



MEMORIAL DRIVE

REVITALIZATION CORRIDOR PLAN

Memorial Drive Revitalization Corridor Plan

Draft | DECEMBER 2019

Prepared by Pond, Bleakly Advisory Group, and Sycamore Consulting LLC



DeKalb County
GEORGIA



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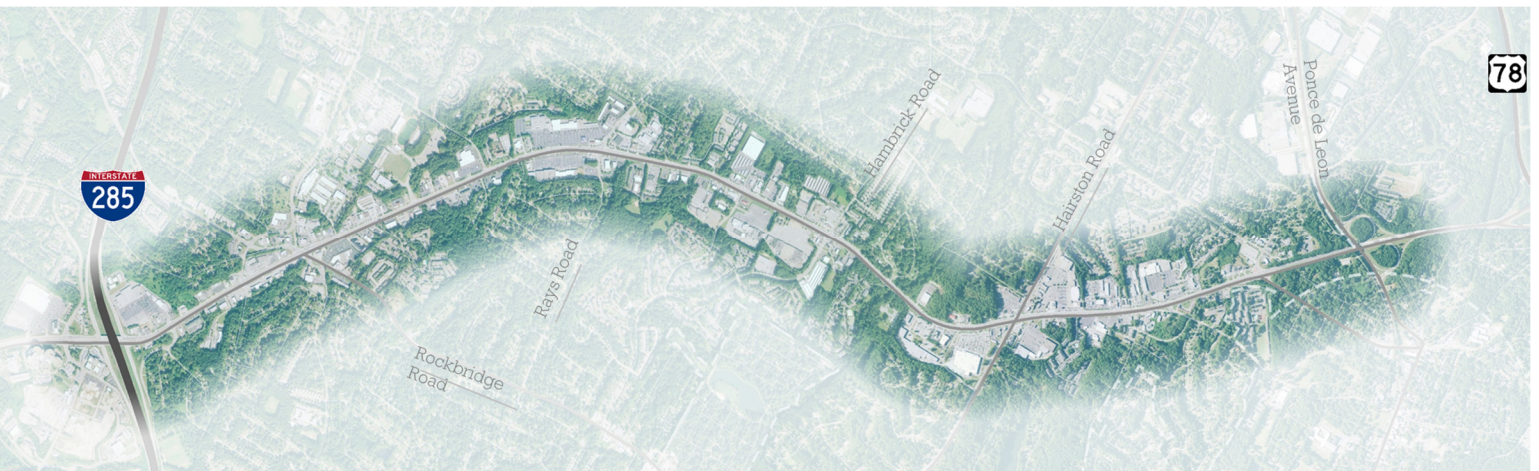
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DATA GATHERING



Focusing on the segment of Memorial Drive between I-285 and Ponce de Leon Avenue in unincorporated DeKalb County, this plan document represents a comprehensive initial step to investigate strategies to revitalize the corridor.

With the understanding that revitalization of the corridor will be a multi-step and lengthy process, initial goals set out by DeKalb County in the development of the plan included:

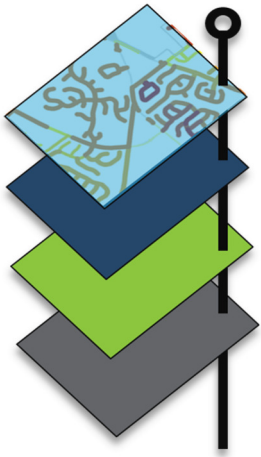
CORRIDOR PLAN GOALS

Provide vision and consensus of business owners and the community

Create a revitalization strategy for this important corridor with beautification, vibrant businesses, mixed use development, and living wage employment opportunities

Establish strategies for creating a “sense of place” upon entering the corridor from Atlanta or Gwinnett County.

The corridor planning process began in the Spring of 2019 concluding in the winter of that year. Three overall steps were taken as indicated below. This plan document is similarly organized by chapter referencing the three steps taken during the planning process.



STEP

1

DATA GATHERING

The early stages of the planning process focused on understanding the underlying conditions of the corridor and included analysis of market conditions, demographics, employment figures, and a physical assessment of the corridor (with a focus on transportation conditions). With this focus on data and analytics, the objective in this phase of the study was to understand the corridor's conditions in an objective manner.



STEP

2

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

The centerpiece of the second phase of the planning process was a robust community engagement process to understand the corridor from the perspective of its residents, workers, and property owners. Anchored by a series of 'design workshops' held with area residents and stakeholders, this phase of the study concluded with a collective vision for the future of the corridor.



STEP

3

ACTION PLAN

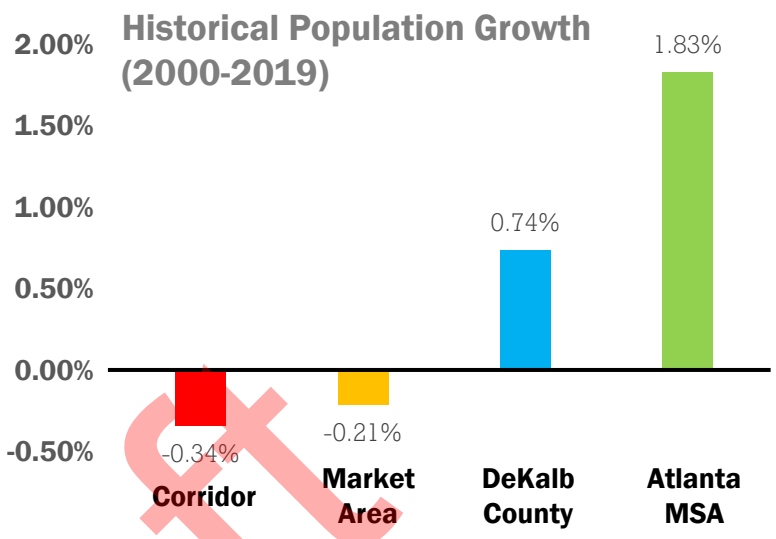
The final phase of the study consisted of formulating the vision for the corridor by describing and articulating **what** could be on the corridor. This was followed by a separate but connected effort to determine methods and strategies on **how** that vision can be achieved.

HISTORY

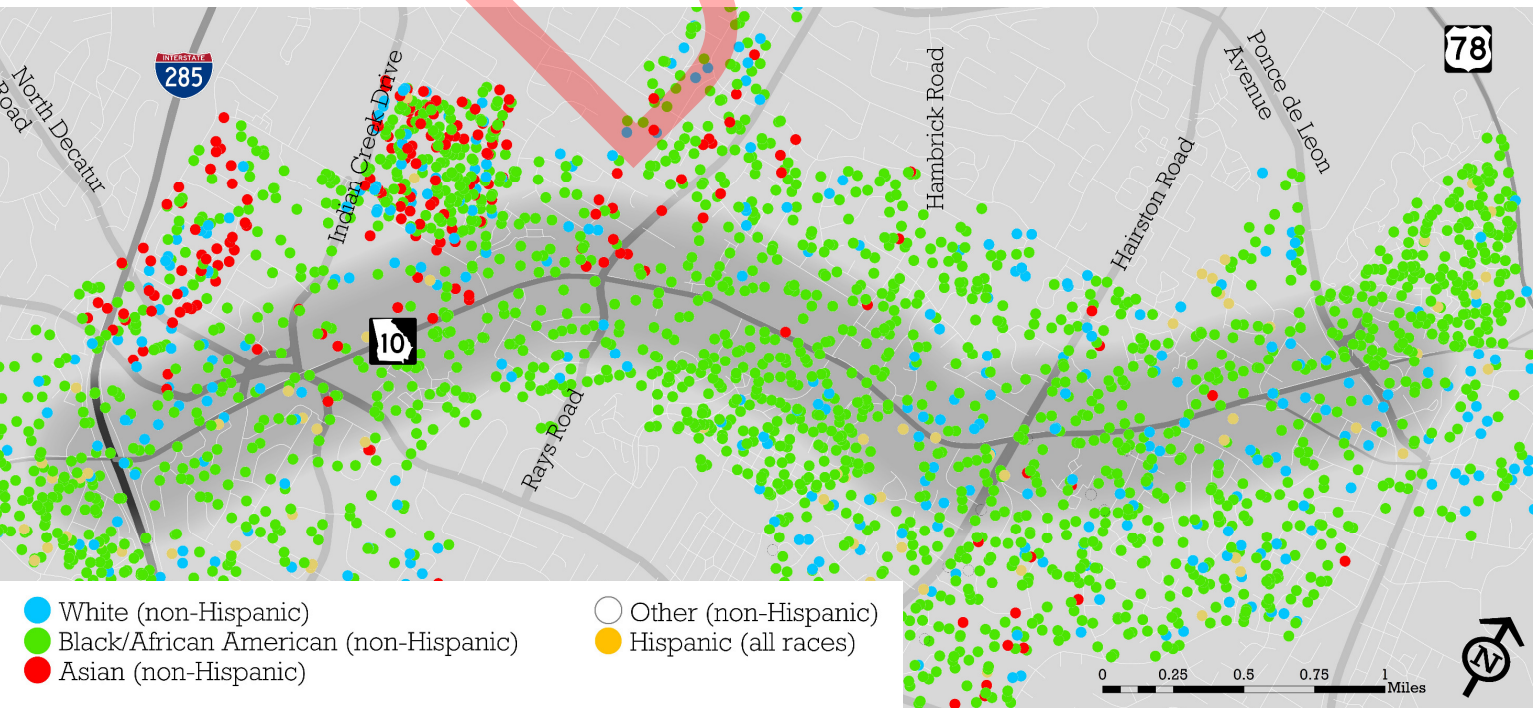
The main connection between Atlanta and Stone Mountain, the Memorial Drive corridor ferried travelers from the city to the suburbs with all the hallmarks of commercial and retail development that goes along with being such a major route.

Suburban growth came to this portion of Memorial Drive (from I-285 east to the Stone Mountain Freeway) in the late 1960s. For the next two decades, the area was relatively affluent and continued to grow. However, starting in the late 1980s, economic growth slowed dramatically and there has been limited construction on the corridor since as shown in the graph on the next page. In addition to being reflective of little investment, this also suggests an increasing challenge as many of the buildings and structures along the corridor are aging rapidly.

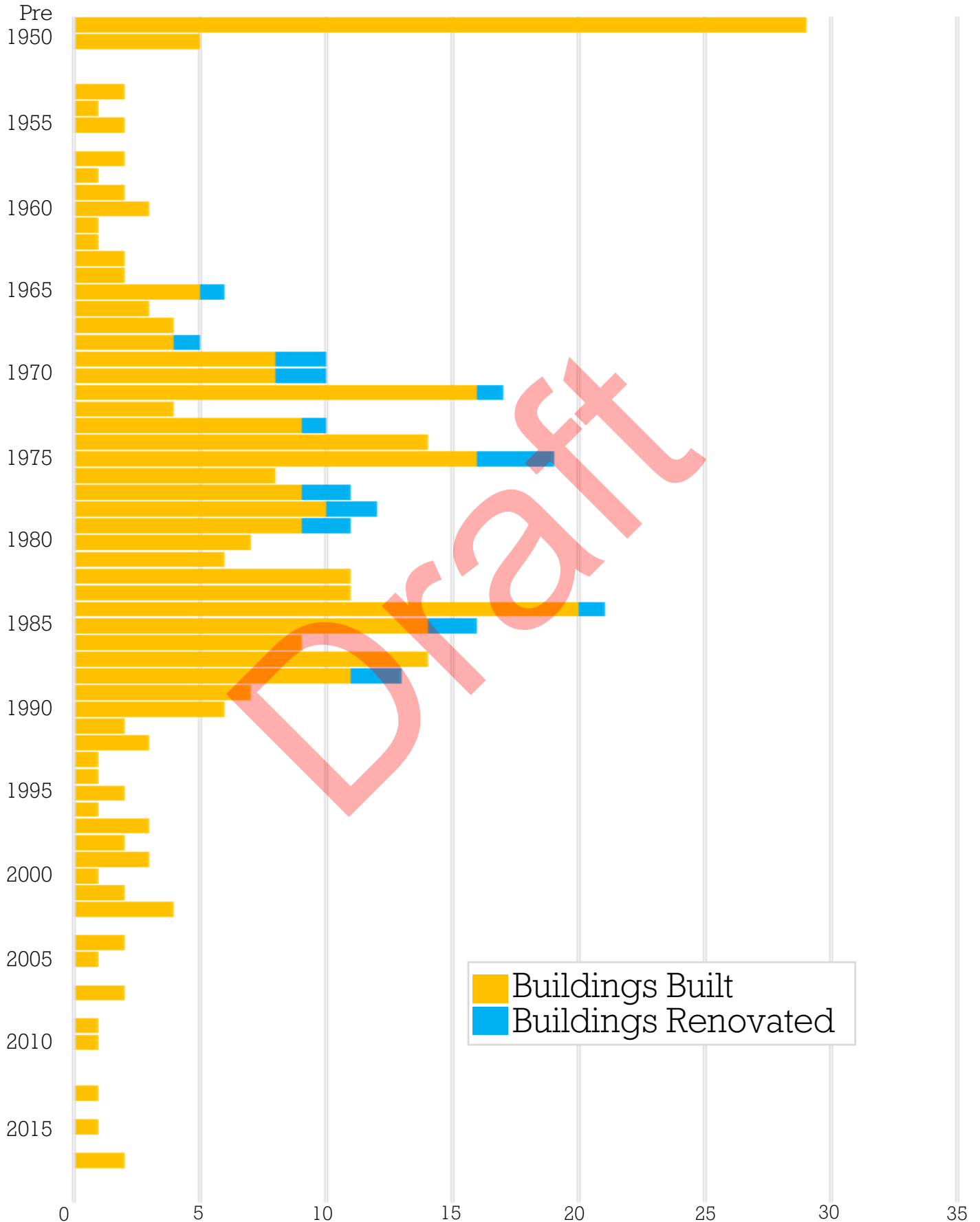
Similarly, population has also been declining along the Memorial Drive corridor and surrounding area since the year 2000, despite a modest increase in DeKalb County of 0.74% and a metro Atlanta growth of 2% during the same time period.



Neighborhood socio-demographics started to change during this time as well. In the early 1990s the nearby community of Clarkston began receiving many resettled refugees (many from the Ethiopian community) and the area became significantly more diverse. Unfortunately, with these shifts, household incomes in the area began to decrease and over time many national retailers (spurred also by national level trends in retail) on the corridor began to pull out as well.

