

County leaders discuss redevelopment, plans for future

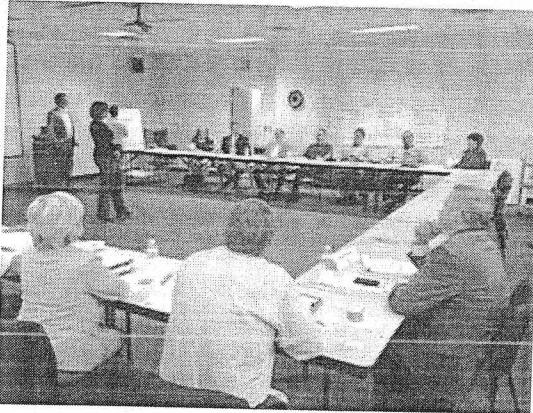
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With the economy beginning to improve, county leaders are now looking at ways to strategically move forward with the goals outlined in Gwinnett's 2030 Unified Plan.

The Unified Plan, which details what Gwinnett County should look like in the future, addresses issues including economic development, fiscal health, redevelopment and more. Also included in the plan are implementation steps and benchmarks which have been challenging to meet due to limited financial resources during the economic downturn. Officials are currently examining the plan to determine what revisions, if any, are needed.

"It boils down to elected officials doing what they can to stay on course," said Joe Sorenson, county communications director.

Commissioners and department heads met July 22 to begin the process of outlining ideas for growth and identifying an overall vision for Gwinnett's future.

Michelle Alexander, of Pond and Company, serves as project manager for the 2030 Unified Plan. Alexander challenged officials to think about what they and their constituents would most like to see.

County commissioners and department heads met Tuesday, July 22, to discuss the county's 2030 Unified Plan. (staff photo: Kristi Reed)

"What's the future — 10 years from now, 20 years from now, the next five years and how are you going to get there? What is the vision?" she asked.

County Chairwoman Charlotte Nash said she expects the Unified Plan to focus on balance, choices, vibrance and sustainability.

"We want this place to be attractive not just to the old-timers like me who know nothing else, other than living and working in Gwinnett County, but we want it also to be attractive to the young talent we've got to have to ensure that Gwinnett County has a good future," she said.

District 3 Commissioner Tommy Hunter shared a similar, and even more personal vision.

"My vision of the county overall is a place where my kids grow up and they don't want to leave," he said.

Tuesday's session focused primarily on the area around Gwinnett Place Mall, stretching roughly from Steve Reynolds Boulevard to Old Norcross Road along both sides of Interstate 85. The area, according to District 2 Commissioner Lynette Howard, is ripe for redevelopment.

"I want to see it done right," she said, adding she believes having a vision for the area is critical to planning.

Jace Brooks, District 1 Commissioner, emphasized the Gwinnett Place Mall area is just one of several strategic locations within the county.

"Each of these presents different opportunities," he said.

Tuesday's "visioning" session was the first in a series of workshops designed to gather input from county leaders. The next workshop, scheduled for Aug. 12, will focus on economic development.

The entire process, which is expected to continue through 2015, is an important one according to Nash.

"I think we've got to be smart about how we use our limited resources," she said.

The 2030 Gwinnett County Unified Plan can be viewed online at www.gwinnettcounty.com.



District 1 Commissioner Jace Brooks (left) and District 3 Commissioner Tommy Hunter (right) take part in a hands-on exercise during Tuesday's "visioning" session. (Staff Photo: Kristi Reed)