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# County may boost Gwinnett Place redevelopment

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By [David Wickert](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Gwinnett County may soon take steps to transform a sprawling suburban business district into a densely packed development of high-rises.

The county Board of Commissioners is considering a plan to create a **new zoning district** that would permit buildings up to 25 stories on property near the Gwinnett Place Mall – taller than any existing buildings in Georgia’s second-largest county. It’s one of several steps Gwinnett may take to spur redevelopment around a mall that has fallen on hard times.



Gwinnett Place Mall in Duluth has fallen on hard times. But the county and a local community improvement district want to ... [Read More](#)

Advocates say redeveloping the Gwinnett Place area along Pleasant Hill Road in Duluth won’t be easy. But after years of planning, 2016 could be a turning point in reviving what once was Gwinnett’s premier commercial district.

“We still see this as our central business district,” said County Commissioner Jace Brooks, who represents the area.

“We have significant plans.”

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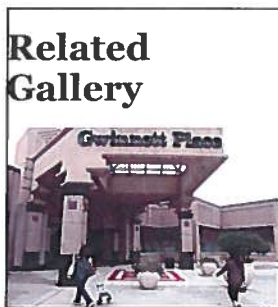
Gwinnett Place Mall opened in 1984 and became the heart of a thriving commercial center. But, like **many malls** nationwide, it has languished in recent years.

- **Gwinnett Place overlay district**

Newer malls and open-air shopping centers lured away customers. The Great Recession also took a toll.

One measure of Gwinnett Place's decline: County records show the mall sold for \$68.1 million in 2007. Its current owner – Moonbeam Capital Investments – bought it for \$13.5 million in 2013.

Some nearby shopping centers also suffered as Gwinnett Place lost its shine. In 2005, commercial property owners formed the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District to spruce up the area and lure back customers.



**Flashback Fotos:**  
Gwinnett Place through the years

The district has transformed streets with new trees and sidewalks. Its crews removed 38 tons of trash last year. And the county built a diverging-diamond interchange at I-85 at Pleasant Hill to reduce traffic congestion.

Still, the area remains a mishmash of shopping centers surrounded by vast parking lots, some of them largely empty.

Those involved with the Community Improvement District want to transform it into a mix of retail, office and residential developments linked by trails, parks and pedestrian-friendly boulevards.

The intersection of Satellite Boulevard and Pleasant Hill would become a large, park-like traffic circle. A trail and pedestrian bridge would connect the area to nearby McDaniel Farm Park.

County involvement would be crucial, and Gwinnett may be poised to pitch in. Commissioners are considering a

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redevelopment overlay district bounded by Pleasant Hill Road to the east, I-85 to the south, Steve Reynolds Boulevard to the west and Satellite Boulevard to the north.

The district would allow buildings up to 25 stories if developers included amenities like multi-use paths and pedestrian boulevards.

Though modest compared to some of the skyscraping business districts that dot metro Atlanta, it would be a big change for Gwinnett. Currently, the county's tallest building is the nearby 17-story Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta hotel.

County officials are soliciting feedback on the proposal, and the details could change. But Brooks hopes the commission will approve it in March or April.

One property that could benefit is the 32-acre Mall Corners shopping center. Leo Wiener, a principal in the company that owns it, said the company has done preliminary planning for a possible redevelopment, though he declined to discuss details.

Weiner called the zoning district "a great first step for this area."

Other public improvements could be in the works.

Brooks said Gwinnett Place could benefit from this year's proposed renewal of a special local option sales tax for construction projects. Among the projects that could get funding are street improvements and the connection to McDaniel Farm Park.

Meanwhile, Moonbeam Capital Investments plans a retail, office and residential development at the mall in 2017, according to its website. A company spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

It could take years for other development to take off.

"If this was easy, it would have already been done," said Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place CID.

“Redevelopment is more expensive. It takes a while,” he said.  
“It’s easier to go and cut down a few trees than it is to retrofit,  
redevelop and renew a 30-year-old shopping center.”

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