

News Release – July 3, 2012

Future Vision: Clayton County Launches Strategic Economic Development Planning with Help from Georgia Tech

Clayton County leaders have begun development of a new strategic plan intended to guide the county's economic development efforts during the years ahead. The eight-step planning process, which kicks off with a community forum on Thursday, July 19th at Clayton State University, will be facilitated by economic development specialists from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

The plan will recommend ways that the county can take advantage of its many economic development strengths, including Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport; transportation and logistics assets such as access to air transportation, an extensive rail network, and Interstate highway connections; location at the center of the metropolitan Atlanta area; a strong core of established industry; a growing four-year public university, and a water system with sufficient capacity.

"What stands out about Clayton County is its strong future potential," said Jason Chernock, project manager with the Community Innovation Services group at Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute. "The county has all of the physical pieces for economic development. It needs a unifying vision, strategic plan and consensus on how to implement the plan. Our job will be to bring people together to find the common ground."

The county's last comprehensive economic development plan was produced more than a decade ago, and a lot has changed since then. Like many communities, Clayton County has faced the loss of jobs from the recession, a slowdown in development and declining real estate values.

"This will be a comprehensive strategic planning process that will involve a lot of research, a lot of public engagement, a lot of interaction with community leaders, and the facilitation of a plan," Chernock explained. "The plan will include everything from mission and vision statements, goals and objectives, benchmarks, to information on roles and responsibilities."

A steering committee will guide the effort, led by co-chairs Yulonda Beauford, president and CEO of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce, and Larry Vincent, chairman of the Development Authority of Clayton County. The committee will include representatives from the county's municipalities, as well as numerous private and public-sector entities that will play a role in the county's future economic development. The planning process will also include opportunity for public input.

Also represented on the steering committee is Clayton State University, a unit of the University System of Georgia with approximately 7,000 students and nearly 200 full-time faculty members.

"As a comprehensive, publicly-supported university, we believe Clayton State must serve as a steward of place," said Thomas Hynes, president of Clayton State University. "Whether through contributing to a more educated workforce; sharing faculty and student knowledge resources in management, small business and entrepreneurship, logistics, health care, archival research; or advancing the arts and social sciences, this economic analysis will help our shared work in the county and the region."

“The development of this strategic plan is a positive step forward for economic growth and prosperity in Clayton County,” said Yulonda Darden Beauford, president and CEO of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce. “This process will be collaborative and involve all sectors of the community. By working together we will strengthen our business competitiveness and future sustainability for our county.”

The eight-step planning process will include facilitating a steering committee, organizing a kick-off meeting, reviewing recent initiatives, interviewing stakeholders, hosting community forums, engaging Clayton State University, performing a target industry analysis, and developing the strategic plan. The work is expected to be completed by the end of calendar 2012.

The kickoff meeting will be held on Thursday, July 19th from 6:30pm – 8:30pm at Clayton State University’s Harry S. Downs Center for Continuing Education, Room 101. The Center for Continuing Education is located at 2000 Clayton State Blvd., Morrow, GA 30260. Light refreshments will be provided.

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