

Plan 2040 Neighborhood Forum Gwinnett, North DeKalb and North Fulton Counties

On November 9, The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened its final Neighborhood Forum for 2010. Like the previous three, this program centered on the Atlanta Regional Commission's Plan 2040, a comprehensive plan currently under development to accommodate the region's population and economic growth sustainably over the next 30 years. Targeted toward residents of Gwinnett and surrounding counties, this forum was designed to solicit public input on the early results of the planning process, including its vision, goals and objectives and recommendations for maximizing transportation resources. Thirty-five people participated in the forum, working in four groups for about two hours. ARC staff members were on hand to provide information and respond to participants' questions.

Participants recorded their reactions and ideas related to the evening's discussion on flip charts. Their comments were later transcribed by Civic League staff and are included in this report under the heading "Small Group Results". Participants' comments were wide-ranging and should be read in their entirety, but several observations are worth noting:

- The primary subjects addressed by the participants were transit/transportation and taxation. The transit aspects of the discussions were a part of the larger regional planning premise, but the taxation chatter typically dealt with how to pay for all the projects that everyone seemed to want.
- Many participants expressed a strong interest in the processes surrounding setting regional priorities, tapping into funding sources and allocating available funds. Many were only marginally familiar with the Atlanta Regional Commission and were curious about how local needs fit into regional plans.
- Many participants directly and indirectly suggested that citizens need to assume more personal responsibility for the region's future. Communicating with their elected officials, changing their own habits and making a point to learn about regional issues were several examples participants cited of important citizen responsibilities.

Meeting Process

The Plan 2040 Neighborhood Forum participants were welcomed by Zayra Fosse, a member of The Civic League board of directors. Zayra introduced Civic League staff members Tamara Pursley and Trip Ferrell; ARC staff members Judy Dovers, Dan Reuter, Jane Hayse; and facilitator Mattice Haynes. Mattice welcomed participants, gave them a brief overview of the night's agenda and directed their attention to a quick "getting connected" exercise in which group members introduced themselves, stated which county they lived in and explained their motivations for attending the forum. The results of this exercise

are listed in the “Small Group Results” section.

Dan, who is ARC’s land use division chief, then gave forum participants an overview of Plan 2040, including current needs in metro Atlanta; the plan’s vision, goals and objectives; and reactions to the plan thus far. A handout accompanied this section of the Forum and can be found in Appendix A.

At the conclusion of Dan's presentation, Mattice had the groups generate some questions relating to Plan 2040 and its implementation. Dan then answered a sampling of these questions. All the questions are documented in the “Small Group Results” section.

Jane Hayse, ARC’s transportation planning chief, gave a presentation on Plan 2040’s recommendations on maximizing transportation resources (handout in Appendix B). This was then followed by a brief question and answer session.

In the next exercise, Mattice had the groups come up with actions individuals and groups would need to take in order for Plan 2040 to become successful (see “Small Group Results”). This was followed with each group highlighting their results.

The final small group discussion had the groups list their suggestions for what would need to be done to implement Plan 2040 (see “Small Group Results”).

Mattice brought the discussion to a close with a “one word” survey of what everyone thought of the forum.

Small Group Results

For the first small group exercise, participants were asked to state their motivations for attending the Neighborhood Forum.

Group 1

- Accountability to the community
- Interested in how public input works
- Protectionism: if you don’t come, your neighborhood can be negatively affected
- Curiosity
- Train to Athens/traffic
- Participatory government
- 2020 vs. 2040
- Interested in issues championed by The Civic League and ARC

Group 2

- Regional planning issues – effect on local planning
- Report to local community about what is being planned in region
- UPCCA interest in SR141
- Future impacts of regional issues
- Regional issues as related to senior issues

- Needs of an older population
- Land use and transportation relationships

Group 3

- Process (2)
- Planning memo (3)
- Curiosity
- Citizen participation (2)
- Transportation issues
- Business issues
- Ideas about projects
- Planned growth

Group 4

- Interest in impacting future
- Interest in developments
- Interest in thoughts on what future should be
- Fact-finding/networking
- Better quality of life
- Future of commuting
- Natural resources/water

Following Dan's introductory presentation on Plan 2040, Forum participants were asked to discuss and document their questions relating to what they had heard.

Group 1

- What authority/power/resources does the ARC have?
- Can the ARC override GDOT or other state agencies?
- How does the ARC influence county/city governments?
- How does ARC integrate with other commissions/agencies?
- How likely is Atlanta to receive federal funding for transit in the next 5-10 years?
- How are the ARC priorities incentivized?

Group 2

- What does "2040" mean to a local jurisdiction?
- What are the shifting demographics?
- How do we balance transit needs with limited \$?
- How do we serve an older population with transit and housing options?
- How do "empty nesters" stay in a neighborhood?
- Is there "political will" to implement 2040?

Group 3

- How do we pay for it?
- How are projects prioritized?
- Light rail included?
- Commuter rail to Athens, Macon, Chattanooga?
- What prediction models are being used?

Group 4

- How will ARC promote, deal with funding, and set priorities?
- How much clout/leverage does ARC have to enact/deal with the legislature?
- Are additional water reservoirs being considered a priority?
- How would different locations be prioritized for rail stops/expansion?

Following Jane's presentation, Mattice asked participants to brainstorm on what will be needed to have Plan 2040 succeed.

