

Project: Addressing Business Growth & Retention Along Redeveloping Corridors

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Prepared for:
Decide DeKalb Development Authority



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to address business growth and retention along redeveloping corridors. Decide DeKalb is the economic development authority in DeKalb County, GA, and charged with attracting and retaining regional, national, and international companies to the county. Candler Road is a major corridor in DeKalb County and presents potential for redevelopment opportunity in South DeKalb. This study evaluates the potential economic redevelopment opportunities for the Candler Road corridor.

1.2 SCOPE

The scope of this study entails creating a road map for the Candler Road corridor that identifies areas of opportunity that could stimulate economic growth and vitality for existing small businesses and attract new businesses, as well as create a sense of community in South DeKalb. The extents evaluated in this scope include an approximate one-mile segment of Candler Road between Interstate 20 (I-20) and Interstate 285 (I-285), as shown in **Figure 1**. Also included in the scope was a review of the Gresham Park neighborhood and its connection to gentrification and redevelopment opportunities within a one-mile radius of the neighborhood.

FIGURE 1: STUDY AREA LOCATION MAP



The Gallery at South DeKalb Mall spans 71 acres along the segment of the corridor that was studied. While redevelopment opportunities for the mall were not explored as part of this study, its redevelopment and potential for regional and economic impact is noted in this report as the repurposing of the American Mall is happening in other parts of the county, across metro Atlanta, and nationally.

1.2.1 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of this study are to create an implementable plan that:

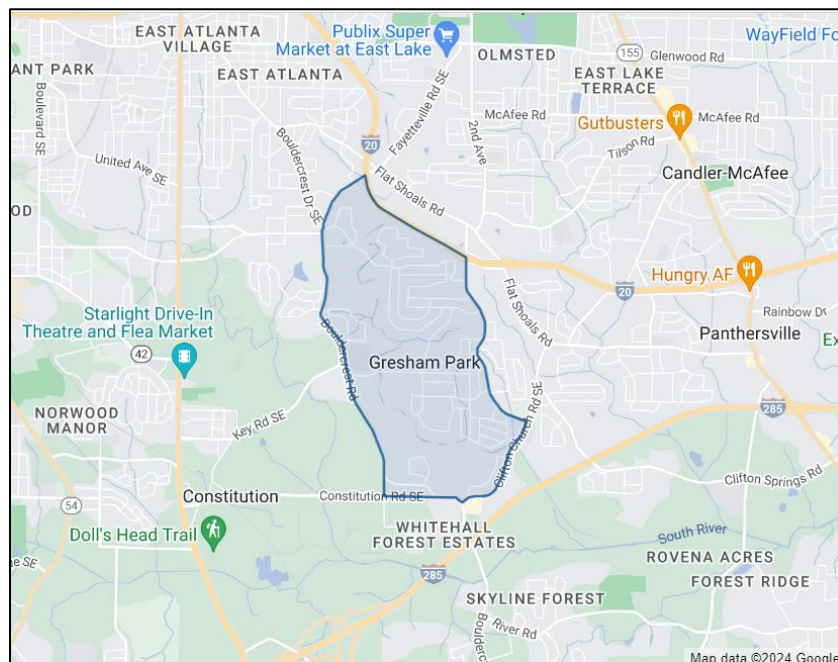
- Facilitates equitable redevelopment
- Addresses business growth and business retention
- Creates a roadmap for the Candler Road corridor revitalization
- Identifies areas of opportunity that could stimulate economic growth and vitality
- Fosters a sense of community and place in South DeKalb County

2. EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.1 GRESHAM PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

Gresham Park, shown in **Figure 2**, is a neighborhood located in southeastern DeKalb County, Georgia, near the city of Atlanta. It's a residential area known for its diverse community and tree-lined streets. The neighborhood offers a mix of housing options, including single-family homes, apartments, and townhouses. Gresham Park is also home to Gresham Park Recreation Center, which provides facilities for sports, fitness activities, and community events. Overall, it's a vibrant and welcoming neighborhood within the greater Atlanta area.

FIGURE 2: GRESHAM PARK NEIGHBORHOOD



Both new and existing residents in the neighborhood desire and are demanding expanded retail options. The current commercial retail environment is described below and shown in **Figure 3**:

- The primary dining options are fast-food (i.e., McDonald's, Wendy's)
- There are no grocery options within a one-mile radius of the neighborhood. The closest major grocers, Publix and Kroger, are over two (2) miles away.
- There are limited leisure options. Piedmont Park is over 6 miles away.
- Many aging, vacant shopping centers (i.e., South DeKalb Mall) and big box retailers (Walmart) are located along nearby major roadway corridors in close proximity to the neighborhood.

FIGURE 3: GRESHAM PARK COMMERCIAL OPTIONS



2.2 CANDLER ROAD

Candler Road is a notable thoroughfare located in DeKalb County, Georgia, specifically in the eastern part of the county. It runs approximately north-south, starting from the intersection with Glenwood Road in the north, through Decatur, and extending southwards towards Interstate 20. Candler Road passes through several neighborhoods, commercial areas, and intersects with various other roads, making it a significant route for transportation in the region. The corridor is lined with various commercial uses with associated driveway access and surface parking lots. MARTA bus stops and sidewalks are prevalent along the corridor.



2.3 GALLERY AT SOUTH DEKALB MALL

South DeKalb Mall opened in 1968, and in the late 1980s, emerged as a mall catering predominantly to an African-American clientele. Between 1996 and 2003, the mall was sold, renovated, and renamed to the Gallery at South DeKalb. The mall and Candler Road corridor have been the focus of many redevelopment studies, including the Candler/Flat Shoal Road Livable Center Initiative (LCI) and county comprehensive plans. Both efforts focused on the walkability of the community and linked transportation and land use. Over the years, the Gallery at South DeKalb has lost major anchor tenants. The last major anchor store, Macy's, closed in 2020, and business occupancy has steadily decreased. The decline of the mall, like other traditional malls, has been driven by the rise of e-commerce, changing consumer preferences, and economic shifts.



