

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

A SUMMARY & FINDINGS ENGAGEMENT ROUND 1

Athens Clarke County, Georgia
Community & Economic Development Strategic Plan

MARCH 2017

This report provides background information to assist with the development of the Community and Economic Development Strategic Plan.

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Focus on the Future Input Summary Report

Envision Athens

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Hundreds of people participated in the initial round of engagement for the Envision Athens process. Pictured here, more than 80 people squeezed into the main space at the Lyndon House Arts Center. The crowd was so large it spilled out into the halls and courtyard.

1. Introduction

The following describes the activities and results from the first round of community engagement for the Envision Athens planning process. This initial round consisted of large and small in-person meetings, both open-call and invitation only. Online tools were added to the process website and collected additional submissions. As a compliment to the public sessions, focus group interviews were convened around specific topics and a two-day stakeholder work session was held at the Classic Center. This document provides a summary of the results of these activities.

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: BY THE NUMBERS



600+

Participants
(online & in-person)

3,700+

Comments

5

Live Meetings

23

Facilitated Focus
Group Interviews

10

Major Stakeholder
Topic areas

1,932

Opportunity
statements

689

"How will we
know we've
succeeded?"
Comments

520

"Greatest
challenges"
Comments

550

General
Comments

87%

Exit Questions
Return Rate

99%

Participants who
said they will stay
engaged

92%

Participants believed
the meeting was the
right length

99.5%

Participants who
said their ideas
were recorded
accurately

1 in 3

Participants found
out about the
workshop from
someone they know



Starting by listening

During each of the five, in-person Focus on the Future workshops, participants were engaged in round table discussions on the key issues and opportunities for Athens-Clarke County. Each comment was recorded by a table leader for the Planning Team. The results have been summarized later in this report.

2. What is Envision Athens?

Envision Athens is a process to develop a community and economic development strategic plan to lead Athens-Clarke County forward. The process is inclusive and community-driven. The final plan will set direction for the priorities from the public and the insight gained through technical research. In three rounds of engagement, the Steering Committee will collect ideas from the public, narrow the focus of community goals, affirm the direction of the plan, and establish a realistic implementation approach.

Intended Process outcomes

The Envision Athens process will result in a visionary, yet achievable multi-dimensional strategy to guide community and economic development for the next 20 years. In doing so, a shared sense of accountability and commitment to implementation will be achieved –this will not be “just another plan.” Envision Athens will be open and inclusive, intuitive and informed, and carefully-designed and facilitated.

In general, planning like this represents good stewardship. Communities like businesses—cannot reach their potential without a deliberate and thoughtful blueprint. The community has many significant assets and the potential to evolve dynamically in the future. This potential has a much better chance to be realized with an intentional and thoughtful planning process.



Focusing on the future

Through in-person sessions and online engagement, participants were asked to consider the greatest opportunities to make Athens-Clarke County and even better community in the future.

Involved Parties

The process has already engaged hundreds through the first round of engagement and the activities of the Steering Committee. The following groups will direct Envision Athens and provide significant input.

THE PUBLIC

Widespread public involvement is vital to Envision Athens' success. A number of in-person workshops and online tools will offer a variety of ways for the community to give input throughout the 12-month process. During the first round of engagement, hundreds of people participated through large in-person sessions, small follow-up meetings or online.

STAKEHOLDERS

Various stakeholder groups will be convened to inform specific aspects of the plan. These groups include business leaders, civic leagues, real estate professionals and developers, education professionals, students, young professionals, and industry representatives among others. The first round of engagement included two major stakeholder activities including a series of 23 focus group interviews and a two-day stakeholder work session facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute.

THE STEERING COMMITTEE

A 38-member citizen steering committee is helping to guide the public process and the plan's recommendations. The group is representative of the county's many diverse interests. The planning consulting team will facilitate the committee's work, convene public workshops, conduct technical work and draft the plan.

Sharyn Dickerson, Co-Chair

Environmental Consultant, Sharyn Dickerson & Associates, LLC (Representing Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia)

Bob Googe , Co-Chair

Owner, Jittery Joe's Coffee

Caroline Angelo

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Athens Technical College

Erin Barger

Vice President of Programs, Action Ministries, North Georgia

Heather Benham

Executive Director, Athens Land Trust

Alejandra Calva

Community Relations Manager, UGA-Latin American & Caribbean

Lenn Chandler

Electric Utility Vice President, Georgia Power Company, Athens

Dr. Andrea Daniel

President, Athens Technical College

Linda E. Davis

Adjunct Instructor, Athens Technical College

Susan Dodson

Director of External Relations, Food Bank of Northeast Georgia

Doc Eldridge

President/CEO, Athens Area Chamber of Commerce

Dodd Ferrelle

Account Representative, Hagemeyer North America

Broderick Flanigan

Visual Artist, Flanigan's Portrait Studio

Houston Gaines

Student Body President, University of Georgia

Mike Hamby

Office cleaning business Representing Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

Diana Hartle

Librarian, University of Georgia

Ann Hunter

IT Specialist, USDA-ARS-AFM-EBSC-IT Branch

Marty Hutson

CFO, St. Mary's Healthcare System

Charia Johnson

Visual Merchandiser, Banana Republic

Richie Knight

HW Creative Marketing

Wilson Lattimore

Pastor, Chestnut Grove Baptist Church

Roswell Lawrence, Jr.

Assistant to the VP for Finance and Administration & Director of Client Relations, University of Georgia

Deborah Lonon

Attorney, Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County

Dean Mannheimer

Banker, Athens First Bank and Trust

Alison Bracewell McCullick

Director of Community Relations, University of Georgia

Humberto Mendoza

Auto Mechanic

Catherine Neace

Co-owner, Barberitos Downtown Athens

Emily Nicholos

Director of Community Impact, United Way of Northeast Georgia

Caroline Paris Paczkowski

Director of Communications- School of Public and International Affairs, University of Georgia

Rick Parker

Executive Director/President, Athens Housing Authority

Nakia Payne

Homemaker

Michele Pearson

Financial Advisor, Edward Jones Investments

Dr. Charles Peck

President and CEO, Piedmont Athens Regional Health System

Whit Richardson

Owner, Tazikis Cafe

Danny Riddle

Maintenance Mechanic, Athens Housing Authority

Johnelle Simpson

Great Promise Partnership/Work-Based Learning Coordinator, Clarke County School District

Barbara Sims

Recruitment Coordinator, All God's Children Adoption Agency; Radio Personality, WXAG

Xernona Thomas

Elementary Principal, Clarke County School District

Guiding the Process

The Committee began their work well ahead of the public process developing the name and identity, launching a publicity and outreach campaign, and creating an agenda for the first round of engagement activities.



FUNDING & ADDITIONAL INVOLVED PARTIES

Major community stakeholders participating in the process are funding the effort. These include the following:

- Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County
- Athens Housing Authority
- Clarke County School District
- University of Georgia
- Athens Technical College
- City of Winterville
- Georgia Power
- Athens Area Chamber of Commerce
- United Way of Northeast Georgia
- Piedmont-Athens Regional Hospital
- St. Mary’s Hospital

Technical research and analysis and process facilitation are being directed by consultants planning NEXT and Ninigret Partners.

The Process

Preparation for the planning process started in October of 2016 and will last approximately one year. The three rounds of engagement and overlaying research and analysis have been illustrated in the graphic below. Engagement activities are meant to be iterative, building from one round to the next. Research and analysis tasks break into two major components: 1) A general scan of key conditions and trends specific to the Athens-Clarke County community, and 2) A targeted analysis of the most important of interesting challenges and opportunities presented in the initial research and community engagement.



3. Focus on the Future: Engagement Round 1

The public process for Envision Athens kicked off in January of 2017 with a series of open-call public meetings called the Focus on the Future Workshops. These meetings, along with smaller follow-up sessions and online engagement, attracted hundreds of participants and generated thousands of comments. At the same time, 23 focus group interviews were convened around important topics like housing, safety, and other interests. Finally, a two-day stakeholder work session was held at the Classic Center in downtown Athens and facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute of the University of Georgia. The following summarizes the design of each of these activities, results are included in the subsequent sections.

Purpose

The initial engagement phase of Envision Athens was designed to engage participants in an open discussion on the key issues and opportunities facing the community today. Through open-call or curated sessions, participants were asked to respond to a simple prompt, “What do we need to do to make Athens-Clarke County an even better community in the future?”. This generated thousands of responses.

The Focus on the Future round was designed to expose the community’s central assets and the challenges and establish a focus for more targeted analysis, and an overall direction for the plan.

Use of the Input

The first phase generated thousands of comments. Each has been entered into a master database and assigned a topic based on a set of categories established by the Steering Committee. In order to understand the priorities of the community, the Planning Team, will provide the Steering Committee with an objective analysis of this data to inform their decision making. Ultimately the data will serve as a foundation for subsequent research and engagement phases of the Envision Athens process.

Communications & Outreach

In order to ensure residents and stakeholders were aware of the opportunity to get involved in the Envision Athens engagement activities, an outreach and publicity campaign was launched by the Steering Committee.

PURPOSE

The goal for the publicity and outreach effort, is to make participation a choice for anyone who cares about the future of Athens-Clarke County. To achieve this, two parallel efforts were initiated to help spread the word. Activities have been summarized on the next page.

COMMUNICATIONS/PUBLICITY (CREATING GENERAL AWARENESS)

- Create a project brand and identity
- Develop collateral (posters, postcards, business cards, etc.)
- Leverage media assets (ads, press releases, etc.)