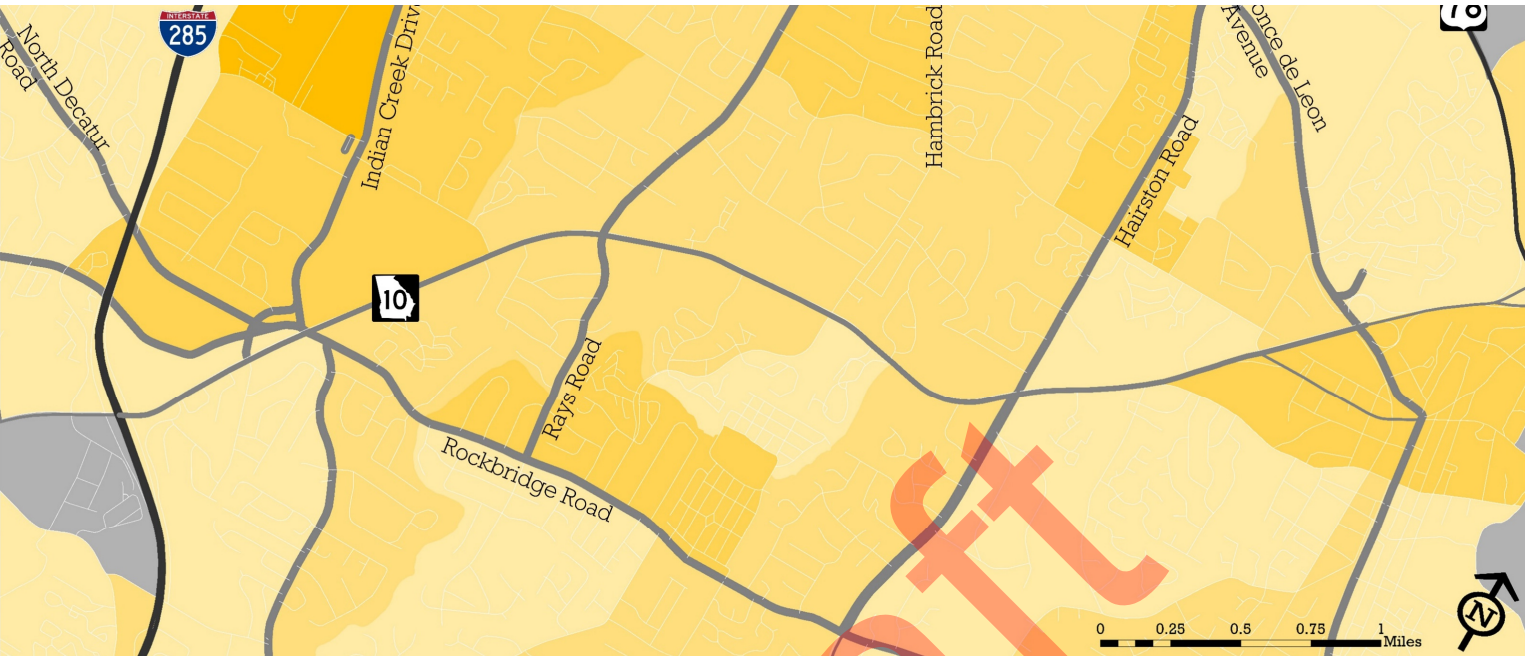


Memorial Drive Corridor Commercial Construction (By Buildings)



DEMOGRAPHICS

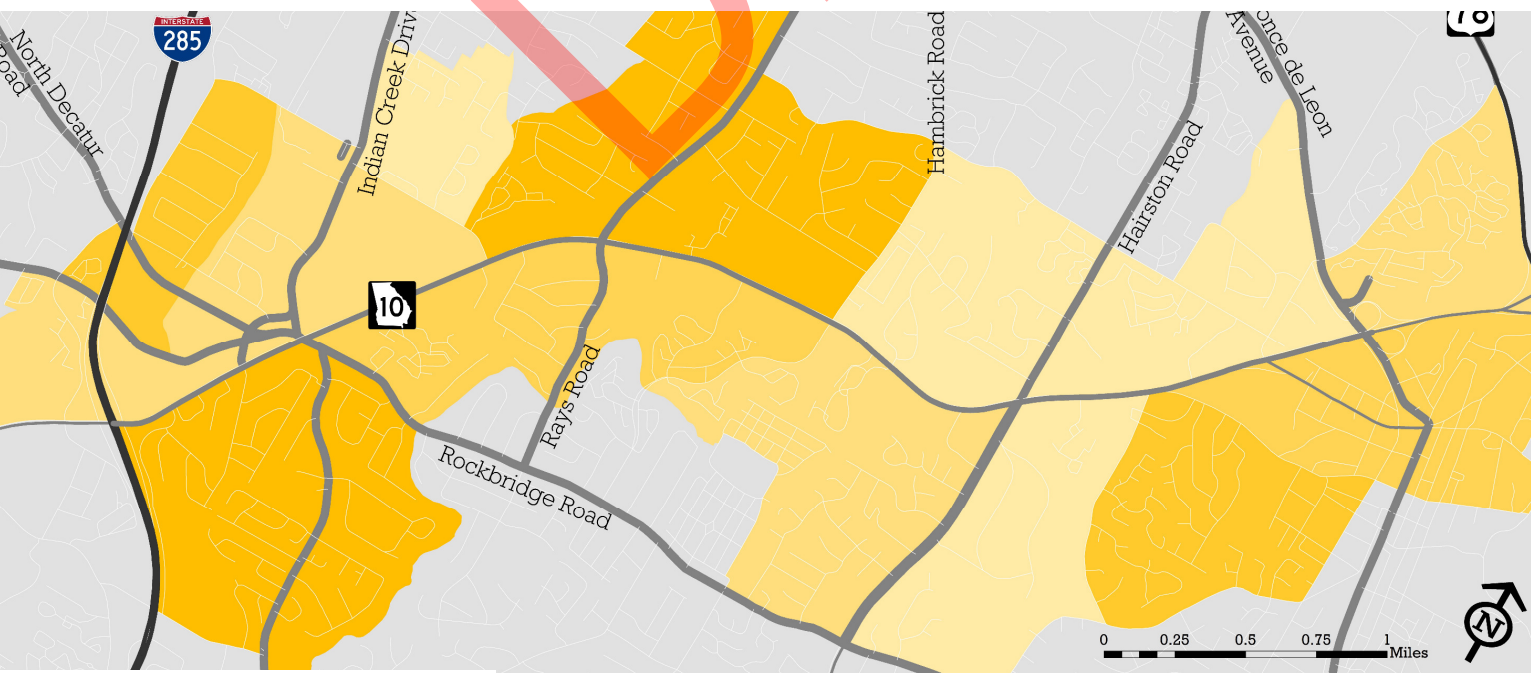
Reinforcing this diversity and the immigrant nature of the corridor, there are parts of the corridor where up to 50 percent of households have limited ability to communicate in English.



- Less than 10%
- 10 – 20%
- 20 – 30%
- 30-40%
- 40-50%
- No Data or Not Applicable

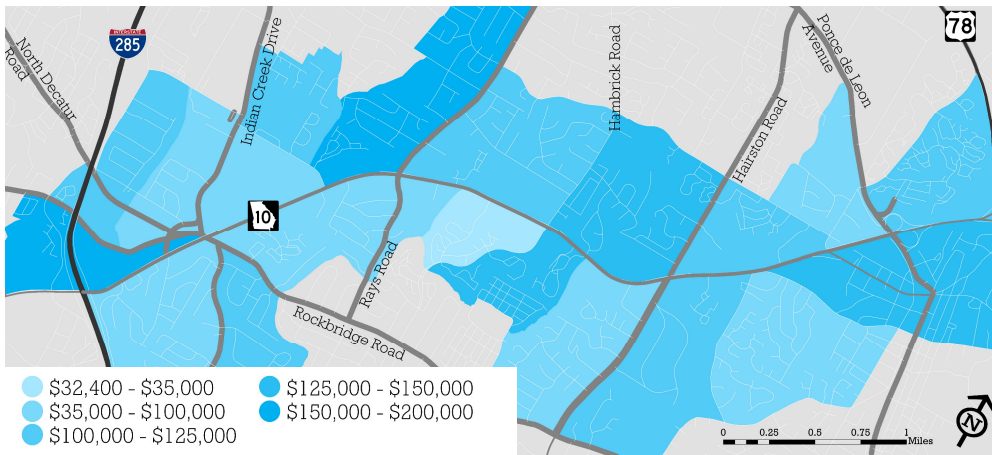
Households With Limited English Speakers (2016)

Median household incomes along the corridor are fairly low with the highest observed rates topping at just over \$60,000 a year and some areas showing particular struggles with median household incomes less than \$25,000. The median income within the Corridor (\$37,794) is nearly 40% lower than DeKalb County's and is a very specific challenge to attracting private sector investment on the corridor.



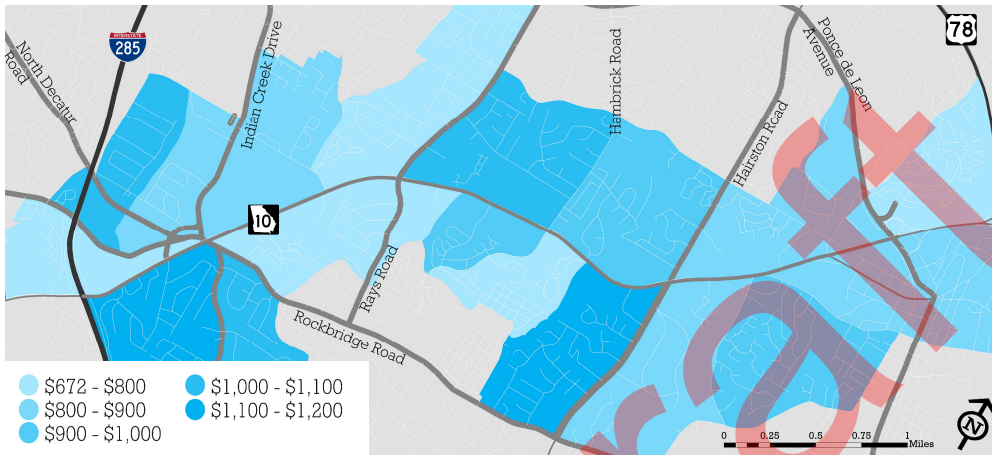
- \$18,000 - \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$30,000
- \$30,000 - \$35,000
- \$35,000 - \$45,000
- \$45,000 - \$61,250

Median Household Income (2016)



Median Home Values (2016)

While some neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity of the corridor have median home values approaching up to \$200,000, there are also select pockets where median home values are only in the low \$30,000s. **Overall, the median home value along the corridor in 2016 was estimated at \$111,396.** For comparison, the regionwide median home value for 2019 was estimated by Zillow at \$219,300.

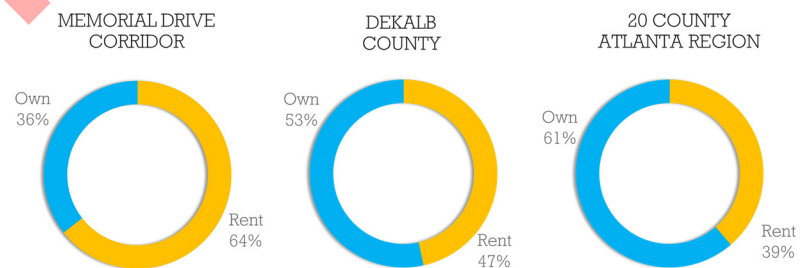


Median Monthly Rent (2016)

Monthly rent along the corridor shows some similar patterns with average monthly payments ranging from fairly low (less than \$800 a month) to much higher values (as high as \$1,200 a month). **Overall, the median monthly rent along the corridor is \$849.**

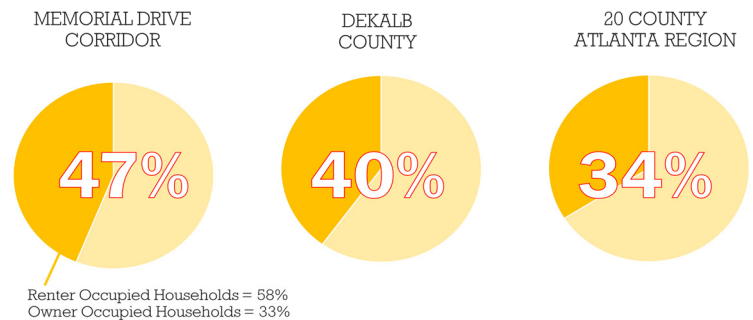
Owner/Renter Profile

Overall, the majority (64 percent) of households on the corridor are in rental properties. Historically, high home ownership levels have implied greater financial strength, stability, and likelihood of future prosperity. The corridor exhibits higher rates of renter occupied properties than both the rest of DeKalb County and the entire Atlanta region.

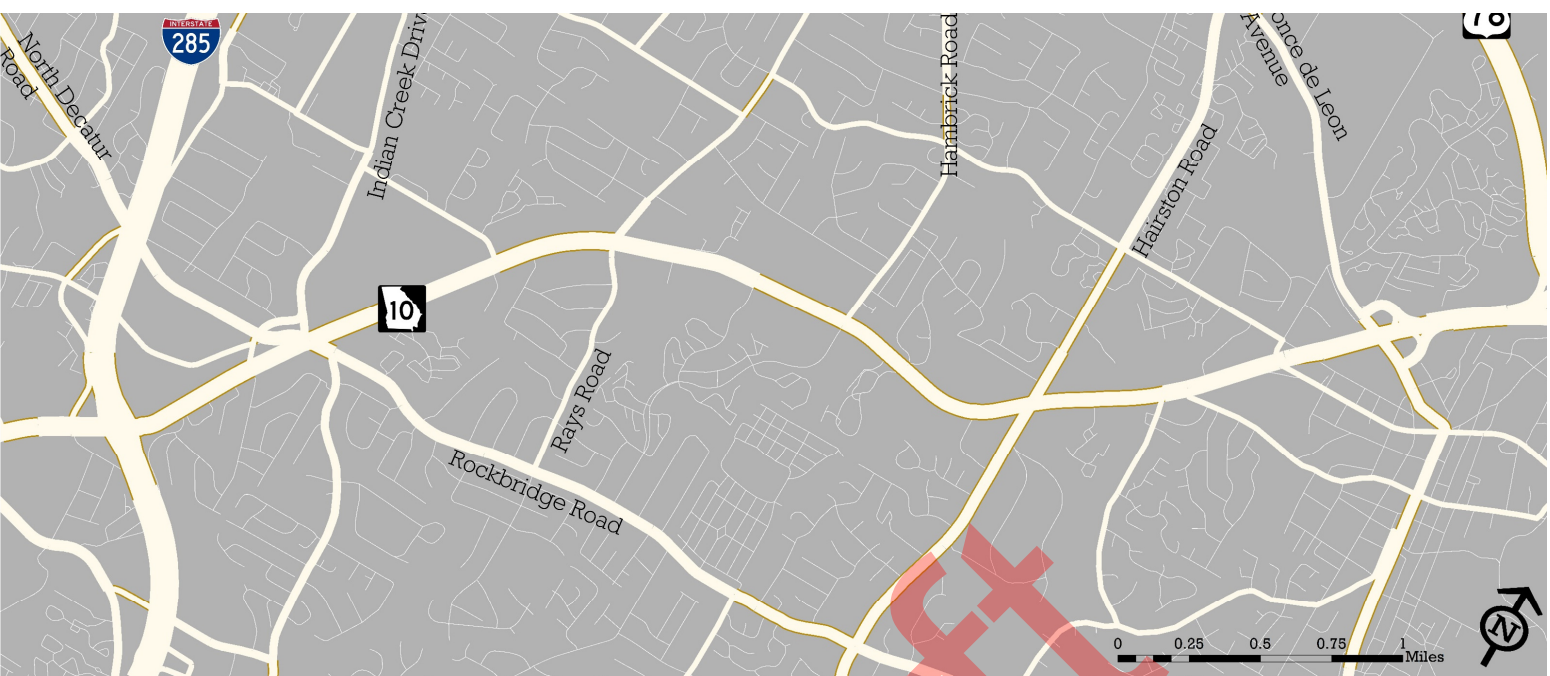


Housing Cost Burden

Households that spend 30 percent or more of their incomes are defined as having a "Housing Cost Burden", an indication that too much of their incomes are wrapped up in their home expenses. Reinforcing the broader health of home ownership, this phenomenon impacts renter occupied households on the corridor at a much more significant rate (58 percent) than those that are owner occupied (33 percent).



