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Gwinnett expands business tax incentives

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Efforts to bring new businesses to Gwinnett County got easier Tuesday with changes to the county's 2006 economic development ordinance.

The County Commission amended the law to align its goals with those of the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce-led Partnership Gwinnett initiative and to make it easier for companies to qualify for incentives — particularly those seeking to locate in areas needing redevelopment.

The 2006 law required companies to provide a \$500,000 net economic benefit to the county over 20 years. The new law lowers that to \$100,000 for companies relocating to one of the county's three community improvement districts or any future tax allocation districts.

Companies seeking to locate elsewhere in the county will be required to meet two of three standards contained in the new law — provide at least 25 new jobs, pay an average salary at least 1.25 times the county average for that industry, or provide a net economic benefit of at least \$250,000.

Incentives offered by the county include tax abatements, reduced development fees and accelerated zoning review.

"We now have armed ourselves with an actual tool," said Nick Masino, vice president of economic development for the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber does most of the economic development legwork in the county. The county's economic development office primarily evaluates leads brought by the state and the chamber to determine whether they qualify for incentives.

The original law was developed before the chamber launched its Partnership Gwinnett effort to attract 65,000 high-paying jobs in the next five years. Planners found some companies that would have been good fits for the community ended up being disqualified.

For instance, Masino said the county wasn't able to help a company that wanted to bring more than 200 jobs paying nearly \$70,000 each to the Jimmy Carter Boulevard area because it was not planning a

