

# Technical Assistance Panel

## Advisory Services Regarding New, Mixed-Use Development around Lillian Webb Park located in the Norcross Central Business District in Norcross, GA

City of Norcross  
Norcross Downtown Development Authority



**October 2010**

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With over 1,000 members throughout the Metropolitan Atlanta area, ULI Atlanta is one of the largest District Councils of the Urban Land Institute (ULI). We bring together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs. We share knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media.

ULI Mission: The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

## About the Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. ULI Atlanta brought this same model of technical assistance to the Metropolitan Atlanta area. Local ULI members volunteer their time to serve on panels. In return, they are provided with a unique opportunity to share their skills and experience to improve their community.

Through Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs), ULI Atlanta is able to enhance community leadership, clarify community needs and assets, and advance land use policies that expand economic opportunity and maximize market potential.

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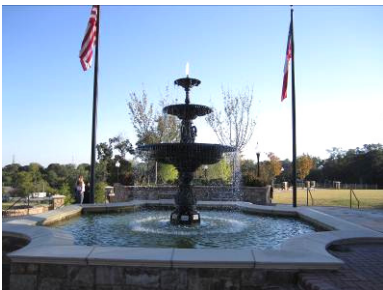
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Panel is also grateful to have the benefit of input from the many stakeholders, city officials and residents who attended the session, including: Bucky Johnson, Rudolph Smith, Chris McCrary, Dwayne Higgins, Jeff Mueller, Chris Izzo, Skip Nau, Bob Wilkerson, Ross Kaul, Laura Laszlo, Chuck Cimarik, Nick Masino, Tixie Fowler, Brant Aden, Charlie Rielm, David McLeroy, Alyssa Sinclair, Robert Patrick

The panel would also like to thank the City of Norcross for the use of their meeting space and the assistance of their staff in setting up the room, the photographs seen throughout this document and providing lunch for everyone.

## PANEL and PROJECT STAFF

ULI Atlanta would like to thank the panelists, moderators and TAP Committee members for their time, energy and passion for ULI.

### PANEL MEMBERS:

**Jonathan Bartlett** - *RCLCO*

**Josh Campbell** – *City of Suwanee*

**Kevin Clark** – *Historical Concepts*

**Eric Masaschi** – *Vintage Communities, Inc.*

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### MODERATORS:

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*Panelists (Left to Right): Kevin Clark; Jonathan Bartlett; Josh Campbell (back row); Thomas Walsh; Cheri Morris; Eli Yewdell (back row); Ellen Heath; Eric Masaschi (back row); John Reagan*



## INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2010, nine ULI members volunteered their time and expertise to discuss progress so far in the City of Norcross, and make recommendations to shape the town's future success. Discussion focused on the development potential surrounding Lillian Webb Park, Norcross' new \$5 million investment.

Ellen Heath, Vice President and Principal at AECOM, served as moderator.

The Park, completed in July 2010, is a signature public gathering place named to honor former Norcross mayor Lillian Webb. The 4.5 acre park was filled to capacity during the July 4th celebration this year and is becoming a popular site for weddings and public concerts.

Since Gwinnett County has several outstanding active recreational parks, Lillian Webb Park fills the need for a regional passive park.

After an overview from Chris McCrary, Community Development Director for the City of Norcross and City Council member Charlie Riehm, Mayor Bucky Johnson led the group on a walking tour of the Park offering further background and context.

When asked what has been the philosophy of Norcross, Mayor Johnson replied, "If we do a good job serving our 10,000 residents with parks, attractive residential and interactive events such as our weekly Farmers Market, old car shows and concerts every two weeks in the summer, we will attract more retail. If we take care of our own citizens, word will spread beyond our borders. Downtown's main street is our jewel. If we continue to make it vibrant and unique, it will sell itself and attract new residents and retail on its own merit."

Today, lunch is the busiest time in downtown Norcross. Weekends and week nights are still relatively quiet.

"Consider this our beach front property with a \$5 million amenity in your front yard," Mayor Johnson added.

## IMAGINE

**Imagine** hundreds of Norcross residents living on Lillian Webb Park in a mix of single-family homes, live-work units, town houses, apartments and lofts. They're keeping new and existing restaurants active seven nights a week. Everyone arrives on foot; their cars left parked at home.

**Imagine** that several of these residents are affluent attorneys, artists, accountants and consultants enjoying the pleasures of working at home with an office on the first floor and extra leisure time to tend colorful roof gardens on top.

**Imagine** when they head to the airport. They will walk to Brook Hollow Parkway and hop on a light rail trolley that links directly to MARTA rail – another opportunity to leave their car at home.

**Imagine** popular cultural events that fill the Park on most weekends, attracting thousands of people from intown Atlanta and a 30-mile radius. Visitors wander the shops and enjoy good food in downtown Norcross' 15 or more busy restaurants.

**Imagine** Norcross residents walking to the Bleu House Fresh Market on Monday, then walking to their local Farmer's Market on Tuesday for locally grown, organic fruits and veggies, home baked breads, fresh eggs and flowers, without ever crossing Buford Highway.

**Imagine** a transformed Buford Highway from Mitchell to Jimmy Carter that's become a true gateway into town, featuring inviting sidewalks and planted medians serving as safe havens for crossing the busy boulevard. Norcross residents are walking more than ever before.

