

partnership with Auburn University to build a new hotel and conference center at Gulf State Park. A management group that runs Auburn's hotel and conference center would likely operate the planned 350-room beachside facility.

Three lawsuits were filed challenging the development plan, though one was dismissed earlier this year. The two remaining cases have been consolidated and will be tried in Montgomery, though no trial date has been set.

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Valley Adopts Plan to Prepare For, Promote Growth

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Valley Times-News, The
Wayne Clark

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Joe Sumners of AU's Economic Development Institute is quoted extensively in this story.

VALLEY — At a meeting on Feb. 13, the Valley City Council approved a resolution establishing a three-tiered method of planning — comprehensive, for periods longer than five years into the future; strategic, for the period of from three to five years, and tactical, which is from the present time to three years in the future.

On Thursday evening, the director of Auburn University's Economic Development Institute spoke to city officials about a strategic plan that could be adopted. Dr. Joe Sumners has been working with the city for some time on this, and there's now a draft plan on the table for the council's consideration.

In introducing Dr. Sumners to a crowd that included members of the city council and Valley residents, Valley Mayor Arnold Leak said that the city is very much in need of such organized planning, given that a major industry could be locating in the Greater Valley Area.

"I feel good about the Kia plant," he said. "If it comes, there will be a lot of changes here, and this planning process we're going through will be important for that."

According to published reports, the Kia Motor Corporation is looking at a site near West Point. It's only about five miles away from the cities of Valley and Lanett. Wherever it goes, this auto assembly plant will bring an estimated 2,000 jobs with it and will generate a demand for approximately 6,000 jobs for its parts suppliers.

Dr. Sumners said he was most pleased to be speaking in Valley and commended city officials and volunteers on the good work they'd done in planning for the future. This is something that can be seen, he said, in Valley's having been selected as an Alabama Community of Excellence (ACE). Only a handful of moderate-sized Alabama towns have been selected for this prestigious program.

He described strategic planning as a long-term, future-oriented process of assessment, goal setting and decision making that maps an explicit path between the present and a vision for the future. It relies on careful consideration of a community's resources, the environment it's in, and leads to priority-based resource allocation.

The important questions are: (1) where are we now? (2) where do we want to go? and (3) how do we get there?

Dr. Sumner engaged the audience with what he termed a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). He asked people to talk about what they liked about Valley. He got such answers as warm, loving people, the small town way of life, an appreciation for local history, the Chattahoochee River, ample recreation opportunities, good transportation (proximity to I-85) and so on.

He then asked them what they'd change if they could. To this, he got such answers as better public transportation, a more diversified industrial base, more career opportunities to keep young people here, better entertainment venues (such as a movie theater), etc.