

## **Fulton County's Governance: Looking at the Big Picture**

*By Fulton County Commission Chairman John H. Eaves*

There has been a great deal made of the study commission on Fulton County governance created earlier this year by House Resolution 351. The committee members have been selected, and a number of dedicated public officials have been charged with examining the operations and mission of our county.

While I am pleased that there is an interest in examining the ways we govern and serve the residents of Fulton County, I caution those who look at this study as a means of fixing what they perceive to be broken. Certainly we have challenges to meet, and are open to ideas on how to improve. However, I hope that the Study Committee will acknowledge the outstanding services that Fulton County currently provides while also making recommendations on continuing and expanding those services.

Just as Fulton County has responded over the years to the changing needs of our citizenry, we have also responded to the changing needs of our residents in the new cities by adjusting our services. An array of outstanding services is funded for the benefit of residents countywide. For our aging population, we have built nationally recognized senior centers. We operate the largest library system in Georgia, with 34 branches. Fulton County is also the leading public funding source for the arts, granting more than \$2 million to help our arts organizations leverage millions more. Likewise, Fulton is noted as the leading local government in Georgia supporting human services agencies, allocating over \$6 million in County funds to support qualified nonprofit service providers.

Fulton County is also a leader in fiscal responsibility and management. Only one other metro County has been able to match our millage rate reductions over the past 8 years, approaching a 25% cut in that period. We are a large urban county that began this year with \$100 million in reserves, and we are judiciously addressing the challenges before us.

Fulton County is the most populous county and the economic center of the Southeast. We are approaching a population of one million because people make a choice to live here. They make the decision to live here for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons is the availability of services upon which our citizens can rely.

While Fulton County's size and diversity may seem unwieldy to some, our record is quite clear on service, funding and fiscal responsibility. I welcome changes that will add efficiency and productivity because Fulton County citizens deserve the best in government and services. We have an opportunity over the next three and a half years to build bridges, and I pledge to be part of the solution and create strong collaborations and a stronger county, while serving all citizens. We are more productive and efficient together than we are divided, and I am certain that the future will shine brightly for Fulton County.