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Originally published July 22, 2007

'Visioning' key to area growth

Conference addresses need for smart development

By Ferdie De Vega
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

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PONTE VEDRA BEACH - The Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce's conference Saturday in Ponte Vedra Beach included opportunities for members to discuss and learn more about regional challenges in economic development.

During the "Regional Overview" session, panelists discussed the following issues: infrastructure, work-force housing, education and work-force training, environmental assets and health care. The Saturday agenda also included a luncheon keynote address by new Florida A&M University President James Ammons, who called for a partnership between the school and business community.

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"I know how important it is for our municipalities to work together," Ammons said. "It is also important for institutions of learning to work regionally. I want to assure the Greater Tallahassee

Chamber of Commerce that FAMU will be a partner in your drive to promote a regional approach."

The conference included representatives from an eight-county region. Although Tallahassee is the center of the area, it may not be the place that always lands new developments, some participants said.

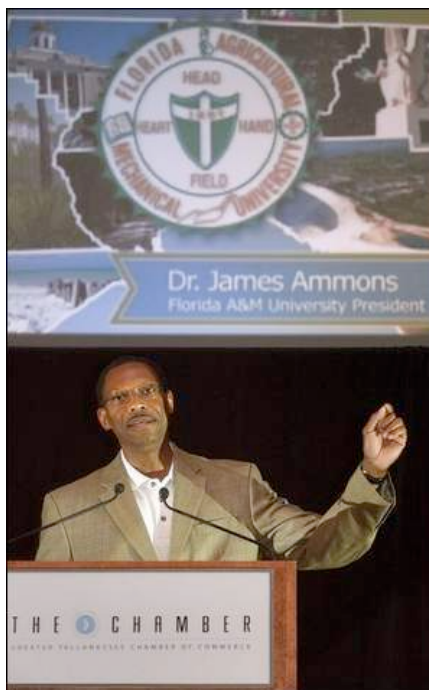
"If you want to know where growth will be in Tallahassee, I say, show me the infrastructure," Tom

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FAMU President James Ammons discusses his plan for leading the university Saturday July 21, 2007 during a luncheon at the 2007 Annual Chamber Community Conference at the Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. Area economic development leaders announced the creation of Our Region Tomorrow Inc., which will facilitate planning for future growth.

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Pelham, secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs, said.

Where roads are proximate to affordable land is where growth is likely tomorrow, he said.

"That means it will not come in Tallahassee," Pelham said. "First will be Gadsden, Wakulla and Jefferson counties in ever-widening circles of development as we have seen in Orlando, Tampa and Jacksonville."

Florida Home Builders Association President-elect Robert Parrish and Audubon of Florida's Director of Policy Eric Draper agreed that it is time to abandon Florida's concurrency laws and regulations as a way to promote more effective and efficient land-use planning.

Former Tallahassee chamber Chairman Henree Martin suggested looking at Leon County's 2010 comprehensive land-use plan as a start to "visioning" like Envision Utah.

Current land-use law and policy encourages sprawl, Parrish said. "It's going to get a lot worse before it gets better."

"I think the worst thing (Florida has) done is try to drive land use by traffic congestion, which we will never get rid of," Pelham said.

Bill Law, president of Tallahassee Community College and chairman of the Tallahassee-Leon County Economic Development Council, said the No. 1 college major in Florida is psychology.

"We need psychologists, but they perhaps will not help move the economy forward very quickly."

Bill Giudice, vice president and chief financial officer of Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, noted that one-third of those in Tallahassee Memorial Hospital's emergency room shouldn't be there because they should have received care elsewhere. Thirty to 40 percent of TMH's daily census of patients is from outside of Tallahassee, he said.

"When we're talking about economic programs, all these issues (education, infrastructure, health care, environmental protection and affordable housing) have to be in place," Law said. "We cannot convince companies to seriously consider relocating to our area without success in each."

Regarding a regional approach to health care, Max Martinez, executive director of the Gadsden County Community Health Council, said, "We can't afford to let this lie and revisit it next year."

The following topics were discussed in other breakout sessions Saturday:



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At left, Florida Home Builders Association President-Elect Robert Parrish discusses the regional overview of workforce housing at the Mega Breakout Session Saturday July 21, 2007 during the 2007 Annual Chamber Community Conference at the Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. About 400 economic development leaders from eight counties participated in the conference.

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David Miller, CEO of the Creative Class Group; Michael Pate, Tallahassee program director for the Knight Foundation and former *Democrat* publisher; and members of the Catalyst Team provided updates of the four projects of the Knight Creative Communities Initiative: Get Gaines Going, Greenovation, Jump Start Plan X and the Tallahassee Film Festival.

Officials from Workforce Plus, Florida State University's Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship and Florida's Great Northwest talked about the programs and services they offer for area businesses during "Tools for Businesses on the Go and on the Grow."

Representatives of Mad Dog Construction, Marpan Supply Co. and Notary Public Underwriters talked about their companies' involvement in various "green" initiatives and projects during "Renewable Energy: A Growing Sector."

Nolia Brandt, associate director of the Jim Moran Institute, led the discussion during the Access Tallahassee breakout session, "How Generations X, Y and Boomers Can Communicate."

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Contact reporter Ferdie De Vega at (850) 599-2321 or fmdevega@tallahassee.com.

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