

Groundwork to Launch Regional Growth Planning Process Reaches Milestone

- **Three teams of expert firms named as finalists**
- **Finalist teams will make presentations during public meeting on Nov. 17**

A stakeholder group consisting of elected, business, and philanthropic leaders from the tri-state region of southeast TN, northwest GA and northeast Alabama which encompasses three metropolitan statistical areas has announced a major milestone in the effort to lay the groundwork to launch a 40-year regional growth planning process. Efforts to identify a team of expert firms to help organize and facilitate the effort have progressed through a request for qualifications, a request for proposals, and reference checks to narrow the field of contenders to three finalist teams:

- Wallace Roberts & Todd; Gresham Smith & Partners; PlaceMatters; Ann Coulter; Neathawk Dubuque & Packett; Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness; Center for Neighborhood Technology; Leslee T. Alexander Consulting; Constructive Technologies Group; and RERC Strategic Advisors.
- McBride Dale Clarion; Clarion Associates; Fregonese Associates; Kimley-Horn and Associates; Brown Pearman Russell; BAE Urban Economics; Opticos Design, Inc; Ann Coulter; PlaceMatters; The Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies; and Neathawk Dubuque & Packett.
- Renaissance Planning Group; Cambridge Systematics; ICF International; Barge, Waggoner, Sumner & Cannon; Ann Coulter; Neathawk Dubuque & Packett; Robert Grow Consulting; and The Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies.

All of the finalist teams include local firms, and the companies that comprise the teams reflect the depth and breadth of experience necessary to complete a truly comprehensive regional planning process including expertise in community engagement, many different types of planning, financial analysis, data collection, and the establishment of community metrics.

According to Hamilton County Mayor Jim Coppinger, the effort is designed to pioneer a new kind of long-term, region-wide planning. “Our goal is to create a kind of business plan for the region,” said Mayor Coppinger. “In addition to incorporating traditional planning topics, the process will include financial analysis. We also aim to establish a set of numeric benchmarks, so we will be able to assess results as we implement the plan and make course corrections whenever necessary.”

All three of these expert teams will make a presentation during an open public meeting on Nov. 17 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Chattanooga Hotel. Everyone in the region is invited to attend the meeting and provide feedback on the finalists. Event organizers are

also planning to broadcast the event via local television and a web cast to make the public meeting widely accessible to people from across the region.

“This is a continuation of the public visioning and community engagement processes that have been transforming Chattanooga and the surrounding region since the early 1980s,” said Chattanooga City Mayor Ron Littlefield. “Our community pioneered this approach, and we know that the key to success is making sure everyone has the opportunity to express their values, priorities, and ideas. This effort depends on empowering citizens to identify common ground solutions that inspire enthusiastic and wide-spread cooperation.”

Bradley County Mayor Gary Davis confirmed that the time is right to broaden planning efforts to promote cooperation in the greater region. “Cities and counties across the area have benefited tremendously from localized planning efforts, but job seekers, dollars and traffic cross state and county lines without a second thought,” said Mayor Davis. “This is an opportunity to coordinate so that we can make the most of our shared opportunities and work together to solve our shared challenges.”

Commissioner Mike Babb, chairman of the Whitfield County Board of Commissioners, pointed to the importance of engaging citizens to set priorities. “Through this process people will have an opportunity to express their thoughts about the issues we face as a community,” said Commissioner Babb. “That feedback will serve as a guide to local leaders as we strive to better steward financial and other community resources in accordance with the priorities of the people we serve.”

“We don’t have to agree on everything, but failing to cooperate when it benefits citizens would be foolish,” said Georgia State Senator Jeff Mullis. “This planning process will enhance coordination among localities without taking away any of their authority or independence.”

“In my mind, the regional planning process is about job creation,” said Tom Edd Wilson, president and CEO of the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce. “We’re competing against the whole world to retain and recruit employers. Coming together as a team on economic development will give us a tremendous advantage in making the most of our economic opportunities while preserving the quality of life that makes us so attractive to the companies we already have.”

Brian Anderson, president and CEO of the Dalton-Whitfield Chamber of Commerce also emphasized how long-term planning benefits the local economy. “Successful companies are constantly planning for the future and figuring out how to adapt to rapidly changing conditions,” said Anderson. “In these uncertain times, we need an on-going process for implementing that kind of strategic approach across our region.”

“Most folks don’t think about roads until there is a traffic jam or pipes until one breaks,”

said Gary Farlow, president and CEO of the Cleveland-Bradley Chamber of Commerce. “But the continued success of our employers depends on proactively ensuring the soundness of the infrastructure that speeds the flow of commerce.”

Following the public meeting on Nov. 17, the stakeholder group which has been working to launch the regional growth planning process will weigh public feedback and other requirements set forth in the selection process to determine which of the finalist teams will coordinate the effort with the aim of starting the process during the first part of 2012.

Q&A

1. Which counties are included in the footprint for the planning process?
 - *Alabama Counties:* Dekalb and Jackson
 - *Georgia Counties:* Catoosa, Dade, Murray, Walker, Whitfield (anchored by City of Dalton)
 - *Tennessee Counties:* Bledsoe, Bradley (anchored by City of Cleveland), Hamilton (anchored by City of Chattanooga), Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Polk, Rhea and Sequatchie

2. What organizations and companies have participated in the stakeholder group to launch the process?

The stakeholder group that has come together to fund and launch the regional growth planning process consists of strong representation from local government, business, and philanthropy including:

City of Chattanooga, Hamilton County, City of Cleveland, Bradley County, Whitfield County, Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency, EPB, Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, Southeast Tennessee Development District, Urban League of Greater Chattanooga, Benwood Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, Lyndhurst Foundation, Maclellan Foundation, CBL and Associates, Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce, BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, McKee Foods, Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, Shaw Industries, Cleveland-Bradley Chamber of Commerce, Unum, and CreateHere.

3. What is the value of this process to local governments?
 - By giving local governments the ability to cooperatively plan and coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions, the process will help elected officials focus on the greatest impact for the most people with the least expenditure, while reducing duplication of efforts.
 - To play a lead role in starting an economic legacy of job creation

founded in regional cooperation to ensure continued prosperity for our citizens, our children, and our grandchildren.

- By giving citizens an opportunity to express their values, priorities, and ideas, the planning process will provide local governments with the ability to better steward financial resources in accordance with the priorities of their constituents.
 - The process will also serve to inform residents of the challenges their home communities share with those across the region and to engage them in developing solutions with broad support.
4. What is the value of this process to local citizens?
- A process for effectively managing the accelerated growth the region is already experiencing through unprecedented investments by a number of industries.
 - A seat at the table in planning how the region can become more prosperous and generate additional economic opportunities for ourselves and our children.
 - A forum for better understanding the “big picture” of the region and expressing their ideas, values, and priorities.
 - The opportunity to join with others in preserving and enhancing what makes our communities special.