

CHAPTER 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this parking study was to determine short-term and long-term recommendations to improve parking in the Gwinnett Place CID. The study initially evaluated existing conditions, determined primarily through a cursory inventory of the existing parking supply, stakeholder interviews and reviews of background materials (including previous parking studies). The examination of existing conditions provided the baseline data from which future development, with its impact on parking supply and demand, could be evaluated.

Assessment of Existing Parking Supply

The first step in conducting this parking analysis was to determine the scale and character of the current parking supply. To do this, an inventory of the existing parking facilities was undertaken. All facilities within the Gwinnett Place CID were inventoried, regardless of whether the parking facility was publicly or privately held, using ArcGIS.



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The inventory effort determined that there is a total parking supply of approximately 36,470 parking spaces. All of these spaces are classified as off-street parking and are privately held with the exception of 63 spaces that support the Gwinnett County Transit Center at Gwinnett Place Mall. **Figure 2-1** illustrates the total parking inventory. The total parking area, as compared to the total area of the Gwinnett Place CID, was also evaluated. It was determined that the Gwinnett Place CID is comprised of approximately 9,770 acres, and of that area approximately 3,760 acres (roughly 40%) is used for parking.

In addition, a parking occupancy survey was conducted on September 6, 2008 between 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm at the Pleasant Hill Square Shopping Center. This shopping center was selected to be surveyed because it has a high tenant occupancy level with a variety of uses and its parking is contained in an area that can be surveyed efficiently. The purpose of this survey was to provide a “snapshot” of parking occupancy, and did not attempt to determine the absolute peak parking period. The overall peak period of parking occupancy occurred at

2:30 on the survey day. During this period, a total of 542 parking spaces were occupied. This level of occupancy translates into 36% of the total 1497 parking space supply.

Parking user information was also examined in the area. Parking information can include maps, signs, brochures and various types of electronic communication systems that provide information to motorists on parking facility location, availability (whether a parking lot is full), service options and price. Typically, parking problems occur when there is a finite amount of parking along with inadequate user information and marketing. Motorists need convenient and accurate information of parking availability and price, including what parking facilities exist near a destination, whether spaces are available in a particular facility at a particular time, the price they will need to pay, and whether there are less expensive alternatives nearby.

Providing this type of information, however, is currently not seen as an issue since for the Gwinnett Place CID there is an abundant amount of free surface parking at all destinations. Parking user information and



marketing tools may be needed in the future when the CID area experiences higher development densities and a significant decrease in the existing abundance of parking.

Assessment of Existing Environmental Constraints

ArcGIS was also used to identify existing environmental constraints that could effect and/or prohibit future parking. **Figure 2-2** illustrates the constraints that were identified. As can be seen in this figure, there are wetland areas located along the western portion of the CID, high voltage power lines located in the middle of the CID just north of Venture Drive and Venture Parkway, and a cemetery located north of Breckinridge Boulevard and east of Pleasant Hill Road.

Specifically, the wetlands illustrated on this figure are a particularly poor location for both surface parking and parking structures as they would interrupt the capacity and flow of these areas. Additionally, the placement of structured parking in the high voltage power line easements noted in this figure should be studied further as there may be access and clearance limitations in these areas.

Stakeholder Interviews

To help guide this study, it was also important to understand the existing conditions within the study area. Specifically, what are the issues and needs related to parking that exist in the Gwinnett Place CID area? What are the prevailing perceptions regarding the various aspects of parking, such as availability and convenience? And if there are problems, what should be done about them and who is responsible for any corrective action? One important method for getting questions such as these answered is the involvement in the project of key stakeholders who may have insight into such issues. The Gwinnett Place CID Executive Director assisted the project team in identifying suitable stakeholders with whom to discuss the topic of parking. To facilitate the individual stakeholder interviews, a questionnaire was developed to guide the discussion through a number of important topics related to parking, such as the potential need for a parking management program, parking availability, etc. A copy of the questionnaire that was used and detailed answers given by the stakeholders can be found in Appendix A.

