



IN THE BEGINNING

City on a Hill thrilled about Sunday's first service/1D

TODAY

High: 81
Low: 70

TOMORROW

High: 85
Low: 67

Total forecast/8A

CAN YOU DIG IT?

Former Woodstock standout part of first KSU volleyball team/1C

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Economy discussed by area officials

Transportation issues spark dialogue among city, state leaders

By Angela M. Jones
Cherokee Tribune Staff Writer

Transportation and economic development were the topics of discussion at a meeting between elected officials, city and county leaders and a regional planning agency Friday morning.

Sam Olens, chairman of the Atlanta Regional Commission, offered representatives from Cherokee County and city governments suggestions on increasing commuter options and encouraging economic development.



Sam Olens

The discussion was held at the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce in Canton, and also included state Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) and state Rep. Calvin Hill (R-Hickory Flat), as well as several local business owners.



Chip Rogers

"As we look at the congestion on Interstate 575 every day, we're finding that an alternate means of getting to work daily would be beneficial to both the commuter and the community," said Olens, who also serves as chairman of the Cobb County Board of Commissioners.



Calvin Hill

Earlier this year, the ARC created the Transit Planning Board to encourage greater efficiency in the current transit systems around metro Atlanta, and explore ways to expand mass transit services throughout the commission's 10-county region.

One option Olens asked officials to consider is the creation of a commuter rail system that would run from Cherokee County to Atlanta. Rehabilitating some of the existing rail lines to accommodate passenger traffic as well as freight could make this possible, Olens said.

"A commuter rail system would provide a valuable alternate to the commuter, in terms of time, gas and outlook," he said. "Not only would it eliminate some of the cars on the road, employees would be able to spend the time traveling to work relaxing instead of cursing the driver in front of them, which could lead to a more productive workday."

Olens also recommended extending rapid



Cherokee Tribune photos by Todd R. McQueen

Above: Kandace Walker of Canton, daughter of market owner Sherri Cloud, cuts fresh sunflowers. The market sells fresh-cut flowers and has an in-house florist for advance orders. Local vendors are wanted for the market. For information, call (678) 907-2912.

Officials

Continued from Page 1A

transit bus service from Atlanta to Cherokee County, with stops along the way in Cobb County. The buses would be similar to those the city of Canton uses for its express commuter service to downtown Atlanta.

The Georgia Department of Transportation is conducting studies about the feasibility and effectiveness of providing rapid transit bus service from Atlanta up Interstate 75 to Town Center mall and Kennesaw State University.

Most of the studies should be completed later this year, Olens said, adding he's recommending a similar study be done for service from KSU to Cherokee County.

Transit park-and-ride lots would be needed around Interstate 575 so people could use mass transit to get to various points in Atlanta, he added.

Olens praised Canton Mayor Cecil Pruet's initiative in starting the city's express bus service, which is a partnership with Cobb County Transit.

The city continues to evaluate commuter requests and passenger levels on the bus service, which began in January. Pruet said, adding a third bus or route could be added to the service, if warranted.

"We want to accommo-

"One of the main needs we're seeing right now is for some sort of startup kit for potential small business owners."

— Misti Martin,

executive director, Development Authority of Cherokee County

date the largest number of passengers possible with this service," he said. "Right now, we're looking at the current schedule and tweaking it as needed, and if we can accommodate more people, we'll try our best to do it."

In July, the 575 Express buses served more than 1,000 passengers commuting between Canton, Woodstock and Atlanta, according to Marie Garrett, the mayor's special advisor.

Another topic of interest at Friday's meeting was how to encourage economic development in the county and attract new businesses to the area.

Olens encouraged more communities to begin redeveloping their urban core by creating mixed-use developments. He recommended city and county officials preserve areas along the I-575 corridor for future business development, and work to maximize the attributes of those locations.

Misti Martin, executive director of the Development Authority of Cherokee County, attended the meeting. She said a committee was formed six weeks ago to begin evaluating sites around the county that could support a business park in the future.

The sites will be evaluated based on their acreage, access to the interstate, existing infrastructure and possible cost to develop the site, if needed.

"We know that businesses will need space to relocate or expand in the future, and we want to make sure that we have the ability to accommodate them here in Cherokee County," she said. The committee is scheduled to meet later this month.

The authority also is working with the Chamber of Commerce to help small business owners by earning the state Department of Economic Development's "Entrepreneur Friendly Community" designation.

"At last count, 92 percent of businesses in the county are small businesses," Mrs. Martin said. "One of the main needs we're seeing right now is for some sort of startup kit for potential small business owners."

As a result, the authority and chamber are assembling kits, which should be available in the next 30 days. The kit would include information needed by people considering starting their own business.

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Residents in the Bells FC Initiative study area will be their input as to what the a...
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