

Challenges in Local Governance: Fayetteville, Georgia,

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Introduction

The City of Fayetteville was incorporated on December 20, 1823 as the county seat of Fayette County formed just two years earlier. Fayette County was carved out of land ceded by the Creek Indians in the treaty of Indian Springs by Chief Macintosh. The name of the City and County are named for the French General Marquis de LaFayette, who served under General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. It is believed that some of the first settlers were war veterans who were allowed to draw land lots and settle in the new county. In the land lottery, veterans of the Revolutionary War were allowed two draws. Each successful drawer was given a 202 ½-acre tract of land for a filing fee of \$19. The county was divided into nine Georgia Militia Districts with two Justices of the Peace to be elected to each. Those districts are still in place and form the basis of the current voting precincts. The justices were charged by the state to set elections to choose the Court Clerk, Sheriff, Coroner, Tax Collector, and Surveyor. In 1824, the Justices of the Peace were instructed by the state to purchase land for the Fayette County Academy and to appoint the first trustees of the school. The Fayette County Court House was built in Fayetteville in 1825 and it is the oldest courthouse building in Georgia. (Cary 1977).

In downtown Fayetteville is the Holliday-Dorsey-Fife House Museum. The connections with Margret Mitchell and the novel “Gone With the Wind” and the subsequent movie is one of the main attractions of the museum. The house, built in 1855, was used as for boarding students of the Fayetteville Academy where Margret Mitchell’s aunt attended, as did Scarlet O’Hara in the novel. According to the historian at the house, Mitchell based the character of Melanie Hamilton on her aunt. In addition, one of the owners of the house was the uncle of Doc Holiday, a dentist and native of Griffin, Georgia who gained fame in Arizona as a gunfighter and associate of Wyatt Earp. The museum is also the repository of artifacts from Fayetteville’s war veteran

heroes who have served in all wars beginning with the Revolutionary War and continuing to today. Scarlett's dresses populate the downstairs area and military uniforms fill the upstairs rooms.

The Fayetteville is 11 square miles in area. As of 2008, the estimated population of Fayetteville is 15,300 people, 1422 commercial businesses. According to the 2007 Economic Census, Retail Trade is the largest business sector in the city. Of the \$920 million in sales, Retail establishments brought in \$615 million (67%) and paid 3,700 employees \$67 million. Health care was second in economic activity with \$82 million in gross receipts and paid out \$38 million to 1,200 employees. Wholesale trade, Professional & Technical Services, and Accommodation & Food Services rounded out the top five standard business classifications with 6%, 5%, and 5% of the total sales respectively (Economic Census 2007).

According to the 2005-2009 census estimates of the American Community Survey of the US Census, of the 15,300 people in Fayetteville, 61% was white, 27% Black or African American, 5% Asian, and 5% Hispanic and 3% other races. The median age was 38.9 with 26% under the age of 18 and 15% 65 or older. The median income of households in Fayetteville was \$54,230. Wage earners made up 81% of the population, 24% lived on retirement income other than Social Security. Of the 29% of households receiving Social Security, the average annual income was \$14,637. Of the 4% of households living in poverty in Fayetteville, 5% were 65 and older. Female householder families with no husband present were the largest category living in poverty at 12%. The foreign-born population of Fayetteville was 8%. Of the 11% that spoke a language other than English at home, 39% spoke Spanish and 61% spoke some other language. Non-native English speakers reported that they did not speak English "very well" (American Community Survey 2005-2009).

In the 2005-2009 census estimates, Fayetteville had 6000 housing units, 81% single residences, 18% multi-family units, and 1% mobile homes. There was a 6% vacancy rate in all types of housing units. Owner occupied units paying mortgages of \$1630 on average made up 40%, Owners without mortgages were 8% and renters 52% of housing occupants in Fayetteville. The breakdown in automobile ownership among these occupants was 6% without a car, 34% with one car, 40% had two and 20% had three or more cars parked at their homes. Of the citizens with cars, 84% drove alone to work, 7% carpooled, 1% took public transportation 6% worked at home, and 2% used other means. The average commute time was 30 minutes (American Community Survey 2005-2009).

Government Structure

The city was initially run by the county commission, and it was not until 1889 that the first members of the city government current system of a mayor and five council members were first elected. This form of government is continued today. The council members are elected for four-year terms and stand for election for one of five at large Posts. The mayor is also elected for a four-year term and presides over meetings of the City Council. A candidate for the council and mayor must have lived in the city for one year. The mayor only votes on matters brought before the council in the event of a tie. The mayor has veto power over the council; however, the council can override the veto with four out of five votes. The corporate, legislative and other contractual powers of the city are vested in the mayor and council. A majority of three out of five council members constitute a quorum. A council member missing four consecutive meetings can be removed from office. Matters that have the force of law must be in writing before being introduced and considered by the City Council and must receive three votes to be passed (Fayetteville Municipal Code 2011).

