

Gwinnett County Walkable Communities Workshop

On September 15, 2005, Gwinnett County held a Walkable Communities Workshop focusing on the Gwinnett Place Mall area. The Walkable Communities program, sponsored by the Atlanta Regional Commission, assists local governments and civic leaders in developing strategies to make communities safer and more inviting for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District (CID) also played a key role in organizing the event. The workshop took place at the Wellesley Inn and Suites conference center near Gwinnett Place Mall and featured Charles Gandy, a noted expert in community design and pedestrian advocacy. To relate the principles discussed to a “real world” scenario, portions of the workshop focused on the Gwinnett Place Mall area, and Market Street, in particular. Included in the program was a walk along Market Street to assess its problems, assets, and potential as a more pedestrian-friendly roadway.

To begin the meeting, Gwinnett Planning Director, Steve Logan introduced District One County Commissioner Lorraine Green, whose commission district includes the Gwinnett Place area. Mr. Logan noted that Ms. Green, as the local elected official representing the Gwinnett Place area, would play a critical role in the area’s revitalization efforts, including creating a more pedestrian-friendly urban form. Ms. Green welcomed the group of approximately 30 participants and recalled her childhood in New York where sidewalks were part of the urban fabric. She also noted that sidewalks recently added to her neighborhood in Gwinnett County provide popular routes to nearby shopping and schools, and have also helped foster a sense of community.

Prior to Mr. Gandy’s program, presentations were made to provide an overview of the factors influencing change in the Gwinnett Place area and describe the area’s planned pedestrian improvements. The role of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District as an agent of economic rejuvenation was also discussed. Steve Logan explained that when Gwinnett Place Mall opened in 1984 the County’s population was about 250,000 and 90 % white. This was during a period of rapid growth in the county as job opportunities, low taxes, affordable housing, and a high-quality school system attracted large numbers of new residents. At that time Gwinnett Place was at the epicenter of a suburbanizing market in which residents wanted a rural lifestyle. This resulted in an auto-dependant development form with few sidewalks. Since the construction of Gwinnett Place Mall, Gwinnett County’s population has grown to over 700,000 and become much more ethnically and racially diverse. While population has increased, the mall is faced with fierce competition from surrounding retail development and newer malls such as Discover Mills and Mall of Georgia. Other factors adversely affecting the Mall area include traffic congestion, a scarcity of office and residential development in the immediate area, and regulations that do not permit mixed-use and high-rise projects.

While, at present, the area does not have the luster it had 20 years ago, a number of steps are being taken to position the Gwinnett Place area as a center of economic and social

vitality. The recommendations of a Livable Communities Initiative Study, the Growth Issues Steering Committee, and the Revitalization Task Force all call for aggressive measures to be taken to enhance the area's attractiveness and economic viability. Among the initiatives under consideration to invigorate the area are tax allocation districts and regulatory changes to encourage high-rise offices and residential development. Already the recently formed Gwinnett Place CID already has programs in place to improve the area's aesthetics and security.

To inform participants of the pedestrian improvements programmed for the Gwinnett Place area, Vince Edwards of the Gwinnett Department of Transportation summarized the locations and specifications of upcoming sidewalk projects. This sidewalk construction is primarily connected with road improvement projects along Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard. Pleasant Hill is the area's main north-south arterial, and Satellite Blvd. is arguably the main east-west arterial, and the mall is located at the southeast corner of their intersection. There are also other sidewalk plans for the area. They all should be completed in the next 2 or 3 years, along with their attendant road projects.

Mr. Edwards also explained that there are a number of programs that can provide funding for pedestrian transportation improvements. The Gwinnett and Georgia Departments of Transportation, the Atlanta Regional Commission through the Livable Communities Initiative, and the Federal Government with programs such as "Congestion, Mitigation Air Quality" (CMAQ) grants all provide funding assistance for pedestrian projects. A portion of the revenues from the Gwinnett Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is also earmarked for pedestrian mobility projects. In addition, Gwinnett development regulations specify that new developments must include sidewalks along major road frontages.

