

Mall owner, others discuss Gwinnett Place's future

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Moonbeam Capital Investments CEO Steven Maksin traveled from New York City to Gwinnett to talk about the plans for Gwinnett Place Mall in Duluth during a breakfast Friday at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta. (Video By [Brendan Sullivan](#))

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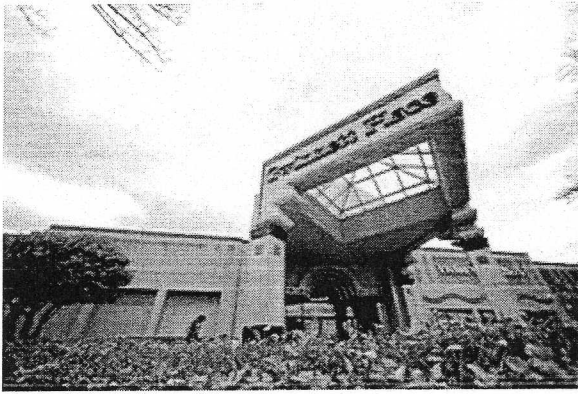
[As of Saturday, April 5, 2014](#)

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Two days before Christmas, Nick Masino pulled into Gwinnett Place Mall to get a gift for his daughter from a specialty Asian mart.

Inside, he found not only the treat he was hoping for but also the biggest selection he had ever encountered at Macy's, the trendy Abercrombie & Fitch and a Spencer's store, which has the same naughty back corner that he remembered from younger days.

"It's not what I thought," said Masino, one of Gwinnett's business experts as the leader of the Partnership Gwinnett economic development effort. "The



fact is the mall is vibrant. The reality is, it's very strong."

With a new owner for the mall and projects like a recently opened diverging-diamond interchange nearby, the area known as Gwinnett's central business district is experiencing a revival 30 years after it opened as the county's first mall on what had been a mobile home park.

Masino's Partnership Gwinnett effort hosted a breakfast Friday to discuss the future of the unincorporated area between Duluth and Lawrenceville, and the topic was enough to pique the interest of nearly 200 business and civic leaders, resulting in a standing-room-only crowd.

"You may have had some unfair perceptions of Gwinnett Place, but Gwinnett Place is where it's happening," said Joe Allen, the executive director of a community improvement district formed by business property owners in 2005, when the aging commercial center faced dark storefronts, litter, graffiti and an increase in crime.

Gwinnett Place Mall in Duluth is under new ownership of Moonbeam Capital Investments. According to Moonbeam CEO Steven Maksin who traveled from New York City to Gwinnett to talk about the plans for the mall Friday, deals have been reached to fill 25,000 square feet of vacant space at the mall. (Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan)

In recent years, the investment has returned, from the DDI and other road and sidewalk improvements to a police focus on code enforcement and a crime-free multi-family housing program.

"The Board of Commissioners is committed to this area," Commissioner Jace Brooks said, as part of the panel. "It's absolutely key and critical to the health of the entire county. ... We'll move mountains, if necessary, to make sure the Gwinnett Place area is successful."

The business community has also responded, with opportunity zone tax breaks drawing 475 jobs in 2013 and millions in investments in offices and other establishments.



Partnership Gwinnett held a breakfast at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta on Friday regarding economic development and the future of the Greater Gwinnett Place area in Duluth. (Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan)

Statistics showed a well-educated, middle-class workforce and residential neighborhoods filled with the millennial and GenX population so many other communities covet.

For years, the missing piece remained with the mall that had once laid the foundation for the area. After years stagnating in foreclosure, new owners with Moonbeam Capital Investments closed on the mall in October.

For the first time since formalizing the deal, Moonbeam CEO Steve Maksin traveled from New York City to Gwinnett to talk about the plans for the mall.

At Friday's breakfast, Maksin said deals have been reached to fill 25,000 square feet of vacant space at the mall, and he has been in talks with national retailers. But Maksin added that his company is being selective and working out a long-term vision for the future.

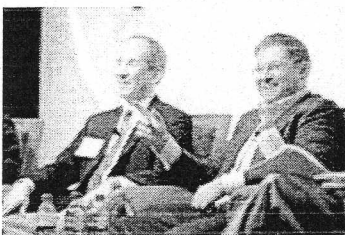
With partners willing to put capital down, at a time when few people were willing to invest in malls and banks aren't financing, Maksin said his company is acting strategically.

"We realize there is a bigger picture in place ... what's going to be needed five to 10 years down the road," he said, describing Gwinnett Place as "a diamond in the rough." "It's ready to be developed to match the 21st century. ... The big box concept is dying out. It's no longer the mall concept that is going to be carried into the future. It's the mixed-use concept."

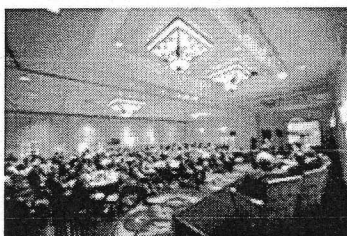
While discussing the possibilities of chopping up spaces and maybe going vertical, Maksin did not describe specific plans. But he said retailers tell him that the foot traffic is increasing and that the mall has stabilized. Soon, he hopes to execute a plan to revitalize it.

"The timing, obviously, is yesterday. We'd like to move as quickly as possible," he said. "It's going to take some time for us to be comfortable with our vision, and we'd like to make sure the community is supportive."

"... This meeting is a testament to that (support)," he added. "We should be successful."



Moonbeam Capital Investments CEO Steven Maksin traveled from New York City to Gwinnett to talk about the plans for the Gwinnett Place Mall in Duluth during a breakfast at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta Friday. A discussion took place regarding the future of the Greater Gwinnett Place area between a moderator and a panel of five men, Andy Sumlin, director of Cushman & Wakefield, left. (Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan)

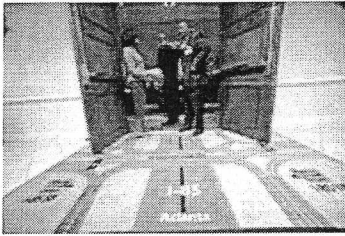


Partnership Gwinnett held a breakfast at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta regarding economic development and the future of the Greater Gwinnett Place area in Duluth on Friday. During the breakfast a discussion took place between a moderator and a five man panel. (Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan)

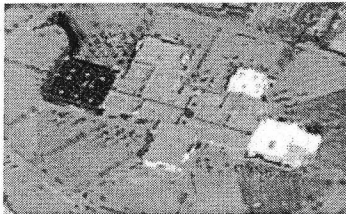


A five man panel consisting of Trey Ragsdale, left, Andy Sumlin, second from left, Steven Maksin, center, Jace Brooks, second from right, and Ken Bleakly, right, discussed the future of the Greater Gwinnett Place area in Duluth during a breakfast held by Partnership Gwinnett at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta on Friday. Ragsdale is the manager of government and community relations with Kaiser Permanente. Sumlin is the director of Cushman & Wakefield. Maksin

is the CEO of Moonbeam Capital Investments, the new owners of the Gwinnett Place Mall. Jace Brooks is the district 1 commissioner in Gwinnett County. Ken Bleakly is the president of Bleakly Advisory Group. (Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan)



A rug illustrating the Diverging Diamond Interchange greeted guests who attended the breakfast at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta held by Partnership Gwinnett regarding economic development and the future of the Greater Gwinnett Place area in Duluth on Friday. (Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan)



The Gwinnett Place Mall in Duluth is under new ownership of Moonbeam Capital Investments. An aerial view of the Gwinnett Place Mall provided by Bing.com.