

## OUR VIEW: Gwinnett Place Mall area still vital to county

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By .

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In some ways it's hard to believe it's been 30 years since Gwinnett Place Mall opened for business. In others, it's far too clear.

Growth and changes in the county have altered the literal and figurative landscape of the Gwinnett Place area, and the opening of the Mall of Georgia in Buford shifted shopping habits. Despite those changes, the Duluth-based mall remains an important part of the county's economy and interest in its revitalization was evident by the large group — a standing-room-only crowd of more than 200 — that attended a breakfast discussion about the area hosted by Partnership Gwinnett on Friday.

The major lure of the breakfast was a chance to hear from the new owner of Gwinnett Place Mall. Steve Maskin, CEO of Moonbeam Capital Investments, came from New York City to talk about plans for the mall, which Moonbeam acquired in October.

He said deals have been reached to fill 25,000 square feet of Gwinnett Place, and that the company has been in talks with national retailers. He also said Moonbeam is being very selective, with an eye toward the future versus a quick fix.

That's good news for people who care about the area. But Maskin was also clear that the mall has to progress with the times, describing Gwinnett Place as a diamond in the rough.

"It's ready to be developed to match the 21st century," he said. "The big box concept is dying out. It's no longer the mall concept that is going to be carried into the future. It's the mixed-use concept."

Maskin said he was heartened by the interest in the mall and the area, and words from Gwinnett County Commissioner Jace Brooks should bolster that feeling. Said Brooks: "It's absolutely key and critical to the health of the entire county. ... We'll move mountains, if necessary, to make sure the Gwinnett Place area is successful."

Those are strong words. Strong actions by Moonbeam and the county are needed as well to ensure the future of Gwinnett Place Mall and the area that surrounds it.

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