

Neighborhood Forum

Stockbridge

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on Sept. 11, 2008 in Stockbridge, in Henry County. This forum was in support of the Atlanta Regional Commission's Fifty Forward visioning initiative and was focused on a major question facing the region in the next 50 years: How can we have growth and a clean and healthy environment? Seventy people participated in the Stockbridge forum. In the course of two hours, participants worked in small groups of 8 to 10 on a series of questions that helped them think about how the region can accommodate growth and a better environment.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 227 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- Support for **public transit**, including rail transit. Every small group listed transit as a solution, and all but one mentioned rail transit in particular.
- Support for **recycling and water conservation**. All but one group listed solid-waste recycling as a solution and most listed water conservation as important. Some were specific about how the region could conserve water, from water-saving plumbing and restrictions on septic tanks, to xeriscape landscapes and additional reservoirs.
- Support for **density where appropriate** and **walkable neighborhoods**. One group suggested "high-density, multi-use developments (including) commercial, residential, retail." "Build higher," it added, ". . . near transportation hubs." Another group agreed there should be mixed-use communities, but also suggested "mixed-value communities" with "million-dollar homes" near smaller houses. Most groups saw a need for "safe, walkable communities."
- Interest in **alternatives to commuting**, including employment closer to homes and telecommuting. One group suggested alternatives to other, more local trips as well, including greater use of home delivery services.
- Strong support for **green space protection**. One group suggested the region "preserve the rural character of the area" through transfer-of-development programs, which provide tax benefits to property owners who promise not to develop their lands.

Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by Doug Hooker, board member for the Civic League, who turned the program over to Jon Abercrombie, the meeting facilitator. Jon explained that participants would work in small groups or "circles" of 8 to 10 people and would be asked to think about,

discuss and come to consensus on several questions. Each group selected a “moderator” to act as facilitator and write the group’s comments on a large flip-chart pad.

The first question Jon asked was part of a scenario. Its purpose was to help the groups imagine how the region would look and work in 2058, if it were successful in creating growth and a healthy environment. Here’s the scenario:

In 2058 iMag, the leading news web site of the 21st century, comes to our region to write about how the Atlanta Region has become a model for growth that does no harm to the environment.

Here’s the question Jon posed to the groups:

What does iMag photograph, videotape and write about? What lessons does it find that other regions could learn from?

Jon gave the groups 50 minutes to work on this question. As they were finishing, Jon asked the groups to look over the ideas and images they had listed and highlight the ones they felt most reflected the rough consensus of the group – and also place a mark next to the one or two that they thought might be their most visionary ideas.



In the remainder of the meeting, Jon asked the groups to consider two other questions:

- *What do we need to preserve among things that already exist in the Atlanta Region today for the iMag article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*
- *What do we need to change in the Atlanta Region for the iMag article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*

The results of these three group discussions (a general vision of how the Atlanta Region can have growth and a healthy environment, the assets that should be preserved and things that should be changed) are in the following three sections of this report.

Small Group Results: A Vision of Sustainability for the Atlanta Region

Here are the vision ideas – the things that participants felt iMag, the leading news provider of the 21st century, would focus on, if it were writing about the Atlanta Region as model metro area for sustainability in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Water Use
 - Desalination pipeline (using the ocean to convert salt water to fresh water) - good source of power - oil pipeline?
 - Qs: Tax incentives, pollution - employees should get tax breaks as well
 - Tax incentives for water/energy conservation
- Video Conferencing - need to be more widespread and in use to reduce the automobiles on the road - part of using technology to reduce commuting times, pollution
- Adding post-secondary schools in Henry County - using technology by having video conferencing to learn as opposed to being in class
- Safe, walkable communities
- Places for children/teenagers to develop (such as recreation centers) - includes after-school programs - help them mature, grow and learn
- Transit systems - reduce dependence on a car - people must support this
- Look at the Walt Disney transit system (MARTA on the south side)
- Recycling - the need for centers (and picking up regularly to reduce the amount of waste - should be provided by city/county)
- Use of renewable energy resources to power homes/businesses
- Use the winds to produce power (and the ocean waves) (in the context of hydrogen separation)
- The need for a highly educated population
- The need for active individuals
- Having more technical academies to help educate the population/workforce and to help advance technology and its use in the county
- Transfer of development rights to help preserve green space in the county/metro area (This is to preserve the rural character of the area)
- School choice - give people the choice on where children should go (want to send their children to)
- Create a man-made lake for boating and water resources

