



**Diversity as our Strength: A Community
Conversation in DeKalb County
Meeting Summary**

June 5, 2006

Monday, June 5, 2006
11:30 am. – 1:30 pm
Malooof Auditorium
Decatur, Georgia

Welcome and Opening Remarks. Vernon Jones, CEO, DeKalb County, welcomed all present and acknowledged the participation of Pine Lake Mayor Greg Zarus, Clarkson Mayor Lee Swaney, Sara Gonzalez, President of the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, as well as others actively involved in DeKalb, including Jimmie Moomaw and Charlene Fang. He noted that “the world has come to DeKalb” and is being fully embraced. The county is home to some of the most diverse communities in the metropolitan area and cited Clarkston as an example. DeKalb is also actively involved in cultural exchanges.

CEO Jones introduced ARC Director Chick Krautler and thanked ARC for inviting DeKalb to host this event.

Background and Overview. Chick Krautler expressed appreciation to CEO Jones for hosting the community conversation on diversity in DeKalb. These events are being held in each county of the region in collaboration with the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Inc., local government officials, business and community leaders. He explained that the intent is to establish a stronger connection between diverse leaders and public officials and help us understand how these communities work and approach problem solving. It is also a way that we hope to build on the region’s diversity and improve participation in the planning and decision-making processes. This is increasingly important for DeKalb, one of the most diverse counties in Georgia.

- ◆ Approximately 25% of all foreign-born residents in the region are DeKalb residents
- ◆ DeKalb’s Latino population increased nearly 14% since 2000
- ◆ The Black population’s growth rate is double the county’s growth rate from 2000 to 2004

(“Diversity in DeKalb County-A Demographic Profile” is a handout provided in each Folder, including a detailed demographic picture of diversity in DeKalb.)

ARC's role as a regional planning agency was briefly described. It was noted that the organization is involved in areas impacting the lives of all citizens such as land use, transportation, aging and workforce development. It is critical that we hear from a broad spectrum of people in the region as they are impacted by the decisions made around addressing growth and development. The Buford Highway corridor study was cited as an example. This corridor encompasses an 18-mile section of Buford Highway that crosses DeKalb, Fulton and Gwinnett counties and over 290,000 people. The corridor study will address safety, accessibility and quality of life along the congested roadway and present specific programs, policies and projects to address the concerns. The decisions that will be made on what happens with this corridor and other projects should reflect input from those living and working in these areas. We were unable to engage the participation of those most affected during the recent public outreach effort for the Buford Highway study.

It was further noted that ARC continues to make significant efforts to reach out to all segments of our population. The Black community is well established in the region and more actively engaged in planning activities. We have not been as successful in engaging the participation of Latino and Asian American citizens and recognize the need to do things differently. Assistance was requested from those present.

Chick Krautler also briefly described *Global Atlanta Works*, a program developed with support from the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. In addition to the communication conversation series, this program also includes publication and distribution of the "Global Atlanta Snapshots." The snapshots provide information on ethnic communities including backgrounds, customs and cultures, roles in the economy and available resources. The folders contain copies of the 11 existing snapshots. A total package of 20 snapshots will be available by the end of this year. The program also includes a quarterly newsletter (copies provided in folders) and a multicultural directory with interactive mapping is in the last stages of development. .

Discussion-Issues, Challenges and Opportunities. Chick Krautler initiated the discussion/conversation by asking the following questions: What made you decide to do business and or live in DeKalb County? What should or could be put in place to keep the positive things moving forward? What are some ways we can work together as DeKalb grows in new and different ways?

Following the discussion, Lesley Grady, Vice-President for Community Partnerships was introduced and briefly discussed the role of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta as a partner in this and other community initiatives.

See discussion summary below.

Discussion Summary and Observations. C. J. Bland, CEO, Minority Professionals Network and ARC Board member summarized the discussion and provided observations as shown below.

