



ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION 40 COURTLAND STREET, NE ATLANTA,
GEORGIA 30303

Meeting Highlights

Diversity as Our Strength: A Community Conversation in Cherokee County

8:00 a.m. – 9:30 am, Monday, September 19, 2005

W.G. Long Senior Center

Woodstock, Georgia

OPENING REMARKS

Brief opening remarks were provided by State Representative Charlice Byrd, Chairman J. Michael Byrd, and Woodstock Mayor Bill Dewrell. They spoke of this event as a beginning effort to listen and share ideas on ways to improve services to Cherokee's rapidly growing diverse population.

PURPOSE OF MEETING/INTRODUCTIONS

Chick Krautler, Director, Atlanta Regional Commission thanked Commissioner Byrd, Mayor Dewrell and Ms. Carnes for collaborating with ARC in organizing this discussion. ARC's intention is to listen to what is being said today and improve outreach to all segments of the region's population. ARC's role in transportation and land-use planning, including environmental planning, aging, governmental services, workforce development as well as information and data services requires public input. ARC is committed to continue working toward ensuring that all populations are considered in planning initiatives and not just traditional audiences.

Changing demographics in Cherokee were cited, including a 17% increase in the total population between 2000 and 2003. The minority populations increased even more substantially.

Asian population, 74%

Black population – 57%

Hispanic/Latino population – 50%

Krautler initiated introductions by asking everyone to provide names and length of time living or working in Cherokee County. Participants also described affiliations (see attached participant list) and activities. The majority of those present described themselves as long-term Cherokee residents (15+ years). Participants were asked to also to discuss the reasons they decided to do business and/or live in Cherokee. The tax base, jobs in construction, beautiful scenery, sense of community, excellent school system were the primary reasons cited.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

A short summary of the major issues discussed was given by Pam Carnes, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce President.

- ◆ Transportation – limited in county(at all levels); contributing to problem of illegal drivers
- ◆ Education- need to educate on importance of taxes, becoming documented, laws;
- ◆ Languages- multiple dialects spoken; English and Spanish classes needed; employers need translation services
- ◆ Housing costs- rentals expensive; housing ownership emphasized by some organizations
- ◆ Trust – need to separate ‘legal’ vs. ‘illegal’ issues; many immigrants come from countries where governments are corrupt so it’s understandable that they do not trust authority; undocumented/documentated preferable terms to documented vs. illegal; issues of trust with law enforcement.
- ◆ Socio-economic class structure - diversity should include poverty issues (poverty & diversity/socio-economic class structure);
- ◆ Government diversity- African Americans and Hispanics are not represented on government boards and commissions and therefore do not reflect the community, i.e. they are mostly white; ask minority community for recommendations; lack of diversity in county administration; the county will grow much better if it is more representative.
- ◆ Embracing Cultural Differences – lack of openness in dealing with differences; people want to be listened to and valued
- ◆ Leadership/Communication – communicating with foreign-born residents will not work by just teaching Americans Spanish; use leaders from within each ethnic community; grow in the place you are; ethnic groups do not want to lose their uniqueness.
- ◆ Minority business owner, organizations and individuals are addressing some of the issues and services needed. Need to build a base of leaders by identifying and linking smaller initiatives; identify services offered by the various groups and share with local municipalities; need to find ways to leverage resources.

NEXT STEPS

1. Establish Chairman’s Diversity Council – Commissioner Byrd asked Jackie McMorris (Cherokee County Community Services Director) to move this initiative forward
2. Develop of organization descriptions (bios) to educate/share with municipalities

INFORMATION FROM ARC

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were described by Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator
 The snapshots include a range of information about diverse ethnic communities in the Atlanta region and a powerful tool to facilitate conversation. Snapshots can currently be viewed or downloaded at: www.atlantaregional.com/regionaldata/globalatlantasnapsots.html. Dan Reuter, Land Use Division Chief, invited participation in the regional development planning process and provided a brief overview of the purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/CLOSING REMARKS

Mayor Dewrell acknowledged the support of Carlos Velez, Long Senior Center and ARC. He stated that the conversation has started on how to better serve minority communities and a plan is in place to continue the discussion.