OUTREACH (PERSONAL INVITATIONS AND WORD-OF-MOUTH)

- Identify opportunities
- Create best methods
- Energize networks - people/organizations
- Give the public a choice to participate in the process

KEY MESSAGES

It is challenging in most communities to rally people to engage in a forward-looking planning effort like the county’s community and economic plan. Key, relevant motivating messages are needed for overall awareness-building as well for targeted audiences. Below are messages intended to encourage the public to get involved in the process:

This is about you and your community.

In general, planning represents good stewardship. The community has many significant assets and the potential to be an even better place in the future.

This is a unique opportunity. For the first time the public and private entities in the community have come together to think about and plan for the future. This planning process will result in a community-wide common vision for the future.

This needs your insight. We need your ideas, your input and your feedback to ensure that this community-wide vision represents the authentic voice of the entire community.

This will ensure our future is not left to chance. Communities—like businesses—cannot reach their potential without a deliberate and thoughtful blueprint. This potential has a much better chance to be realized with an intentional and thoughtful planning process.

PUBLICITY EFFORT

The Communications Team was formed and charged with developing and executing key publicity tasks. This group initiated their work by refining process messages and frequently asked questions. The Team then identified the most effective means for spreading the word and which media to target (like newspapers, facebook pages, etc.).

Through the month of January, a number of actions were taken. These included:

Project Website launch. The envisionathens.com website launched in November and will serve as the portal for communication on the planning and engagement process.

Social Media. A project Facebook page was developed to share content from the website, promote events and share other information about the process. As of March 2017, this page had 619 followers.

Press releases. Several press releases were written leading up to and through the first round of engagement. These provided background on the process, promoted workshop events, unveiled the online tool, and shared immediate results from the initial engagement

Letters to the editor. Members of Steering Committee submitted several letters to the editor on the importance of the process and community participation and input.

Leveraged news stories. The publicity campaign leveraged several new stories during the first round of engagement including coverage from OnlineAthens, Flagpole, and several radio stations.

OUTREACH TEAM

The Outreach Team convened to connect key messages and collateral (developed by the communications effort) with community networks. The group mapped a large database of networks around Athens-Clarke to organize their work. Over the month of November and December, members from the team reached out to these groups to let them know about Envision Athens, invited them to participate, and asked for their ongoing support.



Spreading the key messages

Leading up to, and through Focus on the Future workshops, the Publicity Team developed and executed key actions to help spread the word about Envision Athens. Print materials, like the rack card above, were distributed across the county.

Specific Publicity Actions

- 5,000 branded rack cards
- 5,000 process business cards
- 200+ meeting posters
- Four press releases
- Branded website with accompanying social media pages developed and launched
- Radio ads & interviews
- 619 Facebook Likes
- Letters to the editor
- Leverage media coverage
- Collateral in Spanish

4. Overview of Engagement Activities

The Focus on the Future workshops and online input period took place through the winter of 2017 in multiple locations across Athens-Clarke County. More than 3,700 ideas were generated. The following summarizes the experience of participants, their demographic make-up and ideas.

Sources of Input

A variety of engagement activities were undertaken in the first phase. The following summarizes each event or operation.

THE FOCUS ON THE FUTURE WORKSHOPS

In-person workshops were held in five locations over January and February 2017. The locations chosen needed to be large enough to hold between 100 and 150 people and span the geographic extent of the county. Start times for each workshop varied to allow those with irregular schedules to attend and share. Workshops were held at the following locations:

January 30, 6:00pm
The Classic Center
76 participants



January 31, 12:30pm
Lyndon House Arts Center
112 participants



January 31, 6:00pm
Cedar Shoals High School
74 participants



February 1, 10:30am
The Classic Center
63 participants



February 2, 6:00pm
Clarke Central High School
148 participants



5

Live Workshops
over four days

473

Large meeting
participants

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

An online tool was designed to mirror the questions from the in-person meetings and gather additional input. In order to incentivize attendance at the live workshops, this was not made available until after the final workshop was completed on February 2nd. The engagement period was live for three weeks and gathered an additional hundreds of ideas from more than 90 users. Online engagement tools will continue to be used throughout the engagement process, but will not replace in-person meeting opportunities. Online tools and further information about Envision Athens can be found at www.EnvisionAthens.com.



Above: The Envision Athens web page enabled participants to offer ideas to the same questions posed during the in-person sessions.

SMALL GROUP FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS

After reviewing the initial findings from the exit questionnaire data, the Steering Committee noticed several gaps in representation. The three major deficits were from the Hispanic / Latinx, African American communities, as well as young people aged 18 to 24 years old. To address this, several committee members organized and facilitated small group sessions that mirrored the large workshops and posed the same questions. These meetings yielded an additional 42 participants and helped to close the gap in representation. The committee has committed to an open and inclusive process and will continue to use the data from the exit questionnaires as a guide for more direct community outreach.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Through the week of January 30th, 23 focus group interviews were conducted with 144 community stakeholders. Groups were formed to reflect the diverse set of backgrounds and interests within the Athens-Clarke County community. The discussions were facilitated by planning consultants from planning NEXT. Each meeting included a brief background on the Envision process, but focused primarily on a discussion of the group’s key opportunities and challenges, both today and in the future. The Steering Committee was interested in gathering the intuitive, experiential perspectives from each of these groups to help build a comprehensive set of input. Focus group topics included:

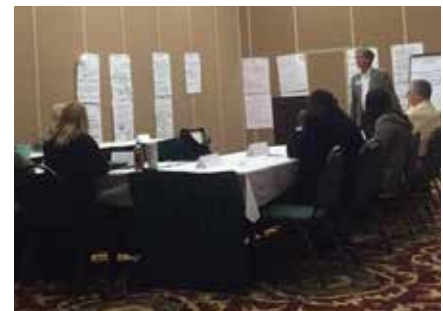
- Music
- Arts
- African-American
- Realtors / Homebuilders
- Large Private Employers
- Hispanic
- Developers
- Alternative Transportation
- ACCUG Planning Commission
- Activists
- Agriculture/ Environment
- Not for Profit
- K-12 Education
- Youth
- Post-Secondary Education
- Faith-Based Community
- Seniors
- Small Business / Entrepreneurs
- Persons with Disabilities
- Health
- Neighborhoods
- Safety

THE STAKEHOLDER SESSIONS

On February 28 and March 1, 150 stakeholders from the County’s most impactful organizations and institutions were invited to participate in a multi-session workshop. As a primer to the conversation, stakeholders attended a presentation of the key findings from the Community Assessment research and analysis. Major themes from the Focus Group interviews and initial results from the public comments were also presented.

With this as a foundation, stakeholders were convened around ten topics listed below. In the past, subject matter experts were invited to participate in a meeting about one topic, and then go home. The fact is, many of the systemic issues and opportunities for the community are interrelated. In this format, the first session stakeholders attended was the one in which they were most conversant. Following this, stakeholders visited each of the topic sessions to not only see what the “experts” thought, but to offer their input in those areas as well. As a result hundreds of comments and ideas were generated around the ten topics. These have been summarized later in this report.

- Health and Safety
- Education
- Neighborhoods and Civic Vitality
- Cultural Resources
- Environment / Agriculture
- Housing
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Social Services
- Future Land Use



Stakeholders at work

Over their two-day work session, stakeholders from around the community traded hundreds of comments. The ten focus topics have been listed to the left.

Participants

More than 600 people participated in the Focus on the Future engagement phase. During each event and through the online tool, participants were asked to fill out an exit questionnaire. The form gathered information on participant’s overall experience in providing input along with their basic demographic information. Questionnaires were not mandatory, but close to 87 percent of participants or online users completed the form.

Groups that were notably underrepresented through the first phase of engagement were targeted for follow-up small group meetings. Despite these efforts several groups remain underrepresented through the first round of input. Strategies will be developed by the Communications and Outreach Teams to help close this gap in future rounds.

The following highlights major deviations between the self-selected participants present at the workshops and the group’s actual share in the Athens-Clarke community. This share is based on the latest available Census information.

GAPS IN REPRESENTATION

AGE

- **Small representation from young people but improved.** Although there is still a small representation of young people, after direct follow-up meetings from the Steering Committee members, the percentage of young people that participated increased by three percent.
- **Large representation from older residents.** Just over 50 percent of participants were over the age of 45 versus the representation of 26 percent indicated by the census.

RACE/ETHNICITY

- **Improved representation from African American residents.** Because of follow-up small group meetings, the African American representation gap was nearly closed. There was an increase of almost 10 percent.
- **Hispanic and Latino turnout seven points below the expected share.** Representation was just above three percent compared with the actual community share of 10.6 percent. This despite direct follow-up in small group meetings.

EDUCATION

- **Low participation from residents with no college degree.** Nearly 78 percent of participants hold a Associates, Bachelor’s or beyond. This compares with 46 percent in the census. Accordingly, relatively few participants (<25 percent) had no college degree, compared with 54 percent of residents.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

- **Small representation of working class citizens.** Out of the 66 percent of working class residents that represent the community, only 37 percent participated in the workshops.

TENURE

- **Diversity in tenure.** High percentage of citizen have recently moved to Athens-Clarke County. Participants responses to “how long they had lived in Athens-Clarke County” followed by 35 percent having moved in the past ten years, 20 percent between 10 and 20 years, and 41 percent longer than 20 years.

Junta Comunitaria

Tod@s están invitad@s a ayudarnos a crear la visión detrás del futuro del Condado de Athens-Clarke. Necesitamos sus ideas y opiniones, pues en estas se basarán las recomendaciones que guiarán la comunidad y su desarrollo económico en los próximos 20 años.

Jueves
20 de abril
5:30-7:30pm

Classic Center
300 N. Thomas St.

Habr@ intérpretes y cuidado de niños disponible.

