

## CHAPTER 5: STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In recent years there has been a paradigm shift in the way parking planning is viewed. Some of the old paradigms have been replaced by new concepts that consider the negative consequences of existing parking regulations. It recognizes that oversupply is as harmful as undersupply. The new paradigm strives to provide an optimal parking supply that balances the other needs of the area. The table in **Figure 5-1** compares the new and old paradigms.

The current parking problems of the GPCID can be attributed to parking regulations adhering to the old paradigm. To help correct these problems solutions from the new paradigm should be explored. Although many of the parking management techniques examined in Chapter 4 are not applicable to the GPCID area because it is not a central city business district. If land use changes and high density mixed use redevelopment is desired, parking approaches must also be re-aligned to be ready for the changes in land use. This section details the parking management techniques that are applicable within the area and those that should be pursued.



Public parking deck serving neighboring businesses (**ABOVE**). Well-designed parking structure lined with retail to enliven the street (**LEFT**).

**Parking Regulations**

The GPCID area suffers from a glut of surface parking directly resulting from historic excessive minimum requirements. These minimums were reduced considerably in 2005 (from 5 spaces to 2 spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. of retail) and maximums were also put into place. Currently Gwinnett County requires a minimum of 1 space per 500 square feet for Office/Professional and Commercial/Retail development and 2 spaces per dwelling unit for Medium Density Residential. These new regulations should help reduce excessive parking in the area. The general consensus of area businesses owners and stakeholders is that the new regulations are sufficient to serve new development and the older minimums were well above what was needed. This is clearly evident today by the large percentage of unused spaces in the area, even at peak times.

The County is currently looking at another draft update of its parking regulations. A recent draft shows no changes to the minimums or maximums required for the land uses in the GPCID. Since little development has occurred in the area since the end of 2005,

the positive benefits of the reductions have yet to be visible. As redevelopment occurs the new regulations should be examined to see if they are satisfactory in reducing excess parking. If they are not effective, additional changes to the Zoning Resolution may be warranted.

Several changes are recommended to the existing county standards. These include 1) allowing on-street parking to satisfy a portion of the off-street parking requirements for a site; 2) providing density bonuses for utilizing structured parking; and 3) allowing developers to pay fees in lieu of providing off-street parking on their properties in areas within a pedestrian shed where a public parking structure is being developed.

Density bonuses for structured parking can help provide an incentive for development to provide parking in a structured parking deck by permitting the construction of more revenue producing space. Density bonuses should permit a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to exceed 1.5, which is the density likely to be needed

**Figure 5-1 Comparison of Old and New Parking Paradigms**

Old Parking Paradigm	New Parking Paradigm
Parking management is a last resort, to be applied only if there is a problem with insufficient supply.	Parking management should be proactive and widely applied to prevent future parking problems.
The only parking problem is inadequate supply.	Parking problems can include oversupply as well as undersupply. They can also include the inefficient use or mismanagement of existing spaces.
Parking should be available on a first-come basis.	Parking should be regulated to favor higher priority uses and encourage its most efficient use.
Parking regulations should be rigid without exception or variation.	Parking regulations should be flexible and adaptable to provide the best solution for each situation.
Parking should always be free.	Where feasible the true cost of parking should be passed on to the direct consumer to limit parking demand.
Solutions should only be applied if they are proven and widely accepted.	Innovative solutions should be encouraged and tested.

for structured parking to make economic sense. Both of these changes to the ordinance are outlined in the draft CID-RAD district that the Gwinnett Place CID has proposed to Gwinnett County for use in the Gwinnett Place area.

### **On-Street Parking**

On-street parking should be encouraged and pursued on secondary streets within the GPCID. These are shown on **Figure 4-8**. On-street parking can help create the vibrant urban atmosphere desired in the CID. On-street parking provides a buffer of cars between pedestrians and roadways making sidewalks and outdoor dining more appealing.

On-street parking also provides convenient access to storefronts and restaurants. To allocate this scarce resource most effectively it should be reserved for short-term parkers. In addition to signage indicating a time limit, parking meters should be installed to encourage adherence. Parking meters for these spots will create revenue to help cover the costs associated with installation, maintenance and enforcement. Any additional revenues can be used for other public improvements in the area.

Modern alternatives to traditional parking meters should be explored. These include new computerized kiosks that signal violators. They can provide better enforcement with less oversight. The full range of parking meter technology should be explored and weighed with its goals, likely outcomes and costs.

