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Duluth mayor delivers state of the city address

DULUTH — Nancy Harris is excited about Duluth and the direction the city is headed.

Reporter: Staff Correspondent Carole Townsend

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DULUTH — Nancy Harris is excited about Duluth and the direction the city is headed. She shared her observations about the city's present and visions for its future in the state of the city address sponsored by the Duluth Civitan Club and held at the Gwinnett Center. Even though the center is outside the Duluth city limits, Harris said that the venue's global location and attraction are perfect for talking about her progressive, inclusive city.

Harris' presentation opened with a view of Duluth High School and several of its students welcoming guests with greetings in various languages.

To present a comprehensive snapshot of the health of the city of Duluth, Harris said that demographics, economics, nature, technology, politics and culture have to be included in the discussion.

Diverse demographics

A challenge the city faced in recent years has turned into a plus — the large Korean community has worked hand in hand with a city task force and the police department to roll out the dual-language sign initiative. With Pleasant Hill Road shop owners displaying the names of their businesses in both English and Korean, businesses and customers benefit as well as the police and fire departments in emergency situations.

Harris also said Tuesday that the city's diversity (about 20 percent Asian and nearly 12 percent "other" national origin) created another challenge that has been met with success — community involvement. Various community action groups bring citizens of all nationalities together to work toward common community goals.

Economy presents opportunities

While the weak economy has affected Duluth as it has cities across the nation, Harris said that planning for the future will position the city for economic growth. The Buford Highway Master Plan project looks 20 to 30 years into the city's future, with the goal of clearing the way for re-development and possibly multi-modal transportation along the three-mile stretch from Old Peachtree Road to North Berkeley Lake Road.

The city's LCI study, commissioned several years ago, also stressed the importance of coordinating the city's roads and sidewalks. Work is scheduled to begin this year on a roundabout in the West Lawrenceville Road/McClure Bridge Road area.

Harris also pointed out the importance of addressing the problem of empty buildings throughout the city. Twenty-five percent of the city's retail buildings are sitting empty, but city leaders are working with the Chamber of Commerce to fix the problem.

The Gwinnett Place CID is "very important" to Duluth, said Harris, and the 230 businesses that tax themselves to make much-needed improvements are making a noticeable difference in safety and traffic matters in the area.

Nature the most
unpredictable factor