

**PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release:**

Tuesday, August 19, 2025

**Council for Quality Growth Hosts 500+ at 5<sup>th</sup> Annual INTERSECTION Quality Development Conference**

*Full Recording of 19+ Speakers and 8 Unique Content Sessions Now Available*

ATLANTA, GA – On August 15, 2025, the [Council for Quality Growth](#) hosted more than 500 attendees at the Sandy Springs Performing Arts Theater in City Springs for its 5<sup>th</sup> annual [The INTERSECTION Quality Development Conference](#). This event is product of the [Quality Growth Institute](#), the education arm of the Council. The INTERSECTION convened public policy and private business leaders from across the region to discuss critical issues facing metro Atlanta. The 2025 theme was “Infrastructure and Investment,” which continued conversations around infrastructure presented last year, but with a new focus on the challenging landscape for funding it at the local, state, and national levels. Doug Hooker, former Executive Director of the Atlanta Regional Commission, served master of ceremonies.

Attendees were Council for Quality Growth members and businesses representing various sectors of development, including real estate, infrastructure, economic development, government, and community organizations. Over 100 elected officials from the region’s 86 local governments were in the crowd at City Springs. The Council works at *the intersection* of public policy and private investment, and The INTERSECTION Conference brings these two sides together to discuss common challenges and uncover new solutions. In the effort to advance the mission of the Council for Quality Growth and the Quality Growth Institute, this event provides an educational platform for private business and local governments to learn from one another, share ideas, and foster strategic partnerships that move our region forward.

George Riccardo, National Practice Consultant for HNTB and transportation policy expert on Capitol Hill, delivered the opening keynote on Friday. As a former policy advisor for the U.S. Department of Transportation, Riccardo brought a national perspective on federal infrastructure funding under the new administration to the conference. He discussed the new faces and new policy direction taking shape at the federal level for transportation funding under the President’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act, Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations, and Rescissions Package. Riccardo’s message for the local audience is to anticipate and adapt, get to the table before decisions are made, and in the famous words of Gretzky, “skate where the puck is going, not where it has been.”

Part I of The INTERSECTION continued to explore the challenges with funding infrastructure locally. Former U.S. Representatives Carolyn Bourdeaux, Georgia’s 7<sup>th</sup> District, and Tom Graves, Georgia’s 14<sup>th</sup> District, sat down for a congressional conversation, moderated by Greg Bluestein, Chief Political Reporter of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, offering their insider’s look at what the changing federal landscape means for the state of Georgia. A panel of Mayors, including Mayor Beverly Burks from Clarkston, Mayor Rusty Paul from Sandy Springs, and Mayor Vince Williams from Union City convened to share the municipal perspective on the barrier preventing them from moving projects forward and how the funding challenges shake out for cities as well. Dean Anason, Editor-in-Chief for the Atlanta Business Chronicle, moderated the Mayors’ conversation. The “Facing the Challenges” portion of the day concluded with a brief presentation from the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Chief Operating Officer, Mike Alexander, who gave insight into what funding mechanisms are available to local governments in Georgia today, including SPLOST and TSPLOST and trends in voter approvals.

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Jared Fleisher, President of Bedrock Real Estate in Detroit, delivered the 2<sup>nd</sup> keynote beginning Part II of the program, “Finding the Solutions.” Fleisher joined The INTERSECTION from Detroit, where he has led the policy and government affairs for Dan Gilbert’s portfolio of businesses, which includes Rocket Mortgage, Bedrock, and the Cleveland Cavaliers. Fleisher shared his experience working with the Michigan state legislature to enable more funding resources to local governments by incentivizing brownfield redevelopment. His message to the Atlanta-based audience was that “leveraging the local option sales tax is best possible mechanism for funding infrastructure.” Michigan has a set sales tax of 6% statewide, and the local option isn’t even a possible funding source. Urging the audience to not blame the mechanism, he said “you wouldn’t go to a restaurant, get a bad piece of fish, and blame the credit card you used to pay for it.” Compared to alternatives, a penny sales taxes has no distortive impact on consumer behavior, but property taxes change where people can afford to live and puts your community at a competitive disadvantage, Fleisher pressed. “Nobody cares about a penny.”

