

Preparing for the Future in Troup County, Georgia

● Supportive Research Report 2008



The VIEW from Statewide and Regional Partners

Produced for Troup County and the
Cities of LaGrange, West Point, and Hogansville

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE IN TROUP COUNTY, GEORGIA

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Produced for

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January 2008
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

In June 2007, leaders in Troup County and the cities of LaGrange, West Point, and Hogansville kicked off a two-year strategic planning initiative to create a framework for sustainable development. The goal of the effort is to develop innovative strategies for promoting quality growth, fostering healthy economic development, enhancing the quality of life of residents, and protecting Troup County's natural environment, sense of place, and community. Troup County leadership wants to preserve and enhance places for area residents and businesses by proactively, progressively and fairly directing the community's growth and development to shape its future.

Georgia Tech - through its Enterprise Innovation Institute and Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development - conducted research, assessments, and strategy development in support of this initiative. This report is one in a series of reports entitled *Preparing for the Future in Troup County, Georgia* produced by Georgia Tech.

OVERVIEW^{1, 2}

In June 2007, leaders from **Troup County** and the cities of **LaGrange**, **West Point** and **Hogansville** launched a two-year strategic planning initiative to create a framework for sustainable development. The goal of the effort is to develop innovative strategies for promoting quality growth, fostering healthy economic development, enhancing the quality of life, and protecting Troup County's sense of place and community. Not only does the Troup County leadership want to further enhance the region's great places for area residents and businesses, but there is great interest in being proactive and progressive about directing the community's growth and development to shape its future.

From June through August 2007, Georgia Tech conducted one-on-one confidential discussions with 154 stakeholders from the Troup County region who have a vested interest in the community's future and its goals for sustainable development. The stakeholders were asked questions relating to their vision for Troup County and desirable community development; the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; their preferences regarding future growth and change, including development and redevelopment; and their views about various support mechanisms.

Following the internal stakeholder interviews, Georgia Tech launched an external stakeholder input process. Specifically, from September through November 2007, Georgia Tech conducted one-on-one confidential interviews with 30 statewide and regional partners of Troup County who also have a vested interest in the community's future community and economic development. These partners were familiar with Troup County and shared diverse perspectives on its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and competitive advantages. Participating partners were identified by Troup County, the cities of LaGrange, West Point and Hogansville; the LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce, and Georgia Tech. Representing several key organizations and interests in Troup County, the partners are listed below:

- Association County Commissioners of Georgia
- Atlanta Gas Light
- Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Development Center
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs
- Georgia Department of Economic Development
- Georgia Department of Labor
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Georgia Electric Membership Corporation
- Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority
- Georgia Environmental Protection Division
- Georgia Municipal Association
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
- Georgia Power Company
- Georgia State Legislature
- Governor's Office of Workforce Development
- Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center
- MEAG Power Corporation
- NeighborWorks America
- OneGeorgia Authority
- The Valley Partnership

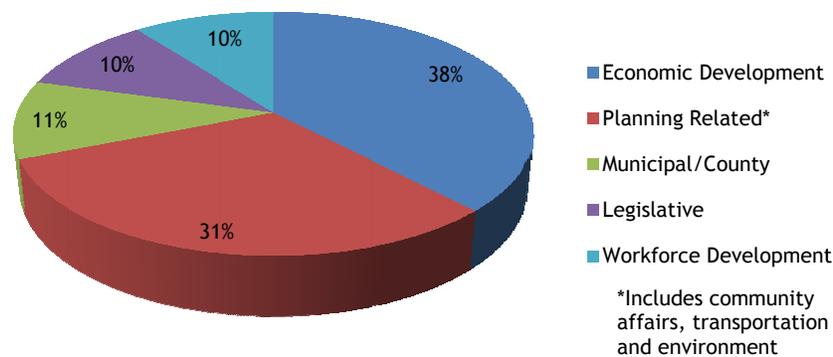
¹ This report includes information from the *Preparing for the Future in Troup County, Georgia: The VIEW from Community Stakeholders* report.

² The interview team included representatives from Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute and Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development. Georgia Tech would like to thank all partners for taking the time to share their thoughts, insights, and ideas relating to Troup County's efforts to strategically plan for the future.

The following is a breakdown of the type of agencies represented by the partners, as well as their area of expertise:

Type of Agency	Number
State	12
Power/Utility	6
Advocacy	3
Legislative	3
Regional	2
Non-profit	2
Business	1

External Partners by Area of Expertise



Every partner had a working familiarity with Troup County and the cities of LaGrange, West Point, and Hogansville, and each shared its experiences working with the community's leadership. These individuals are not bystanders in the state's efforts to attract investment, build well-rounded communities, and develop both physical and civic infrastructure. They are active in these areas today, and have all worked with the local leadership in Troup County and the cities of LaGrange, West Point, and Hogansville.

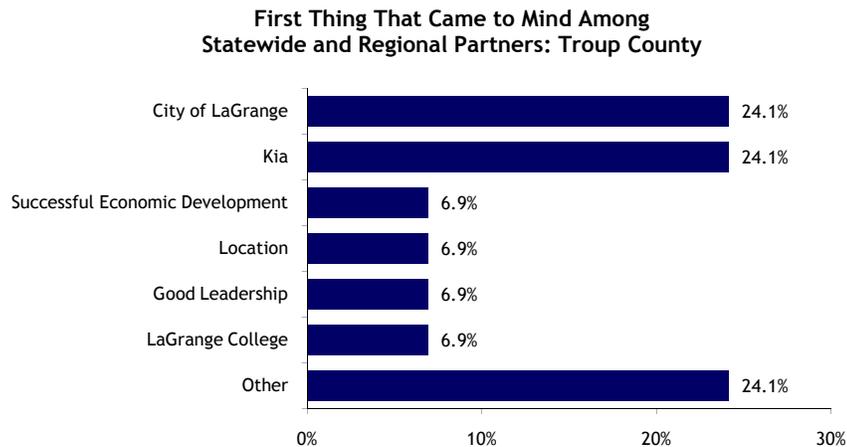
The following report summarizes the partners input and, when applicable, includes comparative references to the input from community stakeholders. This input should be viewed as the perceptions or opinions of these parties.

