

2004 Community Meeting Outcomes for FY 2005 Analysis

The Empowerment Zone had record attendance at its community meetings in 2004. The meetings were held on September 21 and September 28 and up to 300 people attended.

Strategy 1 – Agriculture: The farming and agribusiness community turned out in large numbers and showed strong support for the continuation and improvement of the Agricultural Improvement initiatives. They also made strong positive contributions to discussions of other issues and supported other issues through their votes.

Strategy 2 – Community Volunteers: This strategy received less than 5% of the votes cast. The strategy includes the revision of the current Empowerment Zone benchmarks and the creation of coordinated strategic plans for community growth. Participants also supported increased volunteerism in the community with a volunteer coordinator or similar system.

Strategy 3 – Education: Education results were somewhat ambiguous, with strong support for individual projects but weak support for education as a strategy. The explanation seems to lie in the very strong support for after-school programs (including the Boys and Girls Club project). Many people think of these programs as being part of Strategy 7 (Medical and Social Opportunities). The Empowerment Zone, however, has funded these programs as part of Strategy 3 (Education). Other areas in Education with strong support included Dropout Prevention, Adult Literacy and Continuing Education, Higher Education, and the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

Strategy 4 – Quality of Life (Tourism, Culture, Recreation, Business Incubation): There was strong support for recreational initiatives this year, perhaps from the recent closing of the theater in Cordele. Nearly 50 votes went to some type of recreational activity. Economic Development, particularly the Lake Dooly project, received a significant number of votes. Cultural activities, especially the Lilly School House and Gillespie Selden, received support. From comments at the two meetings, both Lilly School House and Gillespie Selden may need to do additional community outreach, particularly across racial boundaries, in order to be sure that the full community is aware of each facility's existence and benefits. Tourism promotion was mentioned both as an individual need and as an outcome of other types of project.

Strategy 5 – Quality of Life (Home, Work, Family): Affordable housing of various types received significant support, as did the creation of a Family Resource Center for Dooly County. The Hatley Fire Station project in Cordele received significant support. Habitat for Humanity and community child care facilities were also supported.

Strategy 6 – Government-Community Cooperation: This area received just over 5% of all votes cast. Votes supported downtown restoration projects (including renovation, condemnation, or demolition of vacant buildings and houses) and transportation, especially for the elderly and handicapped.

Strategy 7 – Medical and Social Opportunities: Votes emphasized the necessity of early childhood intervention to improve outcomes for children. Handicapped accessibility is very important to the community. The participants also supported reduction of community problems through prevention of specific activities. These included prevention of child abuse and domestic violence, prevention of HIV infection, and prevention of teen pregnancy and low birth weight babies.