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INSIDE VIEW INTO GEORGIA'S POLITICS, BUSINESS & NEWS



## The POLITICAL & LAW ISSUE



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P E N L E Y

# CIDs ARE DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN GEORGIA

by Cindy Morley

Since the inception of the first Community Improvement District, CIDs have become an increasingly popular method of promoting economic growth in Georgia. There are currently 27 in Georgia and that number is expected to grow.

The Cumberland CID was the first in 1988 after state lawmakers approved legislation creating the districts. Then-state legislators Johnny Isakson and Roy Barnes played a key role in creating the enabling legislation along with the late real estate developer John Williams, a visionary who knew traffic would be the key factor influencing growth in the state. Since then, CIDs have influenced the development of the Atlanta region significantly and have expanded to other parts of the state.

"As the Cumberland Community Improvement District approaches its 30th anniversary, it is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity," says Cumberland CID Executive Director Tad Leithead. Since the inception it has collected and invested \$130 million in transportation and related projects, leveraging almost \$2.5 billion for infrastructure improvements within the geographic boundaries.

"The result is that the CCID has emerged as one of four core business districts, joining Midtown, Buckhead, and Perimeter Center, in the Atlanta Region," Leithead says. "In the last three years alone, seven new office buildings have been built for corporate users including Synovus, HD Supply, Genuine Parts, Comcast and others. In addition, 7,000 residential units and hundreds of thousand square feet of retail have been added."

## A FUNDING MECHANISM'S EARLY SUCCESS

Georgia CIDs grew out of a business improvement district (BID) which emerged in the United States as an organizational mechanism for property owners to address problems such as economic decline by levying an additional property tax (or other fees). Both BIDs and CIDs provide supplemental services such as landscaping, street cleaning, public safety and transportation improvements.

However, Georgia CIDs are more autonomous than the other types of BIDs. CIDs have a wider scope of eligible services that they can provide. They are a geographically defined, self taxing district where commercial property owners voluntarily pay additional taxes to fund projects. The Cumberland CID collects about \$6 million a year.

The Town Center CID was another of the state's first CIDs, formed in 1997 to promote infrastructure improvements and improve commercial property values in the Town Center area. Since its inception, it has been able to successfully partner with the county and state to leverage more than \$150 million into significant community improvements, according to Executive Director Tracy Rathbone.

Some of the major projects include the Zagster bike share program which boasts one of the highest in ridership in the nation (nearly 10,000 active members who have taken more than 25,000 rides to date), and Aviation Park a three-acre, aviation-themed park, located adjacent to the Cobb County International Airport runway.

As for the future, The Town Center CID sees itself evolving toward mobility-focused solutions. "From millennials to seniors, every resident and visitor to Cobb County is in need of multi-modal transit options and





Town Center CID Executive Director Tracy Rathbone

effective connectivity," said Rathbone. "We understand that driving success for its community requires a multi-modal transportation effort that includes roadway improvements, buses, and even trails to provide connection and access to destinations in — and outside the area."

The Buckhead CID has also seen much success since its inception in 1999, says Executive Director Jim Durrett. One of the most exciting projects is the nine-acre park being built over GA-400 near Lenox Square. The park is designed as a trail network with green space and establishing links between major office towers and new residential high-rises. Durrett believes the "Deck Park" could become "the significant gathering place that the Buckhead Business District has been missing."

## MORE FULTON COUNTY AND OTHER CIDS

Founded in 2003, the North Fulton Community Improvement District has been catalyst for positive change throughout the northern part of Georgia's largest county. The NFCID has leveraged more than \$20 million to advance more than \$100 million worth of transportation and infrastructure improvements, according to Executive Director Brandon Beach (also a state senator from the 21st District). It was formed to complete construction of the Westside Parkway, which runs parallel to GA 400, allowing travelers to move from Windward to Mansell without getting on GA 400.

In August 2017, the North Fulton CID capped the second phase of the Northwinds Parkway extension with a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Encore Parkway Corridor Improvement project. It consists of enhancing the two-lane Encore Parkway between Westside Parkway and North Point Parkway and replacing the previously-existing bridge over GA 400. The new roadway includes two 14-foot travel lanes, two 6-foot bicycle lanes and two 8-foot sidewalks with landscaped buffers on each side



Proposed plan for the Buckhead CID's "Deck Park"

and a raised, landscaped median. The Encore Parkway bridge was reconstructed to accommodate future GA 400 widening. The new bridge and roadway included trees, landscaping, pedestrian lighting, street furniture and architectural bridge elements, creating a more walkable environment while maintaining and enhancing crucial transportation features.

The \$6 million project was a joint effort by the North Fulton CID, the Georgia Department of Transportation and the city of Alpharetta to build out Northwinds Parkway from where it previously ended at Kimball Bridge Road to meet Old Milton Parkway. This enhancement offers an alternate route for those traveling to and from the growing collection of commercial, residential and entertainment areas in Alpharetta.

In addition to improving connectivity for Alpharetta and the broader North Fulton community, the Northwinds Parkway Extension benefits the Gwinnett Technical College Alpharetta-North Fulton Campus, Avalon and the new Jackson Healthcare Alpharetta campus. The extension includes the addition of a traffic light at the Northwinds-Old Milton intersection and an entrance on the east side of the school.

According to Beach, the North Fulton CID is moving ahead with several new projects including the addition of a triple-left-turn lane that will extend along westbound Windward Parkway to Deerfield Parkway and Westside Parkway. The project is a part of an ongoing effort to improve transportation flow for drivers along and entering Windward Parkway from Georgia 400 northbound.

