

# WHAT'S NEXT, CHAMBERS COUNTY?

## #2 WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

### IDEAS/CONCERNS

#### SUMMARY:

- **Mobility – educational, economic, and physical.** Transportation is a barrier for Chambers County; DHR folks looking into grants, etc. & need community engagement with the issue.
- Good quality, affordable housing for everyone, including seniors. Improve or remove dilapidated structures. Quality of life overall: be able to “live, work and play” in the same county.
- Attract and keep young people here. Offer career pathways. “We need something for youth to do.”
- Concern over siloed mindsets – some degree of apathy, and “we’ve got a lot of little places divided up in our minds from past history – very community oriented by town, and that individual segregation has remained even after broader changes.”  
Address mindsets, soft skills, etc. with potential mentoring programs. Take into account that “education is still tied in a lot of ways to generational poverty and related mindsets.”

### CHALLENGES, COSTS, CONSEQUENCES, TRADE-OFFS

#### SUMMARY:

- Define goals for improving transportation. What resources currently exist and are available that might meet these needs – church communities? Finding initial funding vs. using a volunteer base. “Start small” and “Someone has to manage it” came up as well.
- Identify what folks looking to live here really want & who they are. How to attract not just temporary outside workers, but residents (including physicians), and have the capacity to support folks in Chambers County as opposed to elsewhere (businesses, recreation, resources)
- Some outside concerns are “nowhere to build, school is the reason.” Incoming families look at schools – ex. Korean example
- Taxes in Chambers County are low, but that also means county & city governments don’t have a lot of funding to work with. It’s a tradeoff. Although, perhaps more could be accomplished with what is currently available.
- Consider the need for transportation for existing as well as any new programs, as well as funding & identifying who wants to be involved.

#### Who’s not at the table?

- “if we get some youth in here, we’ll probably get some answers.”
- Who else?

#### What seems most doable?

- A community event – ex. Essay contest at school, with prizes, celebration afterwards
- Market and brand ourselves with what’s excellent – attract new physicians, new residents
- Use human capital – including quiet voices as well as louder ones. May be known by negative things that

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### NOTES FROM THE FORUM

-“What would you change if you could?”

Transportation is a barrier for Chambers County; currently folks are looking into grants, etc. and this involves community engagement with the issue; diversification (services, jobs, addressing needs). Quality of life overall: “live, work and play” same county. Improve or remove dilapidated structures.

Housing: Good quality, affordable housing for senior citizens and everyone.

-Way of keeping and attracting young people here. Career pathways.

-Theaters and jobs that used to be in Chambers County no longer here – there are areas where we’ve digressed “get back to where we once were.” “We need more white collar jobs, so all the graduating kids would stay instead of leaving”

-Folks engaged in their own health, communities, as a way to tie into previously mentioned issues.

-Concern about population decline – by year 2040, ex. Macon Co. predicted to lose 40% while Lee Co. predicted to grow by 50% - seems to revolve around jobs, schools and quality of life

-Strong schools – has implications for future

-Urban vs. rural divide – infrastructure, landfill, etc.

“gets really bad before something is done about it” ex. Fire department sorely needed resources, complete suits – these things are addressed in cities but less so in rural areas. Road conditions in Chambers County have gotten worse over the years. “We’re in the 21<sup>st</sup> century now!” Disappointment with services, access to resources.

happen, but look at human capital overall – what’s working well

“Why did these services, assets go away?”

-Other communities that were/are growing... “their growth is so fast, has stifled ours.”

-Consolidation...idea that bigger is better – communities used to have individual theaters, then went to bigger companies – as economy turned, they went under and community left with nothing.

-If a big store can sell goods for less than a local business, the small businesses have to close. Bigger businesses (Sears, etc) have also come and gone for bigger cities.

-this cycle takes a toll on tax base – people can stay here and go out of town to shop, and people who can’t afford to leave. Many left when mills closed – one reason for old housing – now without draw for middle class

-“Bedroom community” – folks working and living in two different places, dividing their \$ somewhere else. Even if/when a business comes and more jobs are created, doesn’t necessarily mean people move here.

→explanations – outside concerns “nowhere to build, school is the reason”

Find out what the “big wigs” are looking for in a community, what makes them stick to areas like Lee County - ex. When Kia (sp?) came to Chambers County Housing - one subdivision has gone bankrupt “couldn’t have it both ways” either got jobs for folks already here, but this didn’t work for attracting new residents

-Korean church, population in Valley – one local study/ shows that Koreans with families tend to locate to more urban areas. Long term residents tend to be single; there is a minimal community here, but families tend to be places in more densely populated areas.

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-Same time zone in this county...trying to get together on certain things & determining which time zones events, appointments should fall is a struggle.

-Childcare concerns; get back to the basics regarding investing in youth – YMCA, for example. “We need something for the youth to do.”