New streetscapes in the area should incorporate on-street parking in a manner that separates it from travel lanes and does not remove capacity on local roadways. The use of ‘bulbouts,’ extended sections of sidewalks at intersections, can help delineate parking from travel ways, mediating the impact on

traffic flow. Additionally, approval of a Tax Allocation District (TAD) for the GPCID would create a funding source that could potentially be used to finance new streetscapes that are more supportive of the urban mixed-use environment desired. These streetscapes would include wide sidewalks, on-street parking, landscaping and street trees.

On-street parking spaces in close proximity (700 ft.) to businesses should be permitted to count towards off-street parking requirements. Doing this would help in further reducing the number of spaces needed in off-street parking facilities. Currently this is not allowed under existing county regulations and these should be amended to permit such reductions in the GPCID area.

### **Structured Public Parking Facility**

Structured parking is a necessary component for the desired future redevelopment in the area. It should be treated as public infrastructure needed for successful redevelopment and financed in this manner. If left to private development additional parking structures will eventually be built, but they will likely not be in the most central location or made available to the users of surrounding businesses or developments. Through TAD and other public funding sources the County and CID will have a direct influence on the location of the structure and its accessibility to the general public.

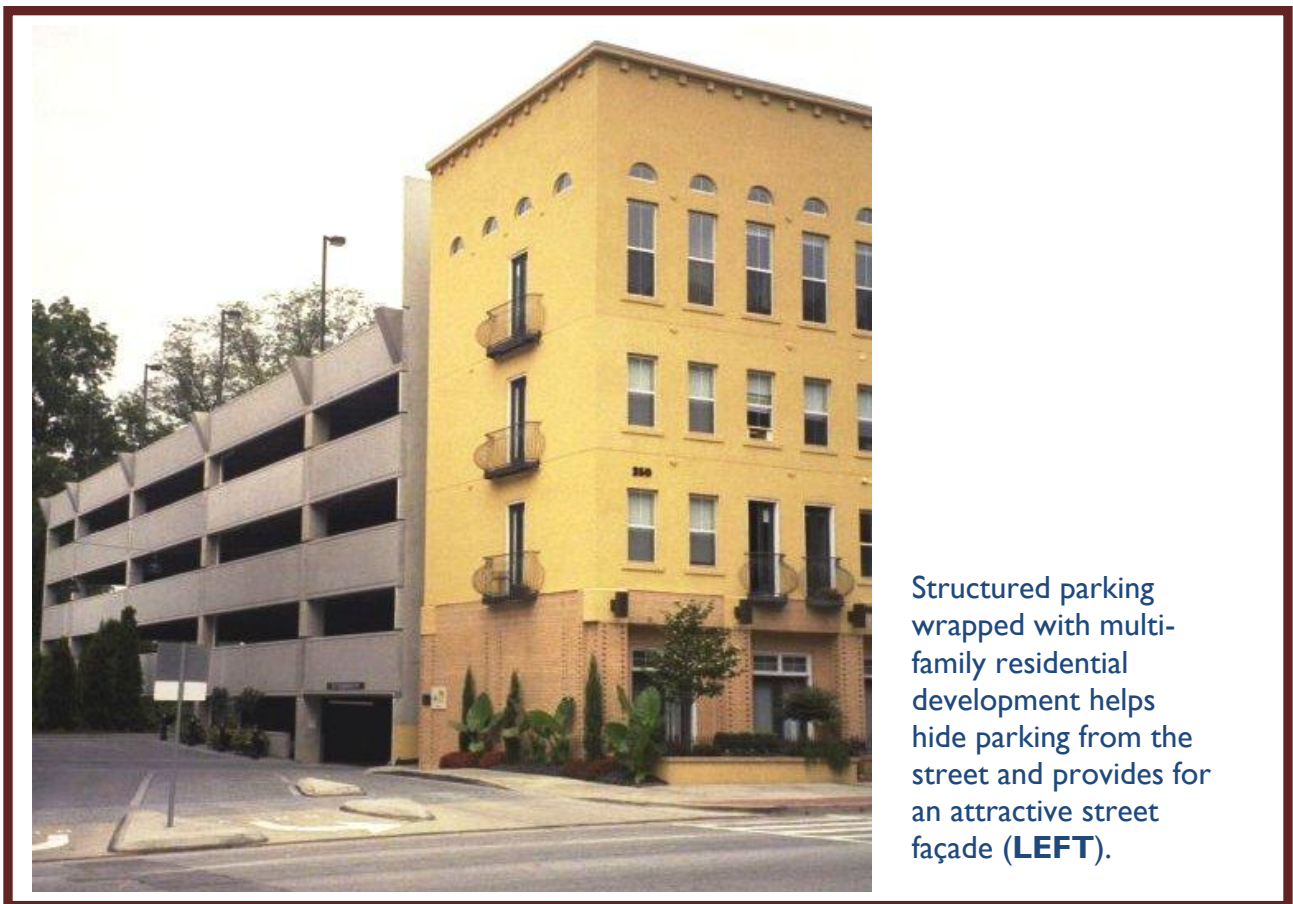
Two mechanisms have been used frequently to fund public parking facilities, Fee-in-Lieu programs and Tax Allocation Districts (TADS). Fee-in-Lieu programs have been used in at least 20 municipalities around the country, primarily in California. TADS have been used in Georgia to successfully develop parking structures as a component of mixed-use developments. Major disadvantages of the fees-in-lieu programs include timing

