



Meeting Summary

Diversity as Our Strength: A Community Conversation in Gwinnett County

7:30 am – 9:00 am

Tuesday, June 21, 2005

The 1818 Club

6500 Sugarloaf Parkway

Duluth, Georgia 30097

Greetings –Charles Bannister, Chairman, Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Bannister welcomed those present and thanked ARC for recognizing the importance of this subject matter. He noted that diversity is one of the most significant topics of discussion for the future of the entire Atlanta region, but for Gwinnett County in particular. He thanked all present for participating in the roundtable and stated, “you are all here for the sole reason that you make a difference in the lives of people here in Gwinnett County, and as the chairman of the county government, we appreciate what you do.” As a frame of reference for discussion, a brief picture of where Gwinnett County stands today was presented. He stated that this information should cause one to think about the reasons this discussion must take place, and must continue to take place in the future.

- ◆ This will be the third year in which the Gwinnett County Public School system is majority minority.
- ◆ Between 1990 and 2000, while the total population of Gwinnett County increased by 67%, the minority population of Gwinnett increased by an astounding 397%.
- ◆ As of the 2000 Census, minorities made up 31% of the population of Gwinnett County, and their share of the population increased from 11% just ten years earlier; and by 2020, most analysts expect Gwinnett County to be majority-minority.
- ◆ Not only do minorities make up a large portion of our population, but the diversity of ethnicities is remarkable.
- ◆ About 13% of Gwinnett’s population is African-American, about 11% is Hispanic, and about 8% is Asian. Many of these groups are represented in this room today.
- ◆ In 1990, about 500 students county-wide were in English for Speakers of Other Languages classes. In 2004, that number was closer to 10,000. More than 100 languages are spoken in Gwinnett schools.

Commissioner Bannister concluded by introducing Chick Krautler, Director of the Atlanta Regional Commission, and discussion facilitator. He mentioned that Chick oversees all of ARC’s regional planning programs in transportation, land use, air quality, the environment, and water quality. He further noted that Chick currently serves as President of the Georgia Association of Regional Development Centers, is a member of

the National Association of Regional Councils, the Clean Air Campaign Board of Directors, the Georgia Foreign Trade Zone Board of Directors, and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and is one of the 100 Most Influential Georgians, according to *Georgia Trend Magazine*.

Purpose of Meeting and Introductory Remarks – Charles “Chick” Krautler, Director, Atlanta Regional Commission

Krautler thanked Commissioner Bannister, Jim Maran and Judy Waters for collaborating with ARC in organizing this discussion. He noted that this “Conversation in Gwinnett” is the first in a series of proposed opportunities to meet leaders from diverse communities throughout the Atlanta region. ARC’s intention is to listen to what is being said today and improve outreach. County administrators, legislators, and others are also here to listen and to learn. He explained that this event is also an opportunity for ARC to provide information about planning initiatives and encourage participation. County administrators, legislators, and others are also here to listen and to learn, he stated.

He described ARC’s role beyond transportation and land-use planning, including environmental planning, aging, governmental services, workforce development as well as information and data services. ARC also produces the Global Atlanta Snapshots, a series of publications created to foster understanding among all peoples of the Atlanta region and improve service delivery.

ARC developed a long-term transportation plan three years ago and needed to get input from diverse communities. While ARC has Hispanic and Asian American Advisory Councils, the agency needs to do a better job recognizing all populations in its plans and not just traditional audiences. This discussion is a step in that direction.

Krautler initiated introductions by asking everyone to provide names and length of time living or working in Gwinnett County. Introductions were followed by a facilitated discussion of challenges, issues and concerns relative to doing business and living in Gwinnett County.

Discussion Summary

- Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce success strategy: a demographically represented membership and board by design, having strong ties to public schools, maintaining positive relationships by being more demographically reflective of the community and being team oriented.
- .Major outreach efforts undertaken to ensure that the chamber looks like the community. 85% of the Gwinnett Chamber members are entrepreneurs.
- Businesses of many cultures have moved into the county. Understanding zoning procedures is one challenge for some of these businesses.
- Communicating effectively will help overcome challenges for people who may struggle with the effects of prejudice and language barriers.
- Diversity should represent all demographics. There is no diversity in county administration or on some board of directors. The county will grow much better if it is more representative.

