

Position Statement: Local Government and Community Study Committee Findings

January 29, 2019

In its continued efforts to help build a vision for a brighter future for the region, The Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, has accepted and endorsed the findings of its Local Government and Community Study Committee. The committee was formed to explore local government consolidation and assess the current trajectory for economic growth and opportunity in the Tallahassee-Leon County area. This effort has been a critical part of the Chamber's mission since the 2017 community leadership trip to Nashville, Tennessee where leaders from both business and government saw an example of the positive impacts possible with a unified community plan for growth.

There is currently great momentum and enthusiasm for the future of Tallahassee-Leon County, but in order to best capitalize on the progress of our community we must make bold plans. Now is the time to act. Deliberate actions must be taken in order to shore up opportunities while also neutralizing threats. This thinking was the driving force for the work of the committee and it greatly shaped their report.

The committee felt it was premature to take a position on consolidation, believing that the proper course was to focus on the underlying problems in the community and help create a process to address them. This approach resulted in a framework for how local governments can collaborate with the broader community to create a plan aimed at addressing our greatest needs and cementing our most impressive opportunities. The Chamber Board supports this framework and is prepared to advocate for the need for such planning with our local government officials.

The committee recommends and the Chamber Board agrees that the focal point of any community plan should be the bicentennial anniversary of the founding of Tallahassee and Leon County in 2024. With this in mind, the committee has made four key assessments that they recommend as top priorities for the community between now and the community bicentennial in 2024. They are as follows:

1. There is a clear need for increased and diversified private sector job growth.
2. There are "two Tallahassees" created and maintained by the forces of economic segregation.
3. There are specific reputational risks created by concerns such as crime and corruption that jeopardize the future success of the community.
4. There is a lack of a clear and distinguishable vision for growth that is widely accepted and believed by the community.

The Chamber Board believes that the path to prosperity can be found by tackling these challenges head on. The Board has carefully reviewed the work of the committee and is prepared to endorse the following recommendations to our local governments:

- Create a Community Leadership Council comprised of the City of Tallahassee Commission, Leon County Commission, and Leon County School Board to meet at least once per year. Regular meetings should occur between the respective chairs and administrators of each body as well.

- Convene a community-wide process to chart the future course. Priorities should be well established and widely accepted across the community. This should be conducted jointly by the three local governments.
- Develop a 2024 joint strategic plan involving the City of Tallahassee, Leon County, and Leon County Schools. Each organization should report status updates throughout the year at regularly scheduled public meetings.
- Embrace the power of the business community as a driver of change. Employ business owners and companies to lean in through strategic partnerships to increase the likelihood of future shared prosperity.

The Chamber Board of Directors realizes that local governments can not and should not tackle the community's challenges alone and is fully prepared to play a strong role in the effort to address the challenges of our current environment. The business community accepts equal responsibility in shaping our shared future and recognizes the strong need for collaboration. The Chamber Board would also recommend a strong and intentional effort to partner with local higher education institutions in the development of a community plan.

The Chamber Board of Directors recommends that the City of Tallahassee, Leon County, and Leon County Schools should work together with other key stakeholders to develop and create a community plan which addresses the critical issues identified in the committee's report, with a particular emphasis on the four key assessments outlined above. Such a plan should consider the immense opportunity to establish measurable milestones and to overcome areas of concern while building towards the bicentennial anniversary of our community in 2024.