Si planea acompañarnos, díganos en:
EnvisionAthens.com/en-espanol



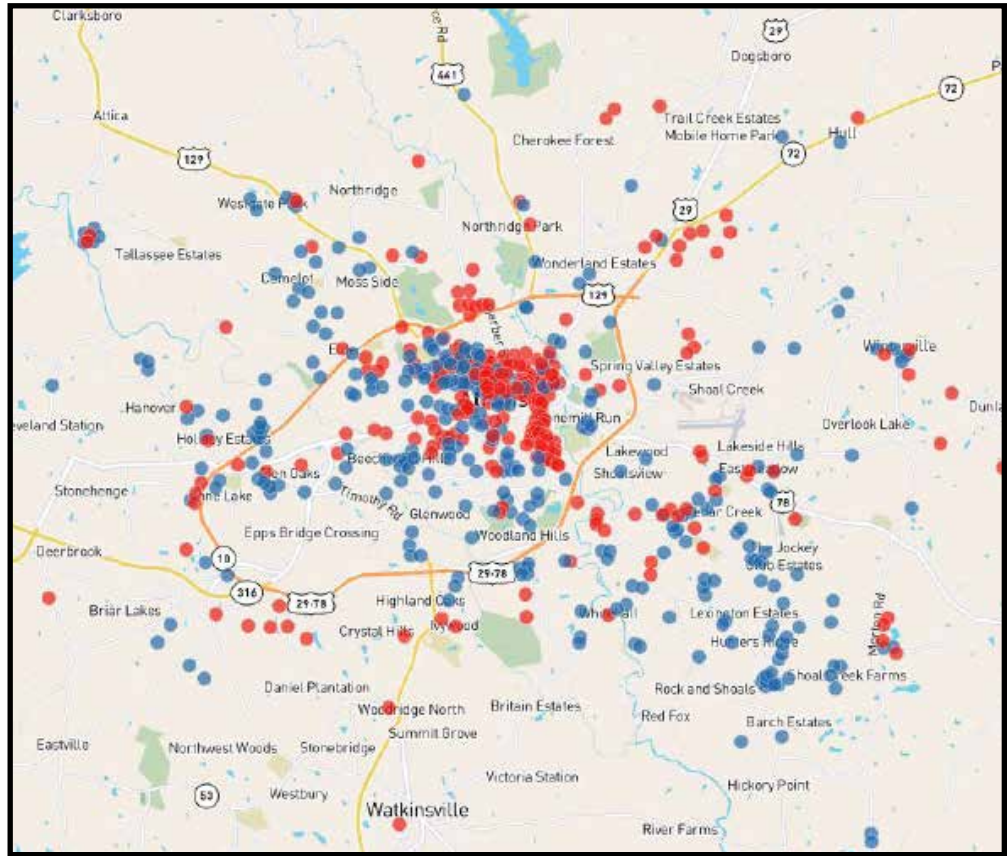
Spanish language assistance

Special steps were taken to ensure the Focus on the Future sessions were open to anyone who cares about the future of Athens-Clarke County. This included providing language assistance. Special invitation collateral was prepared in Spanish as well as English.

LIVE / WORK DISTRIBUTION

Before each meeting participants were asked to provide information on where they live and work in the county by adding a colored dot to a large wall map. This map was taken to each in-person workshop and gathered hundreds of sticky dots. The map shows the distribution of the data with red indicating where participants live and blue where they work.

- Where a participant lives
- Where a participant works



EXPERIENCE

87 percent of participants completed an exit questionnaire. Of these there was very high levels of satisfaction in their experience at the workshops.

- **99.5** percent said they were comfortable working in small groups
- **98.5** percent felt their ideas were recorded fair and accurately
- **91** percent believed the meeting was the right length, with seven percent wishing it lasted longer
- **99.5** percent of participants reported they will continue to be involved with the Envision Athens process in the future

* For the full exit questionnaire data tables and expository answers, please refer to the document appendix.

5. Results from the Focus on the Future Workshops

The Focus on the Future workshops and online engagement generated thousands of ideas. Each of these has been captured and categorized by the Planning Team. The following chapter summarizes the major findings from each of the question prompts. The full database of ideas can be found in the document appendix.

Introduction to the Topics

The large workshops, small follow-up meetings and online input presented participants with the opportunity to contribute their ideas to a set of key questions. In-person meetings began with a brief presentation from the Planning Team on the process. Several key conditions and trends were provided along with the next steps in the planning process. The Team then released groups to begin their facilitated discussions. At tables of eight, table leaders led their groups through a series of questions. They were instructed to guide the conversation, but not inject their own opinions or biases into the group's work. Over an hour, groups were asked to brainstorm responses to three prompts. The following provides insight into the key topics which emerged from the thousands of collected ideas. The topics have been organized by the ten conversation topics from the Carl Vinson Stakeholder Session and ranked based on the frequency of responses.

All collected comments will be explored and addressed equally. The full database of responses to each prompt is included in the appendix to this document and is organized by major topics and subtopics.

Prompt #1:

What do we need to do to make Athens-Clarke County an even better community in the future?

The primary activity of the Focus on the Future round asked participants to consider: What do we need to do to make Athens-Clarke County an even better community in the future? Through table recorders and online submissions, more than 1,900 responses were collected. From this data, ten primary topics, and dozens of sub-topics help to organize the data and determine the most resonant ideas, challenges or opportunities.

The following section provides an overview of each of the primary topics including an overall description of the category, the frequency of ideas, and any sub-topics that emerged through the data. Topics have been organized from most commonly mentioned to least.



Table leaders record the discussion

Members of the Steering Committee and other volunteers served as conversation recorders at the large and small work sessions. Their role consisted of structuring the discussion, collecting ideas and leading the group through its question prompts. The table leaders captured thousands of comments during the in-person sessions.

Notes on major topics

1. *The major topics have been used to organize the data*
2. *These are the same topics used during the two-day Stakeholder work session facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute*
3. *The major topics may evolve as the Steering Committee evaluates the data and makes judgements on the structure of the overall plan*
4. *These changes will be documented by the Planning Team and all collected ideas will be visible in the process database*

1 Transportation & Infrastructure

Ideas addressing mobility, both in and around the county and the region related to vehicular, transit or active transportation (cycling, walking, etc.). Comments ranged from specific ideas for roadway improvements or a transit connection to Atlanta to general calls for more walkability, bike lanes and bus stops. Infrastructure concerns including sustainable energy and infrastructure (in general) and increased access to telecommunications networks (like fiber optic, high speed internet, etc.).

Subtopics:

- Public Transit (111 ideas)
- Active Transportation (108 ideas)
- Roadway Development/Improvement (56 ideas)
- Sustainable Energy & Infrastructure (28 ideas)
- Telecommunication (17 ideas)
- Congestion (14 ideas)
- Airport (9 ideas)
- Transportation Planning (6 ideas)
- Parking (5 ideas)

357

IDEAS

16.9%

OF ALL IDEAS

2 Neighborhoods & Civic Vitality

Ideas about specific neighborhoods, like downtown or the university, as well as unique community character attributes. Civic vitality included citizen and student empowerment, diversity, government, and the planning process in general. A diverse category overall capturing the essence of our people and neighborhoods.

Subtopics:

- Diverse/Inclusive Community (109 ideas)
- Government (44 ideas)
- Planning Process (39 ideas)
- Downtown Neighborhood (34 ideas)
- University Collaboration (28 ideas)
- Citizen Empowerment (27 ideas)
- Community Character (23 ideas)
- University Student Involvement (22 ideas)
- Faith Community (10 ideas)

336

IDEAS

15.9%

OF ALL IDEAS

3 Economic Development

Ideas related to the overall health of the local economy, opportunities for small business growth or the diversity of job offerings, and the quality of work and wages. Strategic actions to improve the tax base through incentives, public-private partnerships, and marketing and branding. Equitable growth was another important issue.

Subtopics:

- Job Quality (68 ideas)
- Business/Employment Opportunity (56 ideas)
- Small/Local Business (39 ideas)
- Business/Employee Attraction (30 ideas)
- Regional connections (71 ideas)
- Tax Base/Incentives (27 ideas)
- Business/Employment Diversity (26 ideas)
- Economic Development/Planning (23 ideas)
- Public-Private Partnerships (15 ideas)
- Tourism (11 ideas)
- Marketing/Branding (9 ideas)

304

IDEAS

14.4%

OF ALL IDEAS

4 Social Services

Ideas related to county services like community facilities and trash pick-up. Also includes services and programs that are population specific. An emphasis on vulnerable or resource dependent populations including parents and youth, the homeless, and those in poverty. Ideas related to the collaboration of non-profits and other agencies and the efficient use of resources.

Subtopics:

- Programs and Services - General (46 ideas)
- Homelessness (38 ideas)
- Programs and Services - Youth and Young Adult (37 ideas)
- Parenting Support and Childcare (32 ideas)
- County/City Services (29 ideas)
- Non-Profit/Agency Collaboration (27 ideas)
- Poverty (23 ideas)
- Criminal Justice System (17 ideas)
- Programs and Services - Seniors (11 ideas)

260

IDEAS

12.3%

OF ALL IDEAS

5 Education

Ideas on improving the education system from K-12, post-secondary, and adult education. Also included support resources for students, parents, and teachers. An emphasis on vulnerable populations and on ensuring there is a mix of race and incomes of students and teachers in the school population.

Subtopics:

- Improve Education - K-12 (118 ideas)
- Support Resources (47 ideas)
- Adult Education (27 ideas)
- Post-Secondary - Technical (21 ideas)
- Mixed Race/Income School Population (20 ideas)
- University Collaboration - in Education (9 ideas)
- Post-Secondary - College (4 ideas)

246

IDEAS

11.7%

OF ALL IDEAS

6 Future Land Use

Key opportunities to improve the built environment through beautification, development opportunities, and redevelopment of existing sites. Also includes comments related to parks, trails, recreation and green space. Regulatory concerns about land use like zoning are also included in this category.

