

PartnershipGwinnett

a shared vision for the future

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT & STAKEHOLDER INPUT

This Competitive Assessment sought to identify Gwinnett County's key competitiveness factors in the areas of education and workforce development, infrastructure, business costs, and quality of life. By comparing Gwinnett County to the selected comparison communities of Cobb County, Georgia; Collin County, Texas; Fairfax County, Virginia; Georgia and U.S. averages, its competitive strengths and weaknesses are brought into clearer focus. Also integrated into this analysis are the findings of the Stakeholder Input Process, which included 20 interviews, 12 focus groups, and over 1,600 survey responses collected as of August 15, 2006.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Quantitative data and community input participant feedback suggested that the K-12 system is strong, but there are growing concerns about the capacity and size of the schools, English as a Second Language, and programs for special needs students. However, Gwinnett and Buford schools were said to be key local assets.

The higher education system – namely Gwinnett Technical College and the Georgia Gwinnett College – was highly rated. Though certain enhancements in programs and capacity at Gwinnett Tech were said to be needed, Gwinnett residents are confident that the school, along with Georgia Gwinnett College and Gwinnett College will effectively prepare their students for the local workplace.

Gwinnett's workforce received generally high marks from public input respondents. Principal workforce issues highlighted the need to more effectively integrate international and minority workers into the local system, and certain deficits in particular skill categories.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Overall, Gwinnett's infrastructure for existing and future development was said to be competitive. The County has tried to remain ahead of the growth curve in its provision of infrastructure, and has largely succeeded. However, Gwinnett's tremendous population growth is nevertheless straining transportation capacity and leading to a level of traffic congestion that

many respondents consider to be the County's top competitive priority.

Improving public transit – both within Gwinnett and developing regional linkages – was said by many to be critical local needs. Implementing a commuter rail (i.e., the Brain Train) was also cited as a key potential focus area.

BUSINESS COSTS

Both statistical research and public input did not reveal Gwinnett to be a high-cost place to conduct business. Utility costs were in the mid-range with Gwinnett's comparison counties. Labor costs were lower in Gwinnett than Cobb, Collin, and – especially – Fairfax County. Real estate costs, availability and quality were also favorable, according to public input respondents.

Gwinnett's tax digest could be cause for some concern. The County has become more reliant on sales taxes and residential property tax revenue in the past ten years, and will need to stimulate commercial and industrial growth to provide more balance to the digest.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Many community input participants said Gwinnett County and its component cities are great places to live and raise a family. Respondents singled out Gwinnett's schools, parks, family-friendly and welcoming atmosphere, abundance of shopping destinations, under-appreciated arts and culture amenities, affordable cost of living and numerous housing options as key local assets.

However, a comparative lack of healthcare resources, increasingly strained local schools, rising crime rates, growing traffic congestion, lack of non-motorized connectivity between activity centers and recreational amenities, and the need to more effectively leverage Gwinnett's diverse population groups were said to be areas requiring strategic attention.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- Gwinnett remains an attractive place to live, work and visit
 - However, amenities that drew residents and businesses to Gwinnett could

potentially be compromised by uncontrolled growth

- Increasingly strained local roadways, highways and schools pose risks to quality of life and competitiveness
- Integration of an increasingly diverse population into Gwinnett's leadership, business community and educational-support networks will also be key
 - It affects schools, workforce, public safety, and many other dynamics
- Effective attention to key competitiveness factors will help to balance Gwinnett's tax digest
 - Sales taxes must be better supplemented by property taxes – more specifically, commercial property taxes
- Comparisons to the Cobb, Collin and Fairfax Counties highlight competitive concerns and opportunities
 - Concerns:
 - Raising percentages of educated and high-skill workers
 - Increasing higher education enrollments
 - More transportation options needed to improve mobility
 - Crime rates must be lowered
 - Gwinnett is underserved for health care – also an **opportunity**
 - Opportunities/Assets:
 - Comparatively affordable business and living costs
 - Competitive provision of small-business lending and assistance
 - Public school quality and overall welcoming and business-friendly environment
 - Continuing provision of physical infrastructure