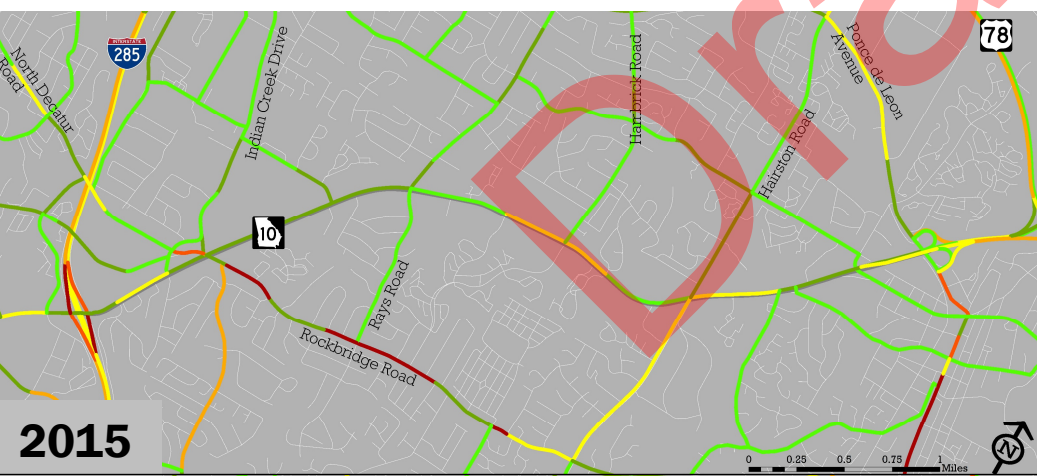
TRANSPORTATION



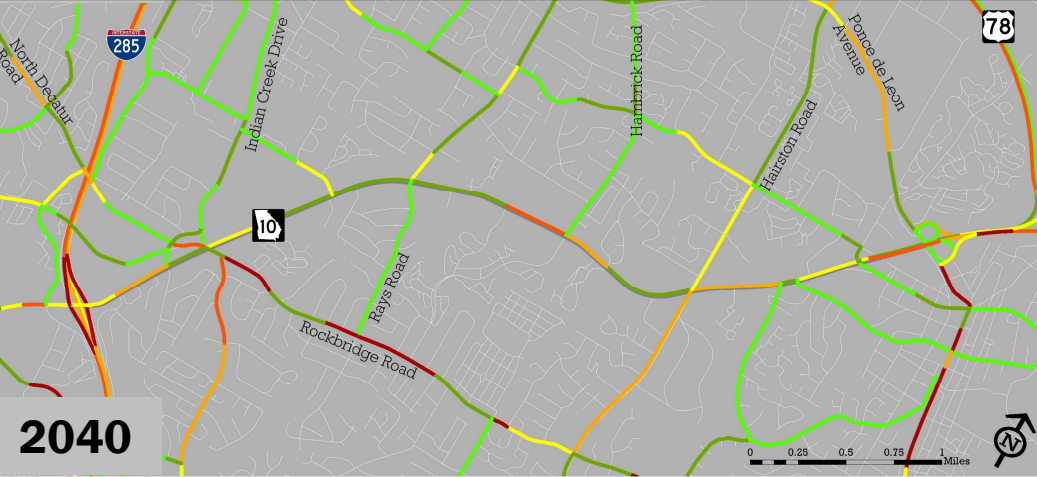
Traffic Demand (2015 & 2040)

Source: Atlanta Regional Commission Activity Based Model

- 2015 Traffic Volume (Line Weight Indicates Relative Demand)
- Additional Traffic Anticipated to Be Added Through 2040 (Line Weight Indicates Relative Demand)



2015



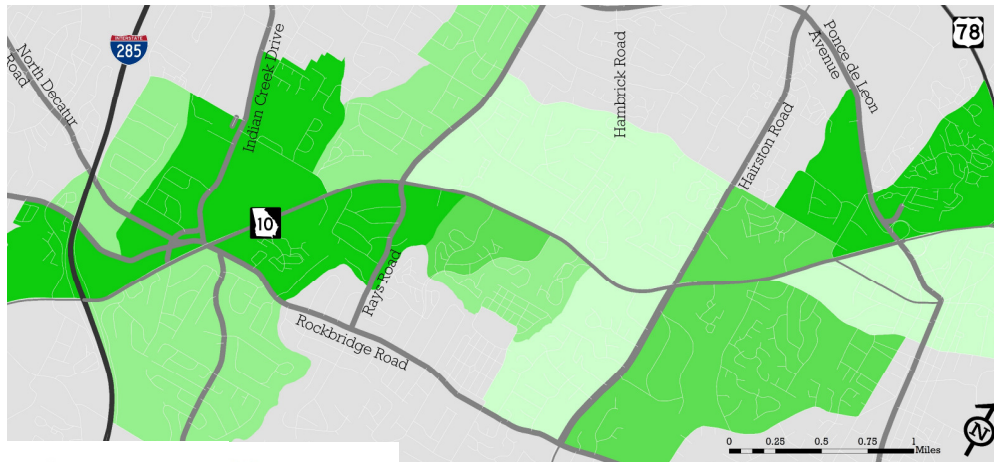
2040



A review of existing and projected traffic demand a corridor that is carrying a lot of traffic but is not anticipated to absorb a significant amount of additional traffic growth, due in part to relatively modest expectations of future development growth on the corridor itself.

Similarly, a review of existing and projected conditions indicates a corridor that experiences some levels of congestion but are relatively minor when compared to other parts of the region.

In many ways, as a roadway, Memorial Drive is built to move traffic quickly and efficiently and tends to be very successful in doing so.



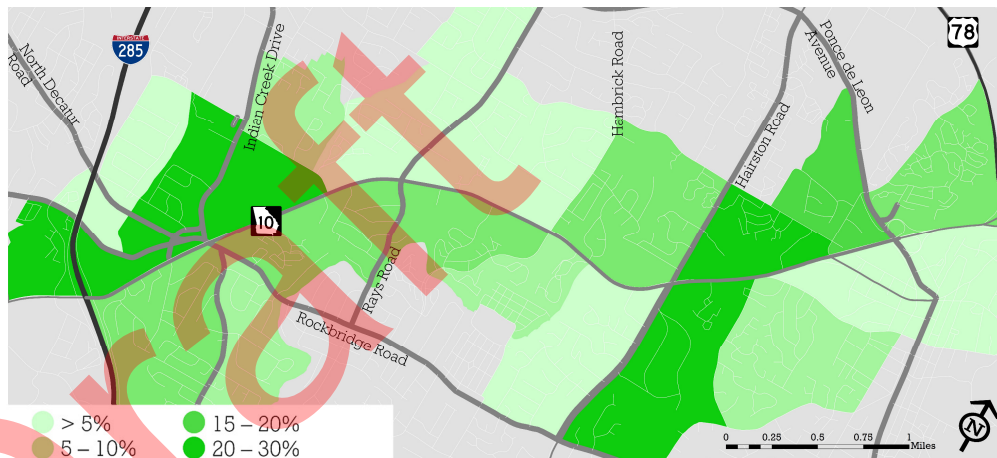
- 10 - 20%
- 20 - 30%
- 30 - 40%
- 40 - 60%

Alternative Commuting

Unfortunately, the efficient movement of vehicles through the corridor contrasts with a large number of people who (field observations suggest) walk to get around the corridor. Census data backs this up further tells us that many area residents (up to 60 percent) commute to work by walking, biking, taking transit, and/or carpooling. These are very significant numbers for an area that is built almost entirely as a predominately suburban auto-oriented environment.

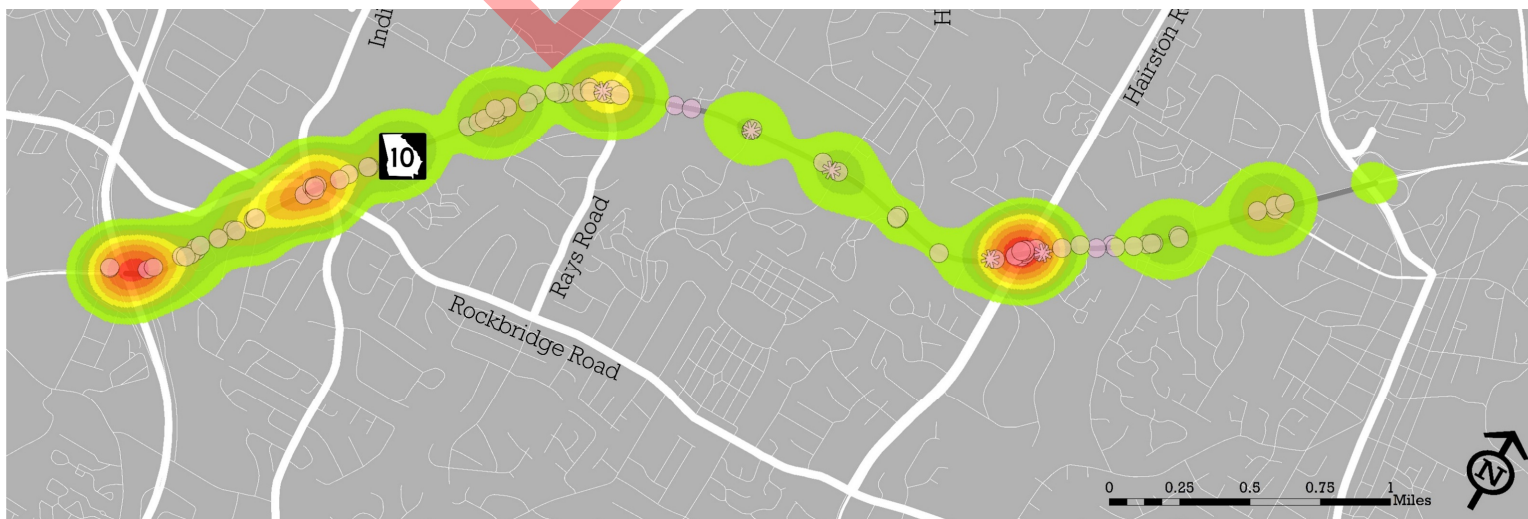
Transit Commuting

More specifically, many of the corridor's residents indicate they are utilizing transit to get to and from work, with some areas exhibiting that transit commuters are up to 30 percent of all commuters, many who are likely walking to and from transit stops in and around the corridor. These are relatively high numbers for an area that is fundamentally suburban and lower density and lacking a direct connection (while close) to the MARTA east line.



- > 5%
- 5 - 10%
- 10 - 15%
- 15 - 20%
- 20 - 30%

We are also able to review and heat map crash data. In particular, pedestrian safety is a concern due to the relatively large number of pedestrians walking around in a transportation environment that is primarily designed for moving vehicles fast and efficiently.

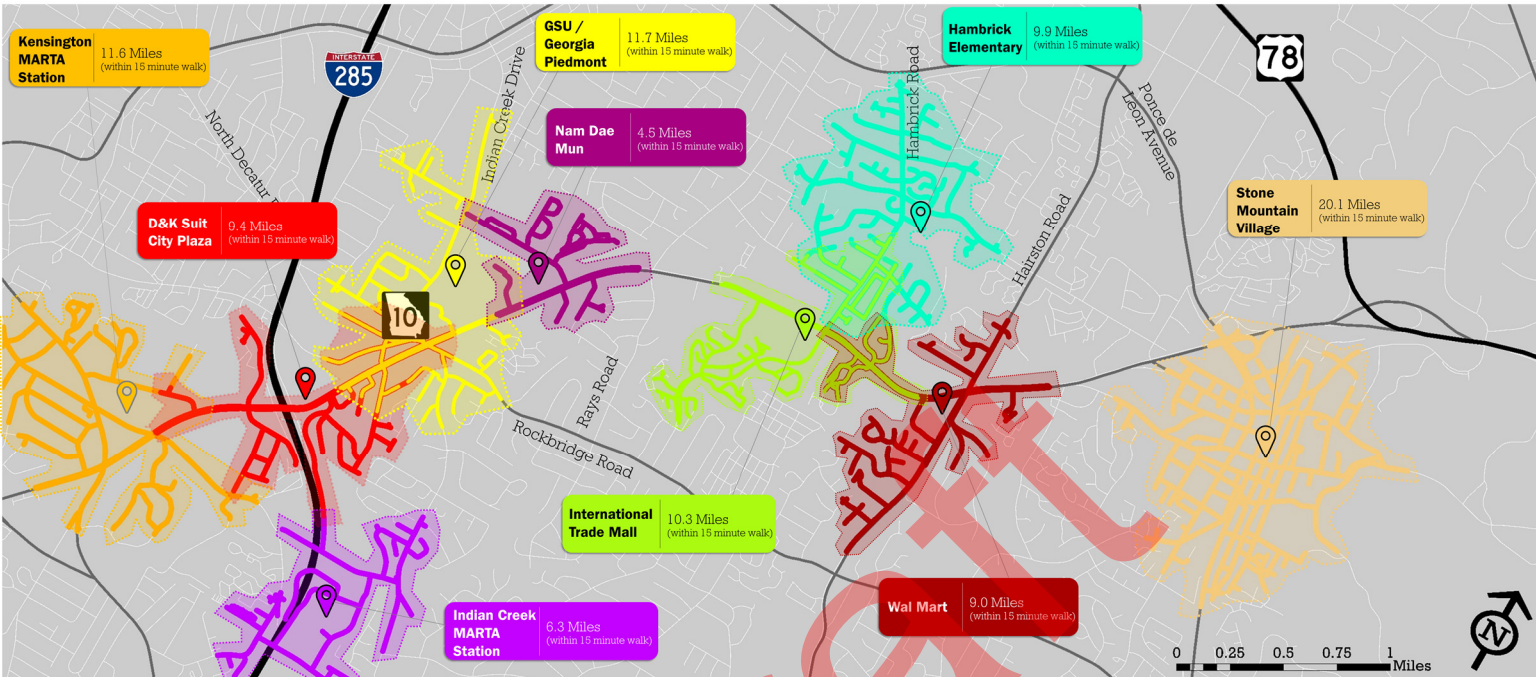


Crashes (2014-2018)



- Crashes Involving Pedestrians (102)
- ✱ Crashes Involving Bicyclists (5)

The pedestrian experience on and along the corridor is further exacerbated by an environment that is not particularly connected, limiting accessibility to points of interest and convenience. Consider the number of miles of connectivity within a 15 minute walk radius of different points of interest on the corridor and contrast that with the more connected and grid oriented network of Stone Mountain Village to the east.



The good news is that Memorial Drive and many of the major cross-routes currently have sidewalk coverage. However, pedestrian connectivity (even within a 15 minute walk of corridor destinations) tends to decrease the further one gets from the actual corridor. Addressing this connectivity will be key to strengthen the relationship between the corridor and the neighborhoods it serves.



15 Minute Walks & Gaps

- █ Sidewalk Within 15 Minute Walk of Corridor Destination
- █ No Sidewalks, But Within 15 Minute Walk of Corridor Destination

Similarly, the auto-oriented environment further creates challenges for pedestrians in the area as evidenced in the photographs below.



Despite signage and pedestrian facilities, the huge expanse of area intersections and the long distance to travel creates challenges for pedestrians to get around.



Similarly, the large setbacks of the suburban oriented shopping centers creates inconveniences and further challenges for area pedestrians and bicyclists.



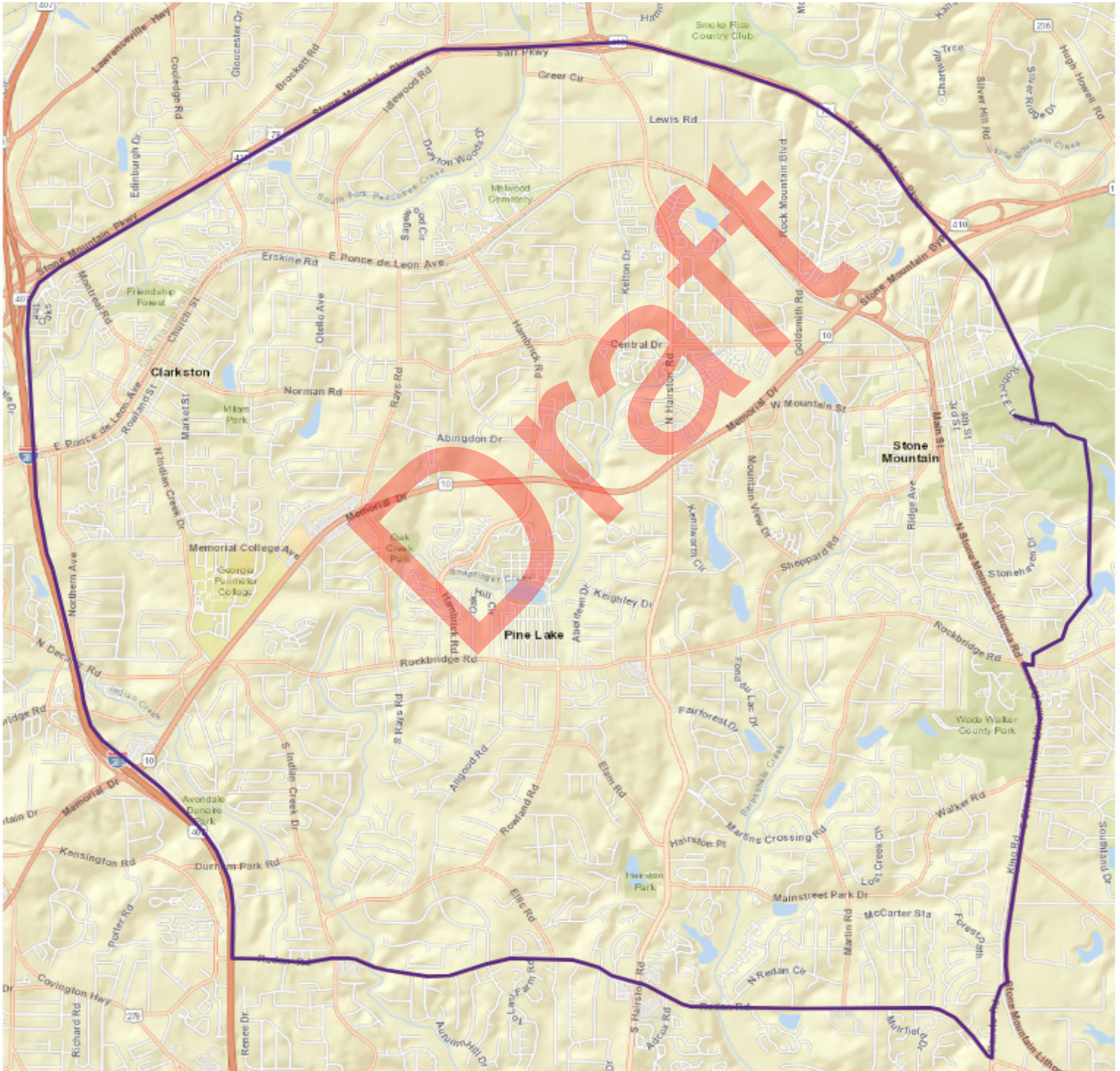
Finally, pedestrians on and around the corridor often encounter challenges such as closed gates (on the left) and long stairwells (below) that can discourage travel.





