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## Group: Gwinnett Place not pedestrian friendly

09/16/2005

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DULUTH — As a group of 28 people walked through the Gwinnett Place area Wednesday, they took note of what they didn't see.

The group studying ways to make the faded commercial center more vibrant and pedestrian friendly didn't see sidewalks, crosswalks or crossing signals.

The lack of amenities caused most to walk in the roadway as they traveled from a row of hotels on Venture Parkway to a string of businesses along Satellite Boulevard.

"You have to walk on the grass or you have to walk on the shoulder of the road," said Laura Moore, who participated in the "walkable communities workshop" hosted by the county and a Gwinnett Place business group.

The purpose of the six-hour session was to develop strategies for making Gwinnett Place a safer and more attractive place to walk and bike, whether it be shoppers, residents or tourists staying at area hotels.

Linking shops, restaurants, parks and neighborhoods with landscaped sidewalks and shaded walking trails would also help revitalize the commercial node and lure economic development, said a national consultant.

Not only should the crosswalks and pathways be functional, they should also be attractive — even unique, said the consultant, Charles Gandy, who is an expert on community design.

"Style matters," said Gandy, who presented photos of brick crosswalks and artsy sidewalks in cities nationwide, from Green Bay, Wisc., to Austin, Texas.

Other pictures showed people frequenting cafes and restaurants along tree-lined promenades.

"You don't want to just create sidewalks," Gandy said. "You want to create a sense of place, a place where people want to live, work and play."

After the walking tour, which covered Market Street and Gwinnett

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Place Mall, county employees, business owners and residents brainstormed ways to improve the area.

Among the ideas: replacing stop signs on side roads with traffic circles, which help keep traffic flowing.

Also tossed out for discussion was creating a trail beneath giant power lines that cut across Pleasant Hill Road, running between the mall and Interstate 85.

And discussed was allowing mixed-use development to replace shopping centers struggling with vacancies.

Letting developers build shops, offices and restaurants closer together — or letting them mix uses — would make walking more feasible and even encourage it, participants said.

The county already has plans to install sidewalks throughout the Gwinnett Place area in coming years, and the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District intends to seek government grants that would pay for landscaping and similar beautification projects.

Moore, who with her husband owns two Burger King franchises on Pleasant Hill Road, said she was already aware of the need for pedestrian improvements.

A Burger King employee was struck by a truck and killed while trying to cross Satellite Boulevard near Pleasant Hill Road a few years ago, Moore said. "It was really devastating," she recalled. Gwinnett Planning Division Director Steve Logan said pedestrian facilities are a pressing need in Gwinnett Place because of the area's changing population.

The population is not only growing, but it is becoming much more diverse with many immigrants for whom walking is a way of life, Logan said.

However, people on foot are having to compete with cars because the Gwinnett Place area was designed for autos, he said.

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