Before notices are voted on, they must be published for at least five days before being considered for passage and they may be amended by the Council during the meeting that they are voted on. There are provisions for emergency passage, with narrow authorizations for specific contingencies affecting the life, health, property or public peace by a minimum of three council members and the mayor. The emergency provision cannot be for matters of taxation, public utility rates, or franchise. Money can be borrowed in such emergencies; however, it must be repaid within 30 days (Fayetteville Municipal Code 2011).

The Council is charged with hiring a qualified City Manager and authorizes the manager to be the Administrative head of the city government and all its departments. The manager is responsible for hiring and firing of city employees and monitors the activity of the various commissions and boards and acts as a liaison for the Council for these groups. The City Manager for Fayetteville is able to exercise maximum discretion in running the city government and a non-interference clause is included in the City Code. When dealing with the city's employees the Mayor and Council may not give orders or direction to any employee directly or indirectly. Exceptions are provided for investigations. The procedures are also codified for the suspension and removal of the City Manager (Fayetteville Municipal Code 2011).

The city manager oversees five main departments. The Finance and Administration Department is responsible for financial functions such as accounting, budgeting and human resources. The Downtown Development Department is headed by the Main Street Director who provides staff support to the Downtown Development Authority. The Police Chief, Fire Chief and Clerk of Court are all organized under the Public Safety Department. The Public Services Department contains the Planning and Zoning Department headed by the Director of Public Services. The Senior Planner, City Engineer and Director of Public Works are key staff members. The Public Services Department is responsible for the major utilities and infrastructure

of the City including public works, Water, Sewer and Storm water, Building and Code Enforcement, Engineering, Solid Waste and Transportation. The directors of each administrative and service department are appointed by the City Manager (Fayetteville Website 2011).

The City Council appoints members of boards and commissions established to perform various “quasi-legislative or quasi-judicial” functions the council deems necessary. The Primary Boards and Committees are the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Main Street Tourism Association (MSTA), the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z), and the Art and Architectural Advisory Committee (AAAC). The DDA is a seven member board that works to preserve and revitalize the downtown district through restoration and recruitment of new businesses. The MSTA has goals similar to the DDA, but their activities center around planning for events. The Planning and Zoning Department goals center around ensuring sustainable development in the implementation of the city’s comprehensive plan. The AAAC reviews the plans to ensure the aesthetic appeal of the city is not changed by new or altered buildings (Fayetteville Website 2011).

The long-range Comprehensive plan of Fayetteville is primarily focused on preserving the downtown area, making the city more walk-able and increasing greenspace. New retail development mainly focuses new centers in peripheral areas and with limits to big boxes. Abandoned industrial areas near the city center are to be developed into public areas where practical and infill of downtown properties could be potentially developed into multi-family or senior citizen housing. Small businesses associated with health care are migrating to the hospital and medical complex on the outskirts of town (Fayetteville Website 2011).

The goals of the Administrative Department of the city is summed up in its mission statement: “The mission of the City of Fayetteville is to ensure a superior quality of life for its citizens by providing the most cost effective municipal services while preserving the cultural,

historical and natural resources of the City”. The resources to further this mission are provided for in the annual balanced budget prepared by the City Manager and the Director of Finance and submitted to the City Council for consideration (Fayetteville Website 2011).

The fiscal year for the city runs from August 1 to July 31 each year. The latest published Comprehensive Annual Financial Report is for the Year ended July 31, 2010. Primary sources of general revenues from Property taxes was \$2,670,285, Sales taxes \$2,259,642 and other taxes (franchise, alcoholic beverage excise, insurance premium, business and occupation) totaled \$3,023,659. Licenses/Permit Fees and Fines/Forfeitures contributed \$217,086 and \$324,925 respectively to total revenues. The newest “big box” retail establishments in the Fayette Pavilion four development phases made up over 12.5% of total Taxable Assessed Value for the city. The previous largest retail center Banks Crossing was 1.52% (Robinson 2010).

Expenses for carrying on Primary Government activities such as Public Safety, Public Works, Water and Sewer totaling \$17,842,077 were offset by charges for services of \$8,077,280. Grants and other contributions of \$1,505,602 also helped offset these expenses. Public Safety was the largest expense category in terms of General Government Activities at \$6,676,928. The financial statements indicate that water and sewer services had to be subsidized about \$650,000 and the judicial activity received about \$900,000 in charges for services above expenses. Salary expenses for police patrol were the highest category for personnel expenses at \$2,064,153. Total salaries for general government were \$1,019,212 including the City Manager annual salary of \$94,942 (Robinson 2010).

Challenges

Mayor Steele believes one of the major challenges facing Fayetteville is getting consensus on public transportation options to meet the current and future needs of a rapidly aging population and to relieve the increasing congestion. Mayor Steele is Chairman of the 10

county Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and he is often at odds with elected officials of Fayette County and Peachtree City who oppose any form of public transportation in the county. Of the ten counties of the Atlanta Metro Area, Fayette is the third fastest growing. Estimates of the growth of Fayette's senior population are expected to increase 450 percent in the next 30 years. Mayor Steele favors private options such as a call center that would match older adults, the disabled and low-income citizens with cost effective transportation options. The integrated human services transportation system would provide scheduling, dispatching, vehicle tracking and trip booking (Nelms 2011).

