

A new Destination

Now is an ideal time to restart plan to chart Augusta's future

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New life is being breathed into Destination 2020 - the visionary initiative focusing on issues to advance metro Augusta area's quality of life during the first 20 years of the new century. It's designed to make our region one of most desirable places to live and work in the South.

The program, sponsored by Leadership Augusta, got off to an encouraging start earlier in the decade, bringing together volunteer citizen activists from Augusta, North Augusta and Columbia County. Although the communitywide enthusiasm is still intact, for various reasons the initiative's organization and planning waned in recent years.

Now it's picking up steam again under the leadership of people such as Andy Crosson, director of the CSRA Regional Development Center. Recently, a new 2020 Board of Directors was formed and area governments alerted that the initiative is being revived. New strategies have been drawn up to grow the economy, and improve recreation and cultural attractions. The group seeks cooperation in getting the plans off the drawing board.

Some proposed projects are already under way, such as building a new main library in Augusta and an amphitheater in Evans. But the plan also calls for a North Augusta-Augusta-Columbia County community service network and referral service - "a public-private partnership that coordinates both assistance and volunteer opportunities for citizens and visitors."

Other recommendations include easing pupil transfers by agreeing on a common calendar for all area school systems, and status reports on economic development and quality-of-life projects in the three communities.

This seems like a particularly appropriate time to get Destination 2020 moving again. First, it's almost a new year, and that's always a good time to start fresh.

On a more practical level, Augusta's new mayor, Deke Copenhaver, has signalled that he wants to reach out and work with neighboring communities for the greater betterment of the CSRA. That's the kind of positive government attitude 2020 should welcome.

Finally, Crosson says the revived initiative will resist biting off more than it can chew, thus risking disappointment and letdown. Instead, it will focus on two or three definable and, hopefully, achievable missions in the coming year.

No vision, particularly one spanning a couple of decades, can be achieved all at once. It must be achieved modestly, patiently - one step at a time. This is a sound strategy for the revived 2020 initiative to follow. We're hoping that 2006 will be its most productive year yet.

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