MARKET CHARACTERISTICS

The “Market Area” for real estate demand along the corridor is comprised of the households and businesses that are close enough to the subject area that residents and workers will likely come to the corridor to shop, eat, or work if the attractive options were available. In this case, the market area is defined as the area bound by US 78, Interstate 285, Stone Mountain Lithonia Rd, and Redan Road. For the population who live and work in this area, the closest commercial area is likely to be the Memorial Drive corridor, however many households might choose to do their dining and shopping in other areas, such as Lawrenceville Highway.



Inventory and Performance Metrics

A review of CoStar data to understand the health of commercial real estate indicates that average commercial rental rates within the Corridor lag both the surrounding market area and the County.

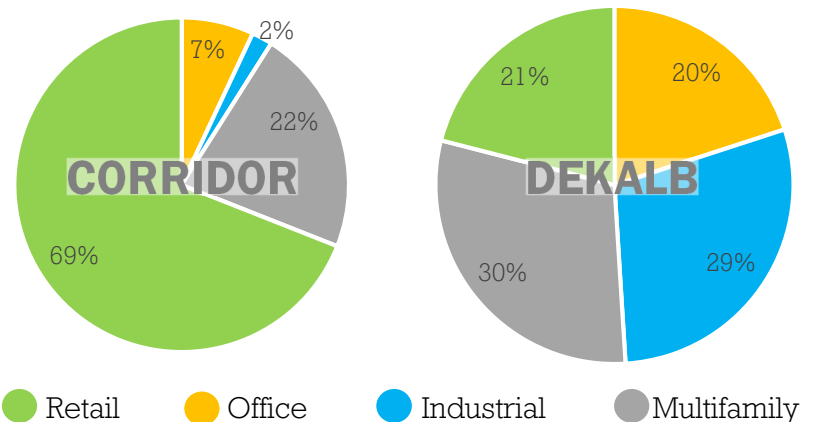
- **Multi-family – 28% lower** than average rents in DeKalb
- **Retail – 24% lower** than average rents in DeKalb
- **Office – 28% lower** than average rents in DeKalb

Conversely, vacancy rates on the corridor tend to be relatively low indicating spaces that are, if not necessarily by the highest and best use, generally utilized.

	Corridor	Market Area	DeKalb County
Multifamily			
Existing Buildings	7	116	617
Existing Units	1,451	23,167	105,089
Vacancy %	4.80%	5.70%	7.30%
Average Rent/Square Foot	\$0.83	\$0.91	\$1.16
Retail			
Existing Buildings	196	874	3,451
Existing Square Feet	2,649,744	9,357,218	43,966,548
Vacancy %	8.90%	5.60%	6.10%
Average NNN Rent	\$10.70	\$12.00	\$14.11
Office			
Existing Buildings	44	530	2,083
Existing Square Feet	267,674	5,067,838	40,694,656
Vacancy %	2.60%	12.70%	12.90%
Average Base Rent	\$17.19	\$21.30	\$24.57
Industrial/Flex			
Existing Buildings	8	443	1,828
Existing Square Feet	93,486	19,427,067	60,781,891
Vacancy %	0.00%	4.50%	3.80%
Average NNN Rent	N/A	\$6.41	\$6.35

Commercial Space by Land Use

Especially when compared to the rest of DeKalb County, the Memorial drive corridor has a significant amount of commercial space dedicated to retail. This will be an important consideration when considered opportunities for redevelopment.

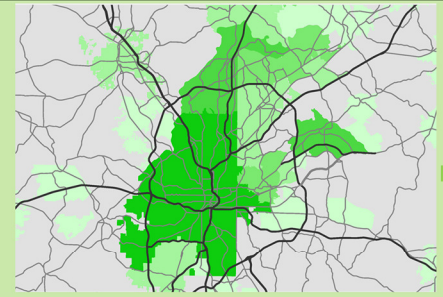
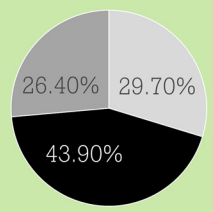


EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

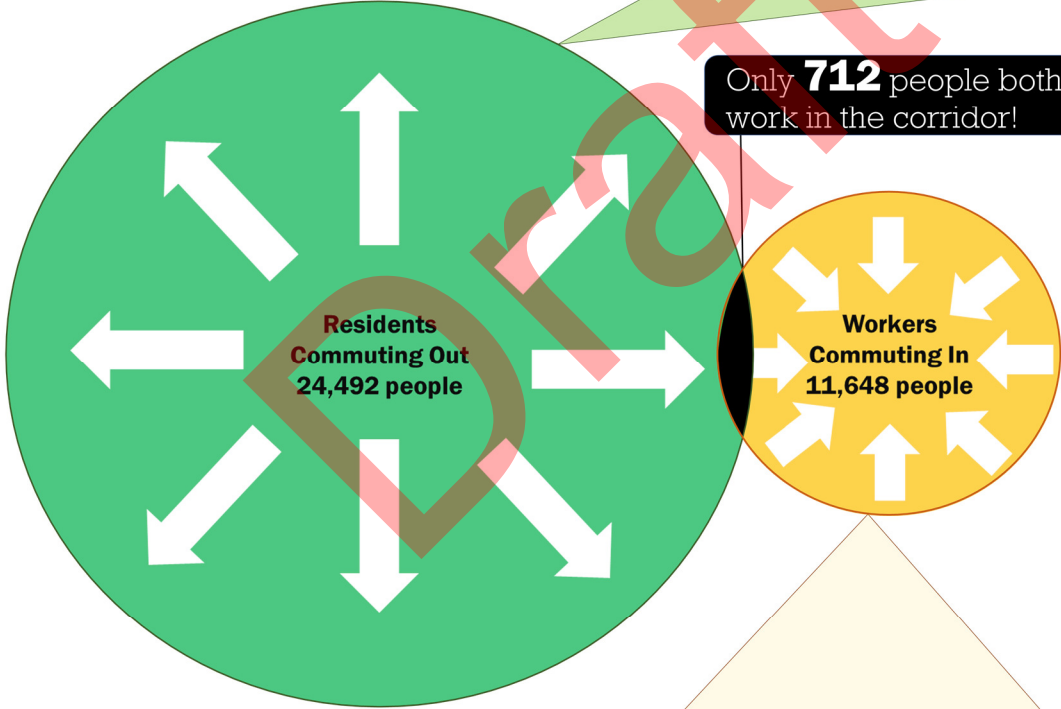
A review of employment along the corridor indicates that most jobs are held by people who do not live on the corridor. In fact, a review of where corridor residents commute to contrasts similarly with a review of where corridor employees commute from, suggesting there may be more opportunities for corridor residents to work closer to home. A further review of employment data does show that both jobs on the corridor and jobs held by corridor residents tend to be relatively low paying, with less than half of all jobs in either group yielding more than \$3,333 a month (annualized at nearly \$40,000 a year).

Residents Commuting Out Top 4 Industries (49% of Jobs)

1. Retail Trade (3,328)
2. Health Care and Social Assistance (3,097)
3. Accommodation and Food Services (2,923)
4. Administration & Support (2,598)

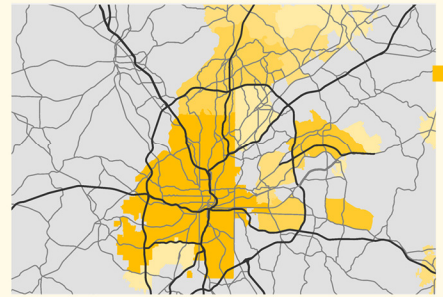
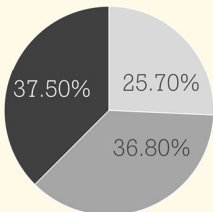


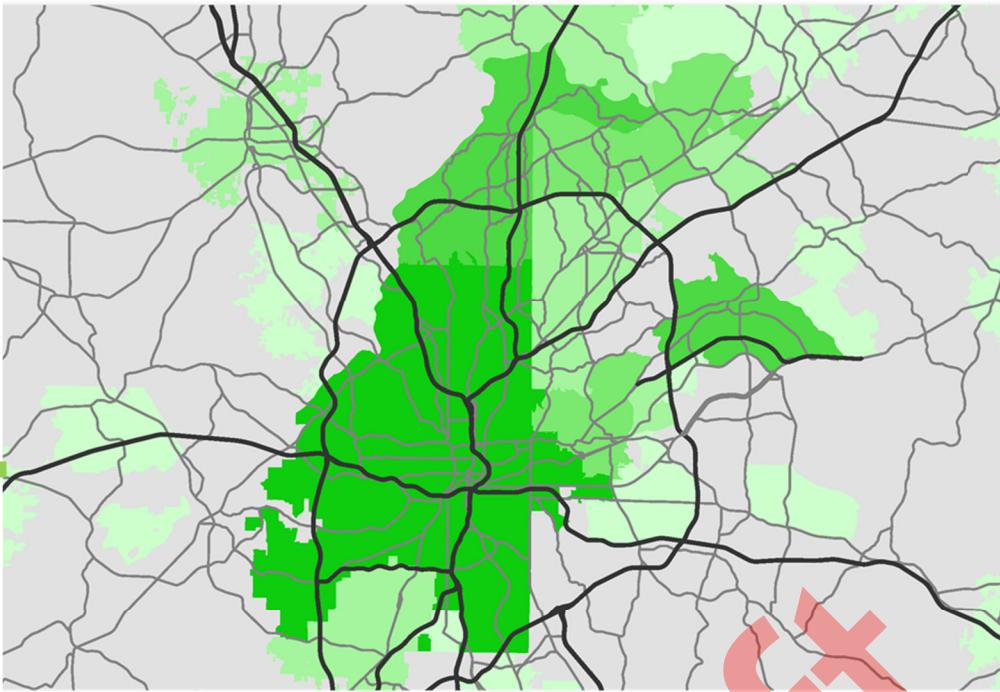
Only **712** people both live *and* work in the corridor!



Workers Commuting In Top 4 Industries (56% of Jobs)

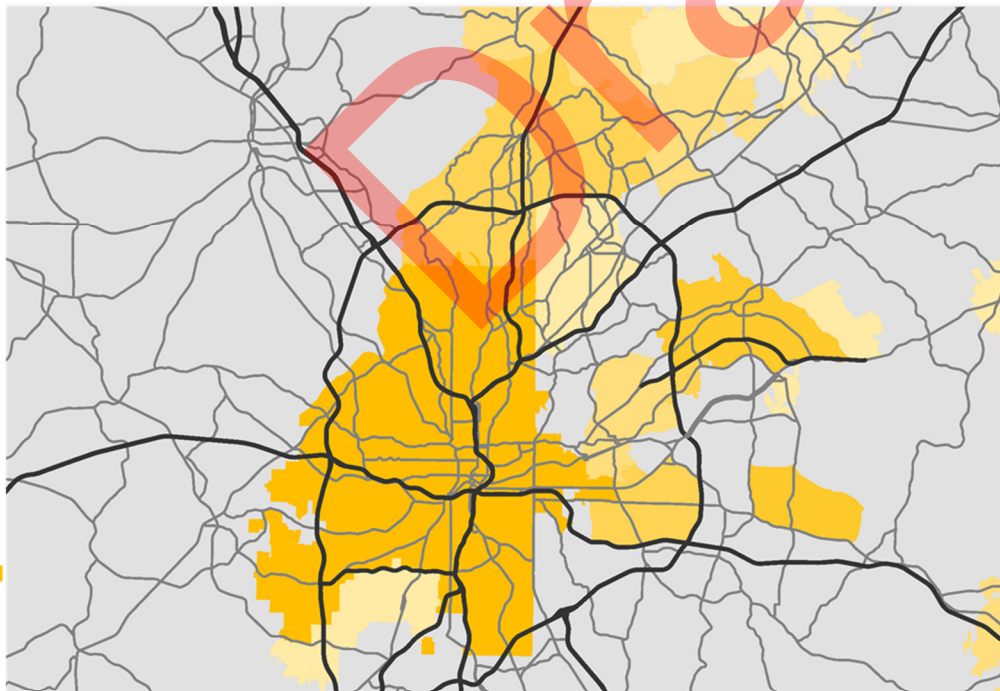
1. Educational Services (1,982)
2. Health Care and Social Assistance (1,658)
3. Transportation and Warehousing (1,433)
4. Retail Trade (1,498)





Less Jobs for
Corridor
Residents

More Jobs for
Corridor
Residents



Less Homes for
Corridor
Workers

More Homes for
Corridor
Workers

In summary, the data gathering phase of the planning process revealed a number of challenges that explain the lack of reinvestment along the corridor and also imply the difficulty in future revitalization.

CHALLENGES

Demographic & People

- Declining Population
- Lower Household Incomes and Spending Potential
- Market Area Median Income is 61 Percent of Regional Median

Built Environment and Infrastructure

- Auto-Centric Environment Not Conducive to Pedestrians
- Implied Evidence of Safety Challenges for Pedestrians
- Disconnected Network
- Large Setbacks

Market Conditions

- Aging Buildings
- Below-Average Commercial Rents
- Lack of Private Investment
- Buildings Perform Well Enough to Maintain Status Quo
- Lack of Diversification in Commercial Uses

Despite these challenges, there are also a number of positional and institutional strengths to draw from on and near the corridor.

STRENGTHS

Demographic & People

- Unique Diversity of Corridor Residents
- Secondary Education Facilities (GSU and Georgia Piedmont) Create large Daytime Student and Faculty Population
- DeKalb Government Acts as Institutional Anchor
- Near Stone Mountain Park

Built Environment and Infrastructure

- Strong Public Investment in Infrastructure
- Close to MARTA Rail Stations and Park and Ride Lot
- Interstate 285 Connects Corridor to Larger Region

Market Conditions

- Limited Retail Competition to South
- Regional Redevelopment Patterns Starting to Move Towards Corridor
- Housing Affordability Relative to Region

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IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

Building from the challenges and strengths of the Data Gathering phase, the planning team worked hand in hand with the community to develop a vision for what a revitalized Memorial Drive corridor would look like.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

To make sure that this vision was representative of a broad cross section of Memorial Drive residents and business owners, an aggressive "Awareness Campaign" was utilized to make sure people knew about the various opportunities to provide input and participate in the process. Methods included social media postings, direct emailing, attendance at local area businesses, working with partners in the community to spread the word, and videos.



It's In DeKalb

June 25 · 🌐

Join DeKalb County Planning and Sustainability tonight from from 6 to 8 p.m. for a Community Open House to discuss the Memorial Drive Corridor. The open house will be at the DeKalb County Watershed Management Office. To take the survey: <https://planningatpond.com/memorialdrivecorridorplan...>

Come Visit Us At Our First of Four Planned Community Open Houses and Tell Us Your Thoughts About the Future of the Corridor!

This meeting will be in an open house format that will allow you and other attendees to arrive anytime at your convenience within the 6 to 8 PM window!

Tuesday, June 25, 2019
6 to 8 PM
DeKalb County Watershed Management Office
(D&K Suit City Plaza)
4572 Memorial Drive Decatur, Georgia 30032

Also, please visit our website and take our survey!
Take an online survey to share your feedback about thoughts about the corridor.
<https://planningatpond.com/memorialdrivecorridorplan>

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES



Commissioner Steve Bradshaw
DeKalb County District 4

Please join us for the second public meeting for the Memorial Drive Corridor Revitalization Plan on August 21st from 1-4 and 5-8 p.m. at the DeKalb Conference Center at Georgia Piedmont Technical College, 495 North Indian Creek Drive. Drop in at any time and stay for the presentation. If you are unable to attend, please be sure to check out the website and take the community survey [here](#).

TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE REVITALIZATION OF THE MEMORIAL DRIVE CORRIDOR!

Collaborate with our Planning Team at our upcoming "Design Workshop"

Wednesday, August 21, 2019
DeKalb Conference Center @ Georgia Piedmont Technical College
495 North Indian Creek Drive Clarkston, Georgia 30021

During this multi-hour and multi-phased meeting, our planning team will be working in real-time to develop conceptual ideas for the future of the corridor and looking for your feedback! **Please visit us at your convenience and interest any time during the tentative schedule below:**

1:00 – 4:00 PM: Freedom Planning Work (Drop in any time!)
The planning team will be developing initial ideas and concepts to be further explored later in the evening.