Then there's the Evermore CID, beginning its 15th year of service. According to Executive Director Jim Brooks, its primary purpose was to improve the environment for property owners and businesses in the Gwinnett area.

The Evermore CID—partnering with Federal Highway Administration, the state Department of Transportation, the Atlanta Regional Commission, Gwinnett County government, Gwinnett's SPLOST and



The Gwinnett Place CID

property owners — has fostered transportation improvements throughout the corridor. The CID has worked with its partners to construct road realignments and the creation of the parallel road to the north and south of the US 78. Sanitary sewer efforts, while not seen, have provided great opportunity for development and redevelopment, according to Brooks.

## CIDs EXPAND ACROSS THE STATE

The Boulevard CID was created in 2010 and initially centered around the Camp Creek Fulton Industrial Blvd. area. In 2012, it was expanded to include the I-20/Fulton Industrial Blvd Interchange, according to Gil Prado, who has served as executive director for the past six years.

The first priorities for the Boulevard CID were public safety, landscaping and beautification, transportation infrastructure improvements, and economic development. They are currently wrapping up a \$2.5 million improvement to the I-20/Fulton Industrial Blvd Interchange area that was originally envisioned by the Fulton Industrial master plan. This multi-faceted project involved improving four intersections to both facilitate freight movement and protect the safety of pedestrians, according to Prado.

The first phase of this project included sidewalks, improved intersection turning radio, upgraded traffic lights and pedestrian crosswalks.

"All of these efforts have helped make the I-20/Fulton Industrial Interchange more attractive," said Prado. "These efforts combined with our public safety initiatives and weekly landscaping and litter pick up maintenance crew has helped to make the district's front door more vibrant, safer and cleaner for more than 30,000 people that work or do business in the district every day."

The CID is now focused on continued improvement of the Fulton industrial area through a multi-point approach focused on increased public safety, landscaping and beautification, transportation

improvement and economic development. The two areas of future focus will be the improvement of two major intersections: Cascade and Fulton Industrial and Camp Creek Pkwy and Fulton Industrial Blvd.

## GWINNETT AREA CIDs

Executive Director Joe Allen says the first priorities of the Gwinnett Place CID, formed in 2005, were general clean-up, improve landscaping and formation of a community patrol. Last year alone, CID-funded landscape efforts removed 43.11 tons of trash along the 10-miles of roadways in the CID. And during 2017, they installed thousands of plant materials throughout the area to beautify and green area roadways.

The CID also funded coordinated safety and security community patrols seven days a week and reported police incidents in the CID have declined by 39 percent, Allen says.

The Gwinnett Place CID recently created Vision 2020 in partnership with Gwinnett County Commission and Partnership Gwinnett. The top priority will be to be a key advocate/partner for transit, housing and catalyst projects. Another goal is to improve the perception of the Gwinnett Place area, according to Allen.

The Sugarloaf CID began in 2016 but did not form around one urgent issue, according to Executive Director Alyssa Davis. *continued on page 36*

The North Fulton CID would like to congratulate



State Senator  
**BRANDON BEACH**

and the Georgia legislature on a successful legislative session and the creation of the ATL!

 **NORTH FULTON**  
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"The CID leaders recognized the need to plan ahead to avoid the decline some other communities in the region have faced as they age. Forming the CID was proactive rather than reactive. It was a recognition of the importance of making improvements now to ensure the long-term success of the Sugarloaf area," Davis says.

According to Davis, they have been successful in advancing initial transportation improvements. "The CID immediately identified key intersection and sidewalk studies after formation, and we were able to take those to the county and the SPLOST Citizen Committee to secure \$7.5 million in SPLOST funding to improve transportation," she says. "One of our intersection projects has already been completed, improvements to the gateway intersection of Sugarloaf Parkway and Satellite Boulevard are currently in design and several sidewalks will be completed this year. We were also recently awarded funding for an exciting project—the Loop Trail—that will create a connection from the Gwinnett Place area to the Infinite Energy Center and up to Suwanee's trail system."

### OTHER CIDS FOSTERING PROGRESS

Airport West and Airport South CID leaders have united their efforts under the name Aerotropolis Atlanta CIDs. Both sets of board members work together as a much stronger unit to serve commercial and industrial property owners in Fulton and Clayton Counties and Gerald McDowell serves as its able executive director.

The AACIDs are currently developing a district-wide feasibility study for transit service enhancements, including modifications to existing services and adding new services. This study will have a major emphasis on public feedback. The team will conduct interviews with key stakeholders, conduct regular stakeholder committee meetings, have mobile exhibits and public meetings, as well as conduct surveys. Throughout the study, a dedicated website will be maintained with meeting notices, maps and contact information.

The Gateway85 Gwinnett CID, funded by commercial property owners in the 14-square mile area spanning the I-85 corridor in southwest Gwinnett County, is the largest in Georgia. Formerly named Gwinnett Village CID, it represents more than 550 owners and accounts for more than \$1 billion in commercial property value. Five thousand businesses employ more than 60,000 workers within the district.

Gateway85 Gwinnett is indeed the threshold between Atlanta and its largest suburban county, Gwinnett. Goals include increasing commercial property values by promoting further redevelopment and new business, investing in infrastructure improvements that enable safe travel by bike or on foot, enhancing public safety with sidewalks and crosswalks and creating an attractive roadside landscape. Impressive progress is already underway on all of them.

*Cindy Morley is a staff writer for James and InsiderAdvantage.*



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