However, the mall is situated in the heart of South DeKalb and presents opportunity to redevelop and revitalize the corridor and the region. A few benefits to note include:

- The mall site is well-connected within a larger network of major roads.
- The mall is centrally located in an under-served residential area that desires near commercial options.
- The large size of the mall site (~70-acre footprint) has potential to have a regional impact
- The potential for transit oriented development (TOD) with existing and proposed transit hub and expansion.
- The potential to promote walkability and connectivity in the area.
- The potential to support economic development to foster small business and entrepreneurial growth.

3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 SWOT ANALYSIS

A Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis for this project established a framework for identifying and analyzing those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for challenges and potential opportunities to revitalize the corridor. The outcomes of the SWOT analysis for Candler Road corridor revitalization is shown in **Figure 4**.

FIGURE 4: SWOT ANALYSIS



3.2 ZONING CHALLENGES

The study area is in the most intense zone of DeKalb’s I-20 Zoning Overlay, Tier 3 – which is the major influence on the types of development of the area. Through a basic analysis of the I-20 overlay code as well as follow-up conversation with DeKalb County staff the Team learned the kinds of development that can be done in the

corridor. The code allows mixed-use development and some impressive densities (19 stories!) by right, at least at first blush. But there is a catch: the code is overwhelmingly geared towards new development at a scale that is not proportional to anything nearby. There is little in the legislation that allows for conversion of existing businesses, without triggering large-scale unaffordable changes. It seems to be based on a model of a large (well-funded) developer coming in to make wholesale changes. It indirectly discourages improvement of existing properties and the building of wealth of existing business owners. In addition, there are restrictions on any kind of outdoor vending, even with a permit, which would preclude such things as art markets, farmers markets, or any less formal commercial activity that would be beneficial to establishing a more robust commercial environment. Since its establishment in 2015 there has been little activity on the corridor that has changed its trajectory.

Mixed use development is allowed by right, which is a positive step, however this too appears to favor large scale redevelopment. The ability to convert or add onto existing properties to create small apartments or live work units is not clear and there is a minimum size may prohibit more efficient and naturally affordable units without government subsidy. These are lost opportunities for small landowners to secure another income stream or to diversify the kinds of tenants they have and build financial stability.

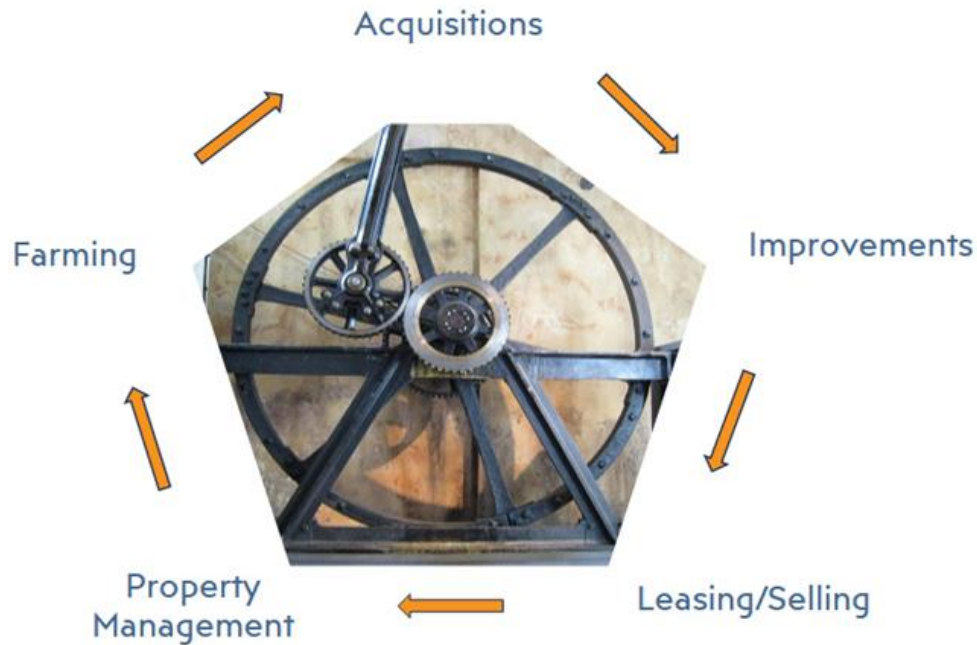
3.3 A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

3.3.1 INTRODUCING THE DEVELOPMENT FLYWHEEL

Monte Anderson of Options Real Estate Investment in south Dallas, Texas has an interesting perspective on development- one that he has put into practice in many locations throughout the state and a message that has resonated with the national Incremental Development Alliance. Monte Anderson's approach is one of bottom-up development and empowering individuals and property owners to participate in the development cycle while making a profit along the way. This model of development- as he practices it -allows for some equity and does not require outside infusions of capital. One way to phrase it is that does not rely on a fairy godmother to save the day. This model appears to have a clear application to this corridor as well as to other areas in the County that lack recent investment, but still wish to grow.

Monte promotes the metaphor of a development flywheel that acknowledges there is inertia and momentum to development. There are actions one can take to improve or slow the momentum. But going from very slow (little development) to very fast (vibrant model communities) takes a lot of energy. One way to do that is through gradual and small applications of that energy. It also allows you to test out which ideas work before making them more permanent. The five main components, shown in **Figure 5**, of the development flywheel include:

FIGURE 5: FLYWHEEL OF DEVELOPMENT



- Farming – Investing in a given piece of land with attention and energy, and over time translating that energy into community excitement and activity
- Acquisitions – controlling the land or property either by leasing or buying
- Improvements – making improvements to a property to align it with community needs
- Leasing/ Selling – renting out spaces to tenants or selling the property to the right owners
- Property Management – managing the property to maximize success

The component that requires the most explanation, and may be most relevant to DeKalb County, is Farming. In this step you identify the passionate individuals that are committed to a place, who will serve as farmers to improve the land. These individuals will either know intuitively what is needed or will ask questions to find out what is needed to be successful. The trick is to find the smallest achievable step to test whether that theory is correct or not. If it is correct, find the next step to build on that success. If not, a different step may be necessary. A farmer will continue this process over and over to work towards better results. The best farmers will not only improve the success of the individual property but will improve the community at the same time.

