Mayors to launch new organization to promote growth planning

By Rudolph Bell
Staff Writer

The mayors of Atlanta, Charlotte and Greenville concluded a two-day brainstorming session in Greenville on Wednesday by agreeing to help launch a new organization to promote cooperation in planning, infrastructure and economic development along the Interstate 85 corridor.

Mayors Shirley Franklin of Atlanta, Pat McCrory of Charlotte and Knox White of Greenville and others who attended the Mayors' Megaregion Meeting also tentatively agreed on the name of the proposed organization: the Piedmont Alliance for Quality Growth.

Attendees agreed to meet again in January.

They included Jennie Stultz, mayor of Gastonia, N.C.; Robert Reichert, mayor of Macon, Ga.; and Neal Peirce, an author and columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group. Also taking part were city and regional planners, university professors and corporate executives along the I-85 corridor from Charlotte to Atlanta.

On Tuesday, attendees talked about the prospects of cooperation on such issues as water supply, transportation and energy. On Wednesday, they discussed how to structure the proposed organization and what its mission and name should be.

McCrory said he sees the organization as an alliance to build infrastructure — water plants, airports, roads — and suggested looking to the Emerging Issues Forum established by former North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt as a model.

Franklin said she would raise $10,000 needed to pay for the next meeting.

"Without this kind of dialogue and collaboration, our region cannot expect to prosper," Franklin said.

Attendees talked about how many people should be on the organization's board and whether it should include governors or university presidents and what kind of "branding" would engage "Joe Six-pack."

Discussions were led by professors Harry West and Catherine Ross of Georgia Tech's Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development.

Ross is author of the newly released book "Megaregions: Planning for Global Competitiveness."