Subtopics:

- Parks, Recreation, & Green Space (81 ideas)
- Development Opportunity (44 ideas)
- Redevelopment/Reuse (31 ideas)
- Land Use Regulation (30 ideas)
- Beautification (10 ideas)
- Downtown Development (9 ideas)

205

IDEAS

9.7%

OF ALL IDEAS

7 Housing

The affordability, diversity, or general provision of housing in the county. Several comments were related to student versus non-student housing and related implications. There were also comments on housing that supports a mix of income and races.

Subtopics:

- Affordable Housing (69 ideas)
- Student vs. Non-Student Housing (34 ideas)
- Housing Choice (24 ideas)
- Senior Housing (14 ideas)
- Rental Market (10 ideas)
- Mixed Income/Race Housing (9 ideas)

160

IDEAS

7.6%

OF ALL IDEAS

8 Health & Safety

This theme focuses on the health and safety of people through access to quality, affordable health care and food. Comments related to police and crime were also included as they relate to the safety of the community and its neighborhoods.

Subtopics:

- Food Access (43 ideas)
- Health Care (43 ideas)
- Police/Crime (39 ideas)

125
IDEAS

5.9%
OF ALL IDEAS

9 Environment & Agriculture

Environment and agriculture included ideas related to conserving land and natural resources and reducing pollution. Comments about sustainable practices (not including energy and infrastructure) are also in this theme.

Subtopics:

- Conservation - Natural Land, Plants, & Wildlife (19 ideas)
- Water Resources (16 ideas)
- Waste Management (13 ideas)
- Sustainable Practices (12 ideas)
- Environmental Pollution (9 ideas)

69
IDEAS

3.3%
OF ALL IDEAS

10 Arts & Culture

Programs and facilities for the creative arts, and cultural and community enrichment through cultural centers like museums and events festivals and community gatherings.

Subtopics:

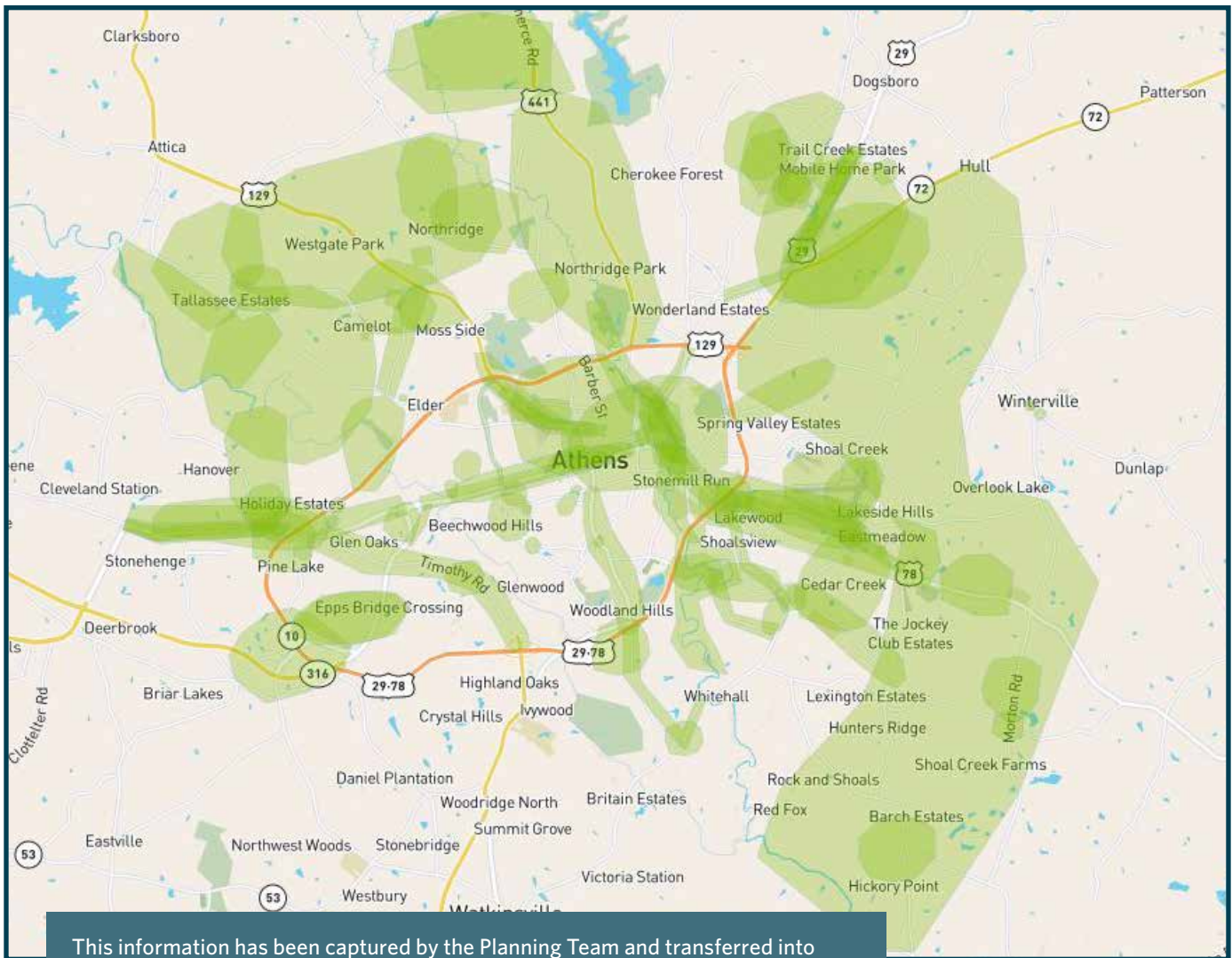
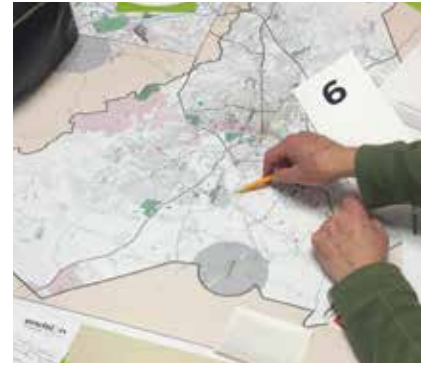
- Events & Entertainment (20 ideas)
- Performing Arts (12 ideas)
- Cultural Opportunities (10 ideas)
- Visual Arts (3 ideas)

45
IDEAS

2.1%
OF ALL IDEAS

MAPPING EXERCISE

As participants shared ideas for prompt 1, “What do we need to do to make Athens-Clarke County an even better community in the future?” they were encouraged to use a red marker to mark a map if that idea was related to a specific place or geography. For instance, if an idea suggested a specific intersection could be improved, they would mark that intersection on their group’s map. Hundreds of map comments were added to maps both online and in-person. The map below shows every marking placed during the Focus on the Future round. This is not meant to illustrate the content of comments, but to show where ideas overlapped. For more information on how to read specific ideas, see the blue box below.



This information has been captured by the Planning Team and transferred into an online map layer. In the online version of the map, available at [<<LINK TO BE ADDED>>](#) users can access the full database of marked comments, zoom in or out and hover over or click dots to see specific ideas. The above maps shows the composite of all the markings collected through the in-person sessions. More than 100 map comments were collected through the process, and each is shown above.

Prompt #2:

How will we know when we've succeeded?

Following the primary prompt, participants were asked several follow up questions including, "How will we know when we've succeeded?". This generated 689 responses. Below are the top five topics that came out of those responses along with example comments that pertain to each topic.

1 Neighborhoods & Civic Vitality

- "Have young leaders engaged and involved in Athens."
- "Downtown is a destination."
- "Our communities would reflect our city's diversity."
- "More friendly community that attracts people."
- "Intergovernmental collaboration."

198
COMMENTS

2 Economic Development

- "Jobs available that pay a living wage."
- "You'll see a continued and increasing development of diverse, small, local business start ups all over the county."
- "Government working with private industry to help make opportunities available - a lot of effort to build things and make things happen."
- "When some of our brightest youth come back to ACC."

122
COMMENTS

3 Transportation & Infrastructure

- "When you can live in Athens without a car."
- "Safe sidewalks in all residential neighborhoods."
- "When 100% of the city, state, and private properties in ACC can be powered with sustainable sources."
- "Easily drive from our side of the city to the other side (or take public transit)."

108
COMMENTS

4 Social Services

- "Our poverty rate will have decreased dramatically."
- "Young adults are regularly supported to their transition to adulthood."
- "Groups regularly coordinate and provide for uncomplicated services."

98
COMMENTS

5 Education

- "Demand for parents wanting their children in all schools."
- "More positive information about our schools being shared."
- "Better integrated schools and neighborhoods."
- "Students coming out of public schools trained for life/life skills."

87
COMMENTS

Prompt 3:**What are the challenges or obstacles to realizing our vision or maximizing our opportunities?**

A final prompt asked participants to consider, "What are the challenges or obstacles to realizing our vision or maximizing our opportunities?" This generated 519 responses. Below are the four topics that came out of those responses along with example comments that pertain to each topic. Note these topics differed from the 10 original topics as the prompt elicited a unique set of responses.

1 People & Perceptions

- "Organizations and people work in silos."
- "Generational and cultural differences and misunderstandings."
- "Fear of conflict and controversy."
- "The perception that we are not business friendly - we are, but the perception is there."
- "We don't as a community talk enough about our positive aspects - there are many good things going on, but we don't promote that."
- "More representative voices for all community decisions."
- "Better communication with community, community discussion."