Monte’s message is that if you start with something seemingly small – like programming a small farmers market in a given location, you can start to build that momentum at that site incrementally. You can then build the next incremental step that uses that momentum to speed up your flywheel. Success breeds more success. If you keep increasing that investment and build community, you gradually get to that vibrant development. This is the contrast to the idea that the hypothetical developer (say, a fairy godmother) will build everything all at once, whenever that might happen. The bottom-up approach doesn’t require government subsidy or external funding (at least large amounts) and it allows individuals to partner and share in that wealth building.

There are several examples in Texas where Monte is active that show the success of this model. In Duncanville Texas, Monte was instrumental in putting together the Duncanville Switch Market (**Figure 6**). He was able to find a piece of land and secure the use of it for a temporary market, he bought some tents, and rented stalls out to

several local vendors and business owners, as well as publicizing the event. They made a fair profit, but more importantly started some interest and momentum in the area. The success of the market allowed some of the nearby retail areas to be more successful too. It started a positive feedback loop.

FIGURE 6- DUNCANVILLE SWITCH STREET MARKET IN DUNCANVILLE TEXAS



Another case study is DeSoto Marketplace (**Figure 7**) in Desoto, TX. This former mall was acquired by Options Real Estate and converted to a food incubator as well as offices. The larger retail spaces were split into smaller units that made rent more affordable to a larger pool of individuals. The availability of different eateries served as a kind of amenity for office space that Options also offered. Additionally, they used trailers to create some outdoor activity and animate the parking lot in a way that did not conflict with the inside tenants. The use of the parking area also converted an excess resource into a performing asset, while simultaneously building momentum for the area and allowing affordable rental space for a small business.

FIGURE 7: DESOTO MARKETPLACE



Another case study in bottom-up development is the Commons on Main Street in Duncanville, Texas. This particular space was a former church and had a single-tenant paying roughly \$2,600 a month (**Figure 8**). This one tenant made the developer beholden to one tenant and provided less options to the nearby visitor. Options

renovated the space and split the it into 5 smaller spaces with a shared bathroom (**Figure 9 and Figure 10**). This allowed for a larger range of options for visitors as well as providing a variety of different businesses with a place to grow. The net result was an increase in rent as well as a more vibrant space.

