



'It can be so much more': Gwinnett Place Mall could become international village

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GWINNETT COUNTY

By August, the team managing the redevelopment of Gwinnett Place Mall expects to put forth its final plan to the public. It will likely include high-capacity transit and a mix of uses, including residential and commercial space.

A shell of its former glory, Gwinnett Place Mall once served as the county's de facto downtown area and welcomed visitors from all over Northeast Georgia.

Now, the main entrances to the mall are padlocked shut. The mostly vacant fortress, located off busy Pleasant Hill Road near Interstate 85, is surrounded by a sea of underused surface parking.

The county [purchased most of the mall for \\$23 million](#) in the hopes of creating a space that meshes with 21st-century suburbia. In surveys and interviews, residents and other community members have stressed the need for a walkable mixed-use destination with efficient transit, jobs and affordable housing.

The team managing the redevelopment – which includes the county, [Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District](#), [Atlanta Regional Commission](#) and [Vanasse Hangen Brustlin](#) (VHB) – expects to put forth its final plan to the public in August, after a year of engaging the community, touring successful mall transformations across the nation and testing what’s feasible.

“We’ve got to do something,” said [Joe Allen](#), executive director of the Gwinnett Place CID. “This is still an economic engine of the county. It can be so much more, and the mall site is key to that.”

Pleasant Hill Road, abundant with minority-owned businesses, is located in the most diverse county in the Southeast. The area boasts the highest concentration of retail space in the county and brings in about \$1.5 billion in annual retail sales, according to the CID. Allen estimates that the redevelopment could grow the area’s annual economic impact from \$13.4 billion to \$82 billion.

Survey says

Residents and other community members want to see affordable housing, local businesses, quality jobs and neighborhood services come out of the redevelopment, according to a report released earlier this year by the county. They also desire a walkable destination, active at day and night, that celebrates the county’s diversity.

Respondents favored a five-story “international village” with new office, residential, retail and restaurant space, according to a series of surveys and interviews from about 1,000 people conducted by the CID and compiled into a report.

About 93% of the people who live near the mall work outside of the area, which could change through the inclusion of quality jobs on and around the site. The county is also exploring job training and workforce opportunities to include in the plan.

The final plan could include bus rapid transit – in which buses run mostly in dedicated lanes with signal prioritization – running through the site, according to the CID’s report. Business owners, residents and community organizations also requested trail connections and bike facilities.

The CID and its partners will host a [workshop on April 20](#) to continue fine-tuning plans for the site. The public will have a chance to [weigh in on two potential redevelopment strategies at the Atlanta International Neighborhood Night Market in Suwanee on April 23 and 24](#).

The bigger picture

Opened in 1984, Gwinnett Place Mall started to go downhill in the early 2000s. Investors pumped dollars into the newer Mall of Georgia and Sugarloaf Mills, formerly known as Discovery Mills, while the older mall traded hands and wilted.

The county decided to purchase most of Gwinnett Place Mall after promised revitalization plans by private investors fell short. Macy's, Mega Mart and Beauty Master independently own their spaces and will likely remain post-redevelopment.

[Gwinnett Place Mall isn't alone in its fate](#). Malls across the U.S. have declined or shuttered altogether amid the rise of e-commerce and shifts in cultural attitudes toward retail. Developers intend to give several underperforming metro Atlanta malls the mixed-use treatment.

Edens plans to [convert North DeKalb Mall near Decatur into a mixed-use center](#) with 1,700 apartments and 500,000 square feet of office and retail space. Trademark Properties [recently unveiled a similar strategy for North Point Mall](#) in Alpharetta. Revitalization plans are also in the works for Northlake Mall in Tucker and Phipps Plaza in Buckhead.



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