Marcie Diaz, with the Gwinnett County Department of Community Services, elaborated on the trails and greenways planned for the Gwinnett Place area. Citing the Gwinnett County Open Space and Greenway Master Plan, Ms. Diaz described proposed greenways that would link Gwinnett Place Mall with the nearby McDaniel Farm Park. Other planned greenways and trails would provide improved pedestrian routes along several of the area's major roadways and links to Shorty Howell Park and areas across Interstate 85.

To explain the role of the Gwinnett Place CID in the area, Dave Rosselle, CID Executive Director, made a short presentation. Mr. Rosselle stated the mission of the Gwinnett Place CID is to enhance the economic vitality of Gwinnett's central business corridor by strengthening the area's role as the center of commercial, cultural, and social activity. Presently the CID represents 191 properties whose owners have consented to an additional tax that will be used by the CID for betterment of the area. The CID expects to initially collect approximately \$1,000,000 annually through the self-taxing district. This money will be used for a number of projects including improve landscaping and maintenance, security patrols, and development of streetscape concepts. The CID will also be active in helping to refine and implement revitalization initiatives and utilizing its monetary resources to leverage capital improvements for the area.

Ms. Regan Hammond, who manages the bicycle and pedestrian programs of the Atlanta Regional Commission, introduced the featured speaker and workshop leader Charles Gandy. Mr. Gandy is the lead consultant of Livable Communities Consulting in Austin, Texas and is a recognized expert in community design, trail planning/design and bicycle and pedestrian advocacy. Since 1998, he has consulted government agencies, communities and other design firms. He has organized and launched citizen based advocacy groups for walking and cycling in thirty states as well as trained advocates in all 50 states. Mr. Gandy conducts Walkable Community Workshops for elected officials, citizens and professionals in the fields of planning, engineering, law enforcement, public health, landscape architecture, and education.

Mr. Gandy projected photographs from various locales to demonstrate ways to make communities safer and more inviting to pedestrians and bicyclists. Mr. Gandy made the point that many people are rejecting the “generic” of the sprawl seen in much of suburban America and seeking opportunities to interact with others and connect with nature in communities with a sense of place. For this reason, businesses are finding that it makes economic sense to be in areas that are inviting to pedestrians.

Mr. Gandy invited the workshop participants to introduce themselves and describe their interest in the subject of walkability. Several participants stated that they missed the opportunities to walk they had experienced when they lived in more traditional cities. Others lived or worked in the vicinity of Gwinnett Place and felt the improvement of walkability was critical to the area’s rejuvenation. Doug Spohn, a developer with experience in mixed-use projects, noted that good pedestrian mobility and creation of a sense of place were vital components of Duluth’s successful downtown revitalization efforts. Jesse Munoz explained that since his mobility is in a wheel chair, he has found the lack of sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities to be particularly frustrating.

A major point made by Mr. Gandy was that converting an area characterized by suburban sprawl into a walkable community with a sense of place requires a bold vision and a determined commitment from local leaders. It is unlikely that only adding sidewalks, crosswalks and pedestrian crossing signals will be enough to create an environment that is safe and inviting to pedestrians. People are seeking areas with a feel of uniqueness and authenticity where walking and bicycling are not just possible but enjoyable. For this reason communities must boldly “think outside the box” and look for innovative, original ways to create a sense of place.

It was also noted that communities that demonstrate a strong commitment to a bold plan would be best positioned to receive funding assistance from the Livable Centers Initiative program. Mr. Gandy reminded the audience that funding for projects to improve walkability can come from a variety of sources and leaders should be thorough and aggressive in identifying and seeking funds.

Using photographs slides from various locales, Mr. Gandy presented many of the design and aesthetic improvements that help to make an area safer and more inviting to

pedestrians. Pedestrian-friendly design features discussed included curb extensions that improve visibility and lessen the distance walkers must traverse to cross a road. The importance of good signage, well marked crosswalks, and median refuges was illustrated, as was the distinction between pedestrian-level lighting and streetlights for cars.

Mr. Gandy also discussed vehicle traffic calming measures as critical to making an area more walkable. Among the traffic calming approaches illustrated were traffic circles, elevated crosswalks, narrow streets, non-straight or brick road sections, and on-street parking.