FIGURE 8: MAIN COMMONS BEFORE

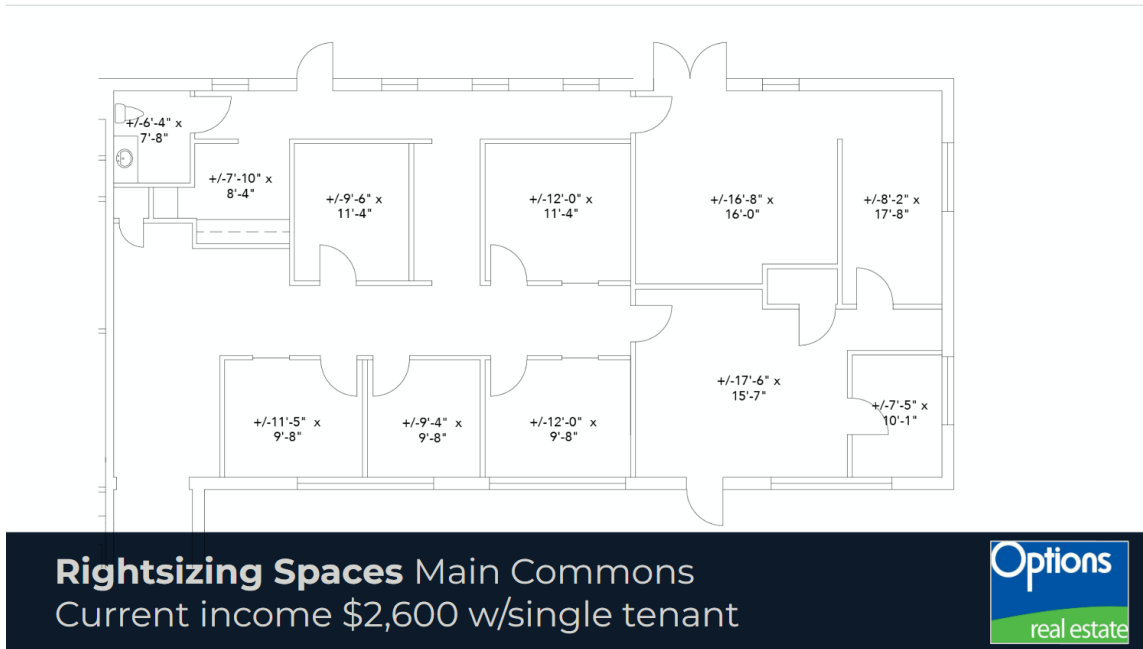


FIGURE 9: MAIN COMMONS PLAN AFTER

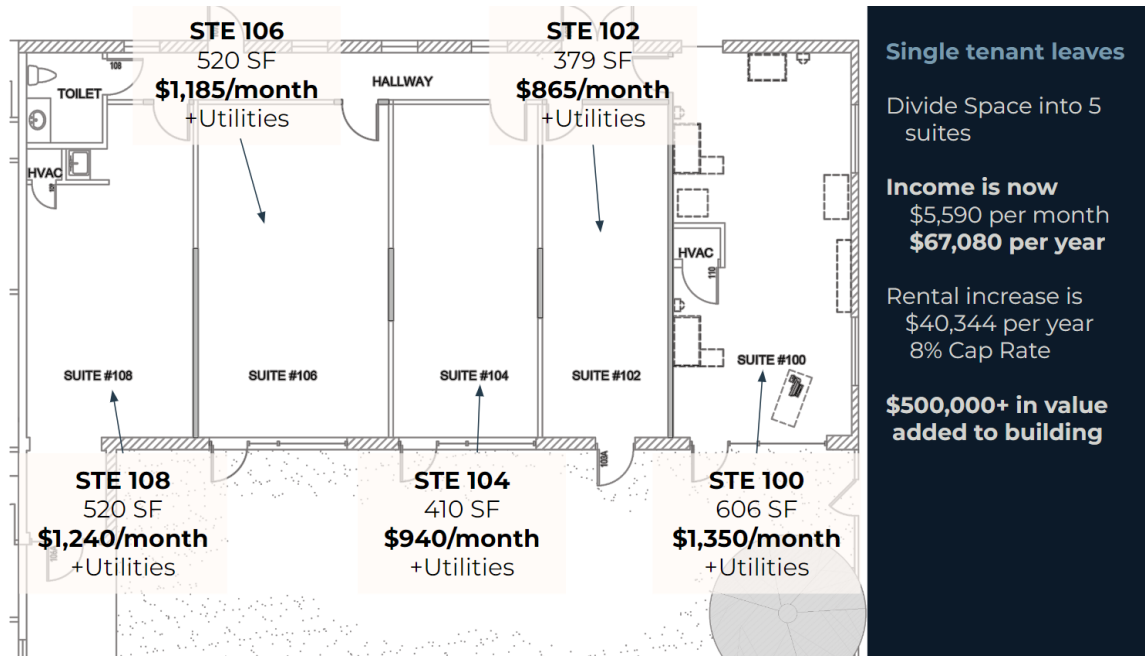


FIGURE 10: MAIN COMMONS AFTER PHOTOS



Another case study on Main Street in Duncanville, Texas, included a medical office building (Lifecare, **Figure 11**) that was underperforming. Options was able to acquire the property and renovate the single tenant into a more retail-focused concept where the single use was split in quarters. This provides a smaller more affordable retail space in the street facing area, as well as two small apartments in the rear.

FIGURE 11: LIFECARE BEFORE

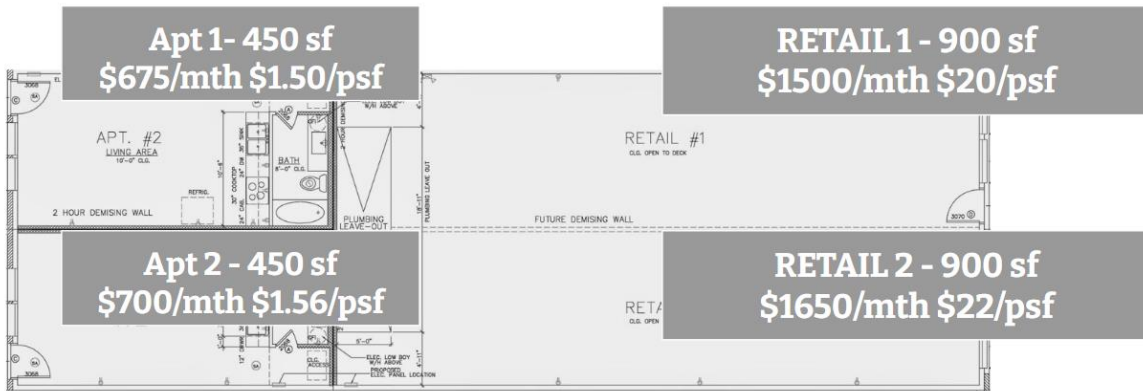


The residential units are small 450sf studio apartments but can provide the owner with another source of income, or a cheap place to stay if they are in an appropriate life stage. Subdividing the building into smaller spaces could allow them to provide ownership and build equity (**Figure 12 and Figure 13**). Monty has been known to partner with small businesses to provide seed money that helps them become owners. With guidance this has the possibility of being a very equitable way to build community wealth.

FIGURE 12: LIFECARE AFTER



FIGURE 13: LIFECARE AFTER PLANS

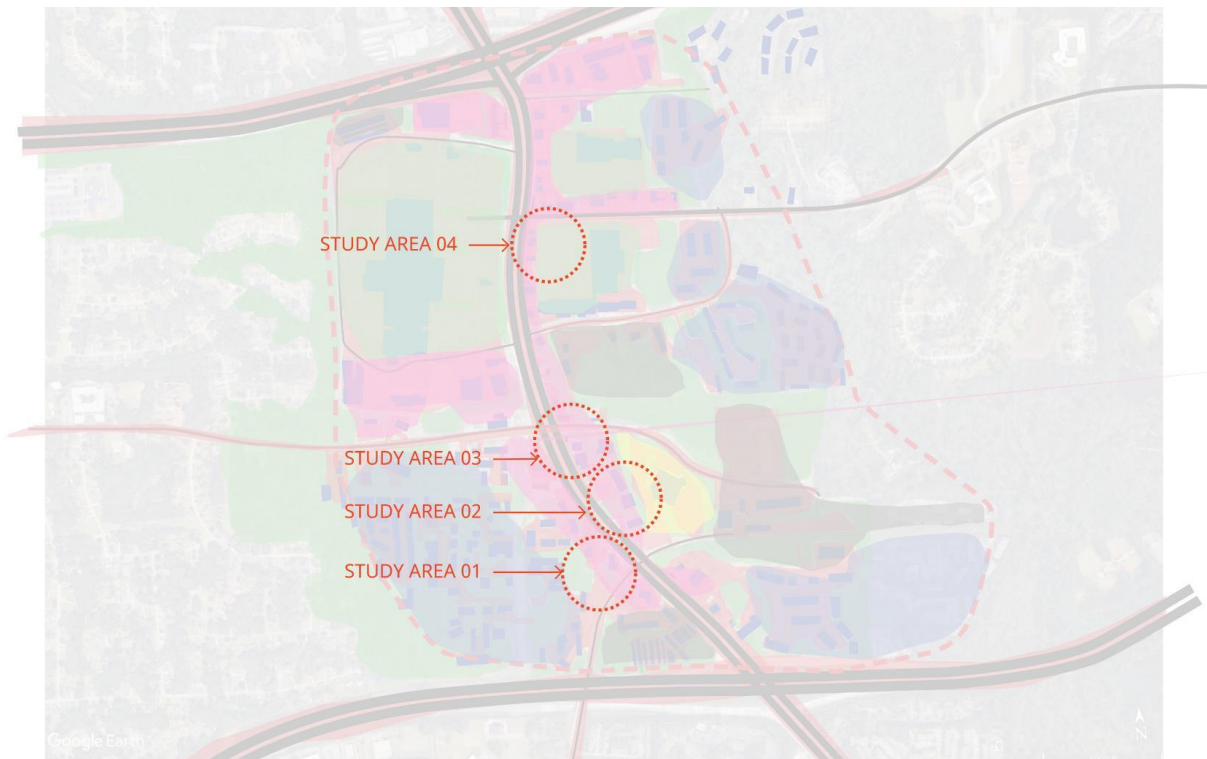


One potential downside of this bottom-up model is that development might not appear as originally envisioned by some grand scheme and maybe less unified. Based on the voiced priorities of the County, the advantages to individual property owners and residence seem to outweigh that risk. However, care should be taken to engage the community and ensure they understand the change in strategy. The community has the potential to be a huge tailwind for development if they can get behind the strategies discussed above.