Small Group 2:

- Toll roads - free market - force more efficiency - force density, mass transit
- Golf cart paths
- Solar powered water heaters
- Smart cars
- Commuter rails, centrally located along I-75
- Land use plan consistently followed
- Live/work/play communities - residents can actually afford to live in the community
- Higher education and high-performing school system
- Tax incentives to businesses
- Quality and affordable health care
- Look at where the county is today and project a cleaner environment from there
- Regional planning - can't stop improvements at county lines

Small Group 3:

- Greenspace
- Water conservation
- Transportation - rail, commuter, park & ride
- Alternative fuel sources - wind, solar, etc.
- Energy conservation - Energy efficient appliances and fixtures
- Recycling
- Increase educational attainment levels
- Mandatory high school graduation
- More parental involvement in schools
- Density of population - vertical
- Neighborhood communities - walking, greenspace
- Sidewalks
- Viable employment - closer to home, telecommuting, flexible work schedules
- Technology = Infrastructure
- State government that values this urban area
- Affordable and accessible healthcare for all
- Rich, blended community - multi-cultural
- Leadership
 - Coordinated region-based planning
 - Cooperative region-based planning
 - Welcoming
 - Represents all areas of the population
 - Reflective of all population
 - Inclusive
 - SPLOST Coordination
- Thriving art community
- Support for aging population

Small Group 4:

- Recycling
 - Mandatory for households, businesses, schools - paper, plastics, aluminum, batteries
 - Incentives - discounts on garbage pickup
 - Multiple centers, drop-offs
 - Attractive recycling bins - pre-sort items
 - Trash compactors
 - Trash haulers provide service
- Fuel Alternatives
 - Natural gas - availability, fill units
 - Wind power, solar power, ethanol, bio-mass
 - Tax credits
 - Public demand of product, increase MPG of all vehicles
- Transportation
 - Mass transit - rail lines, park & rides, carpools
 - Tele-commuters - incentivize business owners
 - Trolleys - electric
 - "Jetsons" flying travel vehicles - utilize air space

- Increase local employment - reduce number of commuters - exporting - make the change
- Water Conservation
 - Use of grey water
 - Reduce use of septic tanks - discourage building outside of sewage line availability
 - Rain barrels - households, businesses, schools
 - Xeriscape - landscaping that requires low water
 - Restructure water authority - within water basins - no longer county control
 - Create more reservoirs
 - Clean streams and rivers - education
- Land Conservation
 - Green space, parks
 - High density, multi-use developments - commercial, residential, retail, build higher, parking, near transportation hubs
 - Pedestrian/bike lanes
 - Transferable development rights

Small Group 5:

- Transit system - it would run north & south - would lessen traffic congestion and be good for the environment
- Bring industries/jobs into the area - residents would not have to drive into other areas to work - bring mall or other major retail development into area - restaurants and other developments
- Maintain greenspace while building - ensure land is left with some trees
- Rehab, reuse existing retail shopping centers before building new ones
- Restrictions on new home construction - amount of new homes/developments
- Building recreation centers for students
- Ensure there is local public transportation - people with no cars are unable to do much else other than work
- Look into alternative energy sources - solar energy (cooperative development b/t counties & power companies)
- Improving education for all kids - improve national ranking - prepare better for college
- Educating citizens on how to get a healthy environment
- More cost-efficient options for recycling



- Water conservation - building more reservoirs
- Develop a system to recycle household water
- A region that has good air quality
- Initiatives to assist small businesses
- Community that promotes alternative fuel sources / solar energy
- Health care resources for low income

Small Group 6:

- More roundabouts - less/no lights
- More stuff coming to us - deliveries, internet shopping
- Curbside recycling - county/city/resident ownership
- Water conservation - water-efficient plumbing, builders plan in use of green materials, county standards that support
- Develop kid-friendly recreational communities - minimal building/driving - multi-use buildings/parks
- More solar power
- Wind power
- Nuclear
- Require homes to install computerized/programmable thermostats
- No cars
- Transportation: heliopads, rapid transit, more pedestrian capability, less polluting vehicles, bicycles, golf carts, more public transportation opportunities
- Restricting days you can drive
- Work at home
- Teleconferencing/office condominiums
- Require developers to plan in green space
- Move more types of industry/work opportunities in
- Offer more community entertainment/dining/church - self-contained communities
- Pedestrian bridges over roads
- Planning: proactive plans, achieving results

Small Group 7:

- Recycle Services - location, landfills
- Government leadership - recycling
- Citizen ownership - think green
- Education - schools
- Skills - environmental plans, etc., entrepreneurs
- Corporate partners - ownership education
- Transportation
- Alternative energies - alternative energies - recharging stations
- Mass transportation - rail services attached to interstates
- Public & elected leadership for change - vote for desired leadership
- Planned development communities - work, school & live in same community - smart growth

- Fair taxes
- Mixed-use communities, villages
- Better waste treatment to increase density and save greenspace
- Developer and builders give back to community
- Have schools within community - walk to school, self-sufficient
- Mixed-valued communities - million-dollar homes and smaller homes
- Master county plan
- 100% high school graduation - jobs - work-ready
- Jobs - high-tech, medical products
- Overhaul tax system - attract more business - fair tax
- Green - greenspace - watercycling
- Managed growth - retail strips
- Pride of ownership - covenants
- Flying machines
- Molecular transporters

Consensus Ideas

Here are the ideas, from those listed above, that the groups felt reflected a consensus of their thinking:

- Safe, walkable communities
- Places for children/teenagers to develop (such as recreation centers) - includes after-school programs - help them mature, grow and learn
- Transit systems - reduce dependence on a car - people must support this
- Look at the Walt Disney transit system (MARTA on the south side)
- Recycling - the need for centers (and picking up regularly to reduce the amount of waste - should be provided by city/county)
- Commuter rails, centrally located along I-75
- Land use plan consistently followed
- Increase educational attainment levels
- Mandatory high school graduation
- More parental involvement in schools
- Density of population - vertical
- Neighborhood communities - walking, greenspace
- Sidewalks
- Viable employment - closer to home, telecommuting, flexible work schedules
- Technology = Infrastructure
- Leadership
 - Welcoming
 - Represents all areas of the population
 - Reflective of all population
 - Inclusive
- Recycling - Trash haulers provide service
- Fuel Alternatives - Natural gas - availability, fill units

- Land Conservation - Transferable development rights
- Transit system - it would run north & south - would lessen traffic congestion and be good for the environment
- Rehab, reuse existing retail shopping centers before building new ones
- Educating citizens on how to get a healthy environment
- More stuff coming to us - deliveries, internet shopping
- Develop kid-friendly recreational communities - minimal building/driving - multi-use buildings/parks
- Teleconferencing/office condominiums
- Offer more community entertainment/dining/church - self-contained communities
- Recycle Services - location, landfills
- Alternative energies - alternative energies - recharging stations
- Planned development communities - work, school & live in same community - smart growth
- Mixed-use communities, villages

Visionary Ideas

Here are the ideas, from those listed above, that the groups felt were their most visionary or “out of the box” ideas:

- Look at the Walt Disney transit system (MARTA on the south side)
- Toll roads - free market - force more efficiency - force density, mass transit
- Mandatory high school graduation
- "Jetsons" flying travel vehicles - utilize air space
- Pedestrian/bike lanes
- Community that promotes alternative fuel sources / solar energy
- Offer more community entertainment/dining/church - self-contained communities
- More solar power
- Flying machines

Small-Group Results: Existing Assets That Should Be Preserved

Here are existing community assets that participants felt should be preserved, if the Atlanta Region is to become sustainable in 2058. These things could include physical assets, organizations or institutions, public policies or decisions, or positive traits or skills of the people who live here now.