Group 1

- Participate in forums and public hearings
- Share knowledge with local community/neighborhood
- Encourage others to get involved
- Hold others accountable for progress, e.g. water conservation
- Volunteer your time in the community
- Teach children about these important issues
- Use the resources to demonstrate demand, e.g. transit
- Support budgeting and appropriations process – increase or don't increase taxes

Group 2

- Stay informed
- Get involved
- Work with developers as a community
- Express desires
- Take advantage or the development slow down to rethink
- Facilitate educational sessions for grass roots organizations
- Spread the word via modern media

Group 3

- Personal awareness via public meetings and web research
- Participation in local elections
- Advocating in communities
- Increase energy efficiency and save water
- Involvement - suggestions to local officials
- Be realistic - incremental implementation
- Build more collaboration
- Think regionally

- Support a tax increase

Group 4

- Do individual research and communicate to others: HOAs, friends, family
- Comments at city council meetings/forums – participation
- Make time to attend/participate
- Being heard/working together
- Informal action- vote/campaign

Finally, Mattice asked the small groups for recommendations on making Plan 2040 successful.

Group 1

- New technology
- Education/project list
- Opportunity to vote for regional sales tax 2012
- Learning more about financial constraints/budgets
- Completing pipeline projects
- Less costly options to maintain rather than build
- 'Changes' to recommendations
- Commuter rail

Group 2

- Need to invest
- Need to prioritize
- Reduce demand
- Get the most out of what we already have
- Change travel habits

Group 3

- How to motivate paying for transportation taxes?
- Instill sense of urgency?
- How do we stop sprawl?
- Incentives and disincentives to use public transit?
- Reevaluate efficiency of projects in pipeline

Group 4

- Maximizing transportation resources
- Allocate funds toward incentives they want to encourage businesses and individuals to make transportation changes

- Convert the federal tax to 90% -> 10% -> state taxes for Georgia

Snapshot of Participants

The Civic League collected demographic surveys 26 of the 35 participants in this forum. Here are the results:

Demographic Snapshot (26 forms total)	
Male	16
Female	10
Age	
Under 18	0
18 to 24	2
25 to 39	2
40 to 54	11
55 to 65	9
Over 65	2
Ethnicity	
Black	8
White	14
Asian	3
American Indian / Alaskan Native	0
Hispanic	1
Other	0
County of Home	
Fulton	4
DeKalb	6
Gwinnett	13
Cobb	1
Barrow	1
Avg. Travel (Miles)	
	12.4



PLAN 2040 Objectives

1. Increase mobility options for people and goods by

- assuring the preservation, maintenance and operation of existing transit and road systems.
- implementing cost-effective improvements such as sidewalks, trails, and bicycle lanes to expand transportation alternatives.
- maintaining industrial and freight land uses at strategic locations with efficient access and mobility.
- maintaining and expanding infrastructure to support air and rail travel and transport.

2. Foster a healthy, educated, well trained, safe and secure population by

- building communities that encourage healthy lifestyles and active living for all ages, with provisions for healthcare, education, recreation, cultural arts and entertainment opportunities.
- promoting a regional community that embraces diversity – age, ethnicity, and lifestyle – as its strength.
- promoting access to quality schools, career training, and technology literacy to provide a workforce that can support economic opportunity.
- promoting public safety efforts to create vibrant and safe 24-hour communities.

3. Promote places to live with easy access to jobs and services by

- building compact development in existing communities with integrated land uses that will minimize travel distances and support walking, cycling and transit.
- increasing housing, services, and employment opportunities around transit stations.
- providing a range of housing choices to accommodate households of all income levels, sizes and needs to ensure that workers in the community have the option to live there.
- protecting the character and integrity of existing neighborhoods, while also meeting the needs of the community.

4. Improve energy efficiency while preserving the region's environment by

- conserving and protecting environmentally-sensitive areas and increasing the amount and connectivity of greenspace.
- continuing to enhance stewardship of water resources throughout the region.
- promoting energy-efficient land development and infrastructure investments that foster the sustainable use of resources
- encouraging appropriate infill, redevelopment and adaptive reuse of the built environment to maintain the regional footprint and optimize the use of existing investments.

5. Identify innovative approaches to economic recovery and long term prosperity by

- focusing financial resources and public investments in existing communities.
- establishing a regionwide economic and growth management strategy that includes federal, state, regional and local agencies, as well as non-governmental partners.
- enhancing and diversifying economic development activities to include sectors like life sciences, logistics and transportation, agribusiness, energy and environmental technology, healthcare and eldercare, aerospace technology and entertainment and media production.
- leveraging the diversity of the region – our people, places and opportunities – to continue to attract business and residents.



Recommendations for Maximizing Transportation Resources

Guiding Principles

- Put the highest priority on asset management – preserving what we have
- Strategically pursue system expansions
- Support programs leading to sustainable growth patterns, focusing on existing places and activity centers

Recommendations

1. Focus on asset management
2. Preserve our existing transit assets and service levels
3. Purpose system expansion strategies for interstate bottlenecks and managed lane expansions
4. Relook at current capacity-adding projects for operational improvements
5. Focus on delivering projects that are already in the pipeline

Appendix C. Evaluation and Feedback Results

How satisfied are you with today's forum?

Very satisfied	5
Satisfied	14
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	1
Dissatisfied	1
Very dissatisfied	0

Did you learn something new about our region?

Yes	19
No	2
Unsure	0

How committed are you to staying involved?

Very committed	6
Committed	10
Neither committed nor uncommitted	3
Uncommitted	1
Very uncommitted	0

How confident are you that Plan 2040 will be successful?

Very confident	2
Confident	6
Neither confident nor skeptical	10
Skeptical	3
Very skeptical	0

What worked especially well at today's forum?

Small Groups/Discussions	14
"Nothing"	1
Snacks	1
Hearing others	1

What should we do differently?

More diverse interests/issues	3
More opportunities to suggest solutions	1
Better time management	3
More educational materials before	5
Questions are difficult to answer	1

Speak in simpler terms	1
Tables	2
Name tags	1
More in-depth discussion of issues	1