4:00 – 5:00 PM: Transition to Open House
The planning team will be focused on finalizing initial concepts and ideas so they are presentation ready for the evening's open house.

5:00 – 7:00 PM: Open House (Drop in any time!)
The planning team will present ideas developed during the afternoon and look for feedback.

7:00 – 8:00 PM: Presentations
The planning team will develop brief presentations to summarize ideas captured and establish the next steps in the planning process.

Want to learn more about our work?
Please visit us at: www.dekalbcountyga.gov/memoraldrive



DeKalb County

Atlanta Regional Commission
5 hrs · 🌐

Live, shop, or work near Memorial Drive? Come learn more about plans for the corridor's future and share your thoughts at an open house Tuesday, June 25. Drop by between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m.: 4572 Memorial Drive, Decatur, Ga. 30032 Meanwhile, take this survey to share your thoughts--> <https://planningatpond.com/memoraldrivecorridorplan#/>



PLANNINGATPOND.COM
Social Pinpoint - Memorial Drive Corridor Plan
A Place to engage your Community

YouTube

Search

🔍



Memorial Drive Revitalization Corridor Plan

Unlisted

COMMUNITY MEETINGS



VISIONING OPEN HOUSE – June 25, 2019

Proving that our initial attempts to solicit input were successful, over 200 people attending our initial community open house! This meeting included an educational summary of the data gathered and the planning team's perspectives on the corridor, exercises and discussion to develop high level goals for the revitalization of the corridor, and activities to identify specific locations for changing (or preserving) the character of the corridor and the intensity of future development.

DESIGN WORKSHOP – August 21, 2019

With initial input in hand from the Visioning Open House and other engagement methods over the Summer of 2019, the planning team hosted a day long design workshop working hand in hand to develop ideas and concepts for the future of the Corridor. Topics of focus included Land Use, Connectivity, and Placemaking and included discussion with over 100 corridor residents and business owners. The day's events concluded with a summarizing presentation of the work and ideas developed in addition to an educational discussion of market realities and challenges in redevelopment.



IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

A WALK THROUGH MEMORIAL DRIVE – October 7, 2019

Building from the design workshop, the planning team developed a series of concepts and ideas for the corridor that were presented through a simulated “walk through” of the corridor, allowing participants to envision the future of locations along the corridor and how that vision developed. This meeting was developed to be a check-in and earn guidance and feedback on the vision developed before working on the various policies and strategies that could be used to develop that vision.



A CELEBRATION OF MEMORIAL DRIVE – November 16, 2019

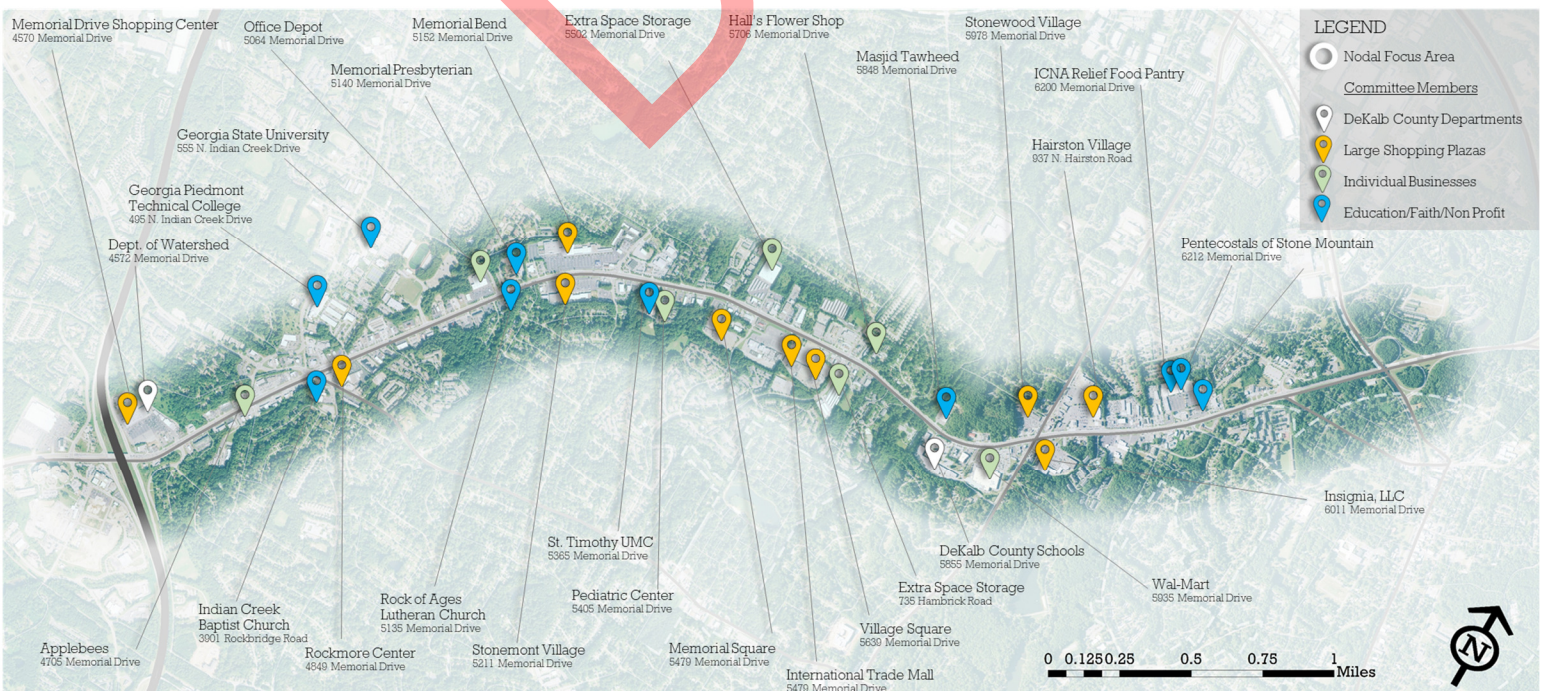
The public planning process concluded with “A Celebration of Memorial Drive” featuring local food vendors, a review of the planning process, and discussions of the various policies and strategies that the community can consider to help redevelop the corridor.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Acknowledging that a format for in-depth and roundtable conversations involving community leaders, businesspeople, property owners, and other stakeholders would be appropriate to supplement the traditional community meetings, a Business Development Advisory Committee (BDAC) was formed to help guide the planning team and vet ideas and recommendations.

Comprised of members selected from throughout the corridor, the BDAC met four times during the planning process often in anticipation of subsequent community open houses. These meetings included:

- June 11, 2019: An initial meeting to discuss conditions on the corridor, perform a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, and articulate possible visions for the future of the corridor
- August 19, 2019: The BDAC was briefed on initial community input and feedback and participated in a abbreviated version of the Design Workshop held with the larger community a few days later.
- September 24, 2019: The planning team presented initial concepts and ideas reflecting the cumulative vision for the corridor.
- October 28, 2019: A final presentation and discussion was held reviewing the emerging strategies and policies to help revitalize the corridor.



IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES





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POP UP EVENTS

To supplement the traditional community open house opportunities, the planning team conducted four pop up events during the course of the process. These events were tactical in nature, designed to reach out to either specific populations (such as students at GSU) or broad groups of corridor residents. In addition to allowing for one on one conversations about the corridor, these events were used to encourage people to take part in the online survey and interactive map (documented on the next page) and/or attend one of the more formal meeting opportunities during the process. Locations and dates are as follows:

Georgia State University Clarkston Campus – April 23, 2019

International Trade Mall – May 18, 2019

Sam Dae Mun – June 21, 2019

DeKalb County Tax Commissioner Office – June 25, 2019



ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

A dedicated project website was set up and updated at regular intervals throughout the planning process to advertise upcoming meetings and advise on the progress of the plan. The centerpiece of this website was an online survey and accompanying interactive map that were used to solicit input and feedback on a host of topics related to the revitalization of the corridor. In particular, the interactive map was useful in understanding community support for different ideas due to the geographical nature of comments provided as well as the ability for other visitors to the site to upvote or downvote comments already provided.



Over 13,000 visits to the website



Over 1,000 survey responses



Over 950 interactive map comments

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

MEMORIAL DRIVE

Drag to comment

Places I Want to Preserve

Places I Want to Change

Ideas and Suggestions

Development Intensity - Suburban

Development Intensity - Village and Town Center

Development Intensity - Urban Regional Center

ABOUT

NEWS

EVENTS

ONLINE SURVEY

INTERACTIVE MAP

socialpoint

1. I shop at businesses on or near the corridor

- I eat at restaurants on or near the corridor
- I attend religious services on or near the corridor
- I commute along the corridor

2. How long have you been living, working, or visiting the Memorial Drive corridor?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-20 years
- 20-25 years
- More than 25 years

3. What initially brought you to the corridor?

4. How often do you shop on the corridor?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- A few times a year
- Rarely

5. How often do you eat on the corridor?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- A few times a year
- Rarely

6. How often do you visit the corridor for services such as banking, postal, or auto services?

Chick-fila is the best food establishment in the community.

15 days ago

Like Dislike

Crime infested. Unsupervised youth in the community. Apparently, low income with no regard to property or upkeep. Not invested in the community.

15 days ago

Like Dislike

No used auto lot or auto dealership.

15 days ago

Like Dislike

The area in and round Rockbridge Road can be like a city center with Urban Intensity development

16 days ago

Like Dislike

Improve the median and provide curb cuts that are attractive similar to Buckhead Community.

24 days ago

Like Dislike

Help this business thrive and remain in the community.

24 days ago

Like Dislike

needs to be Racetrack especially coming off expressway, I am scared to gas up here and i live off of memorial think about the visitors who are on the was to stone mountain. no restroom and too many folks just hanging out.

6 months ago

Like +72 Dislike

too many auto repair shops

6 months ago

Like +44 Dislike -1

this was a dairy queen and my family and I enjoyed going until they stop caring about the restaurant and tons of individuals started hanging out there. We need an ice cream shop on Memorial as well.

6 months ago

Like +41 Dislike -1

This was a Shoney's then ?, then used car lot which is closing now. Needs to be a nice sit down eatery. Memorial Drive used to have tons of family eateries. lets bring them back.

6 months ago

Like +59 Dislike

what is this big space with a cars behind a gate? this space can be used for something else and must go.

6 months ago

Like +45 Dislike

needs to go.