In addition to making walking and bicycling safe and efficient transportation options, Mr. Gandy explained that communities should make pedestrian routes interesting and attractive. Plants, public art, non-traditional sidewalk materials, marked walking tour routes, and novel features such as paintings on the sidewalks all add to the character and walkability of an area.

Following the group presentation portion of the workshop, the participants, led by Mr. Gandy, walked along Market Street to assess its deficiencies, assets, and opportunities from a walkability perspective. The attached maps indicate the route of the walk. The walk along Market Street from Venture Drive to Satellite Blvd. revealed some obvious shortcomings. The lack of sidewalks forced a wheelchair-bound participant to use the street. The aggressive vehicle movements and lack of pedestrian facilities made it an intimidating proposition to cross Gwinnett Place Drive and Mall Blvd. One of the participants, familiar with the area, said serious accidents had occurred there. That provided a chance to talk further about roundabouts as a way to improve both traffic flow and pedestrian safety. Mr. Gandy pointed out the wasted time as a car waited pointlessly for the light to change at the intersection while no other cars were present. The parking lots separating potential sidewalk routes from businesses and the visibility of unattractive features such as dumpsters and loading areas also diminished the routes attractiveness to pedestrians.

During the walk, strategies to make the block of Market Street from Venture Drive to Gwinnett Place Blvd. were discussed. This road segment, which crosses a bleak power line easement, connects the hotel row along Venture drive with nearby restaurants such as Chili's and Hooters. The easement area was discussed as a potential site for a passive park. The easement is basin-like on either side of Market St., serving as a stormwater detention area with power lines overhead. Ideas for improvement of the road were, of course, sidewalks, as well as parallel parking, pedestrian-level lighting, and trees to make an inviting passage to the hotels. No one seemed to know how flexible the power company would be in allowing trails or other recreational furnishings or plantings in the rest of the easement, but the need for them was clear.

The stretch along Satellite Boulevard from Market Street to the bus terminal was next. It consists of shallow parking lots serving retail uses. Some utility and preliminary sidewalk construction along Satellite had just been completed, which required removal of street trees. There was an approximately 20-foot wide strip between Satellite and the parking

lots, into which some of the planned sidewalks will be placed. It is now empty except for some just-seeded grass and the stumps of the trees. Dave Rosselle of the Gwinnett Place CID said that once the sidewalks are done, the CID intends to install landscaping materials and other amenities.

The bus depot, at the intersection of Satellite and Gwinnett Plantation Way (on the mall side of Satellite), is a simple star-shaped pavement island in the middle of a lot for the buses. It is new, since the transit system is only two years old. It has some benches and landscaping, but we noted the lack of ramps, which would make it difficult for our wheelchair-bound participant to use. Plantation Way continues toward the mall and Ring Road, but lacks sidewalks or any pedestrian accommodation. It seems lightly used, so people wanting to get to the mall just walk down the middle of the street.

After completing the walk, participants returned to the meeting room and divided into discussion groups to more thoroughly articulate improvements that would make the area safer and more inviting to pedestrians. This exercise explored the kinds of corrective measures the Gwinnett Place Mall area would need to make it a destination where people would want to go and walk. The participants were divided into four groups, with each given a large aerial photo of the area to sketch concepts on. Each group developed a rough conceptual plan to revitalize the area, focusing on a form that is pedestrian-friendly. So as not to suppress creativity, participants were told not to worry about the cost.

One group came up with the idea of a partially elevated promenade that would circle through part of the Ring Road area near the mall and loop across Pleasant Hill Road on a pedestrian bridge before circling back over another similar bridge. Rex Schuder, who works for the Parks & Recreation Division of the Department of Community Services, initiated this concept. To support this concept, other recommended improvements included locating a high-rise office building where the empty Borders bookstore is now and decking much of the much of the mall parking lot to create structured parking. New developments would be created on these decks, now flush with the elevated promenade. New buildings—a mix of office, retail, and residential—lining the promenade would create an attractive and functional streetscape. Outside dining and interesting retail would line the promenade, and residential would occupy the upper floors. Mr. Schuder mentioned that the promenade concept would have particular resonance with people from Europe and Mexico where recreational walking in cities is part of the culture.

