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Fourth improvement district in the works

By Jamie Ward
Staff Writer

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LILBURN - The wheels have been set in motion to form a fourth Gwinnett County Community Improvement District.

Aptly enough, once those wheels are spinning, the potential CID would like to improve traffic in its corridor.

"We've had a tremendous outpouring of support so far," said Norman Nash, who in addition to leading the effort for a CID also heads up the city's downtown development authority. "Everyone seems interested."

The corridor the CID would eventually serve stretches along U.S. Highway 29 "from city limit to city limit," Nash said. That's more or less Ronald Reagan Parkway to Harmony Grove Road with pockets of Pleasant Hill Road, Indian Trail Road and Killian Hill Road included as well.

Nash acknowledged the fact that initially the CID might not contain each and every parcel of property in that stretch, but he said the goal in time would be to get everybody in that area to join. He estimated that to be as many as 1,000 businesses and property owners but acknowledged the boundaries haven't been determined yet.

He's also realistic about the amount of work that lies ahead, especially when it means getting enough property owners to agree to self-imposed taxation in the midst of a tough recession.

"We'll go door to door, parcel to parcel like a salesman would," Nash said. "We have to sell the idea."

So far, Nash said, 14 individuals with an interest in the proposed area are trying to get the CID started. He said they've already formed a nonprofit arm called the "Lilburn Community Partnership" and have their first \$300,000 in seed money, which they'll use to hire a director and obtain some office space. Half of that seed money came from Lilburn's Downtown Development Authority and the other half came from a loan, which the 14 interested parties would personally guarantee until initial taxes could be collected.

According to Ed O'Connor, who is one of the 14, forming the CID is a way to ensure the area doesn't become blighted or the victim of increased crime.

"It will allow us to not fall behind and deteriorate," O'Connor said of the need for being proactive. "It should help us to give a sense of place to what is one of Gwinnett's oldest commercial corridors."

Both Nash and O'Connor said the idea to form a CID largely stems from the positive work that's already been accomplished by the Gwinnett Village CID. Its director Chuck Warbington said he welcomes the idea of another district committed to community revitalization.

"I don't see it as competition and actually think it complements what we are doing," Warbington said. "It allows folks to bring focus to an area. In this case with us and Gwinnett Place, it would be like filling in a gap."

The Gwinnett Place and Evermore CIDs' leadership shared Warbington's view.

"It would give us another strategic partner in the effort to help another area of Gwinnett revitalize," said Gwinnett Place's Director Joe Allen.

"I think it's good that they are looking into the idea," Evermore Director Brett Harrell said. "Strength in numbers."

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