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ENGAGE GWINNETT PRESENTS RESULTS

(Lawrenceville, Ga., April 28, 2010) – After six months of study and debate, the 42-member *Engage Gwinnett* citizens committee presented its final recommendations to the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners on April 27, 2010. The review process began at a public meeting conducted in September 2009.

Board Chairman Charles Bannister thanked everyone who participated and welcomed the final report. “Even in the midst of a recession, we still have to balance the need for basic government services against our ability to pay for them and this report provides guidance on how our constituents want us to meet that challenge,” said Bannister.

Engage Gwinnett began its work last year with the charge of answering some basic questions about Gwinnett County government and the services it provides, such as: In a time of scarcity, which government services are truly needed? Which should be provided by the County and which might better be provided by others? Which services could be eliminated or reduced? And how should the services that are truly needed and appropriately delivered by the County government be paid for?

“The lengthy process was well worth the effort because it gave local residents many opportunities to express their opinions,” said *Engage Gwinnett* Co-Chair Mike Levensgood, an attorney with McKenna Long & Aldridge. “Gwinnett County has a strong tradition of involving the public in planning facilities and services. Inviting citizens to look at the budget and prioritize service levels and revenue sources was a bold, forward-thinking and proactive move.”

After six months of work – meeting twice a month in three-and-a-half-hour sessions, plus holding six sessions with citizens to get their ideas – the committee delivered the report with two sets of recommendations.

First, 73 recommendations for what committee members called the “status quo,” the possibility that economic conditions will remain pretty much the same in the next few years and further reductions in Gwinnett County government services or increases in revenues will not be needed. Many of these recommendations are detailed and indicate ways of improving service delivery while reducing costs. These are things the County should do simply because they make good sense.

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And second, 40 recommendations for what was termed a “declining digest” scenario, the possibility that the County’s tax digest might decline dramatically for the next few years. The report stressed that this scenario is not a prediction; it is a possibility. The committee was cautioned by County officials, however, that an additional decline in the tax digest is possible. Thus the committee recommended a set of aggressive steps to respond to this possibility.

The final report is available online at www.engagegwinnett.com along with meeting materials, video summaries of past meetings and public input the committee received. Four work groups developed recommendations for community services, law enforcement and judiciary, fire and emergency, internal services, and development and infrastructure. The group studied the County’s current financial situation as well as what it could do if property values continue to fall.

The committee represented 30 stakeholder groups in the community plus 10 self-selected citizen representatives in addition to the two co-chairs.

Engage Gwinnett Co-Chair Bill McCargo with the Atlanta Education Fund said, “The volunteers worked diligently to find common ground and propose workable solutions for the greater good of the community. We believe the results can help guide the County through the current recession and its aftermath over the next five years.”

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