-Mindset change – concern over apathy, wants to see more of “we can make things better”

-Concern over siloed mindsets – we’ve got a lot of little places divided up in our minds from past history – very community oriented, and that individual segregation has remained even after broader changes

-Education – looking at Korean values of education, what are Opelika, Lee Co. doing that we’re not? Technology, financial resources but also parent involvement – huge capital that makes a difference

-Chambers County lost its middle class...looking at what Auburn & Opelika have that CC doesn’t – has great implications for parents’ ability to invest time as well as resources – in the big picture, living in crisis generated by economic downturns means missing out on tools and resources that can get you out of that – how as a community can we educate the ones who don’t know? Re: basic skills like managing money

-A lot of this goes back to consolidation...drawing parallels with economic changes, globalization trends – we have lost a sense of community, knowing who needs what and where to find it – a lot of that infrastructure is not there. Families experiencing 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of apathy, “this is all that’s available to me” – families raised in poverty now raising own families in poverty – how to buy into bigger picture if they have no idea of what possibilities exist, and how to get there if still living in crisis mindset “where do I get my next meal?”

[ex. Understanding the importance of saving is hard if you don’t know how immediate needs will be met.]

### **-define goals for improving transportation:**

are we talking about individuals having a car? Mass transit?

-first goal for Circle of Care is to meet the great need and provide general transportation; for existing services, there is only one van currently and limited funding – impacts residents further away, still restricted by individual needs and not enough resources to meet them

-What resources currently exist and are available that might meet these needs – church communities?

### **What/who are the obstacles to change?**

-Mindsets, misperceptions and misunderstandings – ex. Tradeoffs involved in offering incentive packages, perception “giving away the farm” that came up last forum

-Parental involvement would be huge to have in the schools – grandparents, aunts/uncles often have to be called on.

-Financing for transportation is a barrier

-Tax burden we have in Chambers County is low, but that also means county & city governments don’t have a lot of funding to work with. It’s a tradeoff. Although, perhaps more could be accomplished with what is currently available.

-Communication and coordination across different entities – ex. Someone managing that network, currently may not be where it would need to be – is this a symptom of a larger issue? Could be part of a siloed mindset...Last forum’s conclusion “We need to share our story better with each other”

-re: education – better resources = better technology.

Auburn is preferred over Opelika, and cost of living sometimes explains why folks live in one place and invest in another

→ the disconnect/the opportunity gap manifests itself in:

- young people not knowing how to use an alarm clock, soft skills, etc. – may have ambitions, may have willingness to accept what support systems

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An epidemic within our households. Underlying issues.

-Home services, parent education – develop more mentors to come alongside families and walk them through step by step

“What would that look like?”

-When it comes to faith-based volunteers, “get your church outside your four walls” mindset – folks are scared to do it. “Will they be certified or vetted?” Just enough fear for people to avoid picking up a stranger, for example. “There are great ideas and a growing movement of God amongst people – He does not let them shrink back and be complacent” a continuing prayer within faith based groups that the risk will be seen to be worth it.

-Mentoring movement emerging among churches in Chambers County – “there will be some casualties and horror stories” but folks getting beyond it

-Church members or any community group potentially can be great resources for community mentoring & skill building – same idea could also happen within schools, peer mentoring or tutoring. Thinking broadly – basic computer skills one person might have that another does not. Could make a tremendous difference + build community, address existing generational gaps in education as times change.

“We’ve been getting same results because we’ve been doing the same thing” – need to break vicious cycle. Involves identifying, going to who we really trust – that’s our biggest audience. For people to receive what we have to offer is the issue. Also a matter of filling gaps schools don’t fill by nature. “if we get some youth in here, we’ll probably get some answers.”

### **What do we hold valuable? What priorities do we have now?**

-Actions speak louder than words – each individual needs to put some action behind these concerns that have been voiced. We can’t be all to everyone, but

institutions can offer, but may still not know how to navigate it

- the ability to read but minimal comprehension skills – has great implications for knowing what to do even with what resources may be available – filling out applications, navigating red tape
- “they fear us” (DHR) because concern over losing kids, mistrust, etc. A lot of available resources still aren’t on their level

“Education is still tied in a lot of ways to generational poverty and related mindsets.” (in summation)

→growing movement, folks figuring out their comfort level and how to be involved, especially when working with schools. Some fear levels between faith based groups and other, secular organizations, slowly changing. Money is given more easily than selves.

-Investing in schools vs going deeper in homes – maybe every point of contact is an opportunity when it comes to developing those fundamental soft skills?

-While this is possible small scale, how to motivate enough to make a big enough difference? Incentive to change initial mindset, and a way to get the word out. “Churches are usually stubborn together – could work together” using small groups on a large scale.

-Distinguish between skill-based mentoring and life coaching approach geared towards changing mindsets – slower changes

-need transportation for existing as well as any new programs

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each one of us can help one person or family. If we put actions to our words. Start with ourselves in whatever capacity we can.

-Addressing transportation and education – mentoring or life coaching

#### **What seems most doable?**

-A community event – ex. Essay contest at school, with prizes, celebration afterwards

-Market and brand ourselves with what's excellent – attract new physicians, new residents

-Use human capital – including quiet voices as well as louder ones. May be known by negative things that happen, but look at human capital overall – what's working well

#### **Who's not at the table?**