FIRST THING THAT CAME TO MIND

All statewide and regional partners were asked to share the first thing that came to mind when they thought of Troup County and the cities of LaGrange, West Point and Hogansville. Thirty responses were provided by the partners for each jurisdiction.

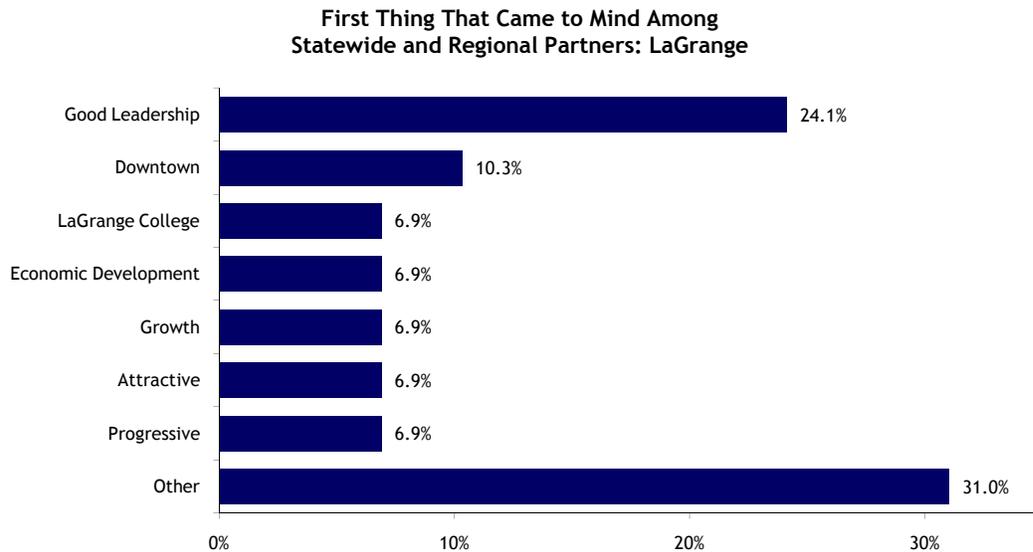
- The first thing that came to most partners' minds when considering Troup County was either the City of LaGrange itself, or the prospect of Kia arriving, each of which accounted for 24.1 percent of the responses. LaGrange is the county seat and largest city, and its leadership has clearly had a great deal of interaction with the external partners interviewed for this research.

- The arrival of Kia ties in with another commonly held perspective of Troup County and its cities, namely that they have instituted a quality economic development program. The LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce and LaGrange Industrial Authority were mentioned often in this context. External partners discussed the community's ability to recruit industrial development to the area even before the coming of Kia, and how the existing leadership fosters this type of progress.
- LaGrange College was occasionally singled out separately from the city, along with Troup County's proximity to Interstate 85 and regional cities such as Atlanta and Columbus.
- Other comments offered about Troup County included:
 - The area's quality of life
 - The growth rate for the area
 - The historic nature of the area
 - The importance placed on improving the lives of children in Troup County
 - The value of West Point Lake
 - Troup County's progressive government
 - Water



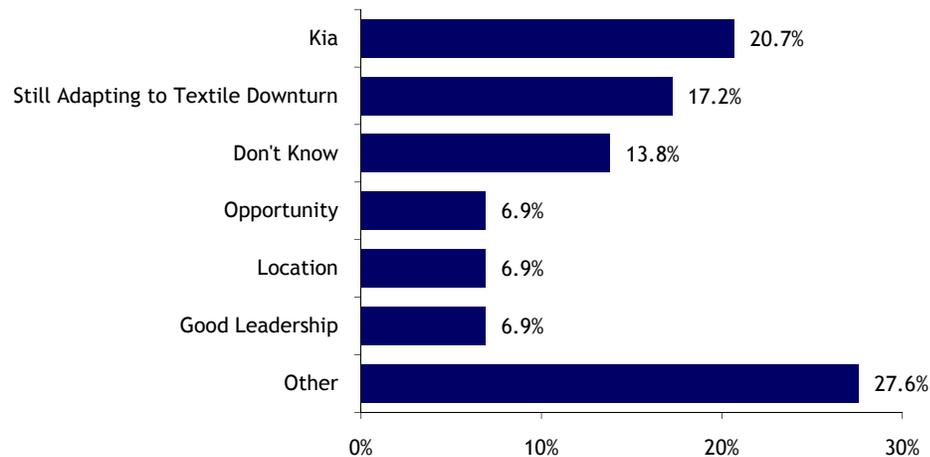
- A wide range of issues and subjects were discussed when partners were asked to consider the first thing that comes to their mind when considering LaGrange itself. More than anything else, partners cited the leadership of LaGrange. Given that all of the external partners had interacted with the leadership of LaGrange, they were speaking of this from personal experience. These comments included specific references to the political, business and civic leadership in the city, as well as the cooperation between them. They also praised LaGrange for having a viable and quality downtown, LaGrange College, and, as when asked about Troup, a strong economic development program. They partners described the city as growing, being attractive, and as having a progressive approach.
- Additional comments included some observations that vary from one another. For example, LaGrange was considered both cooperative and fragmented. Other impressions of LaGrange included:
 - An impressive number of resources and amenities
 - Being organized and structured
 - Embracing development