**Imagine** light rail vehicles delivering commuters and shoppers to Lillian Webb Park day and night, constantly moving in a dedicated lane. First class architecture sets the tone for quality and permanence at Britt Avenue and Buford Highway, rivaling the world's great boulevards in Manhattan and Chicago, even Paris.

**Imagine** plenty of surface parking lots that are full every weekend because visitors choose to eat and shop in Norcross to experience its special character and mix of charming shops, not found in their own neighborhoods.

**Imagine** an award-winning, architecturally significant public library anchoring one edge of Lillian Webb Park. It features state-of-the-art learning opportunities and collections, a casual outdoor café and upscale restaurant, stunning views of the Park, and ample underground parking, shared by downtown merchants.

## **BIG IDEAS THAT EMERGED FROM THE DISCUSSION**

### ***Retail***

It's probably too early to add retail directly on Lillian Webb Park. Concentrate retail on South Peachtree and Skin Alley, its natural home. Successful retail must be connected in contiguous clusters.

Maintain the main street's local flavor. Do not allow chains to locate on South Peachtree. Legislate against chains like Burger King and McDonalds in the downtown corridor.

An active and attractive Skin Alley is what will make Norcross a cool place. It's something no other town has and will be a top reason to come to Norcross.

One-way streets are not conducive to retail. Visitors find them confusing and disorienting. They're designed to move cars faster and are known as "community killers and retail killers as well." Since Norcross must attract outside traffic to its destination shops and cannot rely solely on its own local population, one-way streets could be a mistake.

Keep working on the health of your main street. It still needs additional critical mass to become a true retail destination.

Norcross can legislate that once a lease expires in the retail corridor, no offices will be allowed on the ground floor of those buildings. That space must be reserved for quality retail.

### ***Residential***

We all bought into New Urbanism as a concept, yet it just doesn't work for every project. It could take as long as three to five years for the live-work model to take hold in Norcross, if at all.

Residential may be the best use of land around Lillian Webb Park. Offer a good mix of housing options including rentals, detached single family homes, multi-story condo buildings and town houses. Prices should range from the \$200s to \$400s with perhaps a few in the \$1 million range.

As planners, we think of density first yet Norcross has a unique opportunity to offer single family homes mixed with town houses right on a major park.

There's a clear residential trend that is moving toward smaller, more elegant houses at lower prices, a very positive direction for Norcross, especially on the Park.

The large scale of Lillian Webb Park argues for higher density residential on the Park's perimeter so the Park will become more animated and well used. In time, five-story residential buildings or higher on the Park may be desirable and beneficial to support Norcross' growing retail offerings.

Think of the Park as the heart of Norcross – the middle ground – where residential options of every type can be built, reserving Buford Highway for large retail and chains, and South Peachtree for destination retail.

Focus on establishing a good residential base before building new retail that may sit empty for years. You can always design buildings that have the flexibility to become ground floor retail later, yet that's a more expensive product.

### ***Buford Highway***

Acknowledge Buford Highway as an essential gateway and critical piece of the puzzle.

Raise the visibility of Norcross along Buford Highway and make it overt. Take full advantage of the 35,000 cars that pass by the Park every day.

Continue to improve sidewalks and pedestrian connectivity from Buford Highway to all entry points into Norcross. Consider attractive pavers, not asphalt, whenever possible to create a more inviting walking experience.

Make new development compatible with existing development nearby. No 40-story buildings for example. However, the days of the one and two-story building on Buford Highway are over. Higher density must be added.

Keep national retail chains on Buford Highway while continuing to develop your own locally grown entertainment district on South Peachtree and Skin Alley.

### ***A few more***

Though it remains a blue sky vision, continue to pursue the idea of bringing a new, expanded library to the Park. A major civic function like a library will greatly enhance residential and retail development.

The library could be on the second level with park views and a Tavern on the Green-style restaurant on the ground floor. A three-story civic building would fit the Park's scale well.

Always respond to the market instead of building too much too quickly.

Do not allow land leases for City-owned or DDA-owned property, where the City owns the land and extends a long-term lease to developers. It can't get financed. That's what MARTA does, contributing to their financial woes.

It was suggested that a new street be created around the Park to provide new opportunities for development to face the Park near Buford Highway. The new street could run along the City of Norcross parcel and cut across to create a buildable zone between Bostic and the Britto parcel by extending Bostic on an angle, gaining more Park frontage.

Consider changing the orientation of the existing Hispanic church so that it faces the Park instead of turning its back on it.

### **FIRST STEPS NORCROSS CAN IMPLEMENT NOW**

You already have your first phase win: a completed Lillian Webb Park.

Focus on residential now, and keep development around the Park residential only. The most attractive product may be tightly clustered single family homes and multi-family apartments.

It's essential to offer a healthy mix of residential choices. Do not encircle the Park with only \$400,000 fee simple, free standing homes.

You have a developer ready to develop. Take advantage of Skip Nau's willingness to show a success right now, and keep that momentum going, knowing that development could still be slow in three to five years.

Be mindful of a growing aging population and consider some form of senior housing. There are many models for walkable communities that allow people to stay in their homes longer and not have to drive. Adding elevators is part of this trend.

Control as many parcels as you can while prices are low, especially on Buford Highway and on the South Peachtree main street. Continue to focus on city-owned property in the immediate future.

Program the Park aggressively with cultural events and increase marketing efforts to let a wider audience know about them. It's important to bring in new visitors.