284
COMMENTS

2 Financial

- "Dedicated and consistent funding."
- "Lack of a system for cost sharing among entities."
- "Market & investment factors (can't just make something change)."
- "Where does money come from?"
- "Limited financial resources - smallest county, non-taxed groups - lots of challenges."

107
COMMENTS

3 Government & Leadership

- "Everything has to go through government processes."
- "Having sound and committed leadership."
- "Zoning prohibiting smart growth/historical preservation."
- "Diverse committees to make this happen."
- "Local leadership and getting everybody on the same page."

98
COMMENTS

4 Physical Community Characteristics

- "Existing infrastructure."
- "Reusing empty spaces."
- "Not enough working technology in schools and neighborhoods."
- "Lack of transportation to some areas of Athens."

30
COMMENTS

6. Results from the Focus Groups Interviews

Through the week of January 30th 23 focus group interviews were conducted with 144 community stakeholders. Groups were formed to reflect the diverse set of backgrounds and interests within the Athens-Clarke County community.

Introduction to the Focus Group Conversations

The Focus Group discussions were facilitated by planning consultants from planning NEXT. Each meeting included a brief background on the Envision process, but focused primarily on a discussion of the group's key opportunities and challenges, both today and in the future. The Steering Committee was interested in gathering the intuitive, experiential perspectives from each of these groups to help build a comprehensive set of input.

Summary of the Focus Group Conversations

The following provides a summary of the major themes from each of the 23 conversations. The full set of notes from the meeting has been included in the document appendix.

Focus Group topics

- Music
- Arts
- African-American
- Realtors / Homebuilders
- Large Private Employers
- Hispanic
- Developers
- Alternative Transportation
- ACCUG Planning Commission
- Activists
- Agriculture/Environment
- Not for Profit
- K-12 Education
- Youth
- Post-Secondary Education
- Faith-Based Community
- Seniors
- Small Business / Entrepreneurs
- Persons with Disabilities
- Health
- Neighborhoods
- Safety

MUSIC

Major themes from the conversation

- The Athens music scene is unique, special and nationally recognized, but it needs to be looked after and recognized for its contribution to the community
- Need to develop a music industry, or place where artists can play, record and expand versus a collection of venues and a home base for talent to produce elsewhere
- The community must become more of a regional draw with slow but strategic expansion of festivals, and the cultivation of new venues
- The music scene has evolved, venues have changed or gone away and the downtown is becoming unaffordable
- Engage the college students and pull them back into the music scene
- Music, or venues, can drive redevelopment and is an important consideration
- College radio can be an important tool in pulling in students and promoting events directly to students
- Embracing all genres including hip hop, jazz and classical
- Promotion is important, understanding what's out there and available
- Affordability is becoming a problem for the bohemians in Athens

Focus Group Invitees

- George Fontaine, Jr.**
Owner, Normaltown Records & New West Records
- David Barbe**
Director, UGA Music Business Certificate Program
- Seth Hendershot**
Owner, Hendershots Coffee & Bar
- Bob Sleppy**
Director, Nuci's Space
- Jill Helme**
Executive Director, AthFest Educates
- Eunice Kang**
Musician, Teacher
- William Montu Miller**
Business owner, promoter
- Velena Vego**
40 Watt Club
- Timi Conley**
Wild Rumpus, Fuzzy Sprouts, Abbey Road, Kite to the Moon
- Dwayne Segar**
Jazz musician, radio personality

ARTS

Major themes from the conversation

- Athens is an anomaly, has its own energy, a constant consistent island of creativity, not just because it's a college town, but something unique, special
- An incredible diversity of artists and crafts, people making things, doing things, a buzz to the community unique considering the community's size
- Athens is an incubator for talent, but artists must leave the community to make money or a career as an artist
- Public Art Master Plan underway will have an important impact in organizing the community's priorities and funding for public art
- Tourism not quite what it could be considering the concentration and diversity of arts and cultural offerings, improving but slowly, would help artists survive and thrive
- A lot of the bohemian class not on solid footing, relying on cheap rent, when this changes or goes up the culture will have to change
- When people come here we need them to see something, or do something, or buy something that is unique to Athens, tourism is driven by authenticity, energy
- Everyone trying to deliver more with less, but there are more resources available from the local government than in other communities

AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

Major themes from the conversation

- Would like to see more social outlets for everyone within the Athens-Clarke County community
- There should be a redistribution of wealth and UGA should stop being put first because they take all the tax dollars
- Leaders of African American organizations do not connect with communities that are benefiting, there's a sense of distrust
- Athens-Clarke County should take full advantage of existing programs to establish more programs
- Parents need to be provided with the appropriate tools to address what is happening

REALTORS & HOMEBUILDERS

Major themes from the conversation

- Athens-Clarke is a community of choice with a well-earned reputation as a unique and beautiful built and natural environment
- Housing affordability is a growing problem and will only intensify in the most desirable neighborhoods like Five Points, this is affecting both new build home prices as well as rents overall
- Infill home building increasing as a result of limitations on the periphery and demand in certain neighborhoods, variety of housing types, historic ordinances limit the options in older neighborhoods
- Reputation or perceptions of certain neighborhoods are not always consistent or accurate and they can drive home values
- Affordable or subsidized housing options are fully leased, very little vacancy, long wait lists

Focus Group Invitees

- Rebecca Wood**
Director, UGA Music Business Certificate Program
- Desiree Sharp**
Athens Area Arts Council
- Michael Laochowski**
UGA Museum of Art
- Shayna Hobbs**
Co-owner, Sons of Sawdust
- Marilyn Wolf Ragatz**
Founding Chair, Cultural Affairs Commission
- Paul Cramer**
Classic Center
- Jamie Calkin**
Artist
- Peter Dale**
The National, Condor Chocolate
- Alicia Nickles**
Board Chair, Canopy Aerial Dance
- Terry Powells**
Athens Creative Theatre

Focus Group Invitees

- Kirreena Gallagher**
Mother, Community activist
- Ovita Thornton**
Bethel Homes, Community activist
- Dabriah Brown**
Former ICC chair, Athens Housing Authority
- Andiasean Johnson**
Business owner, youth leader
- Terris Thomas**
Community leader, youth leader
- Rick Dunn**
Poll manager
- Lawrence Harris**
College and Career Academy
- Grady Martin**
East Athens Development Corporation
- Tyron Harris**
Owner, Studio 74 Barber Shop

Focus Group Invitees

- Carol Williams**
Residential Realtor
- Jared York**
Homebuilder
- Michael Songster**
Homebuilder
- David Ogunsanya**
Athens Land Trust
- Spencer Frye**
Habitat for Humanity
- Veronica Imery**
Green Homebuilder
- Gregg Bayard**
Residential Developer
- Hank Joiner**
Multifamily Developer
- Larry Fort**
Residential Realtor
- James Whitley**
Landmark

LARGE PRIVATE EMPLOYERS

Major themes from the conversation

- Manufacturing has gone through a significant transition over the past two decades and will remain a dynamic sector
- The community grew very fast, but the concrete of the foundation was not dry and this has affected the sustainability of the infrastructure
- Difficulty in maintaining a consistent and reliable workforce, with very high turnover of employees
- A lot of people that work in Athens, but don't live here, this has changed significantly from the 80's and 90's
- Lots of competition from Oconee County other parts of the region
- The size of the county and available sites is limiting, regulations also provide another barrier, the regulators and the business community don't always align
- The University is THE driver and affects everything including the large major employers

HISPANIC / LATINX LEADERSHIP

Major themes from the conversation

- Athens-Clarke County itself is segregated, but the Hispanic community is tight and diverse and unifies when it's important
- It is a community of choices with lots of diversity, love of the arts, quality of life, etc.
- Public school system is diverse and the option of elementary aged children to attend a Spanish-speaking school should be offered
- Public transportation and other modes of transportation can be improved, such as dedicated bike lanes
- In some instances, churches provide transportation due to lack of adequate transportation options
- High poverty rate has caused an out migration of residents from neighborhoods
- Poverty needs to be addressed to address schools perceptions

DEVELOPERS

Major themes from the conversation

- Downtown development has picked up significantly in intensity and scale, with a lot of this in student housing
- The rural zoning necklace (1 unit per 10 acre) effectively serves as a growth boundary for the community, limiting subdivision of land, home development, and pushing this demand into surrounding counties like Oconee and Jackson
- Development outside the county has exploded in recent years especially in Oconee County, Athens-Clarke is not big enough to disincentivize living this far out commutes are easy, and land is cheap
- The application of planning principles from the Comprehensive Plan or other policies not always consistent and manifest in strange new developments, requirements to build retail doesn't always respond to market demand
- Need for greater clarity in the application of the code, development regulations
- There are fewer and fewer easy areas to build, but a lot of prepared lots that could be developed in the near future

Focus Group Invitees

- Todd Henry**
Caterpillar, Great Promise Partnership (GPP)
- Steve Hollis**
Power Partners, GPP
- Harris Lowery**
RAI
- Doug Brouillard**
Eaton Supercharger
- Emily Michelbach**
Carrier Transcold, GPP
- Ricky Walker**
Pilgrim's Pride
- Justin Widener**
Merial
- David Dukes**
The Benson Group
- Steve Middlebrooks**
Heyward Allen Toyota
- Ashlea Harris**
VoxPro