problems and requiring the ‘leap-of-faith’ that development will occur in a timely fashion to pay off debt incurred by construction. These programs work best where rapid growth is taking place or is expected in a compact area. Due to the current lack of redevelopment in the area these types of programs are not recommended for the GPCID.

TADS are the most appropriate vehicle for funding a parking structure since through an effective public-private partnership the location and accessibility of the facility can be influenced. Through this mechanism the deck can be located in a central area and required to provide access to neighboring developments. In addition this will permit the parking structure and accompanying development to occur simultaneously; ensuring visitors will be able to utilize the parking deck on opening day.

A major mixed-use development with parking funded through this mechanism also has the potential to serve as a catalyst for further development in the area. Agreements should be established to permit all or a portion of parking for new surrounding developments to be included in the parking structure. This will provide an incentive for future redevelopment in the area as it will free up more of project sites for revenue-producing space.

It is important to note that while TAD’s can be a powerful tool for improving an area they can also present hidden costs for a community and should be considered carefully. When public infrastructure is created through a TAD the maintenance costs associated with it can present a drag on municipal budgets. Additional revenue cannot be used to pay for upkeep of the parking facility until the debt occurred during construction is fully paid.





New streetscapes, parking structures and other public improvements could prove costly to maintain without an additional funding source. It is important to consider the annual costs associated with infrastructure maintenance and whether the municipality is financially healthy enough to handle this, until additional tax revenue can be collected from the area.

Structured parking depending on how it is designed can be either an asset or present problems for an area. It is important that structured parking within the GPCID adheres to the following urban design characteristics to promote a vibrant mixed-use pedestrian friendly environment.

- It should be centrally located to serve the greatest number of uses.
- Blank walls along street frontages should be prohibited.
- The parking structure should be lined with street-level retail to enliven the street.
- Large structures should provide mid-block cut-throughs for convenient pedestrian movement.
- Construction materials should be identical to surrounding buildings to blend with the area.
- Parking entrances should be located on side streets and not cut through the main shopping street façade.

While the location of structured parking in the GPCID will depend greatly on future development plans there are logical locations that are ideal. These are shown on **Figure 3-3 Proposed Gwinnett Place TAD Projects**, as redevelopment areas 1 and 3. The mall and proposed Village at Gwinnett Place area offer the most advantages due to their central

location. The mall has always been the heart of the area and is the most logical place for a true center as the area redevelops. Due to single ownership the mall parcel has the ability to undergo significant redevelopment without parcel consolidation which can provide an obstacle in many situations. The vast amount of surface parking provides many potential sites for redevelopment. The redevelopment of outlying parking areas that front Ring Road with buildings framing the street would contribute significantly to creating an urban sense-of-place in the area.

The village area due to its existing street grid network, small blocks and parcel configuration has the ability to be easily redeveloped into a mixed-use area at a pedestrian-friendly scale. It is an ideal place for a structured parking deck as this will free up surrounding land area for buildings.

The mall and the village area should be the top priority for redevelopment and the construction of a structured parking deck. This is the most feasible location for town center type development. The redevelopment of this area first will likely have the greatest impact on the area as a whole. It will likely serve as a catalyst and an example for surrounding development that will follow.

When locating structured parking it is vital to consider the comfortable walking distances of 1,000 feet shown on **Figure 3-8. Pedestrian Walking Sheds**. Structures should be sited keeping this in mind. Maximizing the amount of land covered in these sheds without overlapping will benefit the entire area by greatly reducing the amount of surface parking needed.

### **Shared Parking**

Shared parking provisions encourage a more efficient use of parking spaces requiring fewer spots to serve the same amount of development. This technique should be employed for new mixed-use development in the area, including within the recommended centrally located public parking structure. The uses of the accompanying development and their peak parking demand curves should be carefully studied to ensure an optimal number of spaces are constructed. Future development should also be considered to ensure new adjacent development in the area has adequate space in the parking structure to locate all or a portion of its parking within the deck.