Overall, the stakeholders agreed that:

- Traffic congestion and safety are the biggest issues facing the Gwinnett Place CID area;
- Parking management is not a high priority for the area right now;
- There is an oversupply of parking in the CID;
- Current regulations require too much parking;
- Shared parking can work given the right set of circumstances; and
- If parking decks are built, charging a fee to park in the decks is not feasible for this area.

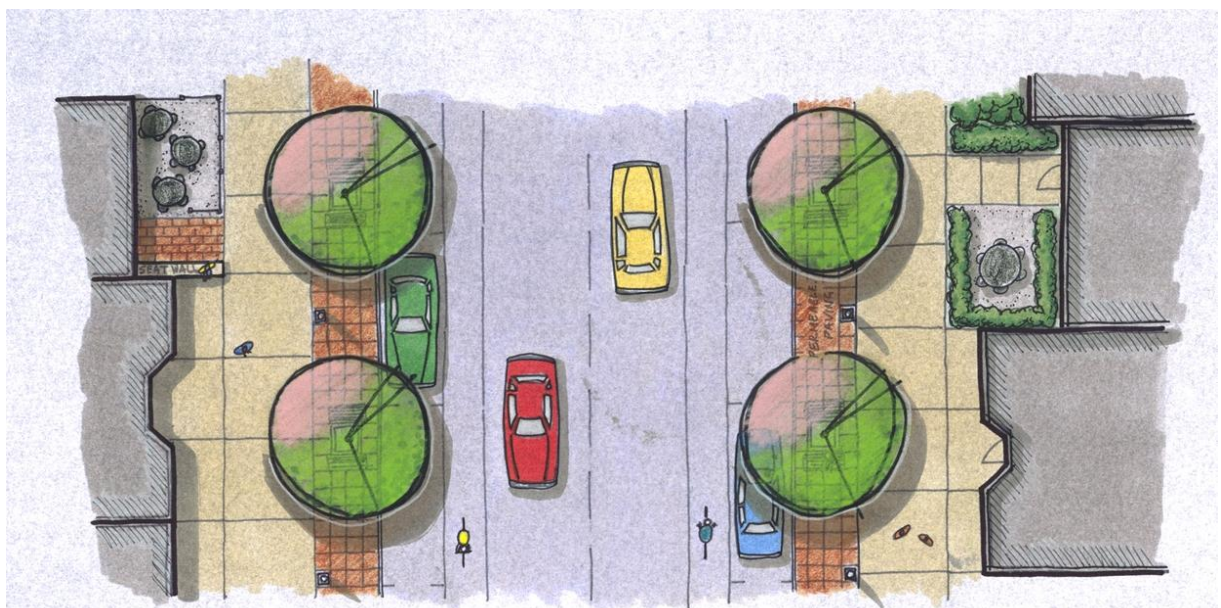


However, the stakeholder's opinions varied when answering many other questions. The various comments received are detailed below:

- Question: "As the area begins to redevelop, how important is the need for better management of the parking supply in the future?"
 - Parking will be very difficult to regulate; it needs to be flexible; one size does not fit all.
 - Not an important issue by itself.
 - Very important. Parking has to be incorporated into the development plan and should be innovative.
- Question: "What changes would you make to the current system of parking management and regulations?"
 - No changes to current parking standards, they seem to be fairly well balanced.
 - Current regulations require too many parking spaces. There needs to be standards for different types of office uses.
 - Nobody designs for the future; parking decks should become the norm rather than a strange new occasion.
 - A lot is needed in the CID, but parking is not the number one change to invest in right now or in the near future.
- Question: "What are your thoughts on parking for current bus transit and proposed future rail transit?"
 - Haven't seen a problem with bus parking; looks adequate.
 - Not adequate, was an afterthought with Discovery Mills.
- Question: "Do you think there should be regulations setting an upper limit on the number of parking spaces permitted on a property?"
 - Yes, as long as there's a reasonable variance.
 - Government should not dictate maximums; this may be good in Buckhead, but not here in a suburban setting.
 - Do you limit the size of the development by limiting the size of the parking? If you do that you're limiting the creativity of the developer and ultimately controlling the market. I don't think that's the role of the County.
 - No, because from a developers standpoint he's not going to build too many. It's too expensive.
 - Definitely.
- Question: "Do you think that there will be a time when it will be necessary to build parking decks in the Gwinnett Place area and what would make that appropriate?"
 - Yes, with density on small land areas, especially with mixed-use residential developments; to accommodate green space; as long as there's enough density to support the parking deck.
 - There are a few now for office and hotel; the fact that you can get density here would make this feasible in time.
 - Sure, but a critical mass of infill development would need to emerge.