Focus Group Invitees

- Noris Diaz**
State Farm
- Juana Gnecco**
Potter
- Pepe Casas**
Director, Tonalli Dance Group
- Noe Mendoza**
Community advocate
- Hugo and Evelyn Zaldaña**
Pastors, Catedral de Fe
- Adiel Santibañez**
President, Students for Latino Empowerment group at UGA
- Christie Navarro**
Family specialist, Clarke County School District (CCSD)
- Cecilia Santibanez**
Translator, Piedmont Athens Regional Hospital
- Bruno Rubio**
Puerto Del Sol, Cali n Titos
- Peggy McClure**
Athens First Bank & Trust

Focus Group Invitees

- Jon Williams**
Civil Engineer, Georgia Planning
- Wes Rogers**
The Mark Properties
- Charlie Upchurch**
Upchurch Realty
- Carl Nichols**
Nichols Land Investment
- Chris Blackmon**
- Christy Terrell**
Georgia Power
- Jim Warnes**
Timmons Warnes, LLP
- Jennifer Zwirn**
Athens First Bank, Commercial Lending
- Bryan Austin**
Austin Sumner Properties
- Jamie Boswell**
Commercial Realtor, Georgia Department of Transportation Vice Chairman, District 10

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Major themes from the conversation

- Athens increasingly active cycling community and destination for both commuting and recreation with more on-street infrastructure and community support
- Need for greater cycling infrastructure on campus, as parking has been moved to the periphery of campus
- The sidewalk program has improved its activity over the past several years due to demand from new residents asking for more walkability
- Transit system is award winning, but there is room for improvement in service, coverage and ridership
- Free school ridership program has been a success, boost to ridership
- The presence of the UGA and Athens Transit system does provide unique coverage and service options, but room for better integration
- Safety is a focus as accidents are increasing
- Better job by City-County in institutionalizing the minimums like line striping and other on-street amenities

ACCUG PLANNING COMMISSION

Major themes from the conversation

- Need better guards to protect downtown and its historical heritage
- Downtown retail shops are closed too often
- The high concentration of students housing downtown is negatively impacting ridership of transit
- Transportation and infrastructure issues need to be addressed. There is no transportation to Oconee and poor corridors with lots of curb cuts such as on Atlanta Highway 78 are inhibiting redevelopment opportunities
- Concerned about affordable housing for citizens – students are moving to “newer shinier things” and properties are left behind
- Planning staff is not getting much planning opportunity versus development review.
- Stormwater management has been hard to regulate due to small lots making it very challenging

ACTIVISTS

Major themes from the conversation

- Athens Clarke-County has a lot to offer such as the Georgia Art Museum, Lyndon House, cost of living, diversity, kid-oriented opportunities, etc
- Education system is segregated causing unevenness within many schools.
- Too many non-profits creating too much competition for limited resources. This also confusing when expert leadership is needed
- Poverty is an issue – there is generational poverty with racial dimensions.
- There has been pressure for UGA has to increase hourly wage routes
- Public transportation system is not bad, but it is not perfect and could be expanded

Focus Group Invitees

- Tyler Dewey**
Bike Athens
- Tony Eubanks**
Community Approach to Planning Prince Avenue (CAPPA)
- Ken Sherman**
Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Planning Committee; and Director, ATHSAV
- Robert Holden**
Associate VP for Auxiliary Services, UGA
- Brian Molloy**
The Hub Bicycle Shop
- Chris Dowd**
Representative, Athens for Everyone Transit Campaign
- Savannah Hembry**
Safe Routes to School Committee member
- Butch McDuffie**
Athens Transit
- John Devine**
FireFly Trail

Focus Group Invitees

- Alice Kinman**
Chair
- James Anderson**
Vice Chair
- Maxine Easom**
- David Finkel**
- Dave Hudgins**
- Hank Joiner**
- Jeffrey Ritchey**
- Lucy Rowland**
- James Scanlon**
- Jeff Scarbrough**
- Brad Griffin**
ACCUG Planning Director

Focus Group Invitees

- Mokah Johnson**
Athens Hip Hop Awards, Anti Discrimination Movement
- Alvin Sheats**
West Hancock Development Corporation, NAACP
- Tim Denson**
Athens For Everyone
- Linda Lloyd**
Economic Justice Coalition
- Irami Osei Frimpong**
Political activist
- Mark McConnell**
Environmental activist
- Ricky Roberts**
LGBTQ activist
- Karen Solheim**
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
- Mansour Buffins**
Student activist, UGA
- Bettina Kaplan**
Ulead Athens

AGRICULTURE/ENVIRONMENT

Major themes from the conversation

- Farmer's markets are a huge asset and success story for this community, learning about real and fresh food, interacting with the rest of the community
- A lot opportunity for partnership here whether its just in the environmental movement or across interests disciplines
- Greenway Network Plan and updates have had a big impact in protecting the community's waterways and riparian corridors and improving their health
- A lot of enthusiasm for moving Athens toward a greener, more sustainable future
- Great parks in and around the community, the best have a diversity of programming and keep people active and having fun
- Lack of sidewalks is a real problem especially outside the more urbanized areas
- A beautiful and ecologically diverse county, one of the community's greatest assets overall

NOT FOR PROFIT

Major themes from the conversation

- Climate for partnership has really improved, a lot more people and organizations are coming together
- A very large galaxy of non-profits working throughout the community with some overlap in mission and key services
- Lot's of intellectual capital provided by the the university, hundreds of grads each year that want to stay in the community but without an obvious landing place
- The diversity of the non-profit sector is a reflection of the diversity of interests in the community overall, ranging from animal rescue to housing affordability to environmental causes
- Scaling of the non-profit model is difficult, but a number of groups have developed a sustainable model and added staff
- Drug prevention and treatment programs need to be a focus in the future

K-12 EDUCATION

Major themes from the conversation

- The school district has a number of quality programs and partnerships, such as the early learning program, which is best in the state, the high schools' AP programs, and the "Great Promise Partnership" which hires students (part time) to gain life and career skills
- Need for quality childcare assistance programs
- There are not enough out of school organizations for students to join and there needs to be more volunteer and service opportunities available to high school students
- Needs to be more job opportunities for young people - college students take a lot of the jobs that would be appropriate for teenagers and young adults

Focus Group Invitees

Nat Kuykendall
Vice-Chair, Greenways Commission

Bruno Giri
Chair, Upper Oconee Watershed Network

Christina Hyilton
Outreach Coordinator, Athens Land Trust, Farmer

Carl Jordan
Former Athens-Clarke County Commissioner

Nancy Stangle
Founder, Athens Land Trust

Beth Gavrilles
Founder, Grow Green; and UGA School of Ecology

David Berle
UGA College of Agriculture; and Founder, Athens Community Garden Network

Mark Farmer
Professor of Bioscience, UGA

Fred Harrison
Farmer

Sarah Thurman
Athens Farmers Market

Focus Group Invitees

Delene Porter
Athens Area Community Foundation

Joan Prittie
Director, Project Safe

Bonnie Miller
Georgia Legal Services

Life LaRoche
Director, Chess and Community

Mike Hackett
Boys and Girls Club, Athens representative

Nefertiti Robertson
Social Services Coordinator for Athens, Salvation Army

Shae Post
Director, Athens Area Homeless Shelter

Leslie Hale
Books for Keeps

Salomon Smothers
Action Ministries

Sister Margarita

Focus Group Invitees

Angela Gay
Counselor, Cedar Shoals; and Leader, YWCO Girls' Group

Mrs. Tranteegus
Parent

Cory Delamater
Parent

Tim Johnson
Communities in Schools

Bertis Downs
Public education advocate

Dawn Meyers
Clarke County School District

Shannon York
Parent

Demetria Fortson
Teacher, Winterville Elementary School

Paula Shilton
Clarke County Mentor Program

Ian Altman
Teacher, Clarke Central High School

YOUTH

Major themes from the conversation

- UGA is everywhere and money and time should be put into Athens and the local schools like they do at UGA
- Athens is a diverse place with programs for teenagers, yoga places, and unique shops
- More collaborative activities with high schools are needed
- There are mentorship programs in schools (with UGA students), but there needs to also be classes of college applications
- There need to be more activities available for the youth - there is no teen center, the mall is going down, and the bowling alley roof fell
- Strong neighborhoods and healthy surroundings are important to success for young people

POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

Major themes from the conversation

- The community is unique and feels young and exciting, very attractive to prospective students and faculty alike
- Lots of opportunities for part-time work during the four years of school, but not sure whether this is the group who should be getting these jobs versus resident population
- Students, generally, would like to stay in Athens following graduation but there are very few opportunities and lots of competition, good for employers challenging for prospective employees
- Art and culture are culture driver for the community and a key reason for its well-deserved, positive reputation
- There is a need to offer more opportunities for the university to turn inside-out and engage with the community around it, improve the dialogue
- Important to recognize that Athens is a community with a number of post-secondary options beyond the University of Georgia including the Athens Technical College and Piedmont

FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY

Major themes from the conversation

- There is a strong nonprofit ecosystem. It is robust, but are there too many
- Interfaith is positive - active effort and better chance to collaborate and be more efficient through efforts such as Athens Prayer Network
- Residents may not know how to access faith based resources such as Community Foundation and Community Connections 211
- Would like to see more emphasis on mental health and the high homelessness rate, even though there are significant resources deployed for the latter
- Need to see more active and engaged families in school system to improve education and student performance

Focus Group Invitees

Student
Clarke Central High School

Student
Cedar Shoals High School

Student
Classic City High School

Student
Clarke Middle School

Student
Coile Middle School

Student
Burney Harris Lyons Middle School

Student
Hilsman Middle School

Student
Rutland Academy

Student
Athens Christian School

Student
Young Urban Farmer

Student
Ulead Athens

Focus Group Invitees

Jacob Fucetola
Student, UGA

Amaan Charaniya
Student, UGA

Roya Naghepour
Student, UGA

Student
Athens Tech

Jane Kidd
Administrator, Piedmont

Student
Piedmont

Pam Whitten
Provost, UGA

Claudia Shamp
PanHellenic/IF, UGA

Dr. Brian Brewer
*UGA Medical Partnership Graduate, third year
Medical Resident at St. Mary's*

