



Meeting 2 Report

The second Envision 2030 vision meeting was held Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2005 at Riverwatch Middle School in Suwanee. Approximately 40 people attended. In the course of two hours, participants worked in small groups of five or more on a series of questions that helped them think about the kind of community they would like Cumming-Forsyth County to be in 25 years.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 218 ideas, which are listed later in this report, but some of the most common themes of this meeting seemed to be:

- A desire for **different kinds of development** in Cumming-Forsyth County, including support for “true mixed-use communities” (“walk to theater, restaurants, schools, affordable housing, diversity in cost, pricing of housing, diversity in age, backgrounds, ethnicity”). One group suggested a Suwanee town center and another an “active downtown area.”
- A concern that **growth should not outpace infrastructure improvements** (“have infrastructure before you build”).
- Strong support for maintaining Cumming-Forsyth County’s **high quality public schools** and **interest in higher education** (build a “major university (with) four-year, graduate programs,” one group urged).
- An interest in **greater economic development**, including a specific suggestion of biotech industries. One group suggested a “Johns Creek-like development in the north (part of the county), with Windward-like business opportunities/tech sector/health/education.”
- A concern about the **environment**, including Lake Lanier and green space.

Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by James McCoy, president of the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce, which is a sponsor for Envision 2030. James then turned the program over to Jon Abercrombie, the meeting facilitator. Jon explained that participants would work in

small groups or “circles” of five or more people and they would be asked to think about, discuss and come to consensus on several questions. Jon also covered a few suggested ground rules. Each group had a “moderator” who acted as recorder and group facilitator, and wrote 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 what an ideal Cumming-Forsyth County would look like. Here’s the scenario:

It is 2030. Time magazine is sending a reporter to Cumming-Forsyth County to do a cover story on how this community came to be regarded as the “model” or “ideal” mid-sized community in the country – the community other mid-sized communities around the country want to be like.

Here’s the question Jon posed to the groups:

What will Time magazine say in its 2030 article makes Cumming-Forsyth County such an ideal community?

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 Cumming-Forsyth County today for the Time magazine article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*

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 that will be needed if Cumming-Forsyth County were to become an ideal community.

- *What do we lack in Cumming-Forsyth County today that we would need for the Time magazine article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*

These things could include physical assets, organizations or institutions, public policies or decisions, or positive traits or skills of the people that are missing today but will be needed in the future, if Cumming-Forsyth County were to become an ideal community.

The results of these three group discussions (a general vision for Cumming-Forsyth County, the assets that should be preserved and those that should be developed) are in the following three sections of this report. (Note: The small groups were assigned numbers before the meeting, but the numbers may not be sequential. As a result, you may find some gaps in the numbering, but be assured that the results of all the small groups are produced below.)

Small-Group Results: A Vision of Cumming-Forsyth County in 2030

Here are the vision ideas – the things that participants felt Time magazine would focus on, if it were writing about Cumming-Forsyth County as the ideal or model mid-size community in 2030.

Small group 1:

- Pedestrian-friendly downtown with Family orientation
- Little traffic / bike paths
- Greenspace a priority: Parks, Sawnee preserve, specified percentage known
- Aquatic center
- Cultural Arts complex
- Small school environment experience
- Dunwoody-like sinage: low, smaller, not tacky
- John's Creek-like
- Developer-Community partnerships evident
- Sewer / water plentiful
- Inter-county connectors
- Gwinnett: smart-growth examples
- Major University - 4 year graduate programs, with teaching hospital, with large medical community, biotech included "clean"
- Large library as a community center - youth center, café included
- Light-rail transportation
- John's Creek-like development in the north, with Windward-like business opportunities / tech sector health / education
- Affordable housing
- International flair / attribute for the community (Arts, markets, bakerys) - Alpharetta's market as an example
- International acceptance as a community / outreach
- No evidence of business that does not conform to community values
- Underground utilities
- Monument on Sawnee mountain as a focal point
- Botanical Gardens