- DeKalb offers different cultures, affordable homes, comfortable environment(Tomi Hall)
- Recreational amenities/international soccer and education opportunities for kids in county are strong in DeKalb. (Melvin McCray)
- Many Chinese work in DeKalb, but live in Gwinnett and Alpharetta. If the Chamblee area is beautified, more Chinese people will live there. There are 3 Korean banks and 2 Chinese banks on Buford highway. Chinese/Japanese/Korean food can be found. Chamblee area needs to look more attractive to be more attractive to Chinese people, in particular. MARTA could say something about the different communities when approaching stops, i.e. Chinatown. (Charlene Fang)
- DeKalb has been a great place for business investments. Originally purchased one hotel in DeKalb and currently operates 15 in metro area. Business is headquartered in DeKalb County and travel daily on Buford Highway. DeKalb has been a great place for investment. Buford Highway should be renamed Buford International Highway. How can we create a Buford CID? (Nitin Shah)
- Buford Highway is a destination and not just something to drive through and the name should reflect this. Difference is often regarded as something bad but it should be branded as something good, and should be celebrated in unity. Celebrating our differences together should be our focus.(Jimmie Moomaw)
- Pine Lake Mayor is director of DeKalb's International Community School in the Avondale Patilla Building. It has been around for 4 years and goes up to 6th grade. 281 kids attend the school. 50% of kids are refugees. 80% of kids receive their only meal at that school. Most kids are from Clarkson. 80 languages are spoken there. Problem – How do we spread the word and market the school to the community?(Mayor Greg Zarus)
- The Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce established the Hispanic American Center for Economic Development, the first incubator that targets community development as an asset. It is about stimulating the formation and growth of Hispanic businesses in Georgia. Language assistance is offered/over 45 seminars and workshops have been held. Why has it taken so long for Atlanta to become an international city? DeKalb's international designation should be part of the branding of

Atlanta. DeKalb is a great place to highlight the diversity of the region (Sara Gonzalez)

- There is a need to allocate funding to market DeKalb as an international county, however, efforts have been focused instead on making Buford Highway safer, e.g. increasing sidewalks. DeKalb recently opened a brand new soccer stadium (for Atlanta Silverbacks sports team) where an impressive mix of people from different cultural background attended. Soccer brought them together. Additionally, people should know more about the upgraded Wake Walker Park, another resource for soccer and other sports. (CEO Vernon Jones)
- Buford Highway offers a variety of activities for residents including grocery shopping, meeting friends and other social events. However, there is a need for services such as aging, job search, and domestic violence prevention. There are not many social services along Buford Highway. The Center for Pan Asian Community Services offers some assistance but there is a need for more. We need to look underneath the surface of Buford Highway.(Chaiwon Kim)
- To increase community participation and create new leadership, you have to organize certain events that will expose each community but also offers the opportunity to bring them together with other communities. These events must be fun. An international fair, for example, will help link communities, integrating them but with respect for their cultural differences.(Joseph Alfred)

Recommendations- What could or should be put in place to keep the positive things moving forward? How can we work together as DeKalb grows and changes?

- Explore changing name of Buford Highway to Buford International Boulevard – i.e. – a stronger branding name with a focus on connectivity and a destination.
- Create a permanent body/strategic advisory panel to provide input on international and diversity issues. DeKalb currently has a Community Relations Commission and is appropriate lead entity. ARC has existing Asian and Hispanic Advisory Councils. With DeKalb as lead, ARC can also work closely with the county in this area on potential joint initiatives.
- Investigate starting a Buford Community Improvement District (CID) - CEO Jones and staff willing to help community leaders learn about process to start a CID. Mr. Nitin Shah is interested in taking a leading role in this endeavor.

- Provide additional support in Asian American community for services such as domestic violence prevention, aging services, and job search assistance.
- Organize and support an international event that will bring an array of diverse communities together.
- Address marketing challenge; develop and implement strategies to more effectively market DeKalb as an international destination.

In a final summary of the discussion, C.J.Bland emphasized that **marketing DeKalb County is key**. He suggested that ARC's newly established Global Atlanta Works program and website as well as his company, Minority Professionals Network, are available resources for this process.

Next Steps. Ann Kimbrough, Chief of Staff, DeKalb County Government, briefly summarized the next steps. She stated, "it is DeKalb County's goal to create greater dialogue among all its diverse communities. We would like to work with the ARC to set another "Conversation" follow up meeting to take place in 6 months."