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Improvement districts bend legislators' ears

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DULUTH - Members of Gwinnett's legislative delegation heard requests for flexibility Monday - in stormwater, transportation and funds.

At a luncheon sponsored by the county's three community improvement districts, the political leaders listened to pitches requesting early action to get Tax Allocation Districts on a summer ballot, more funding for transportation and new rules for stormwater that would encourage redevelopment.

"We planted the seed on three key issues with the legislators," Evermore CID director Brett Harrell said. "It let them see their importance for the future of the county."

Sen. Don Balfour, R-Snellville, agreed with CID leaders that funds from the state's gas tax should go back to funding transportation improvements, and not into the state's general fund. But he said the \$60 billion needed for new transportation projects will be hard to come by, especially considering that a \$200 million tax increase on tobacco products, the last time a tax increase was voted on, passed the House and the Senate by one vote each.

While transportation needs remain among the most important issues, he said concerns about water trump them.

"I wouldn't call transportation the number one issue. The number one issue's going to be water," Balfour said. "It's a huge problem. If we don't solve it, construction's going to come to a halt. We need to think outside the box."

Sen. Curt Thompson, D-Tucker, said legislation that could get TADs on the ballot for the second time could be passed during the first part of the session. Seven Gwinnett cities will have the funding mechanism on the ballot in November.

Joe Allen, the Gwinnett Place CID director, said he thought the session was very successful in opening a dialogue between the groups. Chuck Warbington, director of the Gwinnett Village CID, said he was glad to get local issues on legislators' radars.

"That went great," he said. "I saw it in the legislators' eyes. They were engaging in issues in the community."

Also attending the meeting were Reps. Pedro Marin, D-Duluth; Melvin Everson, R-Snellville; Clay Cox, R-Lilburn; and Hugh Floyd, D-Norcross.

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