4. SOLUTIONS

Given the perspective granted by the Flywheel development model, the Team was interested in how this may be applied to the study area. Several potential sites were selected to help illustrate how the different ideas may look on a familiar site. None of the property owners were contacted, as this was a purely speculative exercise. Four different site areas were selected based on their potential (**Figure 14**) - the first three as more immediate exercises with the fourth being a synthesis of several different strategies on a larger site.

FIGURE 14: SITE STUDY AREAS



Study Area 01 (**Figure 15**) is located on the dead-end road of Panthersville Court near the intersection with Flat Shoals Road and Panthersville Road. As a dead-end road, it has ample space as well as an existing apparently vacant building. It also has some dense vegetation to the west that separates the paved area from the nearby multifamily development. This source of housing is a potential source for both customers as well as small business owners or entrepreneurs. Much like the Duncan Switch market, the County or some other local entity could host a street market (**Figure 16**) – themed in any number of different ways. It could be strictly local businesses, or DeKalb businesses, or centered around food or art and crafts. The theme would need to be one that has the most resonance with the community and different strategies may be employed to get small businesses to

peddle their wares in this informal and less expensive arena. The festival could be further enhanced by erecting a temporary stage and having some live music or entertainment. The adjacent building could be temporarily rehabilitated to allow for restrooms to take any festival to the next level. Occupying the space may help the building to attract a permanent tenant, further helping the area.

FIGURE 15: STUDY AREA 01 CONTEXT

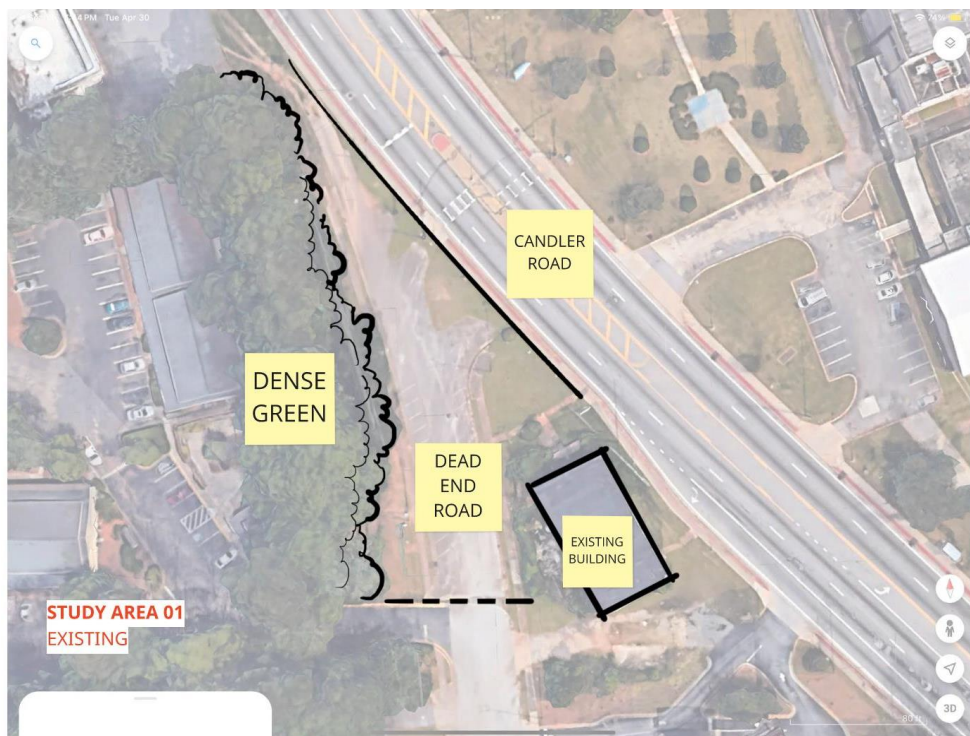
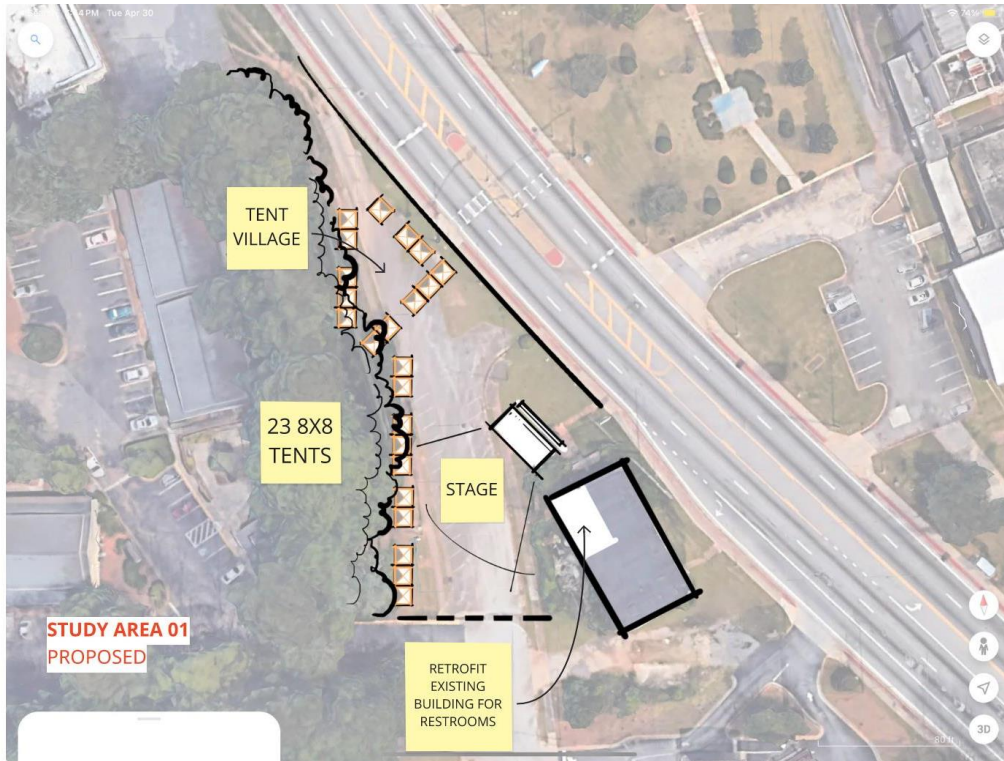