Determine a future site for a multi-level underground parking deck now. Even though you don't have to build it in the next 20 years, you will need it eventually. You have SPLOST money dedicated to parking. Focus on surface lots for the next 10 years.

Make sure your zoning is in order with emphasis on consistent form-based codes. Provide meaningful incentives for the type of development you want. A consistent code will protect your vision 20 and 50 years from now. Put well-defined codes in place before development picks up.

In good and bad times, it's the same. Your vision will ultimately be protected by strong, uniform codes for the entire city. Decatur is a good example. You must have uniform codes from the main street downtown to both sides of Buford Highway so every new project fits your vision. That's the only way to prepare for the future you want. Having smart codes in place will eliminate the uncertainty of today's economy.

The price of land on Buford Highway will only go up. Buy what you can now.

Tell developers, “We will green tape your development if it meets our goals”— the opposite of being slowed by bureaucratic red tape. You must provide meaningful developer incentives to attract new development this far outside downtown Atlanta. Make Norcross more attractive than communities 20 and 30 miles further out. Those communities will never recover.

Now is a good time to plan and prepare. Single family residences can be built one by one. The Park is an infill site.

Consider another growing trend: community agriculture. With abundant full sun in the Park, a portion can be converted to a community garden. Harvests can be used by local restaurants, schools and neighborhood groups.

Rent a van for Norcross leaders to visit nearby communities to experience them together. This is an easy resource that’s often overlooked. Decatur, Smyrna, Duluth and Woodstock are recommended.

Longtime Charleston mayor Joe Riley has a positive, focused attitude that’s transformational. He’s committed to taking care of all citizens, not just the wealthy. ULI has a video of one or two of his speeches. Share it with Norcross constituents to fire them up and inspire them to demand top quality development.

Consider attracting a community college. It worked well in Fairburn, GA where a satellite campus for Georgia Military College and Brenau University were built on a city- floated bond. They’re now attracting thousands of students who are activating the town every day.

When asked what were the best financing tools available, panelists recommended TADS and Permanent Revenue Bonds.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

### ***Skip Nau’s residential development, Parkside***

Norcross resident and developer Skip Nau presented his proposed plan to build 31 units of live-work housing by combining a 1.44 acre parcel he owns with a half-acre parcel owned by the City of Norcross.

Parkside features ground level spaces designed as home offices or light retail enterprises that receive infrequent visitors such as attorneys, accountants and creative class professions including graphic designers, writers and webmasters.

Since there is absolutely no office space that's walkable to the downtown shops and restaurants, the idea is to offer that capability right on the Park.

The live-work units will echo row houses in Boston and Baltimore, featuring second level porches with Park views that feel like Charleston. There's an option to add a fourth level, yet that might look too tall and vertical. Three levels may be plenty.

The plan was revised so that every unit is detached, about five feet apart, since market research shows people prefer to own a fee simple lot with a degree of privacy, instead of an attached town house. Every home will not look the same.

The price point is in the low to mid \$400s which is just below three higher-end communities nearby. One is Col. Jones Park that has set the precedent for higher end residential near downtown Norcross with homes starting at \$500,000 and still selling close to that number.

#### Panelists' suggestions

It's doubtful that Parkside's live-work units will ever become retail on the Park, especially since there's still good potential to substantially increase retail offerings in Skin Alley and along Cemetery and Mitchell, if that new retail can remain contiguous with shops on the main street.

Nau says his plan addresses that. Units will be built in a flexible way that makes it easy to use the ground level as an office as well as more living space.

Consider a wider range of price points beginning in the \$200s. Young people will add cool energy to the Park and may prefer renting.

Create a private sidewalk, decorative metal fencing and landscaped buffers before arriving at the front door.

Consider even more than 15 units per acre on the Park though the economy may not allow it right now.



Be sure to put all parking in the back with none visible on the Park.

### ***Highlights of the Walking Tour with Mayor Johnson***

Included in the \$5 million to build Lillian Webb Park is a \$300,000 long-term investment on a first rate public restroom building that also serves as a visual gateway on axis with the fountain. It features handsome wooden beams, solid rock walls and is all stainless steel inside.

The tiered fountain features a splash pad with shooting water that's very popular with kids in the summer. A visual message is etched into that area in large letters spelling the word, IMAGINE. The theme is tied to the City's Imagination Proclamation and slogan – Norcross: A place to imagine.

The City of Norcross has no debts or bonds. The City operates its own power company and police force which is rated among the top 10 forces in the country.

Norcross has \$5 million in SPLOST funding available to spend in the areas of roads and streets; parking; and parks and recreation. Two million dollars is dedicated to parking only with about seven years to spend it. Transportation funds are more flexible and can be used for sidewalks and bike lanes as well as roads.

Gwinnett Transit runs along this section of Buford Highway and connects to the MARTA rail at the Doraville station. The Gwinnett Village CID is now considering light rail from the Doraville station with potential for a multi-modal transportation station on the Norcross side of 285 that would run up 85 to the Gwinnett Arena and link to the Doraville station. It would also connect to Gwinnett Place Mall. A 40-acre site adjacent to the proposed multi-modal property is available for development.

Norcross is a national area designation historic district, yet with no binding historic preservation ordinance. The City's Architectural Review Board offers specific guidelines for reviewing projects proposed on Lillian Webb Park and on the downtown main street. However, they are guidelines only without strict regulations and nothing prohibits demolition per se, once a six-month waiting period has lapsed.