The other discussion groups proposed less ambitious changes yet identified a number of ways to improve the area's walkability. Recommendations generally shared by the groups were as follows:

- A complete network of sidewalks
- Roundabouts in place of some of the intersections, especially on Market St.
- A park of some kind on the power line easement
- More street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, and businesses closer to the street
- Improved access from the bus terminal to the mall, "promenade style"

- Mixed-use or office buildings on some of the area's underperforming retail sites.
- A safer and more inviting route between "hotel row" and the rest of the area
- Improvement of the block of Market St. going over the power line easement.
- The establishment of "pocket parks" on vacant tracts and excess parking areas
- Convenient and attractive pedestrian routes to McDaniel Farm Park.
- Requiring a minimum eight foot wide sidewalks
- Buildings fronting the Ring Road surrounding the mall
- Filling some of the vast mall parking lot with mixed-use development

The meeting concluded with a discussion to develop consensus on the desired improvements and strategies for implementation. It was agreed that improving the walkability of the Gwinnett Place area was critical to its revitalization and that local leaders including the members of the CID should be aggressive in seeking funding for pedestrian-related improvements in the area. Subsequent to the workshop, the CID submitted a preliminary listing of requested sidewalks to the Gwinnett Department of Transportation for funding through the Special Local Option Sales Tax program. It has not been determined at this point, however, how the \$4,000,000 included in the 2005 SPLOST will be allocated among "rehabilitation and revitalization areas." A listing of the requested sidewalk projects is shown in the attached table. The top two priorities listed for sidewalks, Market Street and Venture Drive, were emphasized during the workshop.

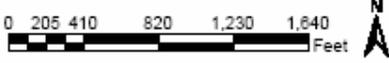
Also stressed during the meeting was the importance of adding residential uses and an increased work population in the vicinity of the mall. Toward this goal, Gwinnett County has drafted new regulations that could open the door to mixed-use and high-rise residential and office development in the area.



GWINNETT PLACE MALL WALKABLE STUDY CORRIDOR



This map is a graphical representation of data obtained from aerial photography, recorded drone photos and engineering drawings and other public records and data. Gwinnett County does not warrant the accuracy or currency of the data. It is provided "as is" and does not guarantee the accuracy of the data for any purposes intended or unintended. USE THIS AS A GUIDANCE ONLY. THE USER ASSUMES ALL LIABILITY FOR ANY DAMAGE, INCLUDING REASONABLE ATTORNEY'S FEES, INCURRED BY ANY USER OF THIS MAP. THIS MAP IS THE PROPERTY OF GWINNETT COUNTY AND IS PROVIDED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE. GWINNETT COUNTY IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY DAMAGE, INCLUDING REASONABLE ATTORNEY'S FEES, INCURRED BY ANY USER OF THIS MAP.



2005 Walkable Community Workshop
September 15, 2005
Wellesley Inn and Suites
3390 Venture Parkway Duluth, GA
Participants

