

## 2020 effort begins again

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By **Preston Sparks** | *Columbia County Bureau Chief*

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An effort started years ago to bring Augusta, Columbia County and North Augusta together on quality of life issues is once again picking up steam.

That initiative, called Destination 2020, is being organized with the recent setup of a Destination 2020 board and contacts made with area governments to alert them that the 2020 effort is being revived, said Andy Crosson, the director of the CSRA Regional Development Center and a member of the Destination 2020 board.

"They are trying to get organized and get going," he said, adding that the recent move comes several months after a strategy document was compiled. "... Now they've sort of gotten back together and said, 'How do we get these strategies implemented?' Now they're trying to get an implantation plan."

That strategy booklet includes some things that are already occurring, such as building a new library and amphitheater in Evans. But it also includes strategies for such ideas as the creation of a Metro Augusta Community Service Network and Referral System, which the document states would be "a public-private partnership that coordinates both assistance and volunteer opportunities for citizens and visitors."

Also included in the report are recommendations for such things as a common calendar for all school systems in the area to make student transfers less troublesome; status reports on existing community plans; new beautification programs; inventories of vacant and dilapidated structures in the Augusta area to improve and market them for redevelopment; and the building or revitalization of a golf resort in the region.

Mr. Crosson said Destination 2020 was an idea started in 2000 that eventually led to a core group of volunteers looking at ways the three government entities could work toward such things as recreation, quality of life and economic development, with goals to be met by 2020.

Mr. Crosson said the idea is once again being kicked around and those with the initiative's board are planning to meet in February.

He said selected team leaders will report to the board at that time and alert them of two or three main items the group would like to pursue in the coming year.

"That's what they're getting back together now (for)," Mr. Crosson said. "... to say here's the one or two things in our strategies that we're going to focus on in this coming year to try to get done."

As part of the effort, grant money also could be sought.

At a recent Columbia County Commission committee meeting, Columbia County Administrator Steve Szablewski told board members the 2020 initiative was picking up steam again and that the idea could involve some future grant requests.

"It was just giving them a heads up that we're meeting with them again, and there may be the need to bring in some outside consultants to help carry some of this out," Mr. Szablewski said.

Mr. Crosson said that, depending on which grants might be pursued, some could require a county to be the applicant and could even require some matching funds.

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An all-volunteer Destination 2020 board will meet in February to determine the top goals it wishes to pursue concerning quality of life issues for Augusta, Columbia County and North Augusta.

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