- Find ways to communicate with those who are foreign-born (e.g. parents). Effective public involvement requires different approach for communicating with and including these groups.
- For residents who are foreign-born (e.g. Hispanic patients), communicating with them will not work by just teaching Americans to learn Spanish. Use leaders from within each ethnic community. Grow in the place you are. Ethnic groups do not want to lose their uniqueness.
- “Success lives here” is a culture in Gwinnett. The culture of success must be maintained as the county diversifies.
- One in every 5 students in Gwinnett school system does not speak English as their home language. Additionally, there is tremendous growth in the number of students living in poverty (i.e. participants in federal reduced lunch program). Though some Title I dollars are available, there is still not enough funds available to cover cost for transportation to summer school.
- There is a dichotomous situation in terms of health and human services. Everyone wants to work together but there is a difference in the growth of needs of those who have and those who do not. Attention is mostly given to the business community but lack of attention and resources on other end. For example, speakers of other languages and the needs of Hispanic population are higher than any culture. This is because they are traditionally in lower jobs and because English is not their first language.
- There is a continuous need for English classes but funding for these programs are being cut on the federal, state and local levels.
- There is a need for more funding for public health. Some rural counties receive more funding for public health than Gwinnett County because rural legislators carry more weight. Andrew Young School of Public Policy at Georgia State University is looking at the public health issue.
- The objective is great assimilation. To move up, one (e.g. women) must step up to the plate, step forward and be counted, be invited to the table, be in the picture. There also need an environment conducive to getting education and businesses going.
- Hopewell Baptist Church’s “Hope for the Future” program offers basic computer skills, job placement assistance, etc. These are programs that take people off the street. However, money to support these programs is being taken away. Disenfranchised people will be accounted for. We are going to pay either at the front end or at the back end (increased crime rate). Hopewell was one of the first to institute a program that prepares students (99% passing rate) for the Gateway test.
- ARC has a workforce development division offering funding assistance for qualified service providers through the Workforce Investment Act.
- Demand a place at the table. Don’t wait to be asked, get involved.....you may never be asked.
- A different approach to community outreach is needed in minority communities. They should be invited to participate instead of simply providing the opportunity to be involved.
- There are resources within the community specific to various minority groups such as the Latin American Association, Mexican Chamber, Georgia Hispanic

Chamber. There is a Hindu temple that will facilitate learning about culture. Strengthening cross cultural ties (e.g. Asian tutoring Hispanics) and revitalizing the Human Relations Commission are other possible community resources.

- Facilitate/strength cross cultural ties. Tap into community resources. Example: Asian students tutoring or mentoring hispanic students.

Summation - Judy Waters, Executive Director, Community Foundation of Northeast Georgia

What we learned: The most valuable point that will bring us together is recognizing that culturally, people need to be invited. In the majority culture, you go and participate. But, those from different cultures want to be invited. Recognize the power of communication. You (diverse people) are Gwinnett's new infrastructure.

Invitation to Get Involve in Regional Planning and Related Activities at ARC- Carolyn White, Community Outreach

Attendees were invited to get involved in several advisory capacities at ARC as well as participate in specific upcoming planning initiatives and special activities. White indicated that follow-up information will be provided on potential opportunities for engagement. Examples cited included the following:

Asian American and Latino/Hispanic Advisory Councils (general agency focus)

Environmental Justice Planning Team (transportation planning specific)

Annual Regional Leadership Institute (2 week intensive focus for leaders on regional issues)

LINK ("city visits" for regional leaders to other cities throughout the US) serve on one of *Community Planning Academy* (offering the latest in community planning and concepts for community leaders and planning officials)

Envision 6 (Land Use and transportation aspirations planning process)

"The Shape of Things to Come" (upcoming public affairs show)

Global Atlanta Snapshots Announcement and Video Presentation, Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator

Daly stated that the snapshots include a range of information about diverse ethnic communities in the Atlanta region and a powerful tool to facilitate conversation. They include information on (1) ethnic and immigrant populations, (2) languages, custom and cultures, (3) population concentrations and maps, (4) contributions to the Atlanta economy, (5) life in metro Atlanta, and (6) community organizations, associations and resources.

Snapshots are currently available include: Asian-Indians, Bosnians, Caribbeans, Chinese, Koreans, Mexicans, Nigerians, Russians, South Americans, Vietnamese. They can be viewed or downloaded at:

www.atlantaregional.com/regionaldata/globalatlantasnapshots.html

The meeting officially concluded at 9:15 following the Global Atlanta Snapshots video.