

Neighborhood Forum

Clarkston

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on Nov. 11, 2008 in Clarkston in DeKalb County, at Georgia Perimeter College's Clarkston Campus. 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 make our increasing ethnic and racial diversity a major regional asset? Sixty people participated in the Clarkston 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 make diversity a major asset.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 261 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- **Local governments should reflect the changing demographics** of the region. As one group said, "Community leadership should reflect (the) diversity of the community." Another group agreed. There should be, it said, "diverse representation in city government."
- **Transportation systems** could make it easier for groups to meet. One group said it was important that the region have a public transportation system that promoted "socialization through transportation." Others agreed. One said it wanted "public transportation (that is) clean, affordable (and) safe." Another was specific that "MARTA should extend here."
- There's a need for **activities, events and institutions that bring people of different cultures together**. One group urged "town meetings (and) festivals" which would lead to "less fear" of diversity. Another suggested a multiethnic "peace center" that could teach "nonviolent communication." Yet another suggested "joint projects" such as homebuilding efforts that would bring people from different cultures together.
- There should be more efforts to **encourage people of different backgrounds and income levels to live close by**. One group said this was "social engineering" but was necessary to create "more social access to . . . other communities." Another group wanted more "mixed-cost housing," including "more people in apartments."

Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by Otis White, 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 a vibrant economy built on the contributions of all its racial and ethnic groups.

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 make its growing diversity a major regional asset, 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 Diversity for the Atlanta Region

Here are the vision ideas – the things that participants felt iMag would focus on, if it were writing about the Atlanta region as the ideal or model community in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Image: People wear native garb - different kinds

- Walking city - slow down - get to know
- Pedestrian square - park, shops, cafes, every age, flowers, music
- Public transportation - clean, affordable, safe, bicycle lanes, no cars, light rail, trains, can get anywhere easily
- Market/open - single place, all kinds of vendors
- More interaction - because we got out of cars, slowed down
- Foods - fresh, healthy, from local farms, organic, community gardens, agriculture
- Schools - kids eating together, not in social, ethnic groups
- Mixed cost housing - affordable intown, more people in apartments
- People in neighborhoods know each other
- Open areas, greenspace easily accessible to everyone
- Ready access to necessary and desirable services in neighborhoods
- Neighborhood schools - kids can walk
- Sharing of cultures in schools, not segregated
- Mothers at home with child for first year - paid to stay home
- Support for families, government
- Healthcare affordable for everyone
- More active community sports - available, transportation not required
- Environment - better stewards, no carbon footprint
- No drugs, no prostitutes
- Mixed neighborhoods - racial, economic, ethnic, religious
- Multi-lingual education - people speak more than one
- Youth from diverse religious backgrounds come together for social service projects
- Schools competitive with rest of nation - higher scores, better schools
- Starts with government - eg, public transportation in the beginning
- Grassroots - from the people - government won't [do it] if people don't ask
- Public forum, people become [energized] - discuss issues - not afraid to speak up
- Businesses in less served neighborhoods - create jobs - diverse businesses
- Industry
- More trade
- Businesses catering to people on bikes
- Create live, work, play
- No subdivisions

Small Group 2:

- Image: markets up and down East Ponce, like farmers market, but different foods from different countries - connected, but small/U.N. strip mall
- Houses in neighborhood - not stereotypical, but planned community
- Architecture of buildings, more ethnic influences, integrated throughout neighborhood, ie like stone temple roof from Vietnam
- Community leadership should reflect diversity of the community, more community based representing different peoples and ideas and law enforcement
- All cultures are part of the overall community culture, elimination of the word "race"
- We celebrate the different cultures and foods but don't emphasize differences or stereotype