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- Yes, definitely. If you don't build parking decks things won't change and the area will have no future.
- I hope there will be an opportunity, but it's not necessary without development.
- Question: "What are your thoughts on allowing on-street parking in some areas?"
 - Not a fan of on-street parking; parking should be free; don't want to make it a disincentive for retailers.
 - Fire safety can be an issue.
 - Traffic is bad enough without on-street parking; wouldn't be in favor of that.
 - Not a fan of on-street parking. Because the area needs to redevelop there's no reason that anyone would need on-street parking.
 - In favor of on-street parking.
- Question: "Who would be the appropriate administrator, (GPCID, Gwinnett County, other), of a parking authority for the area?"
 - Would like the developer to oversee the structure; would prefer the CID over the County.
 - If the GPCID did this it would only benefit a small number of businesses. The County could do this.
 - Would not be the CID; wouldn't have the staffing to do that. In favor of private management. The County should bid out the parking management role and hire people that know that business.
 - The County, not the CID.
 - CID with the blessing of the County



Graphic example of on-street parking recommended for secondary roads within the GPCID (shown in **Figure 4-6**).

Review of Background Material

In addition to an inventory of the existing parking supply and stakeholder interviews, a review of existing plans, studies and parking regulations for the area was conducted. Specifically, this task included the review of the following materials:

- “Gwinnett County Redevelopment Plan For: Gwinnett Place Tax Allocation District #1”, 2008
- “Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan”, 2008
- “A Redevelopment Plan For Gwinnett Place”, 2007
- “Northeast I-85/Gwinnett County Transit Corridor”, 2007
- “Gwinnett Place CID Transportation Study”, 2006
- “Gwinnett County LCI Study”, 2001
- “Article X, Off-Street Automobile Parking and Loading and Unloading Spaces”, 1985 Zoning Resolution, Gwinnett County, GA

From this review, the following existing conditions were identified:

- Gwinnett Place’s weaknesses as identified in the Gwinnett County LCI Study and the Gwinnett Place Mall Area Revitalization Plan include, but are not limited to:
 - Inadequate parking to support high density development.

**(Gwinnett County Redevelopment Plan
For: Gwinnett Place Tax Allocation
District #1, 2008)**

- Through the years, the County has already made major infrastructure investments in several commercial nodes, such as Gwinnett Place Mall.....these commercial nodes are the most likely potential candidates to become the County’s regional mixed-use centers.

**(Policy A.1.1: Promote Major
Mixed-Use Developments; Gwinnett County
2030 Unified Plan, 2008)**

- Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) can be a powerful way to fund infrastructure and other improvements needed to promote mixed-use development or redevelopment.

**(Policy A.2.3: Use Tax Allocation
Districts (TADs); Gwinnett County 2030
Unified Plan, 2008)**

- A frequent impediment to redevelopment is the magnitude of necessary upgrades associated with certain infrastructure facilities, such as stormwater ponds and required parking. To reduce these impediments and increase the economic feasibility potential of redevelopment areas, the County can allow several adjacent properties to install shared infrastructure facilities including, but not limited to, regional ponds and parking decks.