FIGURE 16: STUDY AREA 01 PLAN



The second study area (**Figure 17**) was the New Life community Center. The New Life community is a large strength for the area and the community around it could easily generate a fair amount of activity as well as supporting small entrepreneurs. The parking lot is a resource that could be occupied when not in use by their normal programming. The team envisioned a tent market similar to Study Area 01, but since it is an active parking lot, the team suggested some traffic control to reduce or eliminate traffic in the pedestrian areas (**Figure 18**). Since there is an immediate green space, the team envisioned a 1/3 soccer pitch. It is easy to envision that a local sports league or soccer organization could sponsor the event to generate interest in Soccer and youth activity. Food vendors could be brought in refreshments and any number of other vendors or businesses may want to be around that activity.

FIGURE 17: STUDY AREA 02 CONTEXT



FIGURE 18: STUDY AREA 02 PROPOSED

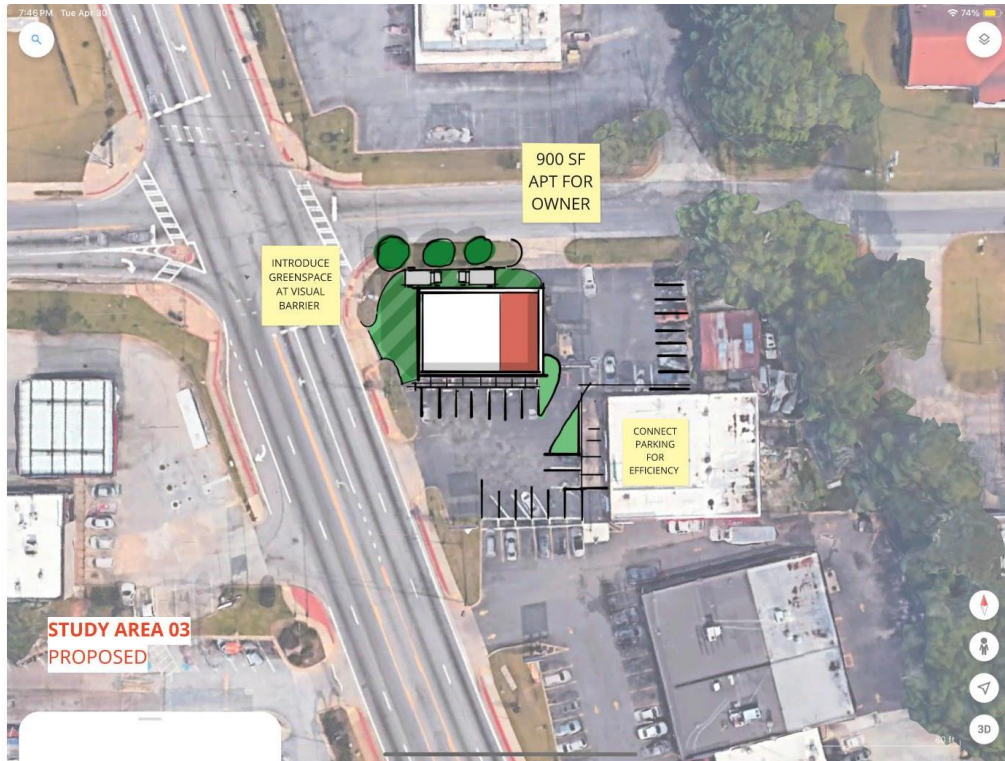


The third study area (**Figure 19**) investigated Jerry Yum’s wings. It appeared that the drive-thru was not being used and there are no close housing options. The neighboring parking lot is separated, reducing efficiency of movement. The team suggested that the restaurant be divided into a right-sized restaurant as well as a 900 sf apartment for the owner (**Figure 20**). As in the Main Street example, it could also be rented to another individual as another source of income. The provision of some picnic tables and some potted plants in the corner could entice people to sit and eat outside. These could be simple and inexpensive improvements to improve the space, allowing the owner to test what might work best and adjust accordingly.

FIGURE 19: STUDY AREA 03 EXISTING



FIGURE 20: STUDY AREA 03 PROPOSED



The fourth and last Study Area (**Figure 21**) was the Sunshine Shopping Center at the intersection of Rainbow Drive and Candler Road. Doing a quick analysis of the site, using current parking requirements, the site was significantly overparked. To address this the team proposed taking a corner of the parking lot to create a new outparcel. This outparcel would be connected to the existing retail center by a restriped pedestrian path through the parking lot. The outparcel could be tested with some temporary trailers with food service or coffee shop to cater to residents as a ‘third space’ to gather. Some outdoor dining or gathering space could be provided with temporary plantings in pots and some fake turf carpet. Once the right combination of uses is proven, some of those temporary installations could be made more permanent – breaking up the pavement to create an in-ground planting area, and deploying modular buildings for additional retail or gathering space. The illustrative renderings, shown in **Figure 22**, **Figure 23**, and **Figure 24** shows some of the possibilities if this momentum can continue to build on a given site and receives community support. Building up to that point will take time and community involvement.