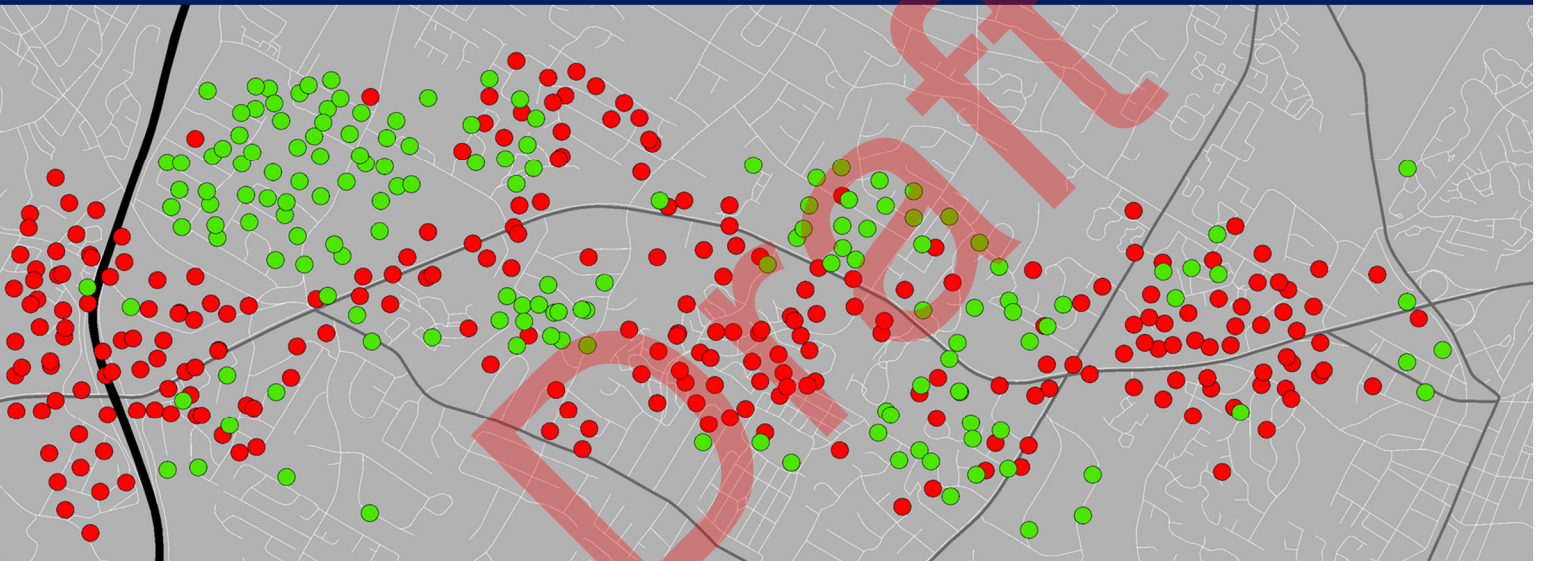
6 months ago

Like +47 Dislike

Business Development Advisory Committee – June 11, 2019



Community Open House – June 25, 2019



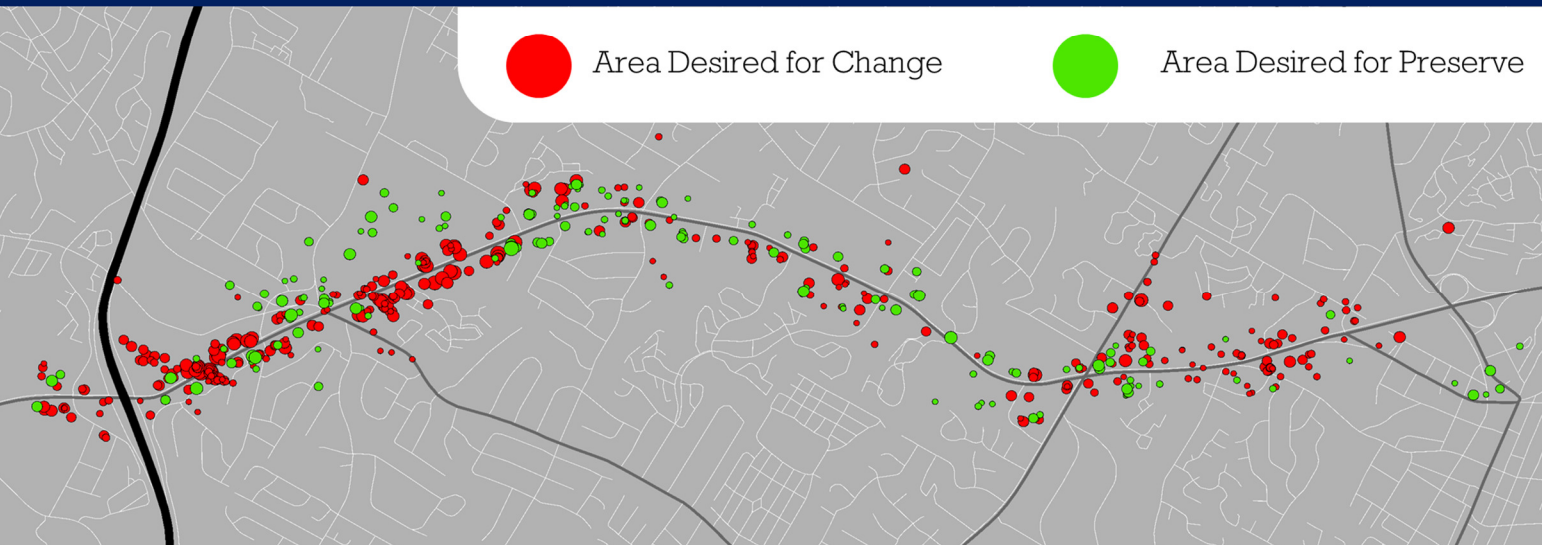
Online Survey



Area Desired for Change



Area Desired for Preserve



CHANGE & PRESERVE

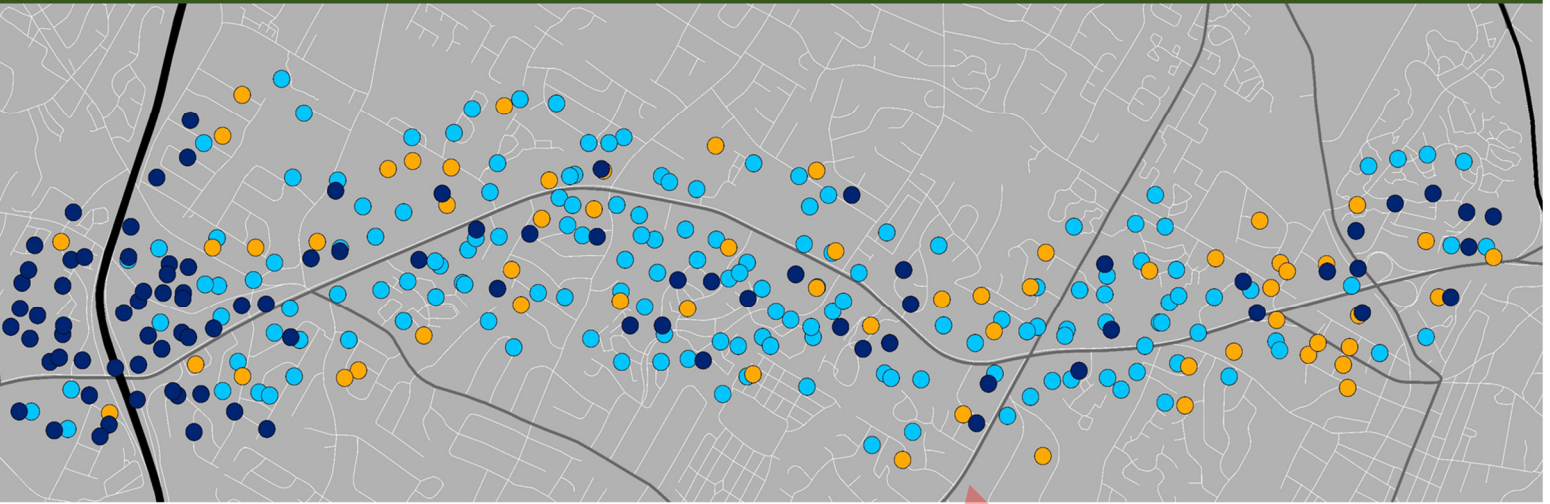


In the Change and Preserve exercise (conducted at the first BDAC meeting, Visioning Open House and through the Online Interactive Map), participants were asked to indicate areas where they preferred a change in character and development and areas where they preferred a preservation of character and development. The input from all participants was compiled and spatially analyzed to develop a visual heat map showing the relative desire and intensity for change or preservation along the corridor.

When We Combine Everyone's Input...



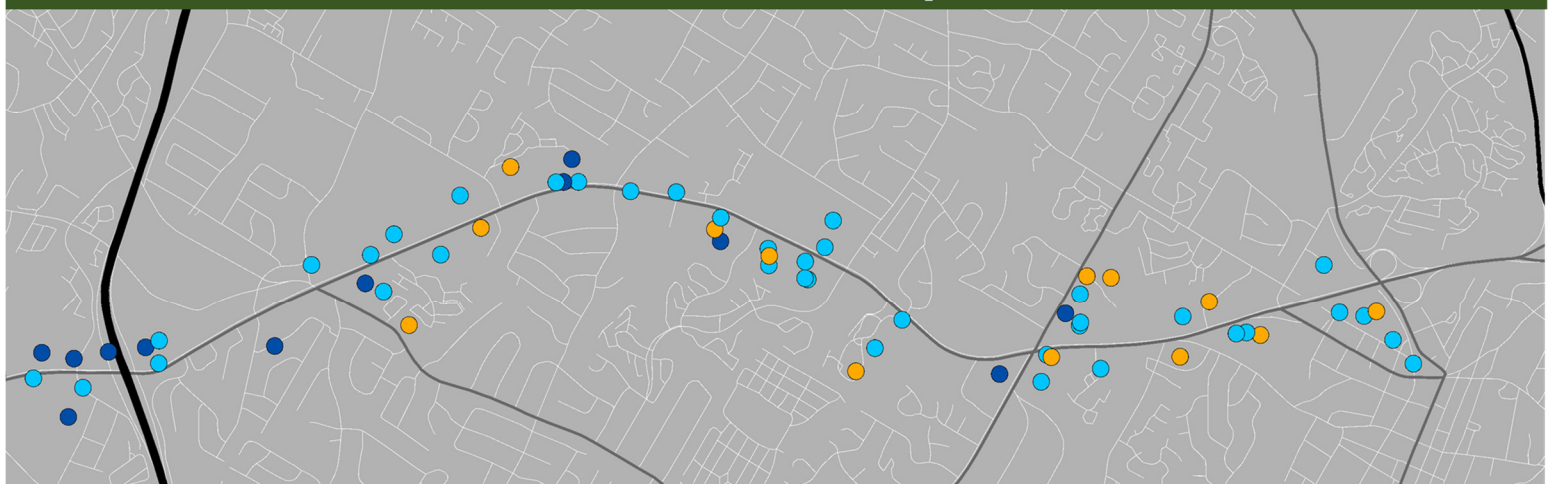
Community Open House – June 25, 2019



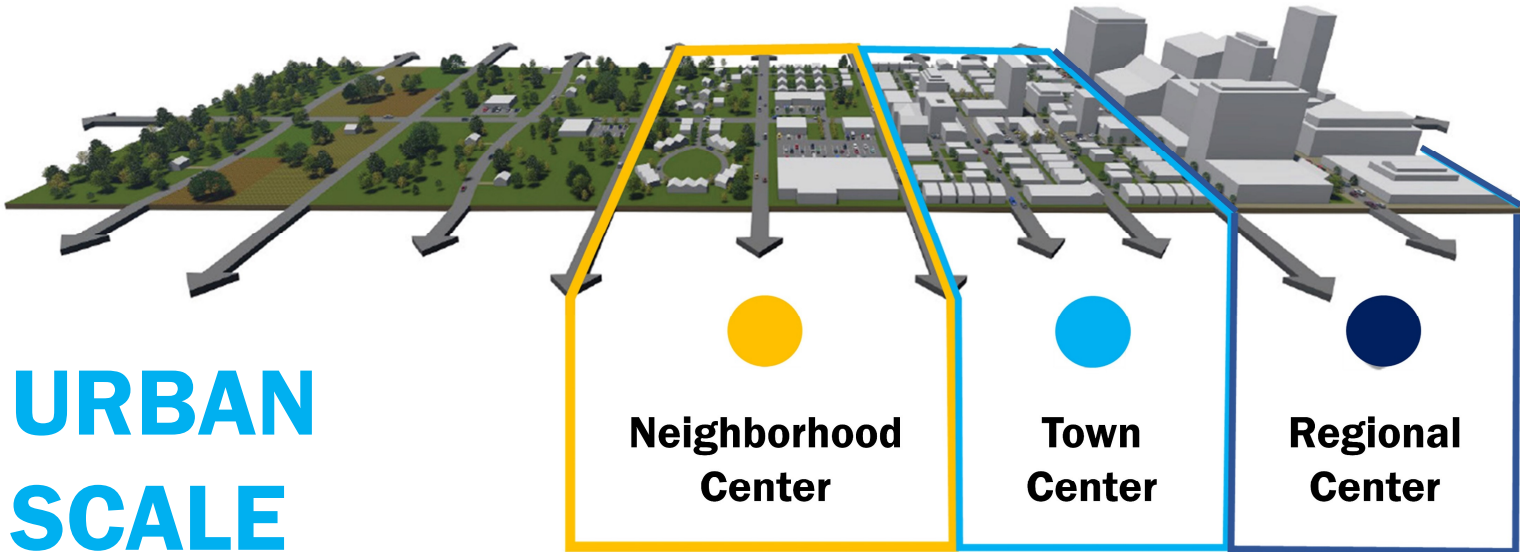
Business Development Advisory Committee – June 11, 2019



Online Survey



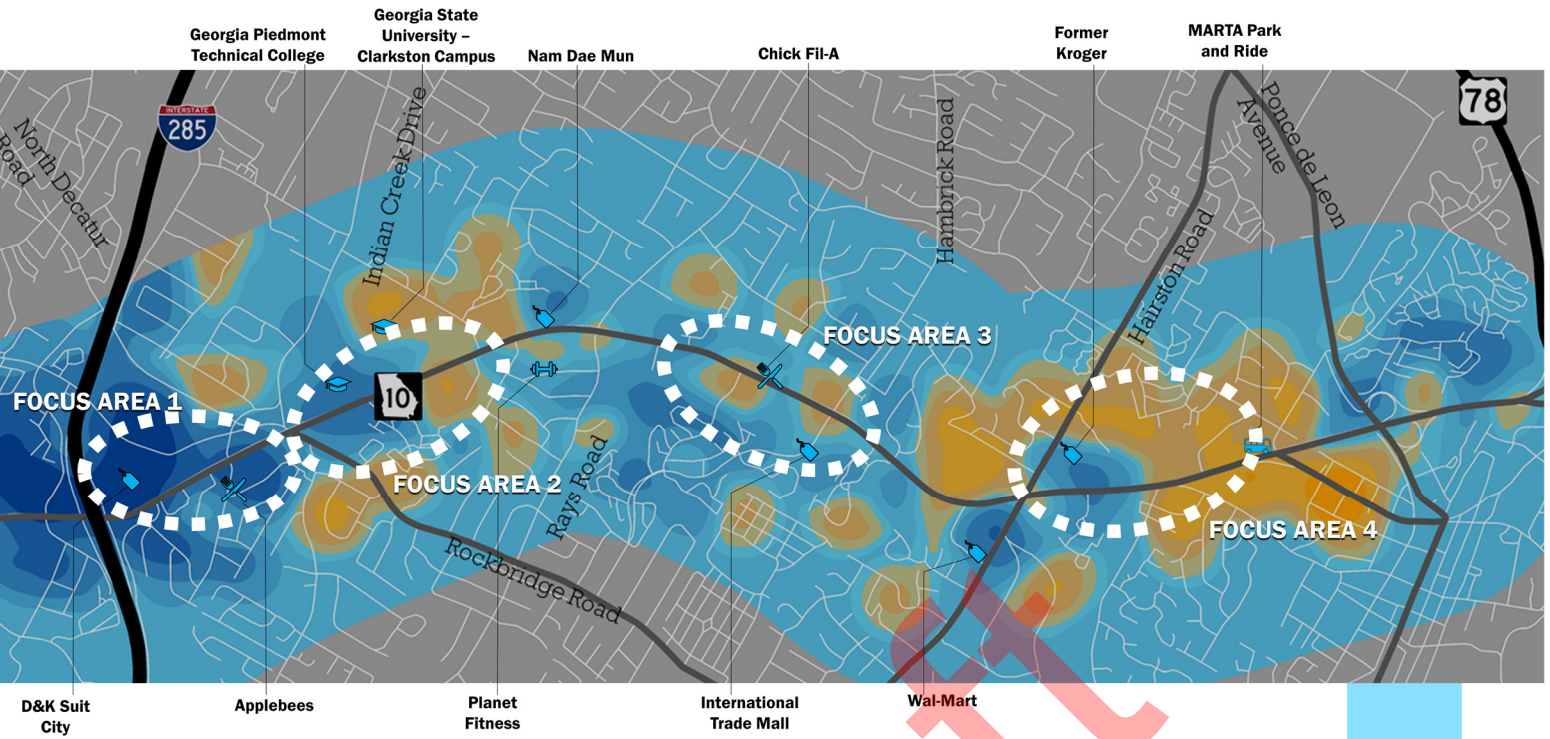
IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES



In the Urban Scale exercise (conducted at the Visioning Open House, first BDAC meeting, and through the Online Interactive Map) participants were asked to indicate the desire for urban intensity (shown above correlated to Character Areas in DeKalb County and ranging from a suburban character to an urban environment) along the corridor.

Similar to the Change & Preserve exercise, results were compiled and spatially analyzed to visually understand the relative intensity of desire for more suburban or urban environments along the corridor.





Collecting Input on Urban Scale

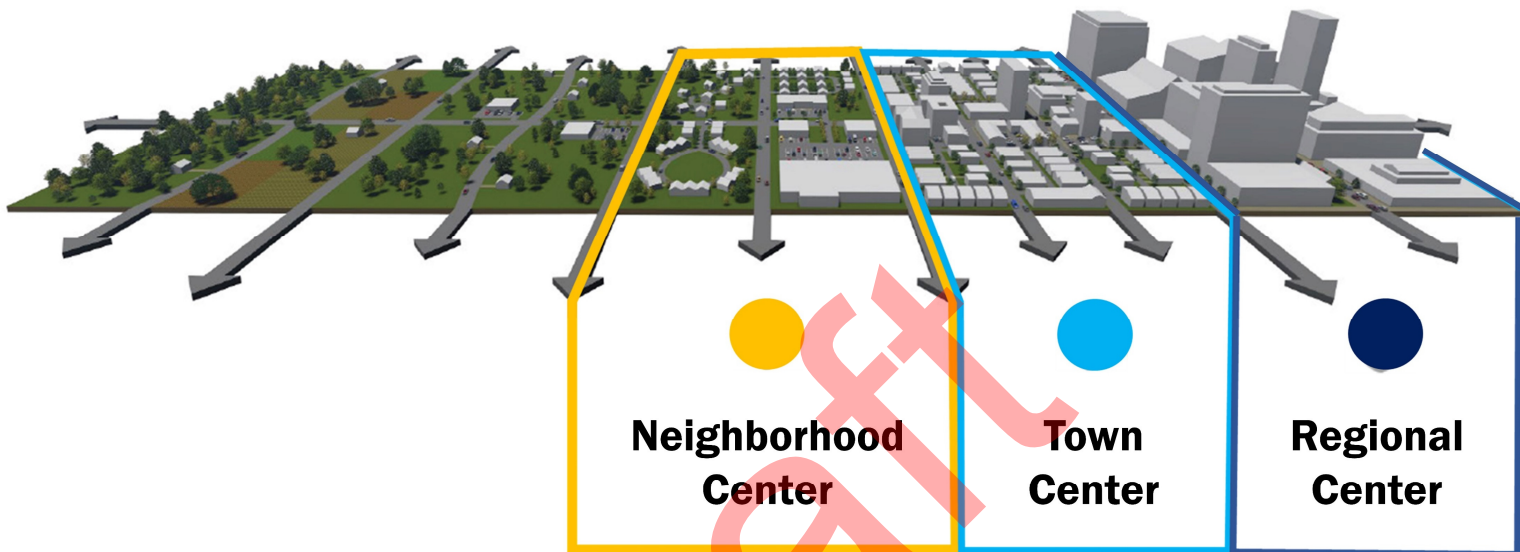
Based around the 'Change & Preserve' and 'Urban Scale' exercises (results shown above) the community's collective desire for redevelopment and its relative intensity was determined and oriented around four focus areas.