- Village-like community - economically diverse, different types of housing for different economic needs
- Diversity of ages - disabled, young and old living together
- Transportation - MARTA should extend here, but bike paths and sidewalks will still be here - and linkage between individual transport and mass
- Organic garden in maybe hydroponics, pots - urban spaces but different fresh vegetables
- Norm is multilingual - English and other languages spoken, written in schools
- Public more like international schools - school access more open to the community - more computer friendly
- State and local government through ongoing community conversations
- Arts, African drumming and dancing, signage on buildings, diversity of music, drama, dance, artists and musicians
- Cultural events going on and integrated throughout the region, not segregated part of the school - culture celebrated
- Air, water, electricity - space age modern solutions to transportation
- Relationships within this new infrastructure - what will they look like
- Diversity in schools will start the progress and lead to diversity of leadership in government
- Microfinance to support different economic levels
- Market levels for individuals to sell art or cooking on small scale - would need non-profit support or grant support
- Government needs to allocate resources to individuals or organizations, property or resources
- More diverse households through intermarriage and friendships

Small Group 3:

- Image: Diverse group in picture
- Exposure - different groups going to different restaurants, etc
- Town meetings, festivals, true integration and wanting to interact - less fear
- Diversity includes: disability, awareness of disabilities, diversity of thought, philosophies, patience/understanding
- School with all needed supplies, parent involvement and being taught according to needs, diverse teachers and students - integration
- Equal voice - decentralization of power
- People empowered to speak with own voice
- Need a "diversity event" to increase exposure to different cultures and types of people
- Informal play groups in neighborhoods and groups are reflective of neighborhood diversity
- Joint projects (eg, build a house) to bring people together
- People swap houses to learn about each others environment
- School curriculum includes info about other countries and cultures - fully incorporated
- Not just black history month - talk about it through school year - diversity projects in school (eg, going to Jewish museum)
- Recruiting diverse teachers - offer scholarships
- School for Hispanic parents and others to learn English
- Diversity-friendly zoning

- Need resources and accessibility for people with disabilities
- No prejudice from businesses

Small Group 4:

- Diversity/tolerance of cultures - belongingness
- Rapid transit (electric cars and trains) - sophisticated transportation systems
- Appreciation for other sports, eg soccer
- Diversity of foods representative of cultures
- Different languages offered from elementary level
- International travel - programs in schools to encourage it
- Zoning laws to create more mixed use of property (move access to closer shops, businesses)
- Affordable housing
- Safety, peace of mind (neighborhood watch)
- Increase in literacy, technology
- Expansion of International Community School to promote cultural awareness (currently k-6)
- Increased courses for adults at International Community School
- Tool to assist foreigners to transition into community
- Access to a library, both physical and electronic, to multicultural data
- Sophisticated universal health care
- Protection of family values
- Better economy -> Higher wages and benefits -> Less crime (value the work of humans vs machines)



Small Group 5:

- Diverse representation in city government
- Acceptance of diverse culture
- Different cultures have a voice in business association
- Walking and biking easy to do
- Everyone made welcome in businesses
- Easier access to other communities without having to drive
- Smaller (MARTA) vehicles and more frequency

- Incentives to get out of cars (eg, tax incentives)
- Sidewalks, lighting
- CSX put overhead crossings and muted trains
- Businesses have broad appeal
- Racism eliminated
- Education improved - smaller community schools
- Upward mobility for immigrant groups, African Americans
- Youth exposed to different cultures - arts - international days (government funding) - music
- Social engineering for more social access to community and other communities
- Local food growing
- More local self sufficiency
- Outdoor market

Small Group 6:

- Incorporate all sorts of peoples
- Snapshot: went online and saw a photo with mixed income shops - shops represent the countries - hear people who look like me speaking other languages freely - [sympathy] back and forth - lots of different redevelopment areas with all socioeconomic levels - no one ashamed of their language and no one stating they don't understand
- MARTA train or bus - people not in cars - socialization through transportation
- Normal - infusion of community collaborations from rich diverse expression, bridge gaps - who is next to you - what do they think - all is shared - health, wellness, kids, talking consistent community collaborations
- Incentive for ideas - byproduct=empowerment
- Peace center open to all levels - oasis - nonviolent communication - supported by community - working - graduate - mothers - anger management
- Huge volunteer service project - all co-op shared - A village - cultural responsibility - have to give - moral presence
- Practical manifestation: retirement communities
- What could other areas learn? Empowered by learning - speaking up - minds are changed with young - next generation - open learning from experience
- Open-minded children
- International Community School
- Picture of a school - Rinse
- Theater, art and dance from all cultures
- Economy
- Societal, community garden with native and foreign vegetation sold at a farmer's market - proceeds go back to community to lessen dependence on foreign markets and trade
- Develop around the garden a living area where items can be sold from an "intentional community" - people choose to live and work together
- Educated excluded/outcasts of society
- Develop barter system within garden community - babysitting for food/clothes, way to give back to community
- Positive Tradition Exchange
- Co-op within garden

- Sustainable community - co-housing, share assets
- Sustain self with unique voices and gifts
- Open-minded
- Don't exclude outside influence
- Modify tax code - reinvest in community
- Recognize wealth as more than assets
- Uneducated, but gift to give back to community
- Rich give more to community
- Give developers incentive to develop community
- Give permit for greenspace development
- If connected to community effort, taxes are lowered
- Tax credit for developers to create sustainable environment
- Tax credit for residents who live there
- Teachers more valued

Small Group 7:

- Public schools more diverse - race, cultural, attendees, staff, curriculum
- All school systems treated equally
- Less movement because of school systems
- Equal funding, resources for school systems
- Valued teachers - every area has same high expectations
- Multi-lingual education and educators
- Introduce [up arrow] early - pre-k schools
- Clean, quiet, free/cheap transit and extensive - more of it
- Affordable housing throughout metro area near transit hubs, mixed income
- Pedestrian friendly: walk areas, green space, parks
- Green recycling - separation of different kinds of waste - containers
- Safety - neighborhood watch, well lit areas, building sense of community
- Community garden - creates buy-in and sharing
- Increase police presence
- Sustainable development approaches - green roofs, water collection for re-use, reclaim and clean brown space
- Celebration of & in community - incredible music, holidays (common, cultural), dispels fears (stereotypes)
- Businesses that care about community - vested interest
- Diversity in workers
- Businesses support education (day care) and the arts (money and time)
- Businesses support community events (money and time)
- Increased presence of international companies
- Global marketplace
- Develop products at home
- Businesses provide widespread matched funding/contributions
- Businesses provide human capital (time off for employees to volunteer)
- Businesses, insurance and county invest in community health - hospitals, education programs

- Atlanta is the Silicon Valley of alternative energy - GA Tech and UGA contribute and based
- Free of illegal drugs and gangs
- Poverty-free = not easily enticed or manipulated to sell and use illegal drugs
- Programs and places for children and youth
- Increased hope - give choices other than illegal drugs and gangs
- Free programs to retrain the unemployed (new skills)

Consensus Ideas

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

- Public transportation - clean, affordable, safe, bicycle lanes, no cars, light rail, trains, can get anywhere easily
- Mixed cost housing - affordable intown, more people in apartments
- Environment - better stewards, no carbon footprint
- Community leadership should reflect diversity of the community, more community based representing different peoples and ideas and law enforcement
- Transportation - MARTA should extend here, but bike paths and sidewalks will still be here - and linkage between individual transport and mass
- Town meetings, festivals, true integration and wanting to interact - less fear
- Equal voice - decentralization of power
- Joint projects (eg, build a house) to bring people together
- Diversity/tolerance of cultures – belongingness
- Sophisticated universal health care
- Diverse representation in city government
- Acceptance of diverse culture
- Education improved - smaller community schools
- Social engineering for more social access to community and other communities
- Normal - infusion of community collaborations from rich diverse expression, bridge gaps - who is next to you - what do they think - all is shared - health, wellness, kids, talking consistent community collaborations
- Peace center open to all levels - oasis - nonviolent communication - supported by community - working - graduate - mothers - anger management