A thorough inventory of all historic buildings is complete; they are scattered around downtown.

A parks and green space master plan is now in the works. The Mayor anticipates that it will call for increased bike and pedestrian trails, and that the plan will recommend they all be connected to each other.

Parks are numerous in Norcross with about 10 pocket parks. Thrasher Park is the oldest with about four acres. Highlights include an amphitheater and attractive wooden band shell, a large modern playground next to the railroad tracks. The moving trains themselves have also become a popular attraction for children.

In fact, 38 trains pass through downtown Norcross every day, making it one of the most frequently used railroads on the east coast.

A public art program is in place with one percent of every development project dedicated to buying public art.

Improved parking signs will soon be installed since there are many free parking areas not being used because people don't know where they are.

Other nearby attractions are a Fire House museum, welcome center, modern City Hall, and a city-owned community center that's also home to a live theater company.

## **DETAILED DISCUSSION EXAMINING SPECIFIC AREAS SURROUNDING THE PARK**

### ***Buford Highway: A Critical Gateway***

At one time, Norcross tried to distance itself from Buford Highway. Yet, City leaders intentionally designed Lillian Webb Park to embrace the active corridor and expand the city center in that direction as another catalyst for development.

Gwinnett Village CID is about to invest \$2 million to improve streetscapes on the Norcross section of Buford Highway and add safe-crossing islands.

Every time a business in Buford Highway's Overlay District changes hands, Norcross leaders have an opportunity to improve Buford Highway and begin transforming it from a highway into a pedestrian-friendly boulevard.

Buford Highway will have to be cleaned up for Norcross to have substantial retail success. Think about making good connectivity happen on real roads. Cemetery could be the retail street serving as a real connector between Buford Highway and the main street.

Another approach was offered. Don't connect Buford Highway to the softer retail on South Peachtree. Continue to connect the main street retail with Skin Alley, and let the Park remain a quiet residential corridor. Keep larger retail operations on Buford Highway.

Be the first community to bring your park right up to Buford Highway in a meaningful, visible way, even though Suwanee has tried. Today, no one knows there's a charming town right here at Buford Highway and Britt Avenue.

Explore what was done on the Memorial Drive corridor near Oakland Cemetery in Grant Park. The community wrote requirements that encouraged commercial developers to build residential simultaneously. In order to build commercial, developers were required to build residential units in a three to one ratio of residential to commercial. It's often necessary to force people to starve and slow commercial development until the demand is so great over time.

### ***Making Retail Really Work***

The total existing square footage of retail space downtown is about 90,000 square feet on all floors.

A general ratio used by retail experts is four square feet of retail per person. Given Norcross' population of 10,000 people, you need 40,000 square feet of all kinds of department-store, merchandise style retail – excluding grocery, cinema and services like chiropractors and dentists.

One panelist is currently working with one of the largest retailers in the country. Their rule of thumb is one middle class household supports 50 square feet of commercial space.

Visitors relate to retail. That's your brand, your public face – the personality of a place. In addition, Norcross' great events and successful restaurants also define your brand. Keep that diverse mix of all three.

Panelists agreed that retail must be concentrated in contiguous clusters. In the near future, the next phase of retail development should expand directly on the main South Peachtree corridor. Right now, there's an auto parts store there, making that section very underused. This is the most logical place to grow the downtown retail before starting to wrap around to adjacent streets.

Over time, it could work to have retail and offices on the other side of Cemetery Street. However, Norcross may never be in a position to disaggregate its retail.

If the time comes when retail can wrap around the main street into Skin Alley and College, make it part of a long term retail plan.

### Background

Norcross has a lot of cut-through traffic during week day rush hour – about 3,000 to 4,000 cars every day. Even with major traffic corridors nearby, people prefer to wind through downtown Norcross. Most don't stop to enjoy the restaurants or shops. The added traffic is an increased pedestrian hazard and changes the desired walking character.

However, several panelists noted these are the traffic counts needed for healthy retail. The added visibility is a real bonus. "The minute you lose traffic, your retail is dead," one panelist said.

A similar situation in Woodstock, GA has proven to be a plus because, like Norcross, the community itself is not large enough to support and sustain a robust retail scene.

Today, with only 400 existing households within one mile of Lillian Webb Park, Norcross does not have enough local density to support retail on the Park. It will take multi-storied residential buildings to get you there.

Given the economic climate, focus on establishing a good residential base before building new retail space that may sit empty for years. The current level of retail activity may be sufficient for the next three to five years. All of the components for success are here to become a destination center. That's why residential is the best use of land around the Park.

You cannot make a retail customer do anything. Shopping is a mindless, meandering, intuitive activity. People will not walk more than a half block from an easy, convenient place to park. Parking must be provided within this range.

You will not be able to have enough retail that only serves Norcross because residents will always need goods and services you can never provide.

Do a Retail Plan and build to that plan. Write code to that plan. Base it on contiguous retail that creates a critical mass of interesting shops and destinations such as the existing Taste of Britain shop on the main street.

You could make a big mistake now that could make retail fail if you scatter it around in smaller, isolated pockets. That's exactly what the City of Atlanta has done and it's been a failure. In fact, Atlanta will be famous for this terrible mistake.

Make the distinction between destination retail which is a different animal than primary, essential retail. It's actually a fluid, non-linear formula.

