

AJC

Atlanta. News. Now.

Gwinnett Place study recommends housing, neighborhood services



By [Alia Malik](#), The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

17 hours ago

A new plan to equitably redevelop Gwinnett Place mall asks county commissioners to commit to 16 strategies, including affordable housing and neighborhood services on the mall site, a small business loan program in the area and a countywide affordable housing trust fund.

A team from HR&A Advisors presented the plan Tuesday to the county board of commissioners, who contracted the study amid concerns that redeveloping the nearly-abandoned mall could displace residents of the diverse neighborhood surrounding it.

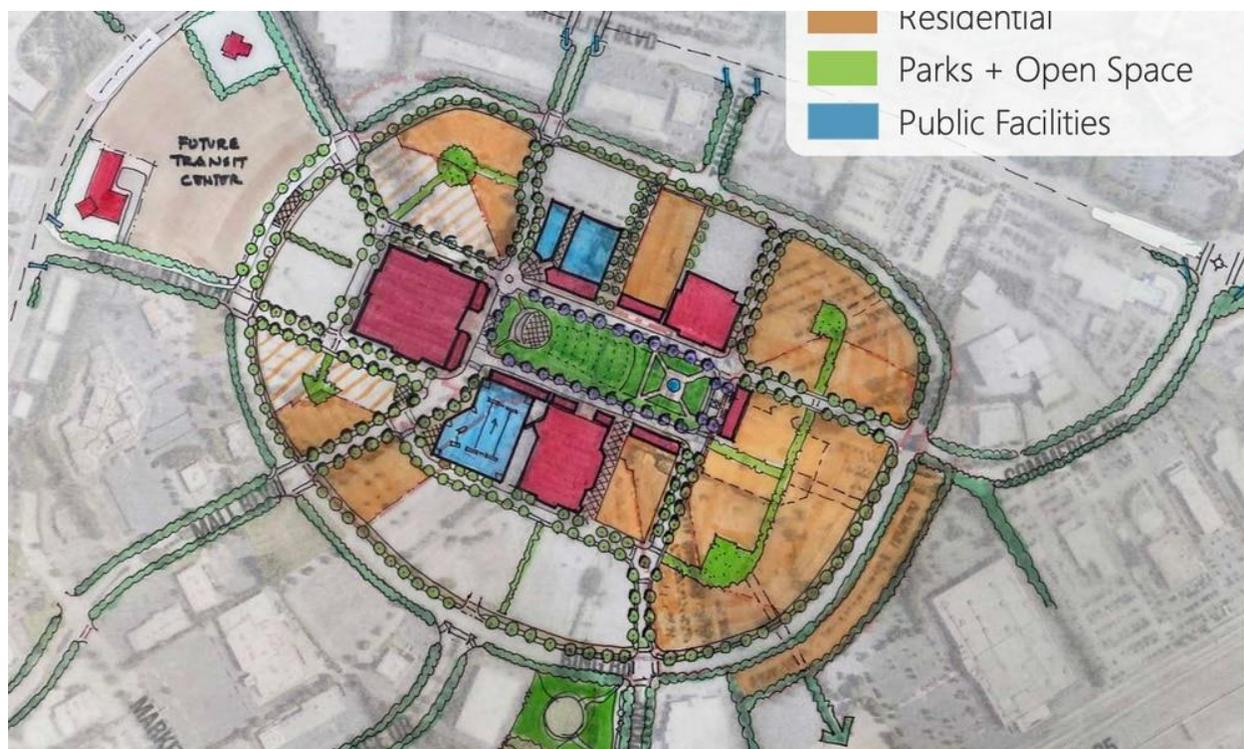
County Commission Chairwoman Nicole Love Hendrickson said she would like the board to vote to formally adopt the plan and include it later this year in a request for developers.

"This center is the voice of the community and what they want to see," Hendrickson said. "We should absolutely consider working with a developer who would consider including all aspects of those pillars that we discussed today."

Community requests for Gwinnett Place project include housing, jobs

The strategies include the creation of a cultural activity center and incentives to contract with local small businesses and residents of color. The area around the mall, off Interstate 85 south of Duluth, has been described as the most diverse neighborhood in the most diverse county in the South. It contains many immigrant-owned businesses but also high levels of economic and housing insecurity, according to the equity study.

The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District has settled on a draft conceptual plan for the mall site that includes a cultural center, a central park, 3,800 units of mixed-rate housing, 100,000 square feet of retail and 50,000 square feet of office space.



Credit: Contributed

The housing units would be built in five residential "villages" with green spaces and courtyards, according to the CID's draft. The existing mall structure would be demolished but Macy's, Mega Mart and Beauty Master would remain in their spaces.

Gwinnett County gained control of the mall's redevelopment last year by purchasing 39 acres of the property for \$23 million. Built in 1984, it was once considered the unofficial downtown of Gwinnett County. Scenes from the hit Netflix series "Stranger Things," set in the 1980s, were filmed in recent years in the now-abandoned food court .

The equity plan, developed with a community advisory board and feedback from nearly 2,000 local residents, includes strategies for the area around the mall and for the entire county. They

include zoning tools that incentivize affordable housing and transit connections to the Gwinnett Place site.

Commissioner Kirkland Carden, whose district includes the mall, said he agreed with the strategies but was concerned they could be a barrier for potential developers. He said he would be asking the consultants for more specifics about implementing the recommendations. Some might have to be pursued independently from the mall redevelopment, he said.

"What I don't want is a plan that sits on the shelf, that sets high expectations and then five or 10 years from now we don't deliver," Carden said.

Andrea Batista Schlesinger, a managing partner with HR&A, called the Gwinnett Place project "an unprecedented redevelopment that will define how we even think about the future of malls in the South in this country."

More stories about Gwinnett County

Gwinnett Place is one of many dilapidated malls across the country undergoing redevelopment efforts. HR&A pointed to Essex Market in New York City as an example of a redevelopment project that successfully prioritized equity.

Nearby, the North DeKalb Mall was recently rezoned for mixed-use development with 1,800 homes.