Dr. Michelle Garfield Cook
Director, Office of Institutional Diversity, UGA

Focus Group Invitees

Pastor Abraham Mosley
Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church

Pastor Benjamin Lett
Hill Chapel Baptist Church

Matt Stevens
Director of Stewardship, Athens Church

Frank Granger
Minister of Christian Community, First Baptist Church

Betsy Butler
Ministry of Missions, First United Methodist Church

St. Joseph's Catholic Church

Ed Bolen
Milledge Avenue Baptist Church

Rabbi Eric Linder
Congregation Children of Israel

Imam, Adel Amer
Al Huda Islamic Center

Rene Dubose
Metropolitan Community Church

SENIORS CITIZENS

Major themes from the conversation

- Workforce development that focuses on better paying jobs is needed
- Athens has the potential to become a better retirement community if there were more jobs available and if UGA allowed seniors to take free courses
- Need better access to affordable housing with low maintenance
- Older neighborhoods are being taken up by students, but there's potential senior and students to be have integrated housing options
- Downtown is not welcoming for seniors - there is not a mixture of offerings for everyone. They can change that by accommodating all age groups not just students. For instance, by offering early bird meals at restaurants or have certain retail offerings
- Poverty and hunger must be addressed - approximate 75 percent of the older adults admitted to the hospital are malnourished and 1 in 15 is food insecure
- Retirees are attracted to Athens-Clarke County in part because older adults support older adults

SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURS

Major themes from the conversation

- There is a supportive system between community and businesses; mutual support.
- Challenge is exists to attract high-capacity people
- Small entrepreneur would not know where to go in Athens to seek assistance.
- There is not a minority supportive network for businesses
- Downtown is too student oriented with too much housing. There needs to be a more diverse mix of uses

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Major themes from the conversation

- The Athens Lift system is a vitally important resource for persons with disabilities throughout the county
- Services can really be viewed as expanding opportunities for all residents of the county and have greatly enhanced both the quality of life and the effectiveness of individuals
- It's important to provide "wrap around" services or a consider the full list of needs in terms of each phase of the life cycle, great coverage for young people but the transition to adulthood can be hard for someone with disabilities
- There could be better cohesion between the service providers and understanding so services are not duplicated, but need to decide who the convener is
- Needs to be better recreational options, improving but still not where it could be
- Measuring the number of children with development disabilities who have direct access to programs will help track change, improvement

Focus Group Invitees

- Alex Patterson**
Retired
- Charlie Maddox**
Retired
- June Ball**
Artist
- Elizabeth Platt**
- Kathy Hoard**
Chair, Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau Board
- Ed Turner**
- Luciano Horescu**
- Helen Mills**
Oconee Hill Cemetery, Rotary Club of Athens, and Boy Scouts
- Walt Swanson**
Retired
- Jack Eisenmann**
Winterville Senior Center programming

Focus Group Invitees

- Davis Knox**
CEO, Fire and Flavor; AthensMade Board
- Kamau Hull**
Owner, Hull Law Firm
- Brandon Checketts**
CEO, Roundsphere
- Isaiah Ellison**
Owner, Ellison's Professional Services
- Chris Herron**
Creature Comforts
- Raisa Drew**
Good Biz Program Coordinator, Goodwill
- Alonso Haro**
La Parillia
- Kristen Bach**
Treehouse Arts and Crafts
- Michael Siebert**
The Sign Bros
- Saphir Grici**
Owner, Holy Crepe food truck
- Deenan Scott**
Owner, Big City Bread and Little City Diner

Focus Group Invitees

- Sue Rickman**
Special Education Coordinator, CCSD
- Roger Kenney**
Director, Athens Inclusive Recreation & Sports
- Laura Whitaker**
Extra Special People
- Dr. Kevin Ayers**
UGA Center for Autism
- Rena Davis**
Georgia Options
- OJ Booker**
Advantage Behavioral Health
- Michael Davenport**
Artist
- Mike Walker**
Hope Haven
- Chris Easton**
Autism and Disability Advocates
- Kent Silver**
Disability lawyer, Silver & Archibald

HEALTH

Major themes from the conversation

- Health Care and Social Services now the dominant industry in Athens outside of the University, with two major hospitals
- Hospitals now provide services once only available in Atlanta MSA, becoming a regional draw for patients
- Improvements over the last decade in overall access to care, especially as the effects of the Affordable Care Act were felt
- Better partnerships forming between service providers at all levels of their organizations
- There is a need to be more innovative in both the delivery of services and the monitoring of outcomes, not enough attention paid the patient once they leave the hospital
- Access improving overall, but in some segments of the population, there are still significant barriers to entry for patients, especially from the low income earners

NEIGHBORHOODS

Major themes from the conversation

- Better transportation choices and improved infrastructure needed in neighborhoods. Would like to see repaired and new sidewalks, improved safety, traffic calming, etc.
- Comprehensive neighborhood planning and preservation planning needed that acknowledges different types of neighborhoods
- Room for improvement for service accessibility in the neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods don't need anything, but, for those that do, how do they get those services?
- Sense of neighborhood pride is good and there is distinct character
- Neighborhood beautification should be pursued - trash and maintenance can be better
- Neighborhoods are socioeconomically segregated
- Must look at cultural resources as impactful: the creative economy

SAFETY

Major themes from the conversation

- Positive relationship between safety services (Police, Fire, EMS, etc.) and community hard earned and stems from openness and transparency
- There is better collaboration between the branches of government along with increasing recognition of community priorities
- Opioids, prescription pain medications, and other serious drugs are a rapidly increasing issue in the community. Treatment, drug courts and other measures have not done enough to stem the flow
- Strategic Planning is essential for all service providers to understand the expectations of services against the limitation of resources
- Mental health a significant concern especially as the community has become a magnet regionally, for those in need of basic health / mental health services
- Resources are dwindling, and without serious investment into human and physical capital, the community will deal with a drop in service level

Focus Group Invitees

Suzanne Lester, MD
Piedmont Athens Regional Community Care Clinic; and AU/UGA Medical Partnership

Claude Burnett, MD
Northeast Health District

Dr. Matthew Mcrae
Dentist

Dr. Hancock
Athens Orthopedic Clinic

Cindy Carmean
Director of Medical Education (residency program), Piedmont Athens Regional

OJ Booker
Advantage Behavioral Health

Kevin Florence
Owner/pharmacist, Add Drug

Dr. Diane Dunston
Neighborhood Health Center

Harold Weber
Athens Neighborhood Center

Dr. Achilia Morrow
Associate Program Director (residency program), St. Mary's

Focus Group Invitees

Kristen Morales
Buena Vista neighborhood

Amy Kissane
Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation

Jane Sullivan
St. Ives Neighborhood Association

Kent Middleton
Green Acres neighborhood

Frances Berry
Federation of Neighborhoods

Sheila Neely Norman
East Athens neighborhood

Aida Quinones
Pinewoods Library

Don Nelson
Five Points neighborhood

John Aitken
Deerfield Neighborhood Association

Focus Group Invitees

Sheriff Ira Edwards
Athens-Clarke County

Chief, Dr. Scott Freeman
Athens-Clarke County Police

Chief Fred Stephens
Clarke County School District Police

Chief Jimmy Williamson
UGA Police

Dale Allen
Athens-Clarke County Probation

Chief Jeff Scarbrough
Athens-Clarke County Fire

Beth Burgess
Athens-Clarke Emergency Management

Robby Atkins
National EMS

Laura Allen
American Red Cross

Brian Williams
UGA School of Public and International Affairs, Blue and You

7. Results from Vinson Institute Stakeholder Sessions

On February 28 and March 1 of 2017, 150 community stakeholders from the community's most impactful organizations and institutions were invited to share their insights on ten community topics. The summary of this two-day session has been included below.

TOP PRIORITIES AND ISSUES

These priorities were developed from the issues that the stakeholders said they heard come up across all groups. Working in ten small groups, the diverse members reached consensus on the top three issues they recognized across the 10 focus areas and the two-days of discussions. These are in no ranked order.

- Retaining talent – locally grown, also within businesses, government, non profits, etc
- Education is core – lifelong learning from birth to old age. School system issues are impacting the community and community issues are impacting the school system
- Need for collaboration and strategic planning and data sharing.
- Commitment to the culture of Athens. We need to define our core values and principles as a community and then plan around those values. Develop unique vision of Athens for everyone and maintain the character as we grow (keep the weird). Define identity and finding the alignment and balance between hometown and business growth. We must corroboratively define our vision for growth that is well articulated.
- Proactive planning – plan for the demographics and industries we have and want; as we plan infrastructure plan for sustainability and maintenance costs
- Attracting and retaining middle income jobs for a sustainable economy; education is a key to getting us there
- Senior housing and affordable housing
- Walkability
- Safe community spaces
- Diversity in leadership and engagement
- Funding
- Poverty - make progress: Access for all including transit, jobs, education, medical services, etc. It is impacted by education, living wage jobs due to underemployment, transportation issues, need for variety of housing costs and types, need for focus on redevelopment and infill
- Stronger collaboration and coordination with regional partners on cross county issues
- Take a comprehensive view of the arts and culture. Culture equals economic development
- Preserve unique culture, history, and environment
- Access – This must be defined for all topic areas from the provider and the user perspective
- A healthy community means inclusion across all segments and cultures
- Economic development
- Mobility and connectivity
- Healthcare and healthy lifestyle
- Beautification and green space

Stakeholder group topics

- *Social Services*
- *Housing*
- *Neighborhoods and Civic Vitality*
- *Economic Development*
- *Education*
- *Transportation and Infrastructure*
- *Arts and Culture*
- *Health and Safety*
- *Future Land Use*
- *Environments and Agriculture*



Stakeholders at work

Over the two-day session, hundreds of ideas were offered by the community stakeholders. Each of these was captured by facilitators from the Carl Vinson Institute. The full list of responses can be found in this document's appendix.