There are slope issues for convenient walking, yet Norcross can still do something significant.

In Memphis, TN, several live-work units were designed with first floor retail 12 years ago. They are still being used as residential only. It's very important to build flexibility into your architecture, both new and old.

Over time, more restaurants could work right on the Park, though it's too soon now. They will only be supported when enough residents live on the Park and all of the existing restaurants are busy every night.

Ideally, retail should be on both sides of South Peachtree Street, yet with such an active railroad, that's a real issue in Norcross.

### ***Residential: Priority Number One***

Norcross needs a much higher residential density. If it is politically feasible to build more than 15 units per acre, do it.

Norcross has very few 20-somethings and very few over 50. Given that 20-somethings can't get a \$400,000 mortgage – “nor should they be allowed to,” one panelist added – it's advisable to make room for rental choices to attract younger energy to downtown. Add attractive housing choices that appeal to seniors and empty nesters as well.

It's very important to make the distinction between density that will activate the Park and density that will generate retail demand. Residential density will activate the Park and make it a cool place to be, especially if rental is included. Cool towns have young people and old people who don't want to leave.

Evidence shows this is smart way to go. Developers “will be dumb enough to go back to building condos,” yet a healthy mix of rentals and for-sale units in several price ranges is the smart thing to offer.

Rental lofts could work one-quarter mile outside town, an easy walk to the main street.

Attached housing at Hedgewood in Woodstock, GA did not sell. The down market has given Norcross an opportunity to be less dense. It could be a quad-plex, a duplex, or a small cottage-style family home with a tiny lawn.

If you built 21 units per acre selling for \$200,000, they would sell quickly and get your density up. It was done in Grant Park in-town and in Woodstock.

Suwanee had six live-work units that sat empty for two years, finally selling recently. If the market is not ready for it, the space can be used as residential only.

Don't build the same housing product on all four sides of the Park. A good residential mix of uses gives character. Aesthetically, four story residential units could wall off the Park as visual barriers.

The Buford Highway side is the right place for even higher density of for-sale and rental units right on the Park.

Over time, Focus Area A (the parcels behind the South Peachtree retail cluster) could indeed support a high-rise residential tower with a mix of rentals, condos and lofts starting at \$200k. Large units can be sold unfinished inside that can be finished by the owner or for an extra fee,

finished by the developer. This could be attractive to the creative class, young and old. They could even be placed near Buford Highway fronting Mitchell and Britt.

Consider allowing retailers like a small ice cream shop in a live-work unit. It could be popular for walk-ins right on the Park.

Consider green building elements – such as EarthCraft an LEED certified homes – which will appeal to the younger market. It was noted that ARC will soon designate Norcross as a Sustainable Community.

Live-work units have rarely worked in Georgia. It has not brought the energy and other attributes expected. Guest parking is also quite limited. We have held on to a romantic vision from the past of the cobbler and his family living above his cobbler shop.

### ***Britto Parcel that fronts Buford Highway***

Norcross has a preliminary conceptual plan for this property that was shared with the panel. The five-story building is centered on the Park's axis with a view through the gateway restroom building, all the way to the fountain. For now, it's envisioned as a mixed-use project for retail, office, condos and apartments.

### **Panelist suggestions**

One panelist was concerned that the view corridor from Buford Highway to the elevated fountain does not seem big enough. It's important that Norcross does not seal itself off again and establishes a clear presence with the 35,000 drivers passing by each day. It has to be very clear that you're here.

Yet another panelist disagreed. Since Buford Highway intersects the site at a 90 degree angle, the view corridor does not comfortably align with those 35,000 motorists zooming by. They may never see it. Keep it a quiet park.

Let the quality of the architecture define the space and serve as a gateway at that location. If you get a bad piece of architecture at that critical intersection, it will be a disaster.

Join forces with Suwanee, Duluth and the City of Buford to approach the DOT collectively as a group. Use your combined influence to make it clear that you all want Buford Highway to be different.

Work closely with the Gwinnett Village CID as well. Buford Highway will always be the front door to your retail traffic. The treatment of the section between Cemetery and Britt all the way to Jimmy Carter Boulevard is essential. Stay involved in the process.

In this plan, the sidewalks are right on the road without a buffer, creating the same problem pedestrians face on Buford Highway today. A green median strip is needed between Buford Highway and the sidewalk. The sidewalk should meet the new building, not a parking lot, as indicated.

It's still a highway in this rendering, not a boulevard. Do not concede to allow existing parking lots to remain as parking lots in the future.

And yet, Buford Highway will be a highway for a very long time, given that it may take more than a generation for a good transit system to be in place. Since cars will be required for quite a while, design your new buildings well including a new take on parking lots.

Large parking lots in front are not needed. Always put the bulk of the parking in the rear. Retail shops need only two rows of parking out front. Grocery stores are different.

Make every effort to isolate through traffic in one dedicated lane and create another lane reserved for local traffic. Ideas like these will help you arrive at a happy medium for an improved look and feel of Buford Highway, even though it will never become Carmel, California. Buildings that front Buford Highway from Cemetery to Mitchell need to be four and five stories since this area is such a high-volume corridor with the promise of transit one day. The entire section from Jimmy Carter past Mitchell should be high density, while steering that level of density away from the Park and South Peachtree downtown.

