

Duluth officials weigh in on mall

Want daily summaries and Breaking News alerts?

By **Tyler Estep (1106)**

tyler.estep@gwinnettdaily.com

As of Saturday, March 17, 2012

© Copyright 2012 Gwinnett Daily Post

#DULUTH — Duluth Mayor Nancy Harris said Simon Property Group's withdrawal of ownership from Gwinnett Place Mall represents a need for the community to rally together.

#Harris issued a statement after it was made public this week that Simon, the country's largest mall owner, had recently "disposed of its interests" in Gwinnett Place. The Duluth mall has long struggled with local competitors Discover Mills and the Mall of Georgia (both Simon properties).

#We regret that Simon Property Group has elected to sever its relationship with Gwinnett Place Mall," the statement said. "The city of Duluth recognizes the rich diversity of businesses and residences of this potentially vibrant retail center."

#There is no doubt this announcement creates a challenge that will require community stakeholders to rally together to take deliberate and timely action to revitalize the Mall and ensure the continuing economic prosperity of the area."

#Simon no longer owns Gwinnett Place, but will continue to manage it "for the foreseeable future," spokesman Les Morris told the Daily Post. Who exactly owns the mall has not been disclosed, though it has been reported that Simon transferred a large loan to a special servicer — a company to oversee troubled loans — late last year.

#Whoever owns or eventually buys the property, however, will have the chance for plenty of local input.

#The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District began updating its Livable Center Initiative study in August. Just last week, it presented an update to the county's Board of Commissioners, one that included two main plans for the redevelopment of the mall and its surrounding area.

#One plan would call for "maintaining and upgrading" the existing mall with infill office, hotel and residential. It would include about 200,000 new square feet of retail, 930 condos and apartments, 160 new hotel rooms and seven acres of parks and plazas.

#The other plan would involve re-configuring and repositioning the mall to give it more of a "town center" feel. It would actually reduce current retail space by almost 300,000 square feet, and add a lot more office space and apartments, three times as many hotel rooms and 12 total acres of park and plaza space.

#The CID listed several existing examples as potential models for Gwinnett Place's redevelopment: Hunt Valley Town Center in suburban Baltimore; Reston Town Center in Virginia; Director Park in Portland; and the Belmar shopping district in Lakewood, Colo.

#For more information, click on the LCI logo at www.gwinnettplaceCID.com.

#While Gwinnett Place has seen an increase in competition, the demographics of the area surrounding it have also changed since the mall's golden days in the late 1980s and early '90s. Data from the 2010 census showed Duluth's population was nearly one-quarter Asian and 14 percent Hispanic.

#The city is believed to have one of the highest Korean populations in both the state and the Southeast.

#All that is likely to factor in to any redevelopment. The CID's plans even mention the possibility of "an international village."

#The city of Duluth wishes to assure the businesses and residents who call this area home that we recognize your value and importance to our continuing economic health," Harris said.