public schools
- Labyrinths
- Separate truck delivery from mainstream traffic hours or lanes
- Bike lanes
- Pedestrian overpasses at intersections
- Sensible zoning regulations = result
- Roundabout intersections
- Telecommute centers - rent-a-commuters
- Don't need a car to get around
- Sidewalks
- Front porches - congregating spaces
- Fewer or no landfills because of refuse reuse
- Direct citizen input in public policy - e.g., zoning
- Land use education - citizen education
- Policy more proactive, driven by incentives, not penalties, not rewarded by cronyism
- Zero power generation that is harmful to the environment
- Incentives to redevelop/TADs where infrastructure is already in place
- Beltline
- Sustainable greenway to Mall of GA, plus regional path
- Higher density, less personal land, better parks
- Neighborhoods with commercial, mixed use clusters, connected by paths and transit
- People will want less private space - easier to take care of - now really on large public parks
- 100 year loans that can pass to children - choices, options

Small Group 6:

- Blue skies
- More recycling
- Clean air, pollution free
- Green spaces with walking trails
- Water supplies - reservoir
- Revitalize existing development - commercial and residential
- Walkable communities - schools, parks, doctors, stores
- More neighborhood/smaller parks

- Diversities within neighborhoods and schools
- More retirement communities
- More special needs facilities (gymnasiums, schools)
- Greater density within communities, with affordable housing
- Artificial water
- Tax credit for recycling
- Commuter train and bus system
- New use for existing areas of retail
- Interconnectedness between smaller areas to one region
- More telecommuters for high school learning
- Limit enrollment for schools in areas
- Existing schools become community magnet, serving community's needs for all residents - e.g., community theater, rehabilitation
- More neighborhood center police check points (buildings), smaller groupings in public places
- More business owners put in position where they are responsible



Consensus Ideas

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

- Reduce the need for landfills through more composting, recyclable materials
- WiFi across the region, especially all public space
- Nanotechnology in building supplies - modular homes that can be re-configured, moved
- Sidewalks
- People movers - trolleys
- Transportation - train lines, convenient mass transit
- Neighborhood schools - smaller
- Walkable communities - businesses, housing all together
- Manage water consumption
- Better transit coverage throughout county, including park and ride
- More solar energy on top of houses
- Incentives for energy self-sufficiency
- Second airport in the north, not controlled by one airline

- Live-work-play area - urbanism meets suburbanism
- More corporations to bring more employees (professional) - mass transit mixed high speed, trolley, monorails, reduce # of cars and parking
- Energy efficiency - solar panels - water conservation - recycle efforts increased - reduce waste - reuse existing buildings - biodegradable products
- Mixed-use development - clustered retail, office and housing - more high rise
- Incentives to redevelop/TADs where infrastructure is already in place
- Sustainable greenway to Mall of GA, plus regional path
- Green spaces with walking trails
- Water supplies - reservoir
- Revitalize existing development - commercial and residential
- Walkable communities - schools, parks, doctors, stores
- More neighborhood/smaller parks
- Diversities within neighborhoods and schools
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- More telecommuters for high school learning
- Limit enrollment for schools in areas
- Existing schools become community magnet, serving community's needs for all residents - e.g., community theater, rehabilitation
- Green spaces with walking trails
- Walkable communities - schools, parks, doctors, stores

Visionary Ideas

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

- Nanotechnology in building supplies - modular homes that can be re-configured, moved
- Car-free society
- Water "grid" to redistribute water to where it's needed
- No new building until existing structures have been utilized
- Artificial water

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:

- Trees and greenspace
- Sense of security, safety, well-being
- High tech industries
- Business advantages - transportation, communication, medical
- Quality education - universities
- Local traditions - fall festivals, gatherings
- Sports, entertainment, cultural offerings
- Welcoming, diverse community
- Water supply
- Sense of community, service, spirituality - things with transcendental nature

Small Group 2:

- Chattahoochee river
- Small neighborhood schools
- Trees and green space
- Shirley Franklin - strong political leadership
- Small town feel - know your neighbors, connectivity
- Educated population - diverse skill sets
- Higher education opportunities - GA Tech, GA State, Kennesaw, CAU, etc)
- Historical sites (MLK Center, Oakland Cemetery, Town Centers, Battlefields, etc)

Small Group 3:

- Historic sites
- Standing as a transportation hub
- Business climate - attract, retain
- Mecca for diversity
- Greenspace
- Sports teams
- Grady Hospital

Small Group 4:

- Civil drivers
- Business base
- Southern accent
- Southern hospitality and culture
- Parks and natural resources
- Historical sites
- Maintaining old neighborhoods
- Maintain education/college communities
- The "post-Olympic" feel - no potholes, working streetlights
- Atlanta as a sports area

Small Group 5:

- Parks
- Southern charm, with diversity
- Historic main street downtown
- Retain ability to attract young professionals
- Business center of southeast
- Generosity and philanthropic institutions
- Arts
- Faith base in culture (also diverse)

Small group 6:

- Residents keep rights - religious freedom
- Historic structures
- Green spaces and water supplies
- High paying jobs in community

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:

- Strengthen k-12 education
- Change the mindset on global warming - more conservation
- Retrofit our interstates to accommodate better transit
- Invest in user-friendly mass transit
- Create a mindset that promotes service and caring for others - focus on we more than me
- Schools more neighborhood-centered, walkable
- More thoughtful, apolitical zoning

Small Group 2:

- "What's in it for me" attitude
- Water use - lower consumption
- Change governance structure at state/local level
- Change NIMBY attitude
- Bigger is better attitude
- How things are funded

Small Group 3:

- Way we educate kids - discipline students
- More energy alternatives need to be built
- Education standards
- The way we build cars

- Eating habits - take out ingredients we don't need (trans fats)
- Way celebrities communicate to kids
- Add new level-1 trauma center
- Give up big houses on large lots
- The building permit process

Small Group 4:

- Right to work law
- More focus on we as opposed to me
- Zoning criteria for historical areas
- Citizen involvement
- Mass transit
- Citizenship education with focus on importance
- Public officials that value citizenship

Small Group 5:

- Sense of combined region
- Reduce number of counties, jurisdictions
- End traffic congestion and emphasis on car
- Campaign finance reform

Small Group 6:

- Educating youth to keep in communities
- Tighter land use and make it harder to rezone
- Ban disposable diapers

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	43%
Female	57%

Age	
Under 18	0%
18-24	2%
25-44	43%
45-65	53%
Over 65	2%

Race/Ethnic Group	
Black or African American	34%
Asian/Pacific Islander	9%
Hispanic/Latino	2%
White or Caucasian	55%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%
Other	0%

Zip Code

Home: 30317*	15%
Surrounding**	40%
Other	45%

* 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.