

COMMISSIONERS SEEK PUBLIC'S INPUT IN REACHING FIVE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Together, we can make county government more effective and move the community forward, Whitfield board says

The Whitfield County Board of Commissioners rolled out an updated mission statement at their first meeting of 2021 that simply states, "Provide quality services at a cost our citizens can afford."

Jevin Jensen, newly installed board chairman, says over the past few weeks, the board – which also includes new for 2021 Robby Staten and returnees Greg Jones and Barry Robbins from last year – agreed on five strategic objectives aimed at making county government more effective and moving our community forward.

These objectives were developed primarily via listening sessions with citizens, department heads and county employees. The Board then collaborated to further refine what they had heard into the following key objectives.

1. Upgrade Commissioner meetings to grow citizen involvement through better communication.

Jensen said everything is "about making it easier for citizens to participate, to attend and to hear commission meetings." The January meeting was livestreamed on Facebook and garnered more than 5,000 views over eight days!

2. Modernize government operations and increase employee engagement.

The most important asset of our county government isn't our trucks or building, but our people. To execute on our objectives, we need actively engaged employees. They should have clear goals and a career where excellence is rewarded. These are the hallmarks of modern organization and the keys to achieving our other objectives.

3. Renew focus on better paying jobs for citizens and continued community development.

This objective is focused on job quality, not just more jobs. "We know the formula to boost the number of \$14 or \$15 per hour jobs," Jensen said. "Our new goal is to grow higher paying jobs and boost jobs that allow a worker to grow into

a higher paying career so they can support their families.” Investing in small business and start-ups will be a focus.

4. Lower residential property taxes.

Everybody likes lower taxes, and Jensen believes this is a challenging but doable goal. “Lowering taxes was a campaign commitment and requires all of us in county government to maintain a focus week in and week out on budget and finances,” he said. The Commissioners agreed that this approach will make the annual budget setting process easier and optimize the opportunity to lower taxes without sacrificing service quality.

5. Improve city-county teamwork to benefit all Whitfield County citizens

“Just one year ago - - we were in front of a judge because we couldn’t reach agreement on the provisions of the Service Delivery Agreement,” Jensen said. “We have committed to breaking down those barriers between the city and the county by building up trust and finding areas of cooperation. We want to rebuild those relationships starting with our fire departments and recreation departments, where we can save each other money and more effectively provide services to everyone in Whitfield County.”

Another sign of that cooperation was showcased last week with the county and city joining forces with the North Georgia Health Department to expand COVID vaccinations via a drive-through process at the Trade Center. It was widely hailed as a success with many hundreds of citizens getting their first COVID vaccine dose without leaving their cars.

The commissioners are asking the citizens to help achieve our 2021 strategic objectives by coming to meetings and giving their valuable feedback. They, department heads and all county employees are in the process of setting goals now which are aligned with these key objectives and determining metrics.

Jensen emphasizes, “It will take teamwork and focus to achieve our objectives to move our community forward. I am confident in our success when the efforts of the commissioners, citizens, and county employees are all so aligned.”