There was a situation similar to Buford Highway on the south side of Chicago. Civic leaders worked closely with their local DOT to greatly enhance the streetscape by creating two rows of parallel parking that was 12 feet deep instead of the usual seven or eight feet. They added a beautiful planted median, then a sidewalk. They were able to keep the same amount of traffic moving.



### ***Keeping It Cool between Skin Alley and College Street***

Skin Alley could become a very cool, signature centerpiece for destination retail. Over the long term, find ways to add boutiques and outdoor cafes on both sides of Skin Alley.

Make sure that the walking experience along Skin Alley is as attractive as possible. Consider pervious colored concrete pavers for parking that would enliven Skin Alley and improve its appearance. The pavers can double as walkways. Avoid asphalt. For a small increase in cost, pavers will give a quality look and feel to this critical part of downtown. Spend the extra money to make it feel high quality. Do not stripe the parking spaces.

Open Skin Alley into a small plaza as a focal point, connected by attractive pedestrian pavers. Create second entrances for all restaurants and shops that now have their backs on Skin Alley. Add tiny boutique shops ala Seaside, FL which creates an interesting pedestrian pass-through. The plaza could also be the site of a smaller, open air farmers market on weekends, bringing added vitality.

The fact that all parcels in Skin Alley, including two historic homes, are privately owned and difficult to assemble is a current obstacle.

### ***Events and other Park Amenities***

Aggressive programming of the Park is critical. Norcross needs more high quality arts festivals and music festivals that will bring crowds from around the region to your front door.

You must decide. Is this a quiet, residential park or is it the public gathering space that will remain full of activity. The 50 to 100-year vision is that the Park is densely developed with residential, and is more than just a walk-the-dog kind of neighborhood park. That's the best way to maximize the \$5 million investment.

Find events and programs that work best in this specific venue and create new events. Without shade, it's limited as another Farmers' Market and oppressive in July and August.

Add a row or two of fast growing trees to create shade fairly quickly. A shady grove would be an excellent site for art shows, picnic tables, even a few grills. The space is not as useable now as it could be.

Use clusters of trees and shrubs to create outdoor rooms and attractive places for benches arranged in circles that face each other so parents can visit while watching their kids play in the splash pad. Right now, all events have to be huge to be successful. Remember that a passive park can still be a place for planned activity for small groups, especially residents.

Encourage the local community to plan events they want. Keep them involved and engaged in the event planning process and schedule.

Realize that people living right on the Park are more likely to complain about loud music and the sounds and smells of dumpsters. This is another benefit of renters, as they may move in and out more frequently.

In Pasadena, it became necessary to soundproof housing on a similar park. Extra insulation was added to windows and doors as the only way to sell the units. Keep Park residents involved by distributing event schedules well in advance to avoid complaints and litigation. Let them know that events will continue and increase and encourage their buy-in. They have to agree that living on Lillian Webb Park is an asset, not a hassle.

### ***Parking***

Keep your retail parking needs to what can be handled by surface parking. The least expensive, lowest impact solution is surface parking, instead of building a deck now.

There's a possibility for an underground parking off Britt Avenue in the future, for a shared parking deck though there will be tight turnarounds.

Consider buying the Carter property on Britt Avenue and the Park to build surface parking there to avoid an expensive underground parking deck, especially one with limited turning capabilities.

It was noted that ideally, an underground parking deck should have been built under the full width of Lillian Webb Park beneath the fountain along College Street from one end to the other.

There are many ways to make parking fit visually into the community. In Lawrenceville, they used a brick façade on a parking deck that made it appear to be solid brick. As long as there's easy parking within a five-minute walk or less, people will park within a quarter mile of their destination.

### ***General***

The question was asked, "How far out is the economic recovery?"

The real estate market analyst on the panel offered this timetable: It will be two to three years before the "for sale" residential market will truly recover.

Multi-family rental is in recovery right now. It will take another five years for retail to recover. The resort market is five to 10 years away from recovery.

It was suggested that Norcross consider buying the Post Office parking lot and the extended stay property as an investment, and "get into debt like the rest of us!"

If Norcross moves forward on the new library, it was not recommended that the City enter into a public-private partnership to make the project happen. The bureaucracy becomes too oppressive.

### **SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES WORTH EXPLORING**

Planning and Inspections Director of the City of Suwanee, Josh Campbell was asked what were the three biggest mistakes his city made during its development?

1. Retail was slated for several side streets that may never be successful. Understand where retail will succeed and where it will not.

2. Design issues would have been handled differently. Make sure new residential developments turn corners when on a corner street. Skip Nau was commended for adding that attention to detail in his proposed development.
3. The most important key to their success was the support of Suwanee's mayor and council. Thankfully, the long-term vision was met with continued support even when officials changed office.

Suwanee's Urban Redevelopment Authority allowed them to take revenue from selling city-owned land to build a new City Hall. They were also allowed to sell land based on criteria other than price. For example, they still have the flexibility of turning down the highest bid from a QT gas station wanting to locate at a prime location and can sell that parcel to the development that best fits the City's vision.

The example of Vernal Heights in San Francisco was mentioned. It's a community of tightly clustered, single family detached homes on tiny lots, about 21 units per acre. Everyone lives one quarter mile from a strong commercial street that's easy to walk to.

There's a new library in Arlington, VA that includes a live theater. The design is "unbelievably great," and has become the center of the community.

