

Our City Gets Better ...When we work together

By: Laurie Searle

Sometimes it's hard to imagine things getting any better here in Chattahoochee Hills. After all, it's hard to improve perfection.

We've got a beautiful rural countryside, home to horses, cattle, goats, and even a llama or two; a strong sense of community where neighbors help neighbors in times of need; and a local government committed to doing all it can to ensure the success of our new city. So maybe it's not a question of what's to improve, but what's worth protecting?

That was one of the questions discussed at the Community-Wide Volunteer meeting on May 18 at Providence Baptist Church Fellowship Center.

The meeting was hosted by the communications committee—one of several volunteer groups that formed earlier this spring. When the communications committee first formed, its initial thought was that many residents may not have been informed about the city initiated volunteer effort. So the committee decided that its first order of business should be to inform the community. It sent a newsletter to all residents describing the volunteer effort and inviting them to attend a Community-Wide Volunteer meeting to learn more.



Council Reps. David Hanson and Faye Godwin (seated) listen attentively to volunteers Barbara and Joe Chatham.



Neighbors meet and greet during the Community-Wide Volunteer Meeting.

Part 1 – Introduction to the Community Volunteer Effort

The morning session was facilitated by Greg Brett, who introduced himself as Melea Goode’s husband and the newest member of the Melear family.

Greg shared his recent experience from the previous weekend, when storms ravaged parts of our community.

“I packed up my chainsaw and hopped in my truck, then started driving the roads of the city to see where I could help,” Greg recalled. He didn’t get far before he saw city employees already hard at work, sawing trees to clear the roadways. But what surprised him more was seeing so many other residents, like himself, who had come out early to lend a hand. That type of caring is ubiquitous throughout our city.



A Volunteer Effort Initiated by the City

Some residents wondered how this volunteer effort got started and whether or not the City supported the effort. District 3 Council Representative David Hanson spoke next to share the background about the effort.

Hanson said the council knew from the start that they would need the support of volunteers to make our city a success. With so few residents and businesses (to generate funds through taxes) the City has the budget to provide basic services, but it can’t afford to do a whole lot more at this time.

That’s where the volunteer effort comes in. Last year Mayor Hayes and the city council initiated the citizens’ volunteer effort by defining five areas that the city needed help with: citizen services, environment and public improvement, cultural activities, public safety, and business & commerce. A city council representative was assigned to be the communications liaison to each group and to facilitate the first meeting. During those first meetings, volunteers learned that they would have the authority to organize and govern their groups, and to set the goals and work for the committees. When that work involved changing policies or procedures to the city, that’s when they would need to make recommendations to their council representative.

Committee Chairs Share their Mission

Next on the agenda, committee chairs were invited to share their committee’s mission, what work they had done to date, what they had planned in the near future, and what they needed help with. A PowerPoint presentation and handout was prepared and posted to the Friends of Chatt Hills Website so those who could not attend could become informed.

What was notable about the chairs and co-chairs was their diversity. Six people had previously served on the Chatt Hills Organizing Committee, seven people had not. Some had volunteered in their community for years through their churches, cross-roads communities, or schools. And some had served in a support role but were now serving in leadership roles.

Chairs Provide Overview of their Committees



Top row left to right: Sandra Huffmaster, Heritage Committee; Molcie Trimble, Adopt-a-Mile Committee; Alton Powell, Recycling Committee; David Goode, Public Safety Committee.



Bottom row left to right: Betty Powell, Parks committee; Judy Henderson, Library arts & Recreation Committee; Nancey Green Leigh, Business & Commerce Committee; Tom Reed, Business & Commerce Committee. Those not pictured: Ruby Foster, Education Committee; Laurie Searle, Communications Committee; Patsy Bohannon, City Celebrations Committee.

A Vision of Working in Partnership

District 4 Council Rep. Faye Godwin closed the morning program by sharing her experience establishing organizations vs. helping to establish a city. She said that most organizations have a "top down" structure and can hire and fire people at will. But a community volunteer effort is different. Its organizational structure is built from the bottom up, meaning it's the volunteers who set the direction.

Godwin thanked the volunteers for their efforts and encouraged them to continue strengthening their partnerships with the mayor and council.

Part 2 – Visioning Session

Tom Tomlinson from the Tomlinson-Gramham Group was invited to facilitate the afternoon visioning session. The focus of this session was on helping the volunteers decide how they should organize their efforts, what work they thought most important, and how they might prioritize their top 4-5 tasks.

Throughout the two-hour session, volunteers decided that their current chair/co-chair structure was a good leadership model; the group should form a civic-type nonprofit association to better coordinate fundraising activities, city volunteer efforts, and citizen leadership development; and out of a list of 30 items they listed as important, the top four items they thought they should focus on are as follows:

1. Short Term List
 - a. How to identify priorities?
 - b. How to assign responsibility?
 - c. How to measure and evaluate?
 - d. How to come up with the next steps?
 - e. (Chairs need to meet and agree how best to do all of this)
2. Create a Formal Organization
 - a. Role of Senate/Chairs
3. Publish a Community Calendar
4. Overlay(revise, educate committees and public)

Many volunteers left the visioning session with a sense of accomplishment. They realized that there are many issues that need addressing, but by working together they can help make our city better.