Membership on the ARC was held by the mayor of Peachtree City, Don Haddix, but because of the strong public opposition to any potential linkages to downtown Atlanta, the Peachtree City Council proposed that Fayette County withdraw from the ARC and join the group of counties to the south. Through some political maneuvering with the support of some of the mayors of the other municipalities in Fayette County, Mayor Haddix was booted from the committee and replaced by Mayor Steele (Nelms 2010). In addition to the general opposition to any form of public transportation, the opponents believe that the proposed one percent 10-year sales tax for regional transportation projects for the ten county area would mainly go to subsidize other jurisdictions with no benefit to Fayette County. Mayor Steele notes that while many of the projects are to the north of the County, three of the road widening projects proposed by the ARC would alleviate some of the bottlenecks that Fayette County citizens experience in their commute to Atlanta. Opponents to regional transportation planning process believe that it will ultimately lead to bus and rail transportation to the county. Steele counters that argument stating that the population density would not support such a system and that the citizens would be able to veto any proposal (Munford 2011).

Opposition to the extension of MARTA into the affluent counties surrounding Atlanta centers on the belief that MARTA will bring crime to the area. Proponents for the spread of public transportation charge that the fears are racially based. The same arguments being made in Fayetteville are the same ones heard in the affluent cities to the north of Atlanta in the 1980's and 90's. Now those affluent areas populations have expanded tremendously and become more culturally diverse with many new non-white minorities. The commute times to Atlanta became longer with frustrating congestion and delays. The air quality in the Metro Atlanta area became the worst in the nation. New political leadership was influenced by some of the new residents from the Northeast where public transportation was more common. Even before high gasoline prices and global warming fears, old attitudes began to change. Concerns based on racial or social differences became less important when the ability to get to work and air quality were the real threats to enjoying life in the suburbs (Firestone 2002).

Another major challenge according to Mayor Steele, one faced by most local governments, is the fiscal crisis caused by a down economy. Sales tax revenues and building permits and fees were lower in the past fiscal year due to less spending and construction. While the revenues have been decreasing, cost are rising it has become difficult to forecast. For the past three years, there has been a hiring freeze and as employees retire, they are not being replaced. No payment for annual leave, reduction in future salary increases, voluntary reduction in salaries on positions of department heads and above, and reduced work hours are other concessions that employees can expect to continue for some years to come. The increased costs for benefits will have to be fully paid by city employees. Benefits have been a big increase in costs for the city. The match for employee retirement plans was reduced for the 2011 budget. With these cuts, the budget for 2011 is balanced with only \$47,000 being required from the reserve fund. In all, the budget was trimmed by \$400,000. The city manager warns that these cuts may not be enough

and that the council may have to agree to a depleted reserve fund and as a last resort, an increase in property taxes that would add an additional \$25 to a house valued at \$175,000 (Robinson 2010).

The economic downturn and the budget cuts have hurt projects that target the revitalization of the historic downtown area. Some projects by the Downtown Development Authority and the Main Street Tourism Association will also be delayed or scaled back. There are not many new grants and most require matching funds. Projects for 2011 will concentrated on revitalization of existing programs such as looking for businesses to fill vacant buildings and to promote the concert series at the Amphitheater. The replenishment of the façade improvement fund will depend on the sale of another city owned property. The improvements to the downtown area are essential to promote one of the newest growth industries in Georgia of providing the settings for movies and television productions. Historic Senoia in Coweta County has had much success attracting movie and television series and commercial projects. The city has restored its downtown area to create a permanent nineteenth century downtown set (Robinson 2010).

Conclusion

Fayetteville has grown in lock step with much of Fayette County, with the growth happening within the past 20 years. The proximity to the Atlanta Airport has been one of the engines driving the growth with its rapid ascent to becoming one of the busiest transportation hubs. Commuters were once drawn to country living in the counties to the north of Atlanta, but the much of the countryside in those areas is indistinguishable from the Atlanta urban areas. If residents want a touch of country with their city, they have to look to the southwest to Coweta, Fayette and Douglas Counties. It is not Doraville, Sandy Springs, or Tucker anymore. Atlanta has grown so far out that even Carroll County on the Alabama line is promoting their rural lifestyle to potential Atlanta commuters.

Fayetteville has a long and heroic history, but now suffers from years of inadequate planning for the recent rapid growth. Now that the city leaders are using their long-term plan to guide the redevelopment of the historic and marginal areas, success should be assured with strong commitment of their citizenry. What Fayetteville needs most is better cooperation and coordination of the master plans of her sister cities Peachtree City, Tyrone and Brooks and all the other crossroad and whistle stop communities throughout the county. The County government needs to come up with a transportation plan that preserves open space and wooded areas. The county needs a modern plan that supports cluster residential development and has linkages with local downtown areas as well as major retail centers. Building four lane bypasses and widening country roads only contributes to the fragmentation of the countryside and sprawling subdivisions. If Fayette County does not provide a practical, economic, environmentally sound and democratic way to get to Atlanta, then Atlanta will surely come to Fayette County.

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