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GWINNETT VILLAGE CID

Businesses turn to CIDs to improve three areas

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 06/21/06

In the past three years, odd new entities called Community Improvement Districts have sprouted in three areas of Gwinnett.

CIDs allow commercial property owners to tax themselves in order to provide benefits ranging from installing new sidewalks and streetlights to putting extra cops on the street. CIDs don't tax residential property, only businesses. Their membership is largely a matter of choice — at least half of the owners representing 75 percent of the value of the property in a district must sign up voluntarily.

Gwinnett County's newest and largest community improvement district — the Gwinnett Village CID, in and around Norcross and stretching to Lilburn — will send out its first tax bills this summer.

Each of Gwinnett's CIDs formed to address a unique problem. And each CID is using its 5-mill tax collections differently.

In practice, the business districts often use their tax collections to fund lobbying efforts and grant applications. Often, state and federal grants end up being worth several times as much as the tax the district collects.

GWINNETT VILLAGE CID

THE PROBLEM

Crime and traffic have driven away businesses and new developments. Buford Highway and Jimmy Carter Boulevard are two of the most congested streets in metro Atlanta. The district's leaders say half the homicides in the county last year occurred in and around the area. Meanwhile, the ethnic mix has changed so much through the years that language can be a barrier to coordinating community revitalization efforts. One of the CID's first projects was to send a crew to remove underbrush from an area police said homeless people, prostitutes and drug dealers use for shelter.

THE CID'S GOAL

Get local police, government agencies and the multi-ethnic business community working together to clean up the district, start crime-prevention programs, alleviate traffic congestion and improve the landscaping. "The area was declining for 15 years. It was kind of left behind," said Shiv Aggarwal, chairman of the Gwinnett Village CID board.

BY THE NUMBERS:

411: Number of property owners

632: Number of parcels

\$679 million: Total value of properties

\$1.5 million: Total annual tax revenue

THE CID'S NEXT STEP

The group hired landscapers to begin cleanups along major public roads. CID officials are negotiating with Gwinnett County and Norcross police to pay off-duty officers for additional patrols.

HIGHWAY 78 CID

THE PROBLEM

Most CIDs deal with many issues — traffic, marketing, crime, development or the lack of it. The Highway 78 district was created to tackle one big problem: Seven miles of U.S. 78 are about to be torn up for a new median. Business owners along the highway want to protect themselves from what they see as pending financial catastrophe during and after construction. The highway has had a "temporary" system of reversible center lanes between Stone Mountain and Ga. 124 since 1989.

THE CID'S GOAL

Promote the area to offset the potential business disruption during the two-year construction project. "At the end of construction, we want an aesthetically attractive corridor," said Brett Harrell, executive director of the Highway 78 CID.

THE CID'S NEXT STEP

Lobbying Georgia DOT for additional median openings, building decorative poles at 13 intersections along the highway and planning to plant flowers in wide spots on the median.

BY THE NUMBERS

390: Number of property owners

750: Number of parcels

\$400 million: Total value of properties

\$850,000: Total annual tax revenue

GWINNETT PLACE CID

THE PROBLEM

Gwinnett Place was the first big mall in Gwinnett County. The 21-year-old mall faces stiff competition from Discover Mills, the Mall of Georgia and a growing number of upscale retail centers in the county. A large section of the mall — the former Macy's building — stands empty, and major anchor stores for the mall's peripheral shopping centers have left for greener pastures.

BY THE NUMBERS

160: Number of property owners

191: Number of parcels

\$500 million: Total value of properties

\$1 million: Total of annual tax revenue

THE CID'S GOAL

Find ways to improve traffic flow and make the area more friendly to pedestrians. Also clean up graffiti and tend to the greenery around the mall. "People perceive that the Gwinnett Place mall is hard to get in and out of. We're here to draw the line in the sand, to not let the area deteriorate," said Joe Allen, executive director of Gwinnett Place CID.

THE CID'S NEXT STEP

The CID plans \$200,000 in landscaping — including juniper trees and a granite wall — at Satellite Boulevard and Commerce Avenue. The area also is attracting interest from developers who want to build high rises.

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