

Gwinnett Place CID takes small steps toward enhancing area

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The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District has started planting flowers at the ramps on Interstate 85 off Pleasant Hill R

DULUTH — Downtown Decatur is the place to emulate.

With restaurants, shops and sidewalks that are often filled with people, the DeKalb County seat is the standard that metropolitan Atlanta leaders are trying to live up to.

Just one problem. It's small. And other areas that are slated to be revitalized as walkable communities — like the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District —

are much, much larger.

The entire city of Decatur is just over four square miles, while the Gwinnett Place CID is more than four times that size.

But Marsha Anderson Bomar, the president of Street Smarts and a Duluth city councilwoman, said the district's size provides a distinct opportunity for it to do even more.

Gwinnett Place is the heart of the county, she said in a presentation last week. But because of its size, it could feature several different districts with different interests. Perhaps there could be one area for entertainment, Bomar said, and another one for fine dining.

Bomar is creating a far-reaching plan that could change the look and feel of the area, urbanizing it and making it more walkable.

"We are not the suburbs anymore," Bomar said. "People want to be here; we just don't have a place to put them."

In addition to a residential component, which the area is lacking, Bomar said the CID needs more gathering places where people with office jobs can go after work, more streets to help disperse the traffic, sidewalks, parking decks, a transit system and the diversification of some retail areas that are too similar.

Doing these things would help draw young professionals and liven up the community, she said.

"We have a lot of kernels already here," she said. "We have to build on top of that."

Joe Allen, the group's executive director, said the vision for the area is exciting. He said involving the community will allow people to have a stake in the outcome of the plan and give them ownership in the process.

"It's not going to happen overnight," Allen said. "Here's what we're working toward. We're supporting the overall vision and future of the CID area."

A plan to put wayfinding signs directing people to roads in the district is also in the works, as is a plan to landscape ramps on Interstate 85, beautifying the area and making it easier to navigate.

Allen said the district wants to have its visions in place so if money becomes available, plans can immediately be put into action.

If the pieces come together, Bomar said, the Gwinnett Place area could have a very different character.

"It's a very exciting opportunity to create a very exciting place that is vibrant," Bomar said. "We don't believe the plan for this area is a one-size-fits-all plan."