The redevelopment of existing outparcels should also employ shared parking to free up more land on tight development sites helping making their redevelopment possible. Graphic examples of this are shown on **Figure 3-4**. **Figure 3-5** shows outparcels that are prime for shared parking applications.

Currently the Gwinnett County Zoning Resolution does not discuss shared parking applications. However, the new, lower parking ratios, such as one parking space per 500 square feet of retail space, would not be practical unless it was part of a mixed-use development using a shared parking arrangement, or if major amounts of transit service were available. Therefore, even though the County Zoning Resolution does not explicitly provide a reduction in parking ratios for the use of shared parking, the ordinance permits such low parking ratios by right that only developments that use shared parking principles will be able to approach the parking minimums in the current county parking regulations. Therefore, the current parking ordinance implicitly encourages shared parking. If developers were to take advantage of this opportunity, then it would be a big step

forward in helping reduce unnecessary surface parking in the area.

### **Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan**

The County has recently completed its comprehensive plan update process culminating in a new comprehensive plan for future development in the county to the year 2030. This lengthy and involved process included numerous public meetings and discussions with Gwinnett's municipalities. The Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan stands as the preeminent policy document guiding development and land use decisions that will be made by the County going forward.

The comprehensive plan supports many of the recommendations of this parking management study. It includes numerous policies that coincide with the conclusions of this study. Some of these policies include:

- Promoting mixed-use development in activity centers, such as the Gwinnet Place Mall area.
- Utilizing TADs to fund shared parking infrastructure to incentivize redevelopment.
- The use of shared parking facilities to ensure small redevelopment sites are economically feasible.
- Establishing new design standards for parking area locations and aesthetics.

The comprehensive plan provides a solid foundation in which to lobby the county commission to enact the recommendations of this study. The recommendations such as funding parking infrastructure through a TAD and allowing shared parking reductions are clearly stated policies in the comprehensive plan. This provides an extra leg to stand on to advocate for regulations and legislative action that are needed to improve the future parking situation in the area.

## **Conclusions and Action Steps**

For the successful redevelopment of the GPCID area to occur a ‘park once’ environment must be achieved. The area needs significant changes to achieve this goal. Major steps to achieve this include maintaining strict minimum parking requirements to ensure new development can diminish its parking footprint and not further contribute to the problem of excessive surface parking. Another step is to permit on-street parking on secondary roads to promote a pedestrian friendly environment and provide convenient spaces for short-term parkers. Of prime importance would be the construction of a centrally located public parking deck to serve new development. In addition mixed-use development and shared parking analysis should be used by property developers to enable greatly reduced levels of new construction of parking spaces for new development. To ensure the conclusions and recommendations of this plan are carried forward a series of Action Steps have been created to guide the GPCID in making parking work for the area. These include:

### **Action Steps**

- ❖ Work with Gwinnett County to identify prime locations for construction of one or more parking structures within the Gwinnett Place CID area.
- ❖ Assist the county Economic Development Office to consider acting in the role of facilitator of a public-private partnership that would help to initiate development of a public parking structure in areas where small lots located in the CID benefit from using an off-site parking structure to avoid some or all of the on-site parking requirements in the Zoning Ordinance.
- ❖ Encourage the county to either adopt the CID-RAD ordinance or amend the county-wide parking regulations to provide density bonuses for structured parking coupled with a program of fees in lieu of off-street parking. The CID-RAD also includes provisions to improve the aesthetics of surface parking, requiring it to be screened from view, and provides architectural standards to ensure that parking structures are compatible with quality design of the adjacent occupied buildings.

- ❖ Work with Gwinnett County to activate a Tax Allocation District for the GPCID area. Ensure structured parking is a central component of infrastructure funded through the TAD.
- ❖ Pursue TAD funding for improved streetscapes including on-street metered parking in feasible locations shown on **Figure 4-8**. Amend county parking regulations to permit some or all of these spaces to count towards required off-street spaces if in close proximity (700 feet).
- ❖ Monitor changes proposed to the existing parking regulations that are currently in draft form to ensure they are in keeping with the parking goals of the GPCID.
- ❖ Monitor Gwinnett County activities to ensure policies laid forth in the Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan that are in keeping with the parking goals of the CID are followed. These include transforming the area into a mixed-use center, using TADs to fund parking infrastructure, promoting shared parking facilities, and implementing new design standards to improve the appearance and location of parking areas.
- ❖ Ensure new developments have access to future parking structures to eliminate the need for additional surface parking spaces.