Small group 2:

- Boulevard
- Arts Center
- Trees
- Community centers for kids
- Affordable housing
- Active downtown area (shining city on a hill) (restaurants, business, arts)
- Bike paths, nice sidewalks
- County planning department for all departments
- Government community centers
- Convention center - restaurants, shops overlooking lake lanier

- Performing Arts theatre
- Bicycle trails, walking trails
- Town Center (Suwanee Town Center)
- Schools - college
- Economic development (new, major businesses)
- Sheriff Center expansion (jail, away from downtown)

Small group 3:

- Roads with grass & trees, moving cars, median
- Kids being well educated and having lots of opportunities in life (leaving here)
- Concert on the lawn-type area with water fountains / children playing on the lawn
- Water on lake lanier / fall-time music venue on water (public access)
- Walking downtown with shops and restaurants - reasons to go downtown
- Riverwalk - shops with places to eat (like San Antonio)
- Downtown with hometown feel - safe (similar like some neighborhoods have for walking)
- Architectural sculpture on top of Sawnee Mountain to identify us as different (like Eiffel tower or Big Chicken - something unique to remember / be known by)
- Greenspace balance - no cement city, not Gwinnett County (but Suwanee-like) GA-20 not becoming a version of Jimmy Carter Blvd
- Committ to high-end corporate space - quality employment to help tax base, develop an area in county for professional business
- Education - keep, don't rest on laurels
- Registration at schools - less paper, more electronic
- Infrastructure - roads, change from septic to sewer, water
- Elderly - living facilities, health care, social, housing, safe environment, active living communities
- Other ways to get places - similar to Peachtree City - golf carts
- walking (safe)
- intra-county train
- non-gas options for getting places
- Alternative means of transportation (Key = easy and low cost -- not MARTA model)
- Trolley
- Airport
- Ability for kids to walk to school -- crosswalks / crossing guards
- Bus riding mandatory for students -- monitoring on busses to control environment
- Master plan - plan for growth -- have infrastructure before you build. Density of homes + balance with business (this gues with our corporate idea)
- Education + _business partnership: work opportunities for students, learning on the job, both feed off each other, other college opportunities, safe locations
- Environmentalists + developers partnership: active group / organization
- More mentoring relationships - businesses + community members with schools
- Civic + religious interaction
- Sports complex in county - soccer team, minor league baseball

- Centralized education complex -- all in 1 building / 1 place: Customers/students can pick, but all at one location -- Businesses, restaurants, office space around the education complex
- Tram system (similar to Europe) -- shoot down median on popular roads -- monorail (like Disney, Celebration)

Small group 4:

- Family - Parks / beach at Lake Lanier
- True mixed-use community: Walk to theater, restaurants, schools; Affordable housing; Diversity in cost, pricing of housing; diversity in age, backgrounds, ethnicity
- Centrally located square with historical attributes: Arts center, restaurants - We are missing our destination of multiple areas that give people places to go
- Community villages (ie Woodlands, TX)
- Good traffic flow - aple highways - control growth
- Cultural arts hub mixed with college / academic centers
- Plenty of green space
- Commitment of developeprs to build infrastructure to support new communities: imposing impact fees; Controlled growth; Collaboration between government agencies and developers
- Strict light pollution ordinance
- Growth that does not outpace infrastructure of any type -- Moratorium?
- Top 10 -- best education system in the nation and maintaining excellence -- youth programs including youth centers / camps -- utilize natural assets/ resources to enhance youth experience - lake, mountains, camps -- alternative school calendar
- Draw more businesses to increase tax base
- We need something concrete as a base -- ie college, cultural arts, technology center
- Highest tax contribution to schools while maintaining low taxes -- larger percentage of tax money goes to schools -- add additional percent sales tax to support schools
- Utilize the talents of our aging / retired population -- schools / community activities
- Maintain one of the best hospitalization facilities / medical care in the nation
- The county needs a tangible theme -- Best in nation: destination, academia/school system, health care system, planned communities