**(Policy A.2.4: Promote Shared
Infrastructure Facilities; Gwinnett County
2030 Unified Plan, 2008)**

- A transit system can help support more intensely developed, mixed-use centers in Gwinnett. Creating TODs that are centered within livable, walkable mixed-use areas should be part of the County’s formula for attracting and retaining urban-acclimated professionals, tech workers, empty nesters, and other households...the County should take action to establish incentives that encourage development that will support transit.

**(Policy A.3.5: Create Transit-
Oriented Development (TOD) at
Appropriate Sites Through Proactive
Zoning; Gwinnett County 2030 Unified
Plan, 2008)**

- Major activity centers should be easier to walk and bike to, and the uses within the centers should be better connected for pedestrian and bicycle access.

(Policy A.5.1: Improve the Walkability of Gwinnett's Activity Centers and Neighborhoods; Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan, 2008)

- New design standards are needed both to encourage and promote redevelopment where appropriate and to enhance overall development quality. Designing these private shared environments as more functional and attractive locations will also require revising the current development standards requiring issues such as access, interior road design, location of buildings in relation to streets, location and design of parking areas, open space and public realm design (including pedestrian facilities) and ability of various users to share infrastructure.

(Policy A.5.4: Enhance Development Aesthetics; Gwinnett County 2030 Unified Plan, 2008)

- A large percentage of land in the Gwinnett Place CID is currently dedicated to parking cars. There is no more land available for parking and new construction. Therefore, increased density can only be achieved with structured parking, i.e. parking decks. Although decks are expensive, their use can be justified when the density of development sufficiently increases the property values. This is a standard transition in urban areas.

(A Redevelopment Plan for Gwinnett Place, 2007)

- Bicycle Travel – There are currently no bicycle lanes in the CID, and traffic is such that it is unusual to see any bicycles in the area. Bicycles must be incorporated into the Gwinnett Place transportation network in a safe manner.

(A Redevelopment Plan for Gwinnett Place, 2007)

- Existing Transit Conditions - Gwinnett County Transit began operations in 2000 and currently operates six regular transit routes plus paratransit (demand-response) vans. Existing Gwinnett County bus routes are regional in nature, covering large areas, but making few local stops. The Gwinnett Place CID area currently lacks a circulating service that could serve working and shopping trips from the surrounding local communities. There is little ability for transit to circulate in the Gwinnett Place area to get to the mall and other nearby retail and office locations. **Figure 2-3** illustrates existing transit routes that service the CID area. Due to pavement rutting issues, there have been issues with buses directly serving the mall. The transit hub for Gwinnett Place is located 1250 feet from the doors of the mall with no sidewalks, lights or a designed path to the mall (shown in **Figure 2-3**). The pedestrian route to the mall consists of a trek through busy streets and across an expansive asphalt parking lot before reaching the doors of the mall. Sidewalks to the transit center from the surrounding community are non-existent or closed for construction and a flight of stairs down a steep bank are the only access routes to the mall. The transit center itself is visually stark, with industrial-looking shelters and no amenities. It currently is not an inviting place to wait for a bus.

(Gwinnett Place CID Transportation Study, 2006)

- Lack of convenience – Most pedestrians in the area have to cross large expanses of parking lots to get to their destinations. Buildings are set too far back from the street.

(Gwinnett County LCI, 2002)

- The minimum and maximum number of off-street parking spaces required for “Retail use, shopping center, or regional shopping mall”, which is the predominant use in the Gwinnett Place CID, is as follows: Minimum is 1 parking space per 500 square feet; Maximum is 1 parking space per 200 square feet.

**(Section 1002, Off-Street Automobile
Parking and Loading and Unloading
Spaces, 1985 Zoning Resolution,
Gwinnett County, GA)**

- Non-residential, mixed-use and/or multifamily residential developments exceeding 1,500 overall parking spaces shall be required to provide at least 25 percent of their overall parking total within a decked or underground parking structure.

**(Section 1002, Off-Street Automobile
Parking and Loading and Unloading
Spaces, 1985 Zoning Resolution,
Gwinnett County, GA)**

Figure 2-3: Existing Transit Routes within the Gwinnett Place CID