Small Group 1:

- Preserve and build communities/self-identification - this is something that can change for the better
- Preserve history - stay connected/learn from the past, building tight-knit communities
- Keep and build on cultural systems - thus, increasing social capital
- Preserving HOPE scholarship and grant

- Preserve natural resources, such as rivers, streams, open spaces, animals naturally in the area
- Preserve old cultural norms, such as farming and gardening

Small Group 2:

- Rural areas
- Community feel
- Water facility
- Industry (existing)
- Parks

Small Group 3:

- Abundant water supply
- Greenspace
- Rural character
- Corporate sponsored min-greenspace
- Dynamic economic vitality
- Youth magnet
- Quality of life
- Entertainment & art & sports
- Racial harmony

Small Group 4:

- Parks & greenspace
- Clean air
- Ample water supply
- Historical landmarks properties
- Private property rights
- "One" Henry - multi-governmental transportation, land use, water plan
- Education

Small Group 5:

- People in the area
- Sense of community
- Small town feel
- Maintain and increase home ownership

Small Group 6:

- Sense of community
- Green spaces - golf, recreational
- Food supply: safe, available
- Water
- Quality air
- Medical services

- Religious freedoms
- Community safety
- Sports

Small Group 7

- Greenspace
- Quality of our education system
- Community feel (sense of family)
- Air quality
- Safety of our communities

Small-Group Results: Things That Should Be Changed

Here are things that participants felt would need to be changed if the Atlanta Region were to become sustainable in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Being more receptive to ideas other people present

Small Group 2:

- Resistance to mass transit
- Community involvement

Small Group 3:

- Get water runoff collection
- Change air quality
- Get world-class schools
- Change planning approach
- Get regional SPLOST planning approach
- Change transportation money distribution
- Get transportation alternatives

Small Group 4:

- Education - every child succeeds
- Education - conservation & environmental stewardship
- Transportation - rail lines - less dependency on oil
- Recycling

Small Group 5:

- Public access to lakes
- Encourage higher education
- Mindset of local government
- Encourage businesses to locate to the area
- Support local businesses

- Engage our youth to stay in school and to work after school

Small Group 6:

- Greenspaces
- Food supply - safe, available
- Water
- Quality air
- Medical services
- Community safety
- Opportunities for retail services
- Commutes
- Emergency vehicle lane

Small Group 7:

- Technical school
- Satellite locations for colleges
- Transportation - after-thought
- Better employment opportunities to decrease crime
- Improve dropout rates
- Parent accountability
- Change in thought pattern
- Activity centers (Youth programs - required supervision)
- Taking care of elderly citizens

The Civic League Lineup

As a final exercise, Jon asked participants to line up across the meeting room according to how hopeful they were that the Atlanta Region could achieve the things they had talked about that evening. On one wall, he posted a “1” and on the opposite wall, he posted a “10.” Those who were very pessimistic should line up near the 1, Jon said; those who were very optimistic should line up at the 10. Others should line up at a point reflecting degree of optimism and pessimism. A large majority lined up in the 7-10 part of the line.



Snapshot of Participants

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

Gender	
Male	40%
Female	60%
Age	
Under 18	0%
18-24	3%
25-44	45%
45-65	40%
Over 65	12%

Race/Ethnic Group

Black or African American	41%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic/Latino	0%
White or Caucasian	59%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0%
Other	0%

ZIP Codes

30281*	46%
Surrounding**	46%
Other	8%

* *This is the Stockbridge ZIP code.*

** *These are ZIP codes adjoining 30281.*

About the Civic League

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta is an organization that builds the knowledge, involvement, voice and power of metro Atlanta's citizens. As part of the Civic League's work, it convenes Neighborhood Forums where citizens can listen to one another and offer their own ideas for improving the region. The Civic League gathers and documents the citizens' ideas and brings them to the attention of state, local and regional leaders.

In 2008 and 2009, we are working with the Atlanta Regional Commission on its Fifty Forward visioning initiative. Our role is to help bring the citizens' voice to this effort to plan how our region will look and work in the year 2058.

In the years ahead, we will host other kinds of citizen gatherings, including forums on pressing regional issues and overlooked problems. Our format for those meetings will be similar to the Neighborhood Forums: facilitated, open-ended discussions aimed at gathering the citizens' thoughts on important issues.