Small group 5:

- Planned - master planned community; Architectural standars for community, themes, codes, maintenance; Slow growth to allow infrastructure to catch up
- Partnership between builders and community
- Ability for stay-at-home moms to be able to voice their opinions of community needs
- Maintenance code enforcement
- Improvements to and addition to infrastructure
- Involve citizens more in governance of community
- Reduce influence of good-'ol-boy network
- Increase amount of guidelines for development
- More citizen representation in how the community devlops / what solutions are to problems
- Improve citizen-to-citizen communications on issues
- Stronger government

- Drug-free community / greater law enforcement initiatives
- Teen community centers
- Greater amount of sidewalks in neighborhoods
- "Town center" style of development
- Maintain "Mayberry" atmosphere
- Increase arts / cultural activities
- Paths / walkways / walkable community / sidewalks
- Law enforcement - greater attention to traffic infractions - "write tickets!"
- Increase driving age
- Better growth management
- Greater investments in public transportation -- trolleys, cable cars
- Bring MARTA further up 400 - transit-oriented design
- Clean / efficient public transportation / safe public transportation
- Change focus from major arterials to more and better connected smaller streets
- Investments in non-road forms of public transportation - rail
- Move away from polluting forms of energy for transportation
- Greater recycling of water
- Assure Forsyth is not a tourist destination
- Create a research center
- Create a pilot program to benefit the community to address energy use / pollution
- More stringent sign standards / controls
- Greater architectural controls

Consensus Ideas

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

- Planned - master planned community; Architectural standards for community, themes, codes, maintenance; Slow growth to allow infrastructure to catch up
- True mixed-use community: Walk to theater, restaurants, schools; Affordable housing; Diversity in cost, pricing of housing; diversity in age, backgrounds, ethnicity
- Growth that does not outpace infrastructure of any type -- Moratorium?
- Top 10 -- best education system in the nation and maintaining excellence -- youth programs including youth centers / camps -- utilize natural assets/ resources to enhance youth experience - lake, mountains, camps -- alternative school calendar
- Water on lake lanier / fall-time music venue on water (public access)
- Master plan - plan for growth -- have infrastructure before you build. Density of homes + balance with business (this goes with our corporate idea)
- Education + _business partnership: work opportunities for students, learning on the job, both feed off each other, other college opportunities, safe locations
- Active downtown area (shining city on a hill) (restaurants, business, arts)
- Town Center (Suwanee Town Center)
- Economic development (new, major businesses)
- Pedestrian-friendly downtown with Family orientation

- Greenspace a priority: Parks, Sawnee preserve, specified percentage known
- Major University - 4 year graduate programs, with teaching hospital, with large medical community, biotech included "clean"
- John's Creek-like development in the north, with Windward-like business opportunities / tech sector health / education
- Envision 2030 for teens / kids

Visionary Ideas

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

- International flair / attribute for the community (Arts, markets, bakerys) - Alpharetta's market as an example
- Convention center - restaurants, shops overlooking lake lanier
- Architectural sculpture on top of Sawnee Mountain to identify us as different (like Eiffel tower or Big Chicken - something unique to remember / be known by)
- The county needs a tangible theme -- Best in nation: destination, academia/school system, health care system, planned communities

Small-Group Results: Existing assets that should be preserved

Here are existing community assets that participants felt should be preserved, if Cumming-Forsyth County is to become the ideal or model mid-size community in 2030. 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:

- Heritage, historical attributes
- Caring / community - family-oriented, service orientation for all ages
- Globally recognized education standards
- Greenspace (parks, developments with trees)
- Lake Lanier's conservation and lake safety
- Open communication on issues
- Family-community connections with respect for diversity
- Visionary community leadership
- Community-schools partnership
- Respectful feel of faith-based values
- Conservation
- City of Cumming

Small group 2:

- County Fair
- Opportunity - economic
- Excellent school system - library
- Lots of greenspace