Vinson Institute Stakeholder Sessions

Approach, highlights and results from the ten topic areas

Over the two days of discussions, participants began in a group giving feedback on themes gleaned from the public input to date. Their first session grouped them with common focus experts for a 50-minute discussion to capture themes and outcomes. Following that first session, groups were mixed into more diverse sets, and participants visited 9 other topics to respond to the themes and expand outcomes. The following are summaries of the notes collected in the feedback sessions.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Conversation Highlights

- Equity of services and facilities between east and west Athens
- Access to affordable childcare
- Senior services/elderly (for those in need and for active seniors/culture)
- Homelessness
- Poverty
- Duplication of services
- Children and youth services and programs and paths for success
- Re-entry/Jail diversion.

Community Outcomes Sought

- Coordinated multidiscipline/partner system of supports for those in poverty, crisis, “well-oiled machine”
- Regional contribution (including residents) to social safety net supports
- People move forward and out of poverty
- Strong workforce in a variety of career paths with supports in place
- Stair step supports as income grows rather than a cliff
- Measure outcomes based on returns
- Schools are hubs for social services (e.g. - St. Louis; Greensboro)

HOUSING

Conversation Highlights

- Provide housing for “real” people, not just students and higher income residents
- Need to provide access to affordable housing
- Need for a balance of housing, both price-wise and different types
- Review, assess, and consider need for revising zoning laws
- Broad need for retirement housing
- Assess the transportation needs as they relate to housing
- Develop plans for renovation and re-purposing of older buildings
- Housing for the homeless should be a priority
- Diminish housing insecurity and increase housing security
- Affordable housing for all income levels

Community Outcomes Sought

- Everyone in ACC has a quality place to live
- We will see a significant increase in home ownership
- Intercity/Downtown access to housing for all ages and income levels
- Easier transition for economic mobility geared to access to quality housing

NEIGHBORHOODS & CIVIC VITALITY

Conversation Highlights

- Inclusive downtown – living, recreation, economically
- Engagement – more civic mindedness, diversity across multiple characteristics and university
- Building/maintaining strong neighborhoods. Neighborhoods should work for age 8 to 80 – a truly livable community
- Government – should be more open/responsive/representative policies to respond to neighborhood needs
- More affordable housing throughout the county – not just public housing, but 1st time buyers, etc. Retiree market (great place activity wise)
- Need innovative, bold thinking that blends with what makes Athens Athens – music, art, etc
- UGA decisions impact neighborhoods/areas

Community Outcomes Sought

- Zoning changes to allow us to address things like neighborhood grocery stores, etc.
- Commit to implementation plan and finance it
- Long term ideas – mixed use/mixed populations; sensitive to economic growth, environment, quality of life, green space, cultural sensitivity
- Inclusive neighborhoods – don't drive people out
Neighborhood pride – brings community together at neighborhood level – clean ups, cook outs, engages in day of community
- How do we connect low income and high income areas when they share a neighborhood
- How are we telling the story of Athens – who is telling it? Lots of pieces to make Athens unique – now do we articulate that – not just UGA
- Want trust between community and police

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Conversation Highlights

- Improve school system
- Workforce Development- need qualified talent and connect workers with the employers' needs
- Need better wages in local jobs
- Common branding and collective vision needed for economic development
- Coordination - Resources are available for entrepreneurial support and resources and small business support but need coordination
- Space for business development

Community Outcomes Sought

- Lowest poverty rate in the state
- Education is a priority
- Quality of Life improves
- Community Spirit is inclusive
- Business support is greater
- New job markets opened and we expand existing markets
- Development of Metro Athens identity
- Transportation is expanded

EDUCATION

Conversation Highlights

- Supporting and Engaging Parents
- Poor Perception
- Collaboration
- School Transition (post high school to work, technical college, four year institutions)
- Early Childhood Support
- Teacher Support, Resources, and Development
- Creation of a safety net for students with complex support issues
- Creation of cultural curriculum to address various learning styles

Community Outcomes Sought

- Increased parent involvement, increased graduation rate, increased access, improved behavior in and out of school
- Increased student support, community schools and healthier youth
- Increased higher productivity, upward mobility, improved economic investment in Athens
- Children school ready, increase literacy, healthier children and increase graduation rates
- Higher retention of quality teachers and greater involvement, and improved morale & safety
- More responsible tax paying citizen, free up other resources committed to managing this population, higher grads and positive school environment

NEIGHBORHOODS & CIVIC VITALITY

Conversation Highlights

- Multi modal - more and better
- Accommodate needs of all demographics, young to old
- More walkability and sidewalk access
- Better and smarter utilities including gigabit Internet to homes, improved handheld access
- Expansion of public transit while being cognizant of the cost to the customer
- Rail is important to future: North south along rail through campus, and west to Atlanta
- Increase transportation and infrastructure efficiency
- Improve and beautify entry gateways into Athens
- Encourage alternative transportation and infrastructure including solar and wind power

Community Outcomes Sought

- Promote development on underutilized transit routes
- Access for all. Low unemployment with transit for workers to where the jobs are
- Plan for IT technology for next generation business
- Better regional transportation
- Increased access to good transit will help alleviate poverty
- Improve walkability for tourists
- The transit options we have now better utilized
- Sewer is adequate for the economic development we want and is in the right places
- Don't want sprawl and gridlock

ARTS & CULTURE

Conversation Highlights

- Inclusivity
- Diversity
- Accessibility
- Preserve unique culture, history, and environment
- Build on and promote Athens as an arts and cultural destination
- Take a comprehensive view of the arts and culture/
Culture=Economic Development
- Better utilize and leverage existing resources

Community Outcomes Sought

- Communicate and promote culture effectively
- Expand access and keep Athens a diverse, inclusive, welcoming environment
- Embrace Athens' identity and keep it local
- Continue to build and promote Athens as a cultural destination
- Attract and build creative jobs
- Integrate cultural and environmental assets, neighborhoods, and UGA with the Oconee Greenway
- A collaborative culture between UGA and local schools

HEALTH & SAFETY

Conversation Highlights

- Affordable health care
- Crime reduction through non-traditional means
- Improving people's perception of safety
- Resources to address issues
- Educating and informing the public on how to access services and resources
- Accessibility to behavioral health and mental health resources
- Lack of providers, services, people to provide resources
- Access to health care in general
- Safer environment for physical activities for kids
- Access to healthy food
- Access to specialist in the local health care systems

Community Outcomes Sought

- Healthy and safe neighborhoods
- Law enforcement trust issues resolved
- Living wage jobs availability increased
- Continued development of natural resources and interconnectivity to support healthy living
- Better coordination and engagement between law enforcement and the community
- Lower the poverty rate
- More adequate services and programs for the homeless to help move toward not having anyone that is homeless in the community
- Collaborate with adjacent counties on issues
- Greater volunteer and mentor base
- More opportunities to capitalize on the diversity of our community

FUTURE LAND USE

Conversation Highlights

- An overall shared vision that is supported by the Athens people as well as the major institutions is essential for land use planning to be successful. These organizations must coordinate, communicate, and integrate their plans.
- The major themes Housing, Transportation, Connectivity and Mobility, Infrastructure, Redevelopment, Downtown, Healthcare, Poverty, and Green space are all interconnected
- Downtown and its specific issues (housing, connectivity, infrastructure, and green space) revolve around making downtown an inclusive place for all ages and the entire community not just young people
- Since Athens is a small landmass and there are areas of blight along our major corridors/gateways redevelopment and incentives to spur redevelopment of corridors, strip malls, industrial sites, gray-fields, and aging apartments should be redeveloped prior to greenfield development

Community Outcomes Sought

- Transportation: more bus ridership, more routes, run more option, bus size options rail with trails or rails to trails, more bike lanes, more sidewalks, real connectivity through neighborhoods and commercial developments
- Attractive corridors and gateways
- Overall vision that all people support
- Research Park connected to UGA's research endeavor
- Affordable middle class housing in Clarke County with good schools
- Downtown with all aged housing
- Grocery store downtown
- Quality grocery and childcare throughout community
- No food deserts

ENVIRONMENT & AGRICULTURE

Conversation Highlights

- Resource Conservation: recycling, compost, tree canopy protection, open space, energy conservation, beautification, outreach and education, air/water/land protection
- Incentivize Beneficial Uses & Aesthetics: promote traditional and urban agriculture, rivers as assets, community gardens, native plants, green building, transportation alternatives other than cars
- Water Vitality: water quality protection, restoration, use conservation, supply, reuse, rehabilitation of resources in the face of growth, public access
- Supporting Local Agriculture & Local Food
- Diminish housing insecurity and increase housing security
- Affordable housing for all income levels

Community Outcomes Sought

- Cleaner Community
- Clean Water & Adequate Supply
- Engaged Public
- Partnerships with Surrounding Counties
- Clear & Defined Strategy
- Supported Ag Community (both traditional and urban Ag)
- Economic vitality
- Visual Vibrancy
- Healthier individuals – less COPD, less asthma, improved life choices (less obesity), increased exercise and recreation, improved mental health

8. Appendix

All of the community input gathered to date has been included in the appendix. For any additional information or other questions please contact the Planning Team.

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