NAME	ORGANIZATION	E-MAIL	PHONE
Scott Haggard	Gwinnett County	Scott.Haggard@gwinnettcountry.com	770-822-7031
Amy Lynn Hoch	Wild Bill's	amylynnhoch@aol.com	404-587-6424
Grant Guess	Gwinnett Co. P&R	Grant.Guess@gwinnettcountry.com	770-822-8855
Terry Obeholtzer	City of Snellville	joberholtzer@snellville.org	770-885-3500
David Gill	Gwinnett Co. P&D	David.Gill@gwinnettcountry.com	678-518-6212
Patricia Huguenard	Gwinnett Co. P&D	Patricia.Huguenard@gwinnettcountry.com	678-518-6221
Rex Schuder	Gwinnett Co. P&R	Rex.Schuder@gwinnettcountry.com	770-822-8864
Nancy Roney	Gwinnett Co. P&D	Nancy.Roney@gwinnettcountry.com	678-518-6214
Steve Logan	Gwinnett Co. P&D	Steve.Logan@gwinnettcountry.com	678-518-6203
Paula Hastings	Golden Triangle Comm. Assoc.	PRHastings98@charter.net	404-290-3764
Peggy Boydston	Gwinnett Co. Planning Commission	lville@aol.com	770-963-1572
Brent Walker	Gwinnett Co. P&R	Brent.Walker@gwinnettcountry.com	770-811-4920
Doug Spohn	Spohntown Corporation	Spohntown@aol.com	770-232-1995
Laura Hill	Precision Planning, Inc.	LauraMHill@bellsouth.com	777-338-8134
Jesse Munoz	Gwinnett Neighborhood Leadership Inst.	Jessemunoz2003@yahoo.com	770-301-6940
John Karnowski	Street Smarts Consulting	johnk@streetsmarts.us	770-813-0882
Marcie Diaz	Gwinnett Co. P&R	Marcie.Diaz@gwinnettcountry.com	770-822-8871
Art Sheldon	Gwinnett Transit Advisory Board	A.Sheldon@mindspring.com	770-623-8290
Jason Crane	Georgia Dept. of Transportations	Jason.Crane@dotstatega.us	404-463-0010
Laura Best-Moore	Centurion Foods	jmoore330@msn.com	770-232-0403
Wes Bagley	Radloff Middle School		678-245-3405
Phil Hoskins	Gwinnett Co. Community Serv.	Phil.Hoskins@gwinnettcountry.com	770-812-8890
Glenn Wisdom	JC Penney Gwinnett Place	gwisdom@JCPenney.com	770-476-3220
Scott Rolston	Gwinnett Place Mall	srolston@simon.com	770-813-6840
Sgt Mike Pearson	Gwinnett Co. Police Dept	mike.Pearson@gwinnettcountry.com	770-495-3900
Jamie Henson	Gwinnett Co. P&D	Gtg308Z@mail.gatech.edu	678-518-6213
James Pugsley	Gwinnett Co. P& D	James.pugsley@gwinnettcountry.com	678-518-6213

Gwinnett Place CID
Sidewalks
10-7-05

2005 SPLOST
Sidewalks for Revitalization Areas

Priority	Street	From	To	Length (in feet)	Sides	Total Distance	cost p/foot	Cost Estimate	Notes
1	Venture Parkway	Pleasant Hill	Mall Ring Rd.	2200	1	2200	\$150	\$330,000	East side. "Motel row" & Pleasant Hill access to Mall. Heavy road traffic.
2	Market Street	Satellite Blvd	Venture Pkwy	2215	1	2215	\$150	\$332,250	North side. Transit center and restaurant access to "motel row" on Venture Pkwy.
3	Old Norcross Rd.	Pleasant Hill	Steve Reynolds	710	1	710	\$150	\$106,500	East side. Residential access to new Kroger Center @ Steve Reynolds
								\$768,750	GPCID discretionary allocation = \$700K
4	Crestwood Pkwy	Pleasant Hill	Pineland Rd.	1210	2	2420	\$150	\$363,000	Residential & office access to Pleasant Hill
5	Venture Drive	Pleasant Hill	Steve Reynolds	2650	1	2650	\$150	\$397,500	East side only. Retail/office access to Pleasant Hill Rd & the Mall.
							TOTAL	\$1,968,000	

<u>Priority</u>	<u>Street</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Length</u> <u>(in feet)</u>	<u>Sides</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>Distance</u>	<u>cost</u> <u>p/foot</u>	<u>Cost</u> <u>Estimate</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	Venture Parkway	Pleasant Hill	Mall Ring Rd.	2200	1	2200	\$150	\$330,000	East side."Motel row" & Pleasant Hill access to Mall. Heavy road traffic.
2	Market Street	Satellite Blvd	Venture Pkwy	2215	1	2215	\$150	\$332,250	North side. Transit center and restaurant access to "motel row" on Venture Pkwy.
3	Old Norcross Rd.	Pleasant Hill	Steve Reynolds	710	1	710	\$150	\$106,500	East side. Residential access to new Kroger Center @ Steve Reynolds
								<i>\$768,750</i>	<i>GPCID discretionary allocation = \$700K</i>
4	Crestwood Pkwy	Pleasant Hill	Pineland Rd.	1210	2	2420	\$150	\$363,000	Residential & office access to Pleasant Hill
5	Venture Drive	Pleasant Hill	Steve Reynolds	2650	1	2650	\$150	\$397,500	East side only. Retail/office access to Pleasant Hill Rd & the Mall.
							TOTAL	\$1,968,000	