In Lilburn, GA, they built a library into their City Hall with a coffee shop that has been well received. It's the Barnes & Noble model.

Woodstock, GA had the advantage of a progressive, forward-thinking government that became a real asset. Good cooperation between local government officials and developers is often a critical ingredient to long term success.

Developers have moved from downtown Little Rock, AK to a previously rough area, transforming North Little Rock into a very cool community. They even have an excellent trolley system thanks to support from the Clinton White House and an attractive building dedicated to a Farmers Market.

Naperville, IL did an excellent job in providing good senior housing. Parking was allowed by day on main corridors. During rush hour, that parking was prohibited, opening the same streets for increased traffic.

Wheaton, IL is another small town success story.

Greenville, SC was also recommended as good example of enhancing similar streetscapes and building a new regional park to create a truly walkable community. Norcross officials have visited Greenville, SC.

One redevelopment that has not worked is Baton Rouge, LA. Their biggest problem is one-way streets.

## PHOTOS FROM THE EVENT



## PANELIST CONTACT INFORMATION

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Ellen Heath is a certified planner with over 25 years' experience in land use and recreational planning, historic preservation planning, and economic development planning for both public and private clients. Ms. Heath also has significant experience on projects involving public participation and consensus building.

Ms. Heath's AECOM experience includes plans for downtown Orlando, NW/SW Jacksonville, Sarasota's parks and greenways, Atlanta's Home Park and Buckhead neighborhoods, and many others. Current projects include a comprehensive plan for Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, a corridor plan in the northeast portion of the Nashville metro area, and a preparation of growth plan for the area surrounding Ft. Stewart in southeast Georgia. Prior to joining EDAA, Ms. Heath was employed by the National Park Service, where she served as the community planner for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, GA.

She received a Master of City Planning from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Delaware. She is the immediate past president of the Georgia Planning Association and serves on the board of directors of the Atlanta Dogwood Festival.

### Jonathan Bartlett

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Jonathan Bartlett is a Vice President of RCLCO, a national real estate consulting firm. He has been with RCLCO for seven years, and has worked around the United States from the firm's Washington, DC, and Atlanta offices. In essence, RCLCO's goal is to help the firm's clients – who include developers, lenders, attorneys, and public sector entities – make smart decisions about real estate. Services include market analysis, financial modeling and valuation, and strategy planning at the enterprise, portfolio, and asset level.

In the last year, Jonathan has led engagements throughout the southeastern United States and in Mexico. He is currently developing expert valuation reports to be used in litigation involving a number of master-planned communities, including luxury second home developments in North Carolina and the Bahamas.

Jonathan is originally from the Boston area, but headed south to attend Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. After graduating with a BA in journalism, he moved to New York City and worked for two years at CNBC. A position with Fidelity Investments in Boston followed, but lacking direction and missing the southern quality of life, he moved to Chapel Hill and earned an MBA with a concentration in Real Estate Finance from the University of North Carolina in 2003. After four years with RCLCO in Washington, DC he relocated to Atlanta in 2007. Jonathan lives in Decatur with his wife, April, and their two children, Victoria (four) and William (two).

### Josh Campbell

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#### Education:

Kenyon College, Bachelor of Arts, majored in Religion, 1994  
University of Georgia, Master of Public Administration, 2000

#### Work Experience:

City of Suwanee (2000 to current)	
Planner I	(2000-2002)
City Planner	(2002-2005)
Planning Division Director	(2005-2008)
Planning and Inspections Director	(2008-current)



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Kevin first joined Historical Concepts as a summer intern in 2001. He is a passionate planner with an in-depth understanding of the complex relationship between the character of the built environment and its effect on both individuals and communities. Kevin is also an accomplished architect whose classical education has provided the background needed to design a wide range of custom residential and commercial projects. Additionally, Kevin is extremely knowledgeable regarding sustainable design and seeks to incorporate energy efficient design concepts into all project types.

Kevin holds a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Notre Dame.

Eric Masaschi has served as Vice President and COO of Vintage Communities Inc., since 2000, and has helped grow the company from a residential development company with annual revenues of \$11.5 million, to a diversified development company, including residential, multi-family, commercial, mixed-use, and resort developments, with annual revenues of over \$60 million. In his role at Vintage, Eric oversees all aspects of the daily operations of Vintage including land acquisition, entitlement, financial feasibilities, engineering, development, sales and marketing, etc. During his career at Vintage Communities he has been responsible for negotiating the acquisition of over 3,500 acres of land. He facilitated the entitlement of over 8,000 residential and multi-family units, as well as 1,500,000 square feet of commercial retail and office space. He oversaw the development of over 4,000 lots, including an average of 900 lots per year in 2006-2008, spread over 20 active communities. In addition, he strategically recruited and managed a guild of over 40 reputable custom builders, who built and sold over 250 custom homes per year in these communities. Some of Vintage's clients include a mix of National Builders, such as Pulte/Del Webb, KB Home, and Ryland Homes, as well as a following of over 40 prominent Custom Home Builders indigenous to the Atlanta Area

Mr. Masaschi graduated from North Georgia College, with honors, earning a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Education. From there, he went on to graduate from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, earning a Masters of Divinity Degree. Eric is currently on the TAP's Committee for the Urban Land Institute Atlanta, and recently graduated from ULI Atlanta's Center for Leadership as a member of its inaugural class of 2010. Eric is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Gwinnett Homebuilder's Association, and is a member of several other professional organizations including the National Association of Homebuilders, Council for Quality Growth, as well as the Gwinnett and Hall County Chambers of Commerce.