- Friendly community
- Positive
- Protective of historic places



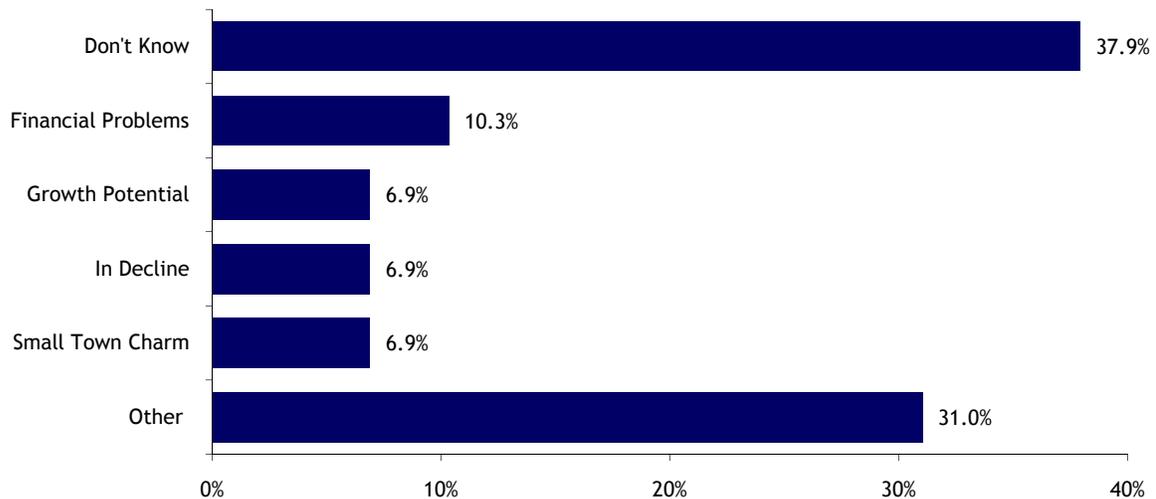
- When asked specifically about the City of West Point, external partners shared several observations. The anticipation concerning Kia was at the forefront of most partners' minds, but also top of mind was the observation that West Point was still recovering from the textile industry that had previously dominated its economic base. Recovery from this period and the arrival of Kia appeared to be tied together in the minds of most statewide and regional partners.
- A number of partners shared that while they were familiar with Troup County, they did not have knowledge about West Point specifically.
- Others discussed the opportunity now available to the city and described it as having a good location in proximity to Columbus, LaGrange, and Kia. Some of the partners observed that West Point has shown itself, through the process to site Kia, to have good leadership to work with.
- Among comments offered about West Point were observations that are at some variance from each other. For example, West Point was considered both attractive and unattractive. Other comments included:
 - Changing
 - Cooperative
 - Independent streak
 - Lack of activity
 - Not prepared for growth
 - Small-town charm

**First Thing that Came to Mind Among
Statewide and Regional Partners: West Point**



- Overall, the partners offered fewer observations to about the City of Hogansville than elsewhere in the county. The fact that over one-third of the interviewed partners did not have an impression of Hogansville has both negative and positive consequences. Unfortunately, it means that many of the partners interviewed are not aware of Hogansville and may not be actively thinking about it when they view the Troup County region. But it also means that the city has a blank slate for developing good relationships and impressions with statewide and regional officials. Therefore, there is still a good opportunity for Hogansville to create the image it would like its partners to have.
- Of the most frequently offered observations about Hogansville, financial problems garnered the most mentions. Beyond this, some pointed toward the city's decline while others noted its growth potential from being close to metro Atlanta and to the remainder of Troup County. Some noted Hogansville's small-town charm.
- Some other comments about Hogansville included:
 - Drug use
 - Making the best of what they have
 - Not engaged with Kia
 - Opportunity for change
 - Opportunity through Kia
 - Better Hometown Program
 - Difficult leadership to work with

**First Thing That Came to Mind Among
Statewide and Regional Partners: Hogansville**

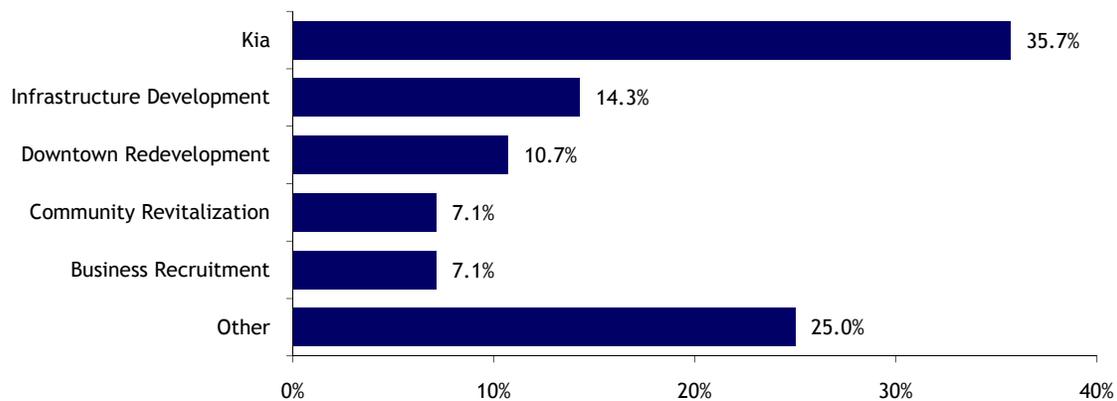


CURRENT OR RECENT INITIATIVE

Troup County's partners were asked to share information on any current or recent initiatives in which they have participated with the county or with the cities of LaGrange, West Point, and Hogansville. A total of 28 initiatives were identified.

- Not surprisingly, projects directly or indirectly dealing with Kia dominated the experiences that statewide and regional partners had with local officials, accounting for 35.7 percent of the responses. These ranged from locating the Kia plant to making joint marketing and recruitment trips and securing suppliers.
- Infrastructure development, from water to roads, made up the second most common initiative on which statewide and regional partners had been working with local officials.
- Downtown redevelopment and community revitalization initiatives were also frequently mentioned. Some examples of these initiatives included organizing a visioning process around the restoration of some older buildings in the county, and working with communities outside of the downtown areas to improve the affordability and safety of housing.
- Some of the partners also discussed efforts relating to non-Kia business recruitment initiatives, mostly foreign manufacturing industries. As mentioned before, they had positive things to say about these particular interactions with local officials.
- A number of initiatives identified by the partners did not lend themselves to categorization. These included:
 - Bus tour of the area
 - Crafting legislation
 - Development of regional impact planning
 - Education improvement
 - Environmental facilities
 - Water projects
 - Workforce training

Recent Collaborations Between Local Officials and Regional and Statewide Partners

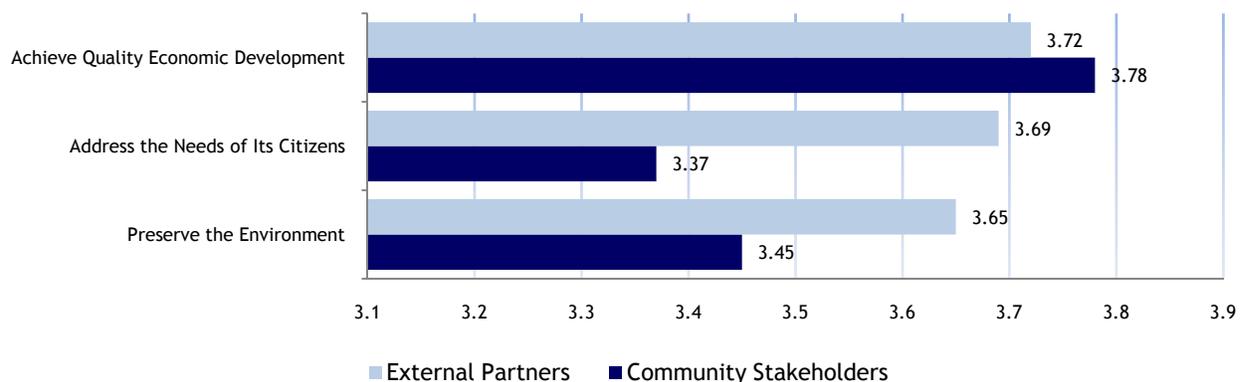


ACHIEVEMENT TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability is often cited as a three-legged stool, consisting of economic, environmental, and social interests. To understand how statewide and regional partners viewed the area’s sustainable practices, each interviewee was asked to rate Troup County and its cities on three categories: *Achieving Quality Economic Development*, *Preserving the Environment*, and *Addressing the Needs of Its Citizens*. The partners were asked to indicate how well Troup County and its cities were doing in each of these areas on a scale of one-to-five, where 1 meant “not at all well” and 5 meant “very well.”

- Interestingly, on all three areas of effort, Troup and its Cities were rated similarly. However, the partners gave top marks to Troup County for achieving quality economic development, second highest marks for addressing the needs of all citizens, and lowest marks for preserving the environment. In all cases, the ratings averaged within the 3 to 4 area of the scale. In this context, the ratings can be interpreted that the partners considered Troup County to be above average in its economic development efforts and close to average in its other efforts.

How Well Do Troup County and Its Cities...



- When compared to the input provided by community stakeholders, the state and regional partners also provided top marks to achieving quality economic development. However, they differed from the stakeholders by giving second billing to preserving the environment and third

billing for addressing the needs of all citizens. For these two areas, the stakeholders provided lower marks than did the external partners.

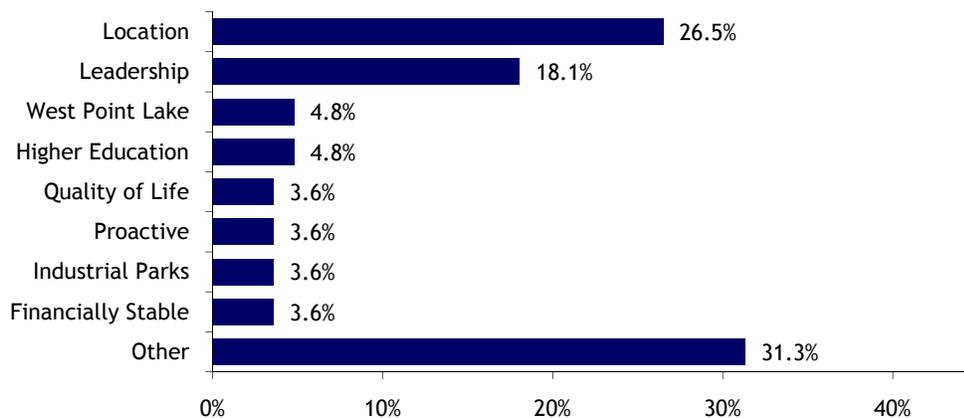
- Most external partners felt comfortable ranking the area’s economic development efforts. However, fewer felt they could accurately rate the area’s environmental and social practices, due to being less aware about local initiatives addressing these issues.

STRENGTHS

Each statewide and regional partner was asked to discuss the top three strengths or assets for creating desirable community development within Troup and its cities. A total of 82 responses were given in 29 different categories.

- Location received top mention by the external partners, accounting for 26.5 percent of all responses. They considered Troup’s proximity to Interstate 85, the Chattahoochee River, Atlanta, Columbus, and a regional workforce to be highly positive characteristics. Location was also one of the most frequently mentioned strengths by community stakeholders, who similarly cited the proximity to Interstate 85, Atlanta, and Columbus, as well as to Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and Alabama a combined 100 times.
- External partners mentioned leadership second most often, with such responses accounting for 19.0 percent of the total. Various individuals within the leadership structure were mentioned frequently, including the political, business, and civic leadership throughout the county. It was often observed that Troup County has a wealth of leadership capital at all levels, from the volunteer citizen to the elected official. Similarly, leadership was the single most mentioned strength identified by community stakeholders.
- Among the other most frequently mentioned strengths were West Point Lake and higher education. West Point Lake (not given the current drought conditions) is seen as both an important natural resource, as well as a driver of regional tourism. LaGrange College, and the impact it has on the shape of downtown LaGrange, is also seen as both a tourism and quality of life asset. Some partners observed how the impact of having students congregate in the downtown area makes people feel safe and draws others to it.

Strengths in Troup County, Georgia



- Numerous strengths were identified by the partners that did not lend themselves to categorization. These included:

- Accelerated Learning Center
- Affordable
- Amenities
- Callaway Foundation
- Certified Workforce Ready
- Communication
- Community involvement
- Cooperation
- Downtowns
- Educational system
- Educational variety
- Entrepreneurial
- Has a strategy in place
- Historic nature
- Kia
- LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce
- Natural resources
- Ownership of utilities
- People
- Smaller size
- Stable population
- Vision

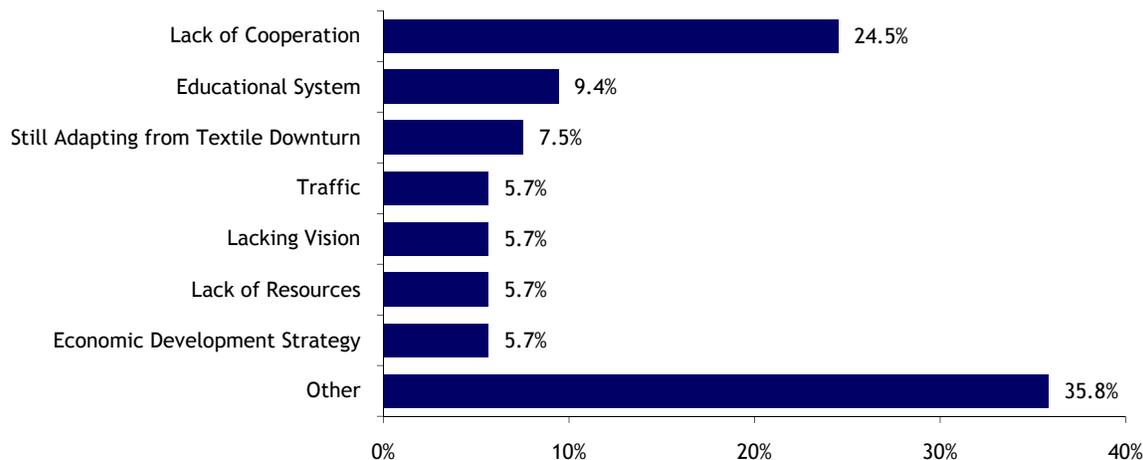
“The leadership tends to bend over backwards to make things happen in the community”

WEAKNESSES

The partners also were asked to identify the top three weaknesses or liabilities affecting Troup County’s potential for desirable community development. A total of 53 responses were given in 24 categories. Notably, the partners pointed out fewer weaknesses or liabilities than they did strengths and assets. Far fewer answers were given, and many partners could only list one or two, even though they were asked to identify three.

- Lack of cooperation between the county and all three cities was cited more frequently than any other liability as regards pursuing desirable community development. The external partners delivered this observation about all officials within the county and cities both political and business. Partners also noted a lack of shared vision for the county, which was hindering its planning and growth efforts. The challenge of intergovernmental relationships was also cited by community stakeholders, but not as often as other challenges, as it was the seventh most frequently mentioned. However, planning and growth management were ranked as the number one weakness or liability by community stakeholders.
- Troup County’s K-12 educational system received the second most mention. Specifically, the partners pointed to the high school graduation rate as needing of improvement. The community stakeholders also cited K-12 education as an area challenge, ranking it third among the challenges they identified, and also cited a high dropout rate as one of their chief concerns.
- The partners described Troup County as “still adapting from the textile downturn” and observed a lack of diversification being sought through the economic development efforts being implemented. Community stakeholders did not rank this as high as did external partners, as it was the 15th most frequently mentioned weakness.

Weaknesses in Troup County, Georgia



- Several challenges identified by the partners did not lend themselves to categorization. These included:

- Affordable housing
- Community resistance
- Environmental damage to West Point Lake
- Financial instability
- Growth management
- Inequity
- Lack of experience in large-scale economic development
- Limited access to West Point lake
- Location
- Missing opportunities from Kia development
- No tourism
- Power conflicts
- Too reactive
- Water

“They need to deal with the rivalry between cities and counties in the area.”

OPPORTUNITIES

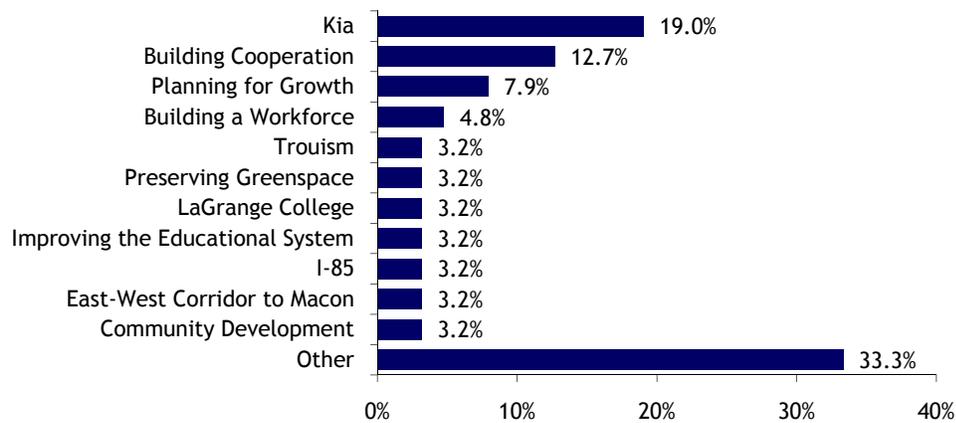
In looking toward the future, each statewide and regional partner was asked to consider the top three opportunities that they currently see available in Troup County and its cities for creating desirable community development. Opportunities are chances for advancement and could be considered local, statewide, or national in scope. A total of 63 responses were given in 32 categories, reflecting a very diverse view of what opportunities exist for Troup County.

- Among the most cited responses were the opportunities associated with Kia’s arrival, which accounted for 19 percent of the responses. The external partners mostly discussed leveraging the plant’s location and economic and social benefits. Similarly, leveraging opportunities from the arrival of Kia was the second most frequently mentioned opportunity by community stakeholders when asked to identify opportunities.
- Building more cooperation between elected leaders was cited second most frequently mentioned opportunity (12.7 percent). Most external partners expressed the need for greater cooperation among county and city entities, but also stressed that the greatest opportunity

came in the form of developing regional cooperation. Working together was also identified as an opportunity by community stakeholders, but to a lesser degree as it ranked eighth. This was largely due to the observation by the stakeholders that Troup County had greatly improved in this area recently.

- The partners also discussed opportunities associated with planning for growth (7.9 percent). Such opportunities were the fourth most frequently mentioned by the community stakeholders.
- Building a prepared workforce was the fourth most frequently mentioned opportunity by the partners (4.8 percent). Such opportunity ranked third among community stakeholders.
- The next seven most frequently mentioned opportunities demonstrate the wide diversity of opinion from external partners.

Opportunities for Troup County, Georgia



- Beyond these, responses to this question did not lend themselves to categorization. Other opportunities identified included:

- Building pride
- Capitalizing on a good reputation
- Creating equity among citizenry
- Downtown revitalization
- Financial stabilization
- Good quality of life
- Improving public transportation (to metro Atlanta)
- Increased tax revenue
- Infill housing
- Infrastructure development
- Leveraging growth near Harris County
- Location
- Marketing to general public
- Proximity to educational institutions
- Proximity to Fort Benning
- Route 27 and East-West Corridor to Macon
- Small-business development
- Strength of LaGrange
- Supportive infrastructure
- West Point Lake
- Working with the Callaway Foundation

“[We] would like to see fewer territorial agendas as the area becomes more regional.”

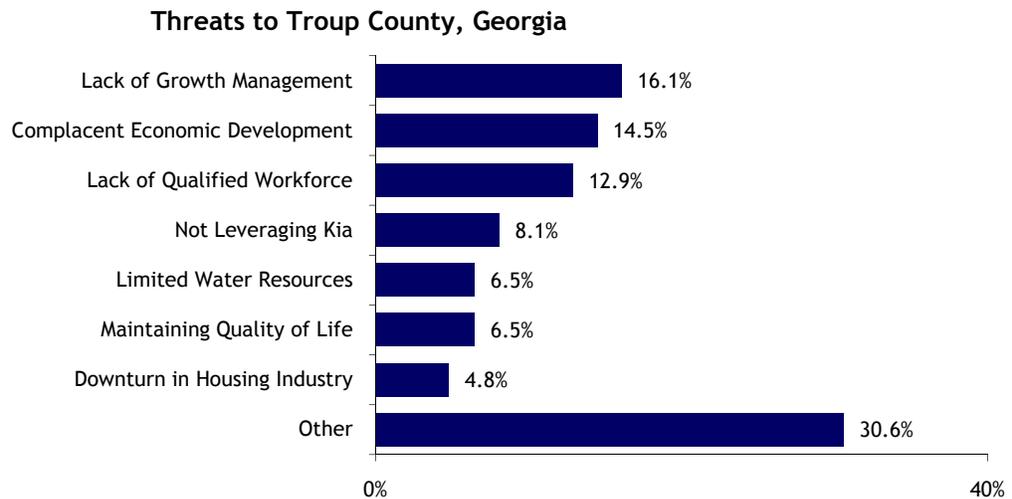
THREATS

Conversely, the team also asked each statewide and regional partner to consider what the top three threats to Troup County and its cities were that could prevent desirable community development. These are factors that could inhibit Troup County’s future ability to realize its vision and can be considered local, statewide, or national in scope. A total of 62 responses were given in 20 categories.

- Not adequately preparing for the expected growth was cited most frequently as a potential hurdle for creating desirable community development. Such responses accounted for 16.1 percent of the threats mentioned. Related to this, threats to the county’s quality of life received some mention as well (6.5 percent), and specifically referred to protecting rural and natural areas as more people move to the area.
- Secondary to the lack of effective growth management, there were some broad reflections that local economic development initiatives should leverage the success of Kia, but safeguard the area from becoming too dependent on an auto-related manufacturing economy.

The partners identified workforce-related threats as well (12.9 percent). There was some concern over labor supply, but most identified threats focused on workforce quality. External partners specifically mentioned that the area’s labor force had to develop a better industrial skill set, specifically for auto-related jobs, and prepare to compete with workers from a fairly large geographic region.

- Not maximizing the potential of Kia was the fourth most mentioned threat.
- The partners also identified water resources as a threat, one which is evident throughout the state of Georgia. In addition, several partners mentioned that the recent nationwide downturn in the housing industry was a threat to the area’s success, and warranted the attention of local leaders.



Other threats identified included:

- Demographic shifts
- Divisions within county
- Educational system
- Finances
- Funding for social services
- Tax reform proposal (“GREAT”)
- Health care
- Infrastructure development
- Lack of inclusivity
- Leadership continuity
- Location
- Social concerns
- Traffic

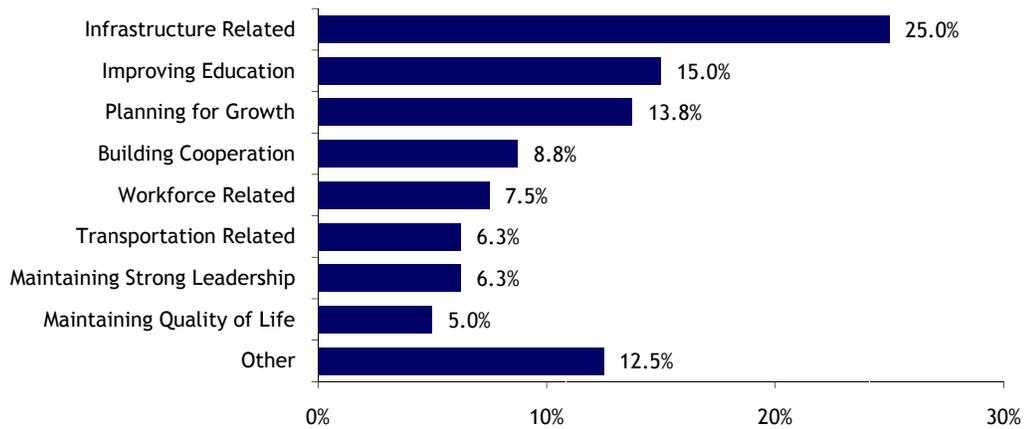
“Unless they have a plan in place, development and growth could be a nightmare. People are already trying to cash in and selling for abnormally high prices. They need to develop policies to control their growth. They weren’t looking for this, but now it’s here. So how they deal with that is an issue.”

MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

Partners also were asked to identify the three most critical issues facing the county. They showed considerable consistency in responding to this question, and most of the answers given appeared during other points of the interview. However, a review of their responses suggests prioritization of some issues. A total of 80 responses were provided, which fell into 15 categories.

- Infrastructure related issues came up most frequently during the discussion, and they mostly centered on having an adequate water and sewer system. These accounted for 25 percent of all responses. Such issues were also raised as being “most serious” by the community stakeholders, ranking fourth.
- Improving K-12 education was the second most cited issue among the external partners, accounting for 15 percent of the issues identified. Specifically, they were concerned about the county’s dropout rate, absentee rate, and public support of education. Likewise, the need to improve the area’s educational attainment and accomplishments were identified as the second most serious issue by community stakeholders.
- The partners identified issues relating to planning for growth frequently, ranking third amongst all issues. Similarly, such issues radiated fairly high in mention among the community stakeholders, receiving the highest billing.
- Building cooperation among the county and cities received fourth highest mention among the external partners. While this was also identified by the community stakeholders as a serious issue, it was done so to a lesser degree - again, due to the observation by the stakeholders that this is something that has improved in recent times.
- Of note, community stakeholders identified the quality of the workforce as the most critical issue and transportation issues as the third most critical while such issues accounted for less prominent mentions by partners.

Critical Issues Facing Troup County, Georgia



- The partners also identified a number of critical issues that did not lend themselves toward categorization. These included:

- Economic development
- Embracing diversity
- Financial stability
- Housing choice
- Leveraging opportunities
- Protecting the environment
- Reducing crime

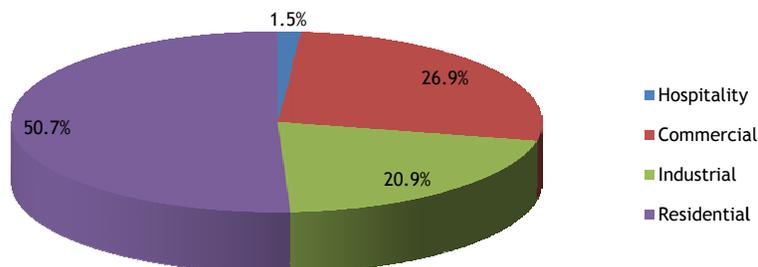
“As an official, there needs to be some recognition that there are going to be issues. Perhaps part of their job will be to bring this to the forefront and raise awareness”

DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH PATTERNS

Each interview participant was asked, based on what they know today, what type of development they anticipated seeing in Troup and its Cities over the five year? There were a total of 67 responses given in four broad categories in regards to the type of development they expected to see emerge.

- Overall, when each partner was asked to identify what type of development he or she expected to occur, residential was identified far more frequently than any other type, accounting for more than half (50.7 percent) of the responses. The chart below depicts the percentage that each style of development was mentioned by interviewees. Following this chart is a brief description of what the interview participants predicted for each jurisdiction.

Expected Type of Development for Troup County Over the Next Five Years



- **Troup County:** Most participants expected to see mainly residential growth in the county, with the possibility of some distribution-related business and industrial development along Interstate 85. External partners expected most of the demand for residential growth to occur around West Point Lake. Likewise, community stakeholders also identified areas around West Point Lake as prime for development, ranking third among the ideas identified. And they also listed Interstate 85 as the second highest location as being prime for development.
- **City of LaGrange:** LaGrange's housing market is expected to continue strong over the next five years, even with the national downturn in the housing market. Several partners stated that they also expected to see more commercial and retail growth emerge in the downtown area, and for industrial growth to continue to occurring within existing industrial parks. While community stakeholders had identified LaGrange more frequently than anywhere else in the county as prime for development, housing, in particular, was not as much of a focus. They identified the Davis Road Corridor as prime for commercial / retail development. Similar to views of the external partners, however, the industrial park areas did radiate fairly highly among the stakeholders.
- **City of West Point:** Development patterns in West Point are expected to comprise the full gamut of residential, commercial, and industrial growth. Most external partners expected this growth to be either directed toward LaGrange, or to focus around the interstate. This was fairly consistent with the community stakeholder feedback, although some community members expected to see more development around their downtown area.
- **City of Hogansville:** Development patterns in Hogansville are expected to mostly comprise residential and commercial growth. Most of this is expected to occur close to Interstate 85. This, too, was fairly consistent with the community stakeholder feedback, although similar to West Point, some community members expected to see more development around their downtown area.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

Each statewide and regional partner was asked to identify communities they believe have “done it right” when it comes to enabling desirable community development. Like the community stakeholders, the partners acknowledged that the impracticality of identifying one community that has done everything right, but pointed to certain aspects of doing it right by communities. Diverse examples were discussed by the interviewees. Overall, 20 different locations were brought up, and only three of them more than once.

- The most frequently mentioned location was the City of Columbus (17.9 percent of the time), which was credited with having strong cooperation among the various leaders and political institutions, and a regional mindset that allows them to accommodate a diverse population and manage change well. Columbus was also mentioned by the community stakeholders, ranking fifth among communities identified.
- The second most frequently mentioned location was Peachtree City (10.7 percent of the time)-cited as an example of strong growth management practices. Peachtree City had received top billing by community stakeholders when asked this question as well.
- Below is list of all the other locations mentioned by interviewees, and the specific areas they believed made good models for Troup County and its cities.

COMMUNITY	DID IT RIGHT IN...
Alpharetta City	Recreation
Athens-Clarke County	Growth Management
Barnesville City	Developing an Attractive Community
Bulloch County	No Reason Given
Carroll County	Preservation of Farmland
Coweta County	Growth Management
Decatur City	Focus on Education
Douglas City	Growth Management
Fayette County	Growth Management & Strong Cooperation
Gainesville City	Developing an Attractive Community & Focusing on Education
Hinesville City	Strong City Management
Jasper City	Scenic Byways
Madison City	Downtown Development
Morgan County	Focus on Education
Rome City	Growth Management & Downtown Development
Roswell City	Recreation
Statesboro-Bulloch County	Growth Management
Thomasville City	Growth Management
Valdosta-Lowndes County	Strong Cooperation

- Community stakeholders listed several of the same locations that the external partners did. The following list includes the communities mentioned most frequently by community members. The names in bold indicate that they are on the external partner list as well.
 - LaGrange, GA
 - **Newnan-Coweta County, GA**
 - Auburn-Opelika Area, AL
 - **Madison-Morgan County, GA**
 - Chattanooga, TN
 - Greenville-Spartanburg, SC
 - **Alpharetta / Roswell / North Fulton, GA**
 - **Rome, GA**
 - Chicago, IL
 - **Gainesville, GA**
 - **Carroll County, GA**
 - Marietta / Cobb County, GA
 - Portland, OR

“[Look to] Columbus, as they are experiencing some of the same things due to the growth of Fort Benning. There have been several strategic plans implemented to help deal with this growth.”

INVESTMENT POTENTIAL

The external partners were asked to indicate whether they would recommend Troup County and its cities to a prospective investor, and whether they would recommend living in Troup and its cities to family and friends.

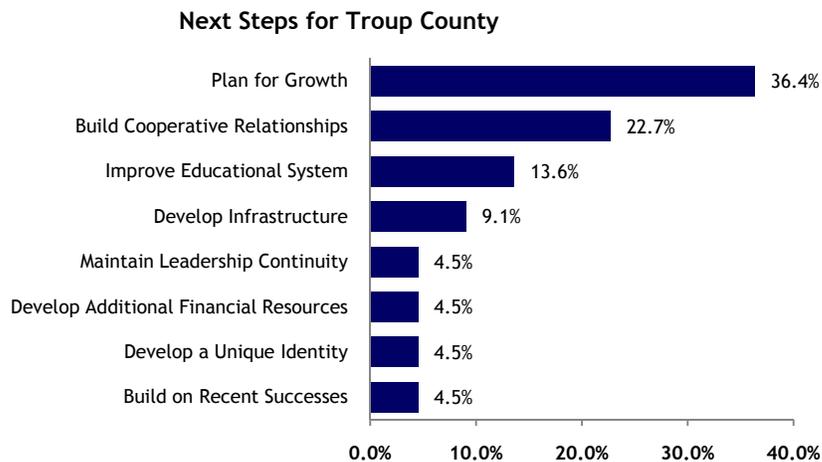
- Not a single partner stated that they would *not* recommend Troup County and its cities to either prospective investors or to family and friends as a place to live. All partners who felt comfortable answering this question responded that they would recommend the area as both a place to conduct business and a place to permanently reside.

- Among the top reasons cited for recommending business in the area: leadership, available resources, available land, and proximity to the airport and Interstate 85.
- Among the top reasons cited for recommending that a family member or friend live in the area: affordability, proximity to Atlanta and Columbus, and balance between its rural character and vibrant downtown areas.

NEXT STEPS

The partners were asked to identify what they saw as the most important next step for Troup County as a whole, as well as for the cities of LaGrange, West Point and Hogansville. A summary of those recommendations follow.

- The partners believed that Troup County, as a whole, needed to focus its efforts on planning for growth (36.4 percent). This was also the top next step identified by community stakeholders. Taken together, this provides significant reinforcement for the leadership’s progressiveness in launching the “Preparing for the Future” strategic planning initiative as well as other efforts for updating local comprehensive plans.
- The second most important next step identified by external partners was building cooperative relationships, which accounted for 22.7 percent of the responses. Many partners saw the county as taking a leadership role in creating trust and cooperation among each of the entities. Similarly, the community stakeholders gave second billing to working together to prepare for the future.
- In addition, several participants felt strongly that the county should focus on improving its educational system (13.6 percent of responses). Similarly, improving workplace skills was mentioned frequently by community stakeholders, ranking fourth among next steps.
- The fourth next step identified by partners related to meeting infrastructure needs, accounting for 9.1 percent of the responses. This was also identified as a top next step by community stakeholders, ranking third.
- The chart below includes all of the next steps mentioned by external partners for Troup County as a whole.



City of LaGrange

- The most prominent suggestion for the city of LaGrange was to plan for growth, accounting for 28 percent of all suggestions. The second most frequently offered suggestion (24 percent) by the partners was for LaGrange to “stay the present course,” indicating that there is broad support for what LaGrange has done to this point. Interviewees also suggested developing transportation solutions (8 percent) and maintaining leadership continuity (8 percent) as issues of immediate importance to the city.
- Other next steps offered for LaGrange included:
 - Develop infrastructure
 - Improve existing amenities
 - Improve the educational system
 - Promote entrepreneurship
 - Redevelop retail and industrial areas.

City of West Point

- The vast majority of respondents suggested that West Point plan for growth as its immediate next step, accounting for 45 percent of the responses and highlighting concern among the partners that West Point is not yet ready for the type of growth expected to arrive in the near future. Along with this concern was the recommendation that West Point should focus on developing infrastructure (15 percent) and building cooperative relationships (10 percent) with its neighbors.
- Other next steps offered for West Point included:
 - Creating greater housing choice
 - Developing an identity for the city
 - Leveraging the arrival of Kia
 - Maintaining leadership continuity.

City of Hogansville

- Similar to the rest of the county, more than any other suggestions offered for Hogansville was the need to plan for growth, which accounted for 30.4 percent of the suggestions. The partners recommended that Hogansville focus on developing its infrastructure second, accounting for 26.1 percent of the responses. Beyond that, partners focused on Hogansville’s need to get more involved in future decision-making with internal Troup County issues (13 percent), and building cooperative relationships with other jurisdictions in Troup and the surrounding region (8.7 percent).
- Other next steps offered for Hogansville included:
 - Form an identity and market itself
 - Take advantage of current and future changes.