Compare to the Comprehensive Plan

These 'Urban Scale' results were compared to the more generalized future development vision articulated in the County's current Comprehensive Plan.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

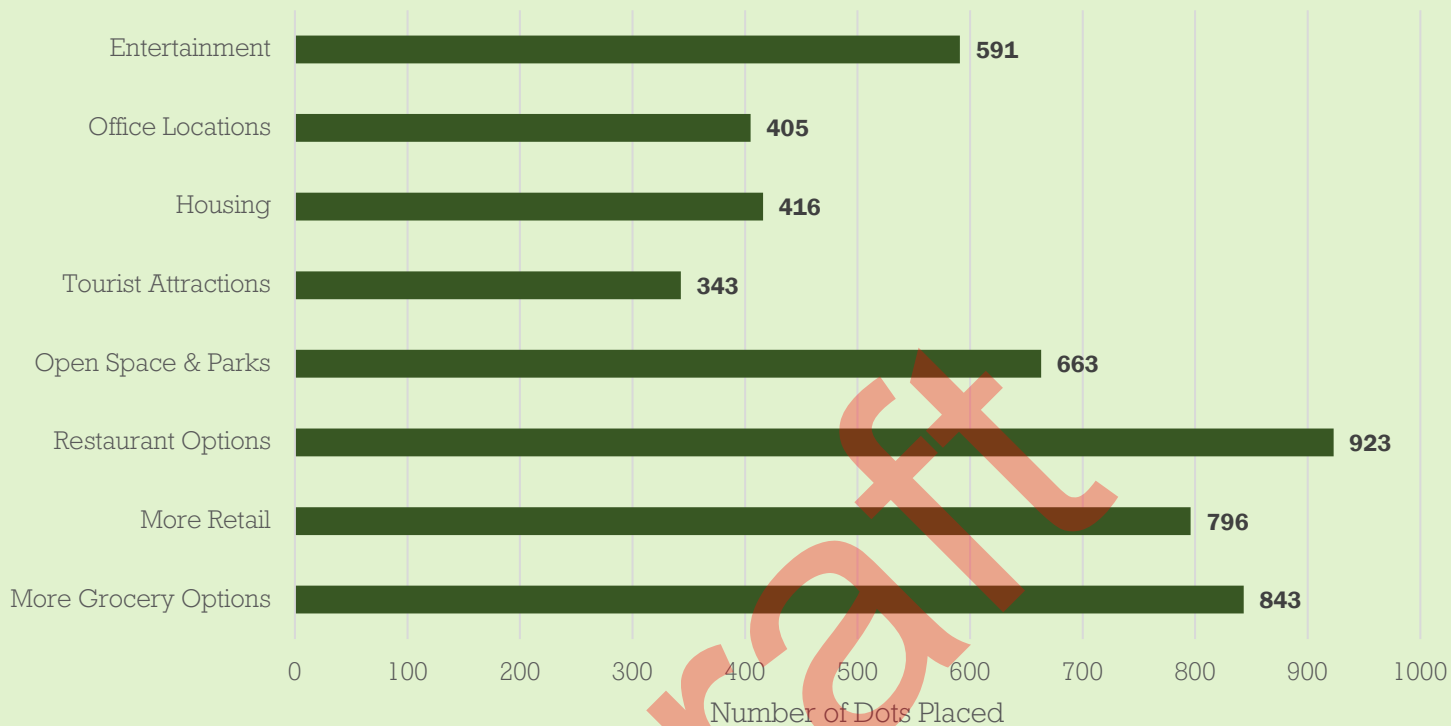


Refine Character Areas

Using this comparison and Character Areas already defined in the County's current Comprehensive Plan, a refined Future Development concept for the corridor was prepared. Areas with the desire for dramatic change are reflected in four focus areas along the corridor as described on the following pages.

Development Priorities

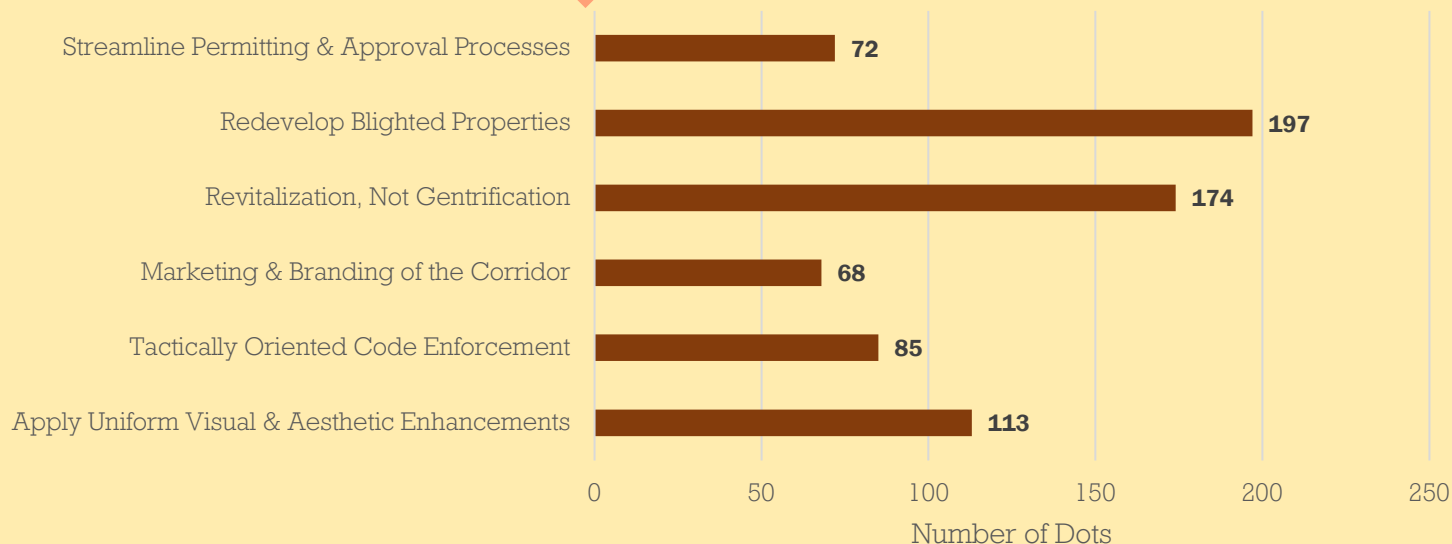
Through the initial community open house and online survey, we asked the community what types of developments and businesses they want to see more of on the corridor. Top responses are indicated below:



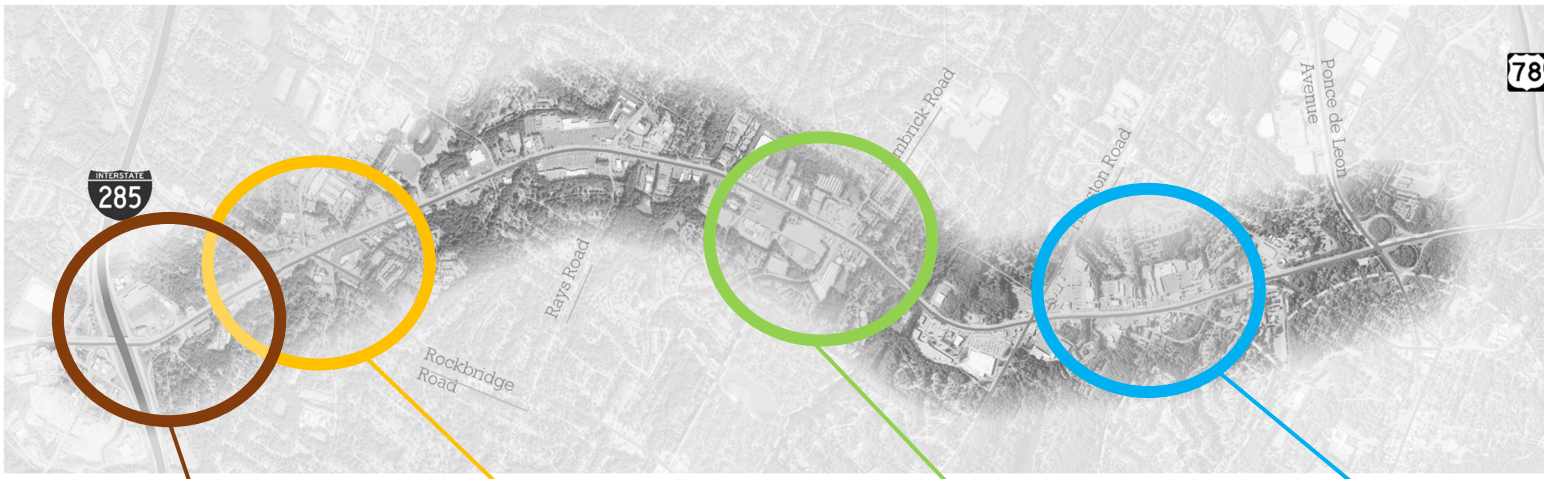
Strategy Priorities

At the first community open house, we also asked the community what types of strategies and policies they would like to see enacted on the corridor.

We heard overwhelmingly of a need to focus on redeveloping blighted properties as well as a desire to revitalize the corridor while avoiding gentrification.



IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES



GATEWAY WEST

GLOBAL CITY

HAMBRICK VILLAGE

GATEWAY EAST

Consideration and identification of the four focus areas resulted in the branding of four distinct areas along the corridor:

- Gateway West
- Global City
- Hambrick Village
- Gateway East

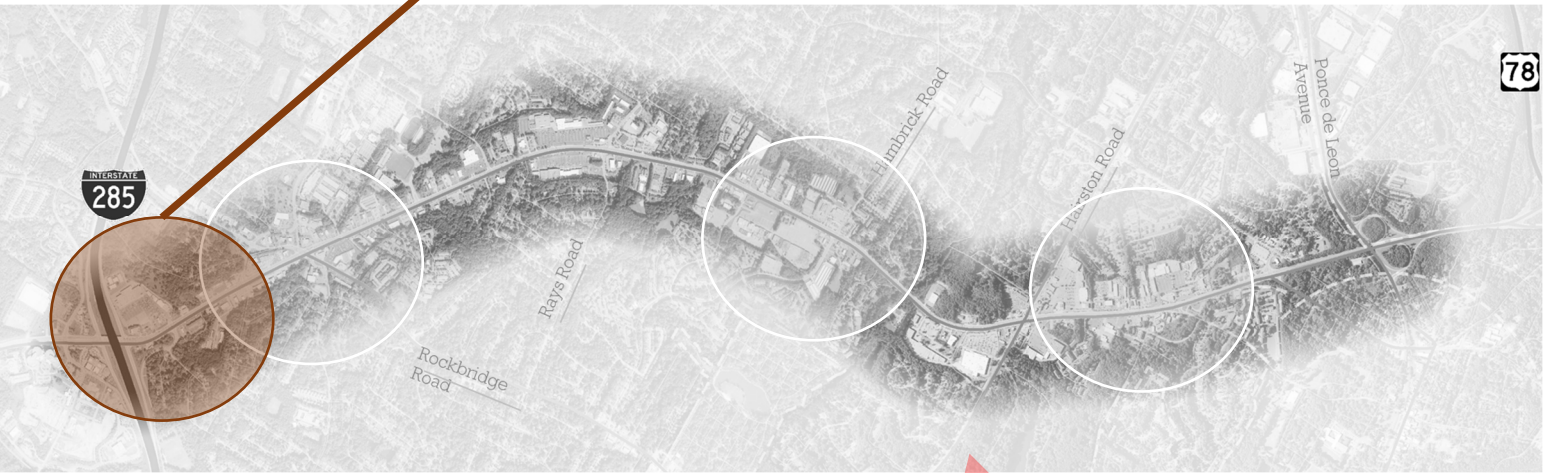
Visions for each areas were developed hand in hand with area residents and stakeholders during the Design Workshop activities and reflect a combination of both the community's articulation for the future and the planning team's understanding of the corridor's challenges and needs from the Data Gathering analysis.

As the following pages detail, the vision for each of these four areas have distinct qualities in urban intensity and form but are unified in the broad desire for a mix of uses, an urban form that is more conducive to pedestrian travel, and a focus on human scaled environments.

Similarly, the visions for each of these areas is not intended to be specifically prescriptive to future developers but rather to indicate the possibilities at each of these locations. To that point, these visions are generalized and flexible inclusive of many of the different development types indicated by the community through the online survey and Visioning Open House as indicated in the table below.

Development Types	Focus Areas			
	Gateway West	Global City	Hambrick Village	Gateway East
Entertainment	◆	◆		◆
Office Locations	◆	◆		◆
Housing	◆	◆	◆	◆
Tourist Attractions	◆		◆	
Open Space & Parks	◆	◆	◆	◆
Restaurant Options	◆	◆	◆	◆
Retail Options	◆	◆	◆	◆
More Grocery Options	◆	◆	◆	◆

GATEWAY WEST



At the western end of the corridor, Gateway West has the broadest potential to become an area attracting regional interest. Therefore, the vision for this part of the corridor is an urban center to include a mix of land uses. Ideas discussed at the Design Workshops included:

- Retail
- Greenspaces
- Office Space
- Cultural and/or Theatre
- Restaurants
- Public Squares
- Apartments

A recent conversation in DeKalb County is the potential need for a civic or convention center that could host everything from High School graduations to professional conferences and festivals. As a relatively central location within DeKalb County (just east of the Kensington area, where the attraction of a centralized location has led to discussions about consolidation of County offices and services) with strong transportation access via I-285 and nearby MARTA heavy rail stations at Kensington and Indian Creek, this site is a strong candidate for such a consideration. Such an investment would be generally consistent with the idea of having a cultural and/or theatre component of any redevelopment here and would likewise be a particularly strong anchor for the mix of uses envisioned.



The area today is dominated by low density strip shopping centers with a tremendous amount of unused impervious surface.



Through a façade improvement program that could be implemented corridor wide, an incremental step toward redevelopment could include aesthetic enhancements

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

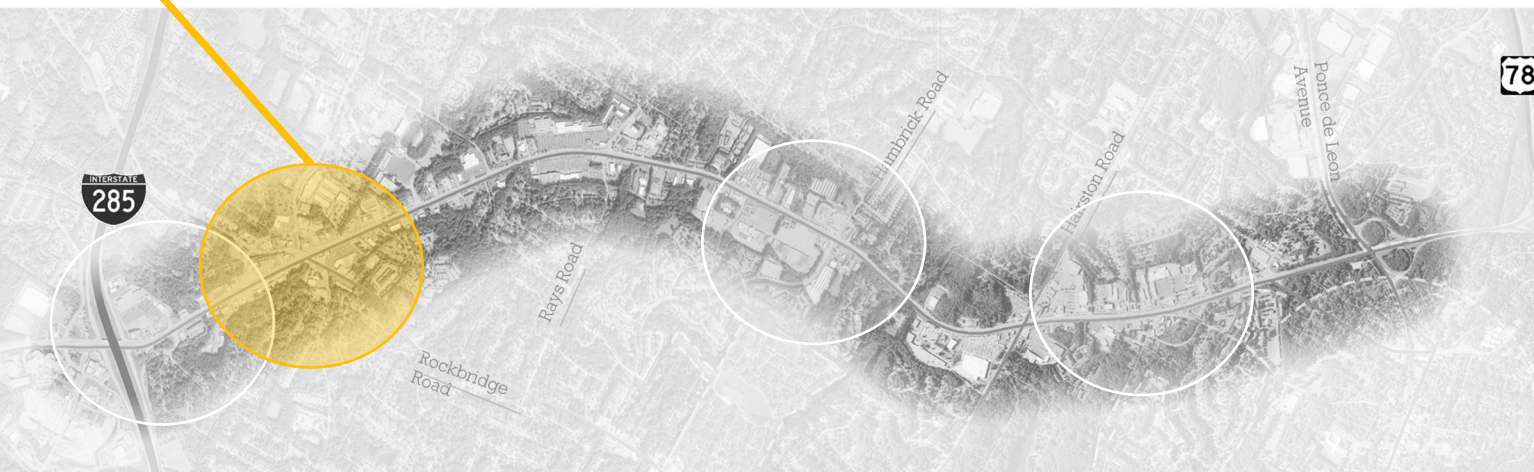
The illustrative redevelopment plan above includes various features including green and public spaces and a tighter urban network of buildings and streets to reflect the vision for the area. This image also implies how the exiting building fabric can be honored through incremental development.



The long-term vision for Gateway West is to develop an urban center of regional attraction and importance. This image illustratively shows many of the features of such a development including public and green spaces and buildings of varying height that can support a mix of uses within them including retail on the first floor with office and/or residential on floors above. In this particular image, the concept of a facility that could host conventions and other events is incorporated along with a building that could easily serve as a hotel.



GLOBAL CITY



78

The Global City concept explicitly recognizes the opportunity to enhance and express the cultural diversity of the area. Less urban and intense than the ideas expressed at Gateway West, but still embracing a more urban environment than current conditions, this area would also potentially support multi-story buildings including restaurants, retail, offices, and residential opportunities.

The 'global' component of the area would likely be reflected in the desired types of businesses and may require the specific curation of locally owned and sourced opportunities. Optimally, these businesses would not only support the cultural needs of the local community but also serve patrons from around the Atlanta region with interest in the various cultures featured, similar in many ways to how Buford Highway is known as a culinary destination for both various Asian and Hispanic foods.

With Georgia State University's Clarkston Campus and Georgia Piedmont Technical College nearby there are also opportunities to leverage the business of students who visit the area. Longer term options associated with the schools depending on their growth patterns could include student housing and opportunities for co-working and/or business incubator spaces.