- What could other areas learn? Empowered by learning - speaking up - minds are changed with young - next generation - open learning from experience
- Less movement because of school systems
- Affordable housing throughout metro area near transit hubs, mixed income
- Sustainable development approaches - green roofs, water collection for re-use, reclaim and clean brown space
- Poverty-free = not easily enticed or manipulated to sell and use illegal drugs

Visionary Ideas

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

- People swap houses to learn about each others environment
- Better economy -> Higher wages and benefits -> Less crime (value the work of humans vs machines)
- Societal, community garden with native and foreign vegetation sold at a farmer's market - proceeds go back to community to lessen dependence on foreign markets and trade
- Atlanta is the Silicon Valley of alternative energy - GA Tech and UGA contribute and based

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:

- Civic league forums
- Cultural differences
- Trees, nature, greenspace
- Freedom of speech
- Democracy

Small Group 2:

- Southern food, culture and hospitality - sweet tea
- Clarkston community garden - expand
- Visible assets - trees, green space, parks
- "Diversity Magnet?"
- Financial opportunity

Small Group 3:

- Trees
- Diverse people coming to Atlanta
- Green space for kids to play

Small Group 4:

- Water resource
- Green aspect/space

Small Group 5:

- Diversity
- Ecosystems
- Places of worship
- Community gatherings

Small Group 6:

- Hartsfield International Airport
- Greenspace
- Languages and cultures
- Preserve values
- Arts in schools
- Higher education institutions
- Collaborations/coalitions
- Simplification
- Reading and meditation
- Libraries
- Community power

Small Group 7:

- Greenspace
- Colleges
- Airport
- Food
- Museums
- Hospitals
- Multi-cultural communities
- ARC

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:

- Current mindset/more open minded - accepting
- Way communities segregate by culture, economics
- Multicultural schools high standards, international studies - add them
- Reduce distance between live and work

Small Group 2:

- Isolationist mentality
- Closed-mindedness

- The way we educate our children
- Law enforcement and leadership
- Change relationship between politics and government

Small Group 3:

- Stop using cars and building highways
- Lower crime rate - punishing criminals, better law enforcement, eliminate racial profiling
- Stereotyping

Small Group 4:

- Bus and tram service
- Racism - hampers diversity
- Decentralized resettlement of newcomers
- Media - need to be more positive
- Justice system - more rehab needed
- School system discipline

Small Group 5:

- Attitudes
- Education system upgrade
- Small scale local development
- Slow down sprawl
- Continuity of bike path & maintained
- Invest in youth

Small Group 6:

- More greenspace
- Ideals of centralized language
- [Viability] of family
- Remove stereotypes
- Standardized testing
- Monotony
- Dictatorship
- Dedication to technology
- Addiction to competitiveness
- Schools
- Closed minds
- Justice system
- Embrace all genders, races, colors, sexualities, backgrounds and economic status

Small Group 7:

- Transportation/transit system
- School systems - arts, p.e., teachers, language, music
- Political involvement - residents
- Xenophobia - fear of other cultures
- Sustainable development

- ARC - plans able to be enforced
- Clean air
- More greenspace
- Affordable health care system
- Community investment in health
- Fair housing

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	33%
Female	67%
Age	
Under 18	0%

18-24	15%
25-44	27%
45-65	47%
Over 65	11%

Race/Ethnic Group

Black or African American	31%
Asian/Pacific Islander	11%
Hispanic/Latino	7%
White or Caucasian	43%
American Indian/Alaskan	
Native	2%
Other	6%

Zip Code

Home: 30066*	15%
Surrounding**	46%
Other	39%

* This is the ZIP code where the meeting was held

** These are the ZIP codes adjoining 30066

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.