FIGURE 21 STUDY AREA 04 EXISTING



FIGURE 22: STUDY AREA 04 PROPOSED



FIGURE 23: STUDY AREA 04 PROPOSED ALTERNATE

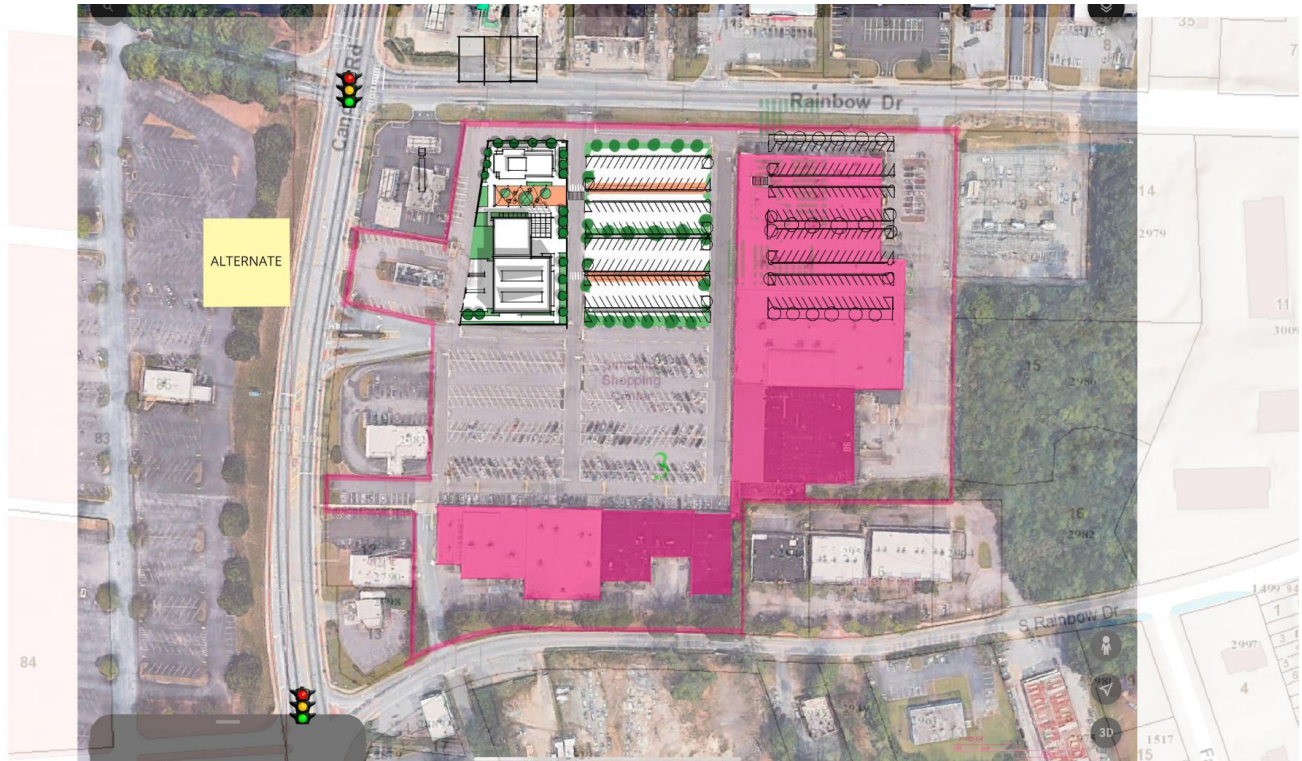
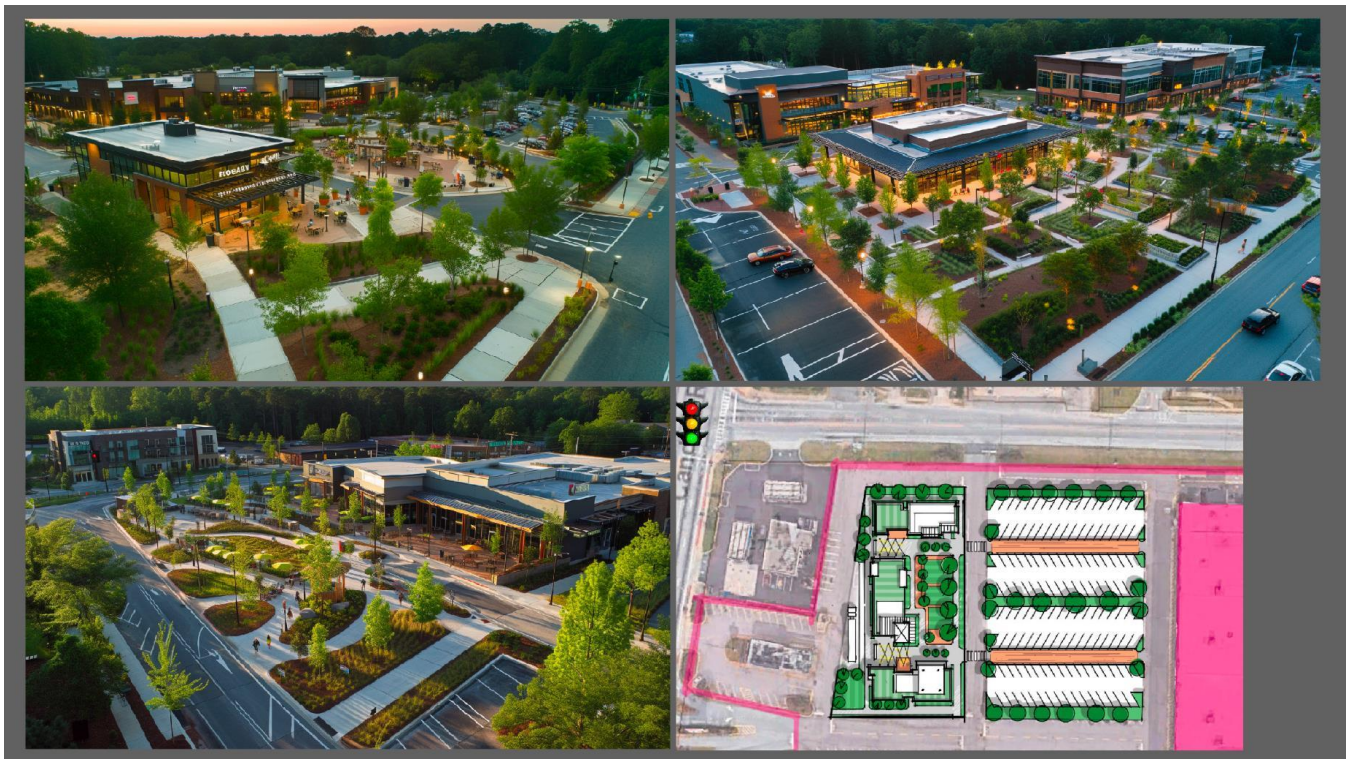