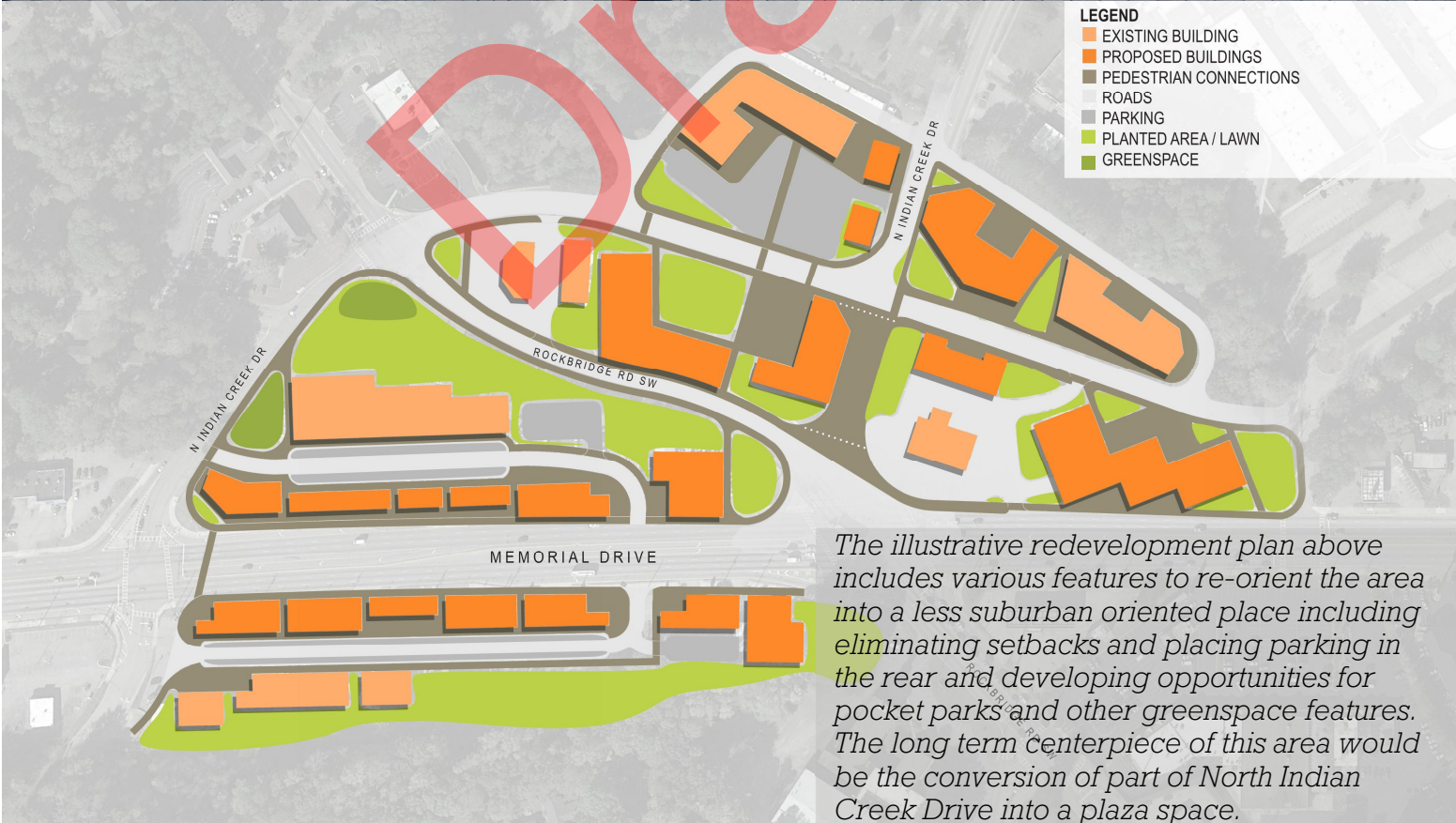
The area today includes many smaller scaled strip shopping centers and outparcels in a suburban setting.



Redevelopment efforts should focus on bringing businesses up to the street (with rear parking) to be more accessible to pedestrians and help activate further pedestrian opportunities. Ideally, businesses should reflect the culture of the surrounding community.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

A long term option would be to close the underutilized spur of North Indian Creek Drive to vehicular traffic and re-orient this area to a plaza that could spur redevelopment opportunities as shown in the image below.



- LEGEND**
- EXISTING BUILDING
 - PROPOSED BUILDINGS
 - PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS
 - ROADS
 - PARKING
 - PLANTED AREA / LAWN
 - GREENSPACE

The illustrative redevelopment plan above includes various features to re-orient the area into a less suburban oriented place including eliminating setbacks and placing parking in the rear and developing opportunities for pocket parks and other greenspace features. The long term centerpiece of this area would be the conversion of part of North Indian Creek Drive into a plaza space.

HAMBRICK VILLAGE



Unlike some other surrounding commercial areas in the middle of the Memorial Drive corridor where residents broadly spoke of a desire to preserve shopping plazas as they are (but with the hope for maybe some aesthetic enhancements), the two mostly vacant shopping centers at Hambrick Village have attracted the attention of specific redevelopment. Recognizing that increased density in this area is generally not desired coupled with the desire to leave other parts of the corridor alone (effectively as part of the Commercial Redevelopment Corridor), the redevelopment of this area can be elevated to serve specifically as a Neighborhood Center.

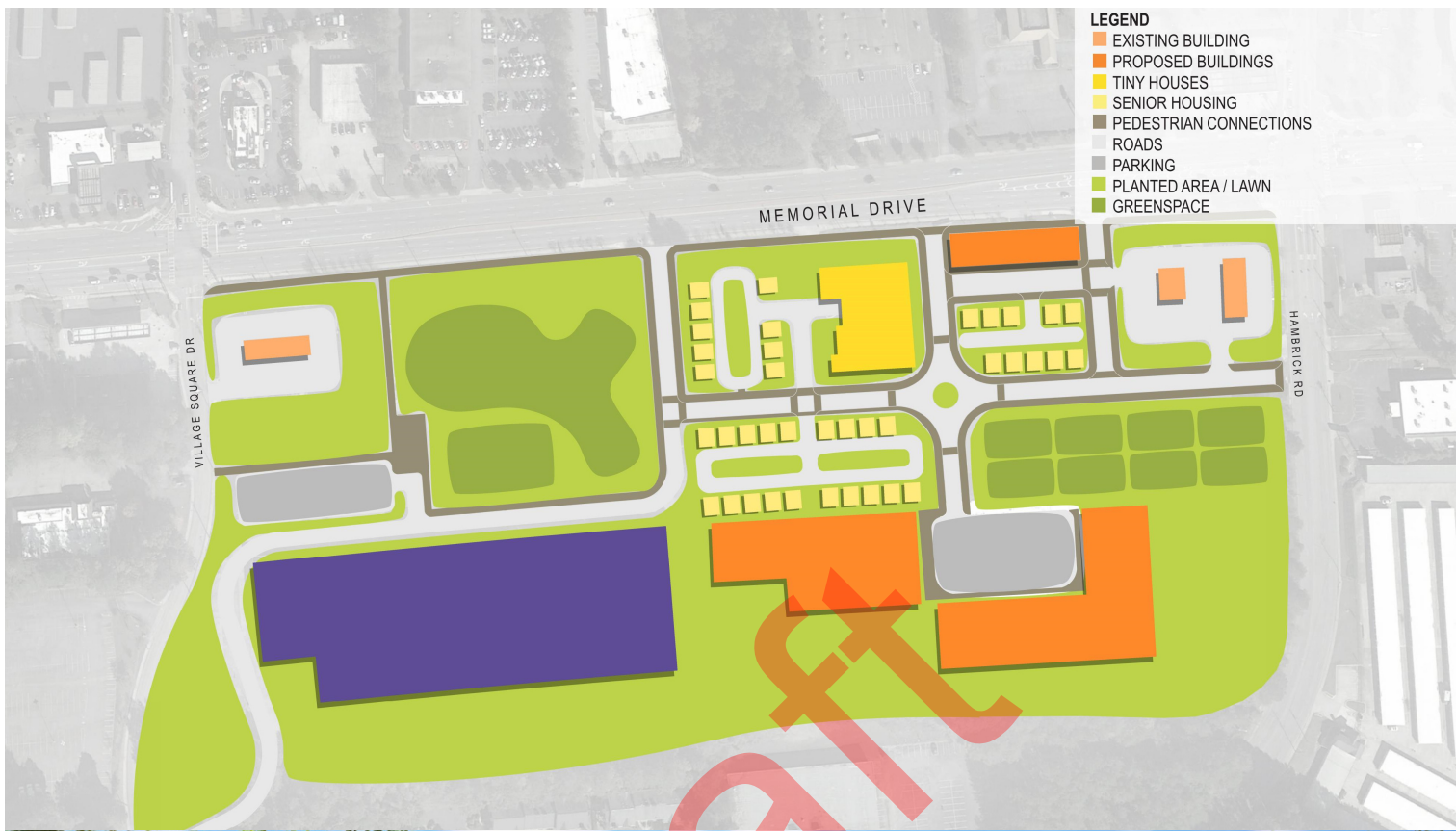
As such, much of the thinking in this area is to not necessarily build taller but rather to rethink the purpose and layout of these sites. An illustrative site plan implies smaller scale retail but is balanced out with general ideas for residential including the potential for senior housing and even (as suggested by a few members of the community) tiny houses.

Separate, but compatible, concepts for the area that were discussed during the process included ideas for some type of tourist or festival activity (including potentially a permanent ferris wheel that could be visible from Stone Mountain), park space (including in particular sporting fields), and civic cultural opportunities such as a recreation center, library, or small theatre.



The area is dominated by two nearly vacant shopping plazas. These plazas appear to be particularly distressed due to the large amount of unutilized parking in front of them that are entirely impervious surface with no landscaping or tree cover, providing a particularly comprehensive view of the lack of activity taking place.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES



GATEWAY EAST



Gateway East represents a unique opportunity on the corridor. Somewhat less built up and retail oriented than other parts of the corridor, there is an element of this area offering a blanker slate of how redevelopment could occur. The community's vision implies maintaining a relatively suburban oriented density but also envisions a pivot into being a more employment oriented area supported by a mix of uses (effectively retaining the area as a Commercial Redevelopment Corridor in feel if not necessarily function).

The concept of turning this area into a more employment oriented area is not immediately obvious given its distance from I-285, but when considering the easy access to the Stone Mountain Freeway immediately to the northeast the opportunities become more clear. Different than other nearby suburban oriented employment areas that are explicitly industrial and warehousing related (such as along Mountain Industrial Boulevard) the employment vision is for small scale light industrial, office, and manufacturing that is craft related due to the desire to mix housing and retail into the area.

A good model for the vision of this area is on the aforementioned Westside of Atlanta along Howell Mill Road in the early 2010s where such manufacturing uses intermixed with coffee shops, chef driven restaurants, artist galleries, and small scale retail.



While still commercial in nature, most of the retail in this part of the corridor is in smaller strip shopping that are not anchored. In many ways, it feels (and is) much less intensive in activity than the western parts of the corridor.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

This illustrative plan view of potential redevelopment emphasizes restoring a grid pattern in the area.

- LEGEND**
- EXISTING BUILDING
 - PROPOSED BUILDINGS
 - PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS
 - ROADS
 - PARKING
 - PLANTED AREA / LAWN
 - GREENSPACE



An illustrative rendering of the future on the corridor emphasizes the value of good landscaping and bringing buildings (that could serve a variety of purposes from retail to office to light industrial) up to the road

Despite these visions, the fundamentals of redevelopment tell us that a property owner is often not incentivized to redevelop their property. Consider the typical scenario in the graphic below in which an otherwise successful redevelopment doesn't actual generate more net income due to the costs associated with redeveloping. Understandably, a property owner is not willing to take the risk in redeveloping their property when there is great likelihood that their net income will increase substantially.

Cash Flow Before Redevelopment

Gross Income # Units x \$ Rent	Net Income
	Operating Costs
	Taxes

Cash Flow After Redevelopment

Gross Income More Units x More Rent	Net Income
	Operating Costs
	Taxes
	Capital + Profit
	Debt Service
	Lost Income <i>(during redevelopment)</i>
	Sales & Marketing

Nonetheless, it often takes some entity taking an initial modest and calculated risk and electing to redevelop their property, serving as an example of the opportunities to surrounding property owners. Consider the ongoing and incremental redevelopment of a three block stretch along Howell Mill Road in the Westside of Atlanta as depicted in the image below.

Mid 2000s
 In an initial wave of growth of an area known previously for light industrial uses and occasional crime, Octane Coffee (pictured here) and similarly minded businesses begin opening in repurposed buildings. It is often pioneering businesses such as restaurants, coffeeshops, and artist spaces that lead the private sector into seeing the opportunities of redevelopment.

Early to Mid 2010s
 Following a slowdown in momentum due to the Great Recession, the area begins to revitalize in earnest with several 3-5 story mixed use buildings (such as this one which opened in 2015) containing ground floor retail and apartments on upper floors.

Late 2010s
 With redevelopment increasingly profitable, property owners and developers become more ambitious and build taller, such as this 13 story building which currently (2019) being constructed.



With these inherent dynamics in mind, the following pages consider the baseline economic opportunities on the corridor – and acknowledging their modesty – identifies the broad opportunities and strategies that can help encourage redevelopment and revitalization of the corridor.

Thoughts on Attracting National Brands and Specific Businesses

Much of the public discussion in this process has been about how to attract a higher or different class of restaurant and retailer to the corridor, particularly national brands. How do restaurants and retailers make decisions about where, and when, to open or close stores? The criteria for site selection for national brand retailers and restaurants are complicated and proprietary.

Each chain or retailer looks at similar factors and criteria, but the decision-making process of any particular retailer is a closely held secret. All retailers, restaurants and chains will have a similar decision process:

- **Density and drive time**– How many potential customers are within a reasonable travel time from my location, and what level of spending power (income) do they possess?
- **Competition**- Do my competitors have a presence in this market area? How many? How close are they? Do I want to compete directly with them or give them space?
- **Cannibalization**– Do I have other stores or restaurants near this market area so that I would be competing against myself?
- **Customers and demographics**– Does this market area have the kinds of people or households that are likely to be my customers? Is there enough retail spending power to keep my store busy? Is the market area's population growing, stable, or declining?
- **Traffic & Accessibility**– Do a lot of people drive by my site? Is it visible to passing traffic? Is it easy to get to? Is it easy to park? Does it feel safe, attractive and pleasant enough for my desired customers?

Large corporate chains and franchises have well-established methodologies and staffs dedicated to site location and evaluation. Most of these national brands are responsive to stockholders, corporate finance and investors, and therefore they are less tolerant of risk. They are responsive to numbers and math, and they rarely respond to qualitative arguments.

Local and independent establishments and small chains tend to be more open to a qualitative understanding of a site. They are more likely to invest in unconventional or emerging markets, and they are more likely to seek the lower commercial rents found in emerging markets. However, they are also more likely to fail as businesses. Many retail property managers will try to balance the retail users of an area by seeking “edgy” local brands and local chains balanced by national brands who are not flashy but who are known to be stable and credit-worthy. A great example of this in the Atlanta area is Buford Highway in Fulton and DeKalb Counties. The Memorial Drive corridor has elements of unique worldwide cultural influences somewhat similar to Buford Highway that may be able to be catalyzed in order to attract additional spending from outside the Market Area. The County can prioritize local small business development to help them improve and harness their attractive elements. It is likely that these efforts to support the local small businesses can be the most effective way to impact positive economic uplift in the area, particularly in the short- and medium-term.

UNDERSTANDING REDEVELOPMENT



While the vision lays out what residents would like to see along the corridor, a key element in planning for revitalization is forecasting the actual demand for new housing units and commercial space and understanding how this influences strategies to encourage revitalization. This forecasting exercise is based on a combination of factors:

- Regional and local forecasts population and household growth;
- Demographic and income trends and conditions;
- Local and neighborhood-level real estate and development trends; and
- Status, vacancy, and condition of residential and commercial real estate in the corridor and surrounding market area.

Based on these numbers we can begin to answer questions such as:

- How many new people and households are likely to move into this area over the next 10 to 20 years?
 - This population and household growth will be one of the main sources of demand for new housing, as well as commercial real estate such as stores, restaurants and office space.
- Of the people who live in the local market area, how many of them spend time shopping, eating, working or otherwise doing business in the Memorial Corridor?
 - Are they choosing to spend their disposable income locally in the corridor or are they spending it in other areas or online?
- Based on current trends and patterns, will there be enough demand for new housing, stores, restaurants and workspaces in the Memorial Drive Corridor so that it makes sense for property owners and or developers to begin rehabilitating properties, redeveloping properties or building new buildings?
- If changes occur in the corridor through the execution of this plan and other efforts that improve the dynamics of this growth forecast, would that convince property owners and or developers to begin rehabilitating and/or redeveloping properties or building new buildings?
 - What if more households begin moving into the corridor or market area?
 - What if people begin spending more time and a larger share of their disposable income in the Memorial Drive Corridor area?
 - What if average household incomes in the area were to increase faster than forecast?
 - