

*Building a Diverse Economy*  
*Partners for a Prosperous Athens Economy Sub-committee*  
*June 26, 2006 Discussion Notes*

1) What is the definition of a 'diverse economy' for our purposes?

- Has varieties of Jobs:
  - Skills
  - Wages
  - More private businesses (not all public)
  - Ownership models (nonprofits, cooperatives, etc.)
  - Sizes from 500 employees to small entrepreneurs
- Doesn't take traditional view of attracting companies, but looks at what skills we have in Athens and sees what can be done with bartering and other forms of economy
- Access to capital- not just traditional banks, but credit unions, Individual Development Accounts, community loan funds for businesses, home buyers, and individual needs
- Commitment to improve and support existing industry- retain jobs
- Has different sectors- service, entertainment, education, healthcare, agriculture, arts, retail, hospitality

2) How can a 'diverse economy' impact poverty in Athens-Clarke County?

- Improves the condition in which people live
- Diversity gives better paying jobs and more options for advancement
- It simply impacts poverty because it is diversity
- It builds on itself and improves all aspects of community not just economic aspects
- It sets the bar high for wages and benefits to have multiple employers competing for employees
- It brings out innovation and creativity in industry and beyond
- It provides mobility within an company as well as between companies
- It affects a larger group of people
- It gives more options to people who live in Athens
- It can weather the ups and downs in different industries (like if the tire industry or UGA is cutting back, other employers are still robust)
- Creates more options for school age children- they see more options about what they can grow up to do
- Creates self sufficiency- if we need something we should produce it locally
- It improves infrastructure for the whole community- local skills attract niche industry (i.e. plant nurseries)

The question was asked, on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being 'Very Little' and 10 being 'A Lot') how diverse is Athens' economy? People responded with the following votes:  
1-3 (13 people)      3-6 (17 people)      6-10 (2 people)

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- 3) What have we learned thus far that can lead to future strategies?
- Support needed for a “Buy Local” campaign- identify businesses in Athens, owned locally, and things produced here
  - Explore New Models
    - Local currency- Local Economic Trading System in Ithaca NY
    - Downtown gift-certificates
    - Living Wage Model
  - Recognize good businesses by how they treat their employees, etc.
  - Our economy needs to be more diversified.
  - Underemployment is an issue.
  - Many employees must work more than 40 hours a week to support their families
  - Economic growth initiatives need to work in tandem to support improvement of our housing stock, health care, etc and should be a considered with each economic development opportunity or initiative.
  - The Economy sub-committee needs to coordinate closely with the workforce subcommittee.
  - Look at UGA temporary workers to improve their status
  - Support more educational/training opportunities
  - Consider all jobs essential to a diverse economy- shift attitudes so that all work is seen has of value to the entire community
  - Foster participation of all people
  - Talk to/learn from people who have or are experiencing the effects of poverty
  - Support the local Community Development Corporations- Hancock CDC and East Athens CDC
  - Support and strengthen families.
  - Support youth and adults needing to get engaged in the workforce.
  - Support training- Performance Learning Center, Athens Tech, Public Schools, programs through community groups and nonprofits
  - Some top-down measures need to happen- systems change- improve schools, etc.
  - Studies show that businesses look at education, transportation, and healthcare in a town before they look at tax breaks and incentives when they’re deciding where to locate
  - Everyone needs to be engaged in this poverty initiative because it affects all of us
- 4) What do we still need to learn to develop future strategies?
- See a graph of jobs broken down by sector so we can see what types of jobs we need.

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- What resources are here already to help incubate new businesses (like a directory)
- How do we market the positives of Athens Clarke County not just to potential incoming businesses but to Athenians
- What would bring people/resources to Athens?
- Hear from people who have experienced poverty first hand
- How do we get to the heart of what is causing poverty to improve the underlying causes and at the same time identify and respect cultural differences that don't need to be changed?
- How do we connect mentors with people- how do we create hope?
- What do employers need? Talk to prospective companies as well as local companies

The Steering Committee has talked about the need to address race and discrimination when discussing poverty. Does the group agree with this?

- Yes- it is harder for a black person to get a job than a whiter person
  - Does the group agree with this?- many yeses in the room
- Women tend to make less than men- information is being gathered by the Economic Justice Coalition about this in Athens
- There is racism in the justice system which detracts not only from the lives of people who are convicted of crimes and given jail time- it also affects the life of their families and the whole community- employers don't employ people with records
- Need to have measurable results- we can't tackle all the problems at once

Brings us back to #1- in the definition of a diverse economy we should see that all types of people (different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, etc.) are benefiting from the diverse economy, i.e. getting jobs, owning businesses, getting living wages- everyone should benefit.