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Gwinnett Place district faces sweeping changes, studies new master plan (SLIDESHOW)

Sep 16, 2015, 3:27pm EDT



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Gwinnett Place was once a healthy suburban mall, a spark for dozens of new shopping centers filled with the biggest names in American retail.

Today, the more than 1-million-square-foot mall and surrounding retail district are in the midst of sweeping changes that could include the demolition of long vacant retail buildings and a new emphasis on developing apartments linked to walking and biking trails and parks.

"We want to stem the retail decline," said [Leo Wiener](#), chairman of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District and new president of retail for the Atlanta real estate services firm Ackerman & Co.

"We need more multifamily development," he added.

In the mid-2000s, as Gwinnett Place began to lose retail anchors, some developers floated the idea of adding residential towers to the district. Then the worst real estate downturn the region has faced in more than 20 years snuffed out any lingering ambitions to bring more mixed-use development to the Gwinnett Place district.

Even so, district leaders continued to study ideas that could help the area adapt as retailers moved out of malls to more urban, street-level concepts, and more suburban companies relocated intown.

The highest-profile example is NCR Corp., which is moving its headquarters from the Gwinnett Place area along Interstate 85 at Pleasant Hill Road. NCR is relocating to

Technology Square, a cluster of corporate research and development centers and apartments taking shape around Georgia Tech's Midtown campus.

Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, knows the mall and surrounding areas face challenges, but he also sees opportunity.

For more than a year, Allen and other Gwinnett leaders have worked with planners and consultants on a series of ideas to reimagine the district as a "multi-modal green corridor." The master plan is supported with funding from Atlanta Regional Commission and the National Association of Retailers.

The work recently culminated in several requests for proposals seeking firms to explore ideas including the feasibility of greater connectivity from nearby McDaniel Farm Park to the Gwinnett Place area; streetscape enhancements along Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard; improvements along Mall Boulevard and Gwinnett Place Drive; and intersection improvements at Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard.

The proposals could transform parts of Pleasant Hill, Steve Reynolds and Satellite boulevards. While no one would confuse Gwinnett Place with intown Atlanta, the plans to reshape the struggling retail district could draw inspiration from the Atlanta Beltline, a 22-mile loop of abandoned railways around the city being converted into trails and parks lined with new apartments and townhomes.

Douglas Sams covers Commercial Real Estate