- Lake Lanier (economic and pleasure)
- Water
- Our history
- Our safe lifestyle
- Sawnee Mountain

Small group 3:

- Quality schools
- Lake -- use it
- Mountain + its heritage
- Green space
- Agricultural / rural mountain heritage
- Safety
- Property values
- Economic opportunities / jobs
- Friendliness - people waving as you pass by - hospitality
- Historical - buildings and homes
- Keep it clean
- Identity -- not become part of Atlanta
- Parks

Small group 4:

- Lake
- Sawnee Mountain
- Heritage
- River
- Family feeling
- Hometown / small town atmosphere
- Strong leadership
- Community values education (preserve increasing momentum of the value of education)
- Local self-determination (smaller cities / communities identity within Forsyth County)
- Continue to get community input for planning future / vision

Small group 5:

- Natural beauty
- Small town charm
- Excellent school system
- Commitment to community
- Community activities
- Civic groups
- Keep open dialogue between community members, residents and government
- Parks and ball fields
- Preserve greenspace

- Farmers market

Small-Group Results: Assets that will be needed

Here are community assets that participants felt are missing now and will be needed, if Cumming-Forsyth County is to become the ideal or model mid-size community in 2030. These things could include physical assets, organizations or institutions, public policies or decisions, or positive traits or skills of the people.

Small group 1:

- Transportation infrastructure and a State government understanding of the issues
- Political influence / advocacy on a metro Atlanta scale
- Judicial complex
- Commercial tax base
- Public places for youth recreation
- Water and sewer
- Public awareness / education of conservation (scarce resources, e.g., water, energy)
- Recycling infrastructure
- Equity of education offering: sports as a priority now, cultural arts

Small group 2:

- Road system to move our increased traffic better
- Cohesive government between and within county and city
- Affordable housing - cheaper homes (for teachers, policemen, firemen)
- Vision (planned community)
- Subsidized apartments
- Architectural controls (sign ordinances)
- Businesses to help balance our taxes

Small group 3:

- Money
- Making utilities look better -- lines under ground, poles look like trees - blend with natural landscape, sign control, building requirements
- Standards - architectural, everything has a "look and feel" that makes it Forsyth
- Vision + creativity - what/who are we?
- Roads
- Something to come and see in Forsyth County (a draw -- ex. Sports arena)
- Use of lake - maximizing and utilizing it and having a vision for it -- control it -- venue to identify with
- Transportation -- monorail
- Rail facility and location
- Needs being exposed at State level (lobby and voice)
- Hotels
- Park and recreation facilities for multi-use (sports complex) - hub for region

Small group 4:

- Professional county management - county executive form of government - appointed head of government
- Put politics aside to focus on issues and work together
- Transportation alternatives - efficient transportation
- Eliminate conflicting self interests (politics, growth vs. non-growth, growth of infrastructure)
- Planned communities - emphasis on the "plan"

Small group 5:

- More neighborhood parks / fields
- Parental groups to discuss issues related to kids / to help develop programs their kids will like to be included with / proud to be a part of
- Entertainment for teens
- Youth work programs
- Community service required for teens - internships in government for teens
- More SPLOST projects
- More police enforcement of traffic laws
- Teen focus groups / government - find out what they want in their community
- Envision 2030 for teens / kids
- Teen seat on Board of Commissioners
- Start youth programs in middle school and continue them through high school -- have the high school students feed info back into improving the middle school programs

What Is Envision 2030?

Envision 2030 is a year-long, citizen-led community planning initiative to envision – and plan for – Cumming-Forsyth County's development over the next 25 years.

It begins with eight vision meetings in fall 2006 and will continue as a strategic planning process in early 2007. At every stage, citizens will be invited to join Envision 2030 meetings and planning groups – and to critique its reports and work products. Every document will be available on the Envision 2030 web site, www.envision2030.com.

Envision 2030's final report will be available in June 2007.