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Gwinnett County, Georgia

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Officials kick off county study with tour of area

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By Camie Young
 Staff Writer
camie.young@gwinnettdaily.com

DULUTH - Consultants from as far away as Vancouver, British Columbia, toured Gwinnett Wednesday in the kickoff of a two-year study to envision the suburban county's future. To begin work on the county's Comprehensive Plan, Consultants with Parsons Brinkerhof, Quade & Douglas as well as numerous subcontractors circled the community in a white government bus from Lawrenceville to Snellville, the Gwinnett Village community to the Mall of Georgia.

County staff pointed out highlights such as a \$13 million project to revitalize one of Gwinnett's oldest neighborhoods, Liberty Heights, and the soon-to-be-completed expansion of the F. Wayne Hill Water Resources Facility.

"This is for them to see more than just numbers and maps," said Craig Goebel, who heads the county's community development block grant program.

Goebel is part of a technical advisory team of county officials to help the consultants get an idea of the county's past and present in order to present options for the future in terms of land-use policies and transportation, water and sewer enhancements.

At a stop at the Wild Bill's entertainment hall near Gwinnett Place Mall, officials with Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District explained their efforts at revitalizing the mall area.

"This is the heartbeat of Gwinnett County," CID Director Dave Roselle said.

But officials wanted the consultants to get a feel for all of Gwinnett's 437 square miles.

Goebel said he wanted to get across "the whole diversity of the county, not just the people, but revitalization versus new construction and residential versus commercial."

Gwinnett Planning Director Steve Logan, who is heading up the study for the county, said he thought the largest part of the initial phase of the study is introducing the consultants to Gwinnett.

The team has already been immersed in reading material on information such as demographic changes, the range of housing

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types and businesses.

"But this is a feel for the lay of the land," he said. "We're trying to give the opportunity for the consultants to see Gwinnett County and see the major projects that lead to its growth."

Uri Avin, the project manager for Parsons Brinkerhof, said the team was charged to work by the tour.

"I've learned there are impressive resources in the county and lot of things being done," the Baltimore resident said. "It's a big diverse county with a lot of issues. It's a good time to step back." In addition to the technical advisory committee, made up of staff from all county departments, including transportation, community services, public utilities and finance, a citizens advisory committee will work with the consultants on the plan.

In August or September of 2007, county officials will hold public hearings on the study before it is submitted to the Atlanta Regional Commission, Georgia Department of Community Affairs and federal department of Housing and Urban Development.

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