FIGURE 24: STUDY AREA 04 RENDERINGS



4.1 EMPOWERING FARMERS

One of the first things that the County can do is to identify the passionate farmers in the area that are keenly interested in making the Candler Road area a better place. The Team interviewed Tene Gallamore, the general manager at the Gallery at South DeKalb who is a resident and master programmer of the space. She helped develop the mall walker program there that attracted over 300 local residents. They supported the program by helping them get access to the building early, helping to find sponsors for breakfasts, and getting speakers to talk to the group. This is top notch farming. There are undoubtedly others like Tene in the area, the County should find those individuals and find out what is getting in their way. Then do their best to remove those hurdles. The County should also try to network and empower those farmers so they can enact the kind of change that is needed for the corridor.

4.2 ZONING FLEXIBILITY

To make these kinds of developments work, there needs to be some flexibility in how the zoning code is applied. This could be a conversation with the County about how certain codes are applied or enforced and beginning to have a conversation about how the code can work better for existing businesses. Based on a bottom-up model of development, some initial suggestions for zoning flexibility include allowing temporary vending outside with a permit, ideally one that can be granted quickly and administratively. Another suggestion may be to relax the standards for development for smaller developments or keep changes proportional to the size of the proposed change. These relaxed standards may need to be temporary to test the new legislative environment and should be coupled with outreach to existing businesses in the area so they can take advantage of the new freedom. An additional change the County may want to consider is allowing smaller apartment units in the corridor as well as allowing retrofitting or conversion of the relevant structures rather than triggering changes in the site and landscaping when only the building is being converted. In general, the County should consider how the existing regulations around the zoning overlay are impacting existing businesses. Identify the provisions that are preventing the local farmers from making the improvements they want to make. From a more traditional perspective the County might want to consider investing in sidewalks and landscaping in kind when new development is taking place on the corridor to allow a better hospitable pedestrian network. The County has made investments in the space, but there is a need for strategic improvements and considering how to improve the pedestrian environment incrementally.

5. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

The Candler Road area has suffered from years of disinvestment and broken promises. The I-20 Zoning Overlay which was intended to help address that inequity, may have unwittingly made things worse for the area by structuring change in a way that can only reasonably be done by large outside investors. Even if change were to come, many existing businesses would likely be displaced. Instead of continuing that same paradigm, the County should try a bottom-up approach. Allowing for some smaller experiments and activities in the area could both empower local businesses and entrepreneurs, while starting to create some momentum for investment for the larger area. The County has already expressed an interest in connecting and consulting with Monte Anderson to help them formulate what they could do to allow more momentum to get started. This is just the beginning of a journey, and much work and study will be needed to create the equitable development that this area deserves.

6. APPENDIX

Sources

Some of the Monte Anderson/Options Real Estate Articles referenced

1. **"One Dallas Developer's Secret: Bigger Isn't Always Better"**
Source: D Magazine
2. **"Why Developer Monte Anderson Is Betting Big on This Urbanist Market in DeSoto"**
Source: Dallas News
3. **"Building Better Neighborhoods Through the Use of Incremental Development with Monte Anderson (Ep. 48)"**
Source: Placemaking Podcast
4. **Monte Anderson's Official Website**
5. **"Q&A: Developer Monte Anderson Shares His Ideas for Southern Dallas"**
Source: Oak Cliff Advocate
6. **"The Developer Who Was Desperate to Save a Struggling Neighborhood"**
Source: Strong Towns
7. **"Dallas Developer Monte Anderson Named First Urban Pioneer"**
Source: CandysDirt
8. **"Great Idea: Incremental Development"**
Source: Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)
9. **"A Ton of Work to Do After CNU 23 in Dallas (Part I of II)"**
Source: R. John Laumer

Notes from Interview w/ Tene Gallamore

Our team had the pleasure of talking with Tene Gallamore, the General Manager at the Gallery at South DeKalb. We wanted to talk with her about the mall walkers' program that took place at the Gallery. Tene has been with the mall since 2003 and lives in nearby East Lake, so in addition to being an excellent source about the operations of the mall she has a perspective on the neighborhood and was involved in the initial overlay discussion. Tene described the mall walker programs that – unsurprisingly- have been altered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic there were two groups – inside walkers and outside walkers. Predominantly these groups are seniors (she estimated around 70%), with some middle-age, and some grandkids that come along occasionally. Both groups also tended to come in the morning, the inside walkers starting as early as 5am- even before the mall opens- and ending around 10am. The outside walkers tended to arrive more like 7am and go until 9:30am. Tene believes that the mall walkers are there mostly for social interaction and friendship as well as getting their steps in. Pre-pandemic there were more than 300 registered walkers with the program that had badges issued (which indicated they were allowed to access the mall as early as they did). The internal walker program was heavily programmed – they had speakers to talk about relevant topics as well as sponsors such as Piccadilly that would provide free breakfast. These programs drew a fair amount of people, that Tene believed mostly to be from the immediate area. Since Covid, they have not restarted the internal mall walkers' program but intend to later this year. The walker population shifted to outdoors but is not as well monitored and there has been no programming along those lines.

Tene also spoke about the mall itself, especially considering possible interventions that use existing parking spaces. She pointed out that the mall sits low relative to the road, so feels disconnected and adding challenge to making that connection to the public realm of the street. She indicated that they had hosted food trucks and festivals but needed to be careful to balance the needs of their tenants against that exterior programming. During the pandemic they hosted Covid testing sites and later vaccinations. Additionally, she pointed out that though it appears there is a lot of excess parking, the parking has been leased to various entities over time. Emory uses the site as a park and ride for its campus. She also mentioned there are more temporary events such as when the PGA tour uses the site for off-site parking and Ford has also leased the site for private events.