Cheri Morris is President of Morris and Fellows, which develops, leases, owns and manages upscale mixed-use communities. Most recently she developed Vickery Village in Forsyth County and Woodstock Downtown, in the City of Woodstock. She was also on the team that created a three-block dining, retail and entertainment district known as Luckie Marietta in downtown Atlanta. Her projects have been awarded the "Development of Excellence" by the Urban Land Institute, named "America's Neighborhood" by Better Homes and Gardens Magazine, cited as "Development of the Year" by the Atlanta Regional Commission, received the CNU International Charter Award for Best Neighborhood District, and named "America's Best Smart Growth Community" by the National Homebuilders Association.

Prior to becoming a developer, Morris ran a retail planning firm which guided developers, institutions and city governments on strategic planning, development, design, merchandising, leasing and marketing. Her client list included names such as The Rockefeller Foundation, AT&T Pension Fund, Bass Brothers Enterprises, Equitable and Prudential.



*Over the years, her firm worked on some of the western hemisphere's most noteworthy properties including Colonial Williamsburg, Georgetown Park in Washington D.C., Toronto's Eaton Centre, Tyson's Corner, The Summit and Rosemary Beach.*

*Morris served on the teaching faculty of the International Council of Shopping Centers for over 20 years. She has been a frequent speaker for such groups as ICSC, Urban Land Institute and the Atlanta Regional Commission, and has been a keynote speaker at national and international retail conventions, including the first International Congress of Shopping Centers in Rio de Janeiro, and the World Congress of Shopping Centers in Vienna, Austria. Morris has contributed to several prestigious media outlets, including Shopping Centers Today, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, The Journal of Property Management, and Shopping Center Business.*

*Active in civic planning, the arts and sustainable development, Morris has served on the Fulton County Stormwater Advisory Task Force, the Southface Eco-Office Task Force, the Citizens Advisory Committee for the City of Sandy Springs Comprehensive Plan, and several LCI committees in Metro Atlanta. She was the first Chair of the City of Sandy Springs' Design Review Board, is on the Boards of the Sandy Springs Conservancy, and ART Sandy Springs, and chairs the Urban Design Committee of the Chamber of Commerce.*

*Cheri is married to Terry Morris, who retired in 2008 as President of GMAC Real Estate, the world's fifth largest residential brokerage firm, with 100 offices coast to coast. The couple has two grown children and three grandchildren, all of whom reside in Sandy Springs, GA.*

## John Reagan

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*John Reagan is the President and CEO of Reagan & Company, LTD, an Atlanta-based development. His career began in architecture with several Atlanta firms before forming his own practice in 1979. His work included a wide range of project types including historic renovation, industrial, medical, housing, hospitality and education. He practiced in Atlanta; Annapolis, Maryland; and coastal Georgia. Notable projects include: the restoration of the Jekyll Island Club Hotel; the Student Services Building, the Ferst Theater for the Performing Arts, the Post Office and Bookstore renovations at Georgia Tech; and the All Saints Episcopal Church Children's Center.*

*In 1998, he turned his focus completely to development and formed the Templeton Reagan Development Fund and, in joint venture with Winter Properties, developed Copenhill Lofts, a 40-unit, \$13,000,000 residential loft condominium near the Carter Presidential Center.*

*Shortly thereafter, he joined Urban Realty Partners as Partner for Design and Development, a position he held until 2006. During that time, he was instrumental in the development of Puritan Mill, Alexan Ponce (with Trammell Crow Residential), and The Reynolds, The Brookwood, and Oakland Park condominiums. He remains a partner in the redevelopment of Capitol Homes and Grady Homes with Urban Realty Partners and The Integral Group.*

*Mr. Reagan received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Georgia Tech in 1971. His professional and civic activities have included: Study Commissions for the City of Atlanta and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce; Board Memberships with Historic Oakland Cemetery, Inc., Cabbagetown Revitalization and Future Trust, Grant Park Neighborhood Association, NPU-W, Theater Gael, Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta Architectural Commission, and All Saints Episcopal Church; and membership in the Greater Atlanta Homebuilders Association, the Urban Land Institute, the Atlanta Preservation Center, and the Congress for the New Urbanism.*



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*Tom Walsh has over 30 years of experience as a landscape architect, urban planner, and college planner. Tom has broad-based experience in historical master planning and consensus building.*

*Tom is also an avid member of the new urbanism movement. He applies many of the design principles of new urbanism to his projects to ensure the best quality project for current and future uses. He has been involved in over 50 new urbanist projects since 1989.*

*Tom has a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from Louisiana State University and a Bachelor of Urban Geography from Southeastern Louisiana State University.*

**Eli Yewdall**

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*As a Regional Officer with ICLEI's Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta, GA, Eli Yewdall provides support to Southeast members, and a number of tools and resources, including ICLEI's partnership with ENERGY STAR programs. He joined ICLEI in September 2007, contributing to the development of the Climate and Air Pollution Planning Assistant (CAPPA).*

*Before joining ICLEI, Eli produced educational materials on climate change for the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative, and participated in writing the international youth declaration on climate change in Montreal, Canada in 2005. Eli has a Masters in Energy and Resources from the University of California, Berkeley, and a BS from Gonzaga University.*