Part II continued with presentations from Robert Criste, Infrastructure Partner at Sustainability Partners, Carolyn Kramer Simons, Senior Director, State Funding Policy, American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), and a panel featuring local County Chairwoman from Cobb, Gwinnett, and Henry. Criste shared his unique model to funding infrastructure as a service, one that lifts the burden of debt from local government and continually invests in the maintenance and upkeep of the infrastructure. Sustainability Partners is working on a transformational shift in mindset across that infrastructure can be offered as a service, rather than something that must be owned and maintained by the public entity. Carolyn Simons joined the conference from Washington, D.C. to share her ARTBA’s data on local ballot measures to advance transportation and transit funding across the U.S. last year. As Georgia did not share the same rate of success on TSPLOST in 2024, Simons gave her insight into what worked and what didn’t. In conclusion of the day, former Gwinnett Chair Charlotte Nash moderated a conversation with Chairwoman Lisa Cupid from Cobb, Chairwoman Carlotta Harrell from Henry, and Chairwoman Nicole Love Hendrickson from Gwinnett. Henry County passed its first ever TSPLOST in 2021 and Cobb and Gwinnett Counties are looking into how to fund a growing need for transit after the 2024 elected results for TSPLOST. The panel backed Fleisher’s keynote in sales tax being the most effective method for funding these long-term infrastructure needs, and the County Chairs discussed future approaches to ensuring both continued and new successes at the ballot box.

Sally Riker, Immediate Past Chair of the Council for Quality Growth and VP of Strategy and Growth at Atlas, and Michael Hightower, Managing Partner of The Collaborative Firm, and Michael E. Paris, President & CEO of the Council for Quality Growth, also delivered remarks. Mayor Rusty Paul offered a welcome from the City of Sandy Springs to kick off the day.

The 2-part agenda for The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual INTERSECTION included 19 speakers and 8 unique content sessions on these highly relevant infrastructure and investment topics. “This is where the Council for Quality Growth works the best...at the *intersection* of the problems and the solutions,” said Sally Riker, 2024 Chair, during her opening remarks. “We have to come together to talk about the problems we’re facing. If we can’t name them in plain sight, we can’t solve them.”

The INTERSECTION Conference attracts a wide array of attendees representing various sectors, including real estate, infrastructure, economic development, government, and community organizations. The event aims to further fulfill the mission of the Council for Quality Growth, promoting balanced and responsible growth by advocating for its members, educating an industry of leaders on these critical issues, sharing information, and fostering strategic partnerships.

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The INTERSECTION Conference is a product the [Quality Growth Institute](#), the education arm of the Council for Quality Growth and an established 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the state of Georgia. Through the Quality Growth Institute, conference attendees are eligible for credit hours towards occupational licensing, including Continuing Education (CE) real estate credit hours approved by the Georgia Real Estate Commission, Certification Maintenance (CM) AICP planning credit hours approved by the Georgia Planning Association, and Professional Development Hour (PDH) engineering credits.

A full recording of the event is available now at [www.CouncilforQualityGrowth.org/INTERSECTION](http://www.CouncilforQualityGrowth.org/INTERSECTION).

**About The INTERSECTION Quality Development Conference:**

The INTERSECTION is the Council for Quality Growth's Quality Development Conference that annually convenes the public and private sectors for an in-depth discussion of critical issues to our region and how we compare to national trends. The INTERSECTION was developed as a means of education and information for our members, partners, and other industry professionals, with a sharp focus on the most relevant trends and issues affecting the growth and development industry from year to year. The INTERSECTION Conference is a product the Quality Growth Institute, the education arm of the Council for Quality Growth and an established 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the state of Georgia. <https://www.councilforqualitygrowth.org/INTERSECTION>

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**About the Council for Quality Growth:**

The Council for Quality Growth is a trade organization that works to ensure continued growth and economic success for generations to come by providing advocacy, information, and education to its members. For 40 years, the Council has been committed to the mission of promoting balanced and responsible growth and is proactively involved in the formulation of policy and legislation critical to the growth and development industry. The Council addresses, head-on, strategic economic planning, infrastructure needs, and tough quality-of-life issues throughout the metro Atlanta region and state. <http://www.councilforqualitygrowth.org>

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