



South County Area: Regional Community Forum Summary

The South County Area Community Forum, co-sponsored by the Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable and the South County Economic Development Association (SCEDA) was hosted by the Ebenezer AME Church in Ft. Washington on June 21, 2005 from 7 – 9 P.M.

Representatives from the following communities were invited to participate: Fort Washington, Oxon Hill, Temple Hills Camp Springs, District Heights, Forestville, and surrounding areas.

The fifth in a continuing series of community focus groups to be scheduled by the Roundtable, the South County event was convened in Classrooms 1 and 2.

Introduced by GPGBR President and CEO Jim Estep, Ebenezer AME Church Administrator Walter Ridley welcomed the Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable, the South County Economic Development Association and all participants on behalf of Senior Pastor Grainger Browning and the congregation.

Jim Estep thanked Mr. Ridley for hosting the Roundtable and thanked Nathaniel Bryant, representing the South County Economic Development Association, for collaborating with the Roundtable in putting the forum together. He then introduced Petey Green and Mike Little who have served on the GPGBR Board of Directors since its inception. Mr. Green talked about the positive efforts of the Roundtable in working with the community to both listen to citizen needs and facilitate the publishing of their concerns.

Each attendee introduced themselves and mentioned the organization with which they were associated.

Mr. Estep briefly reviewed the purpose and mission of the Roundtable and then asked the participants to tell him what they thought the word "*VISION*" meant in their own words.

Some of the key definitions of “*Vision*” were:

1. *A Roadmap to Where You Want to Go*
2. *Building a Hypothesis to Gauge Accomplishments*
3. *Establishing Specific and Measurable Goals*
4. *Seeking a Fair & Equitable Dream for All Citizens of the County*
5. *A Sum of All Parts*

He then asked what they would consider to be the signatures or measures for success in creating this vision for the County. The Signatures mentioned were:

1. *Asserting influence in the Political Arena*
2. *Increased involvement from the Business, Faith-Based and Civic Communities in government affairs.*

Most of the participants agreed that the Quality of Life in this county could not be improved unless we addressed education, public safety, and transportation issues. Growth cannot occur when crime is out of control and the education system is poor—crime and education go hand in hand. Most agreed that we must have accountability to the citizens.

In order to have the ability to absorb growth, many attendees felt we needed to be proactive in planning our growth, both in determining where new businesses would be located and in assisting in planning the infrastructure and transportation needs for those areas.

We also need to attract new businesses and retain the current ones. In order to do this, we must improve *Public Safety, Public Schools, and Transportation*. The participants suggested areas that needed to be addressed to accomplish this were:

- **Family Structure affects all aspects of the county including crime and education. The young need jobs and structure in their lives. Businesses need to help facilitate this by becoming more involved in the lives of young people. Offering summer jobs would boost morale and influence work ethics. In addition, business leaders could volunteer time to help someone read or teach skills in cooperation and leadership.**
- **Our Transportation System is vital to economic development. Prince George’s County needs multi-modal systems—light and heavy rail—and the Metro needs to extend across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Additional improvements are needed on Routes 5 and 210, with more intersection flyovers created for the commuter.**

- **The Educational System needs a total overhaul starting with the State Board. We also need to reintroduce the technical training that was removed from the schools. In addition, we must train our workforce not simply to seek academic outcomes, but also to provide vocational direction for the future workforce.**
- **Employment issues are also in need of study. The County has a lack of an employment hub; e.g., there should be employment hubs around the metro stations. The Federal Government is the number one employer in the County. We need to attract more businesses and even consider importing workers until we get more of our own residents trained with the needed skills.**

Jim Estep then asked each of the participants what was the *perception* of the county?

Many participants thought that we did have a negative perception that reached beyond the Washington, DC area. Most attendees felt the media put out too much negativity on the county without promoting the good things that occurred here. It was also mentioned that we are profiled by our zip codes. Many thought that we needed to turn this around by correcting the things that are wrong with the system. We pay high tax dollars to live in this county, yet 34 percent of our schools are on the watch list and an astonishing 70 percent of our 8th graders will fail, according to one of the participants who claimed to have knowledge of this statistic. Our children are fearful both on the streets and in school.

Citizens need to be more outraged at the system; we are much too compliant with the status quo. We need to become activists. We should hold accountable those who are in control of and mismanage county funds.

Mr. Estep then asked that the participants to rank the issues that are community priorities. For example, is our revenue adequate and what aspects of Government, if any, need changing?

The participants responded that revenue appeared adequate but that it was not properly distributed and managed.

The aspects of government that need changing include zoning ordinances and the political process itself. Legislative Districts must be restructured to have Single-Member Districts. We must elect qualified, visionary officials for positions of responsibility. We must train citizens to vote for the person, not the slate and empower the community to be a vital check and balance for the government.

SOUTH COUNTY FORUM PRIORITY LIST

The Participants of the Forum were polled to put the priorities for change in the County in order. The listing below shows the results:

- #1 Education**
- #2 Public Safety**
- #3 Transportation**
- #4 Changing the Political Process**
- #5 Providing Local Employment Hubs**

Jim Estepp thanked all of the participants for coming and taking part in the active discussions of the forum. He said that because this group was so responsive that there may be two more forums in South County. With that, the session adjourned.

GREATER PRINCE GEORGE'S BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE SOUTH COUNTY REGIONAL FORUM

Attendees:

- 1. Virginia Callis, Unity Economic Development**
- 2. A. Beverley Taylor, Camp Springs Civic Association**
- 3. Rushern Baker, Former Chair of the County House Delegation & CAC Member**
- 4. Samuel Epps, Citizen attendee**
- 5. Katherine A. Pérez, Chief of Police, City of District Heights**
- 6. Earl A. Gumbs, President, Hillcrest Heights Civic Association**
- 7. Carolyn C. Rowe, Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society**
- 8. Zeno W. St. Cyr, II, Riverbend Citizens Association**
- 9. Angie Duncanson-Taylor, UnCommon Services**
- 10. Alonzo T. Grigsby, G-SCCAP**
- 11. Edward T. Morgan, G-SCCAP**
- 12. Zalee Harris, ZOPs Management**
- 13. Valencia Rutledge, You-Nique Services**
- 14. Judith Davidson-Hawkins, You-Nique Services**
- 15. Jane T. Thomas, SCEDA**

- 16. Nathaniel Bryant, SCEDA**
- 17. Jack Sims, SCEDA, Former Mayor of District Heights, MD.**
- 18. Lenward A. Hood, Hood's Institutional Foods**
- 19. Rev. C. Anthony Muse, Bishop, Ark of Safety Church, Former State Delegate**
- 20. Petey Green, Community & Business Relations Corp., GPGBR
Board Member, President, Black Chamber of Commerce**
- 21. Alma Cravins-Essex, Applied Quality Comm.**
- 22. Mike Little, President, B & W Solutions**
- 23. Dick Cherry, President, Southern Maryland Printing & Graphics**
- 24. M. H. Jim Estep, *President & CEO*, GPGBR**
- 25. Ryan Gray, GPGBR**
- 26. Liz Casto, GPGBR**
- 27. Walter Ridley, Administrator, Ebenezer AME Church**

The Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable sincerely appreciates the efforts of the South County Economic Development Association for their collaboration on this event and offers special thanks to Walter Ridley and the staff of the Ebenezer AME Church for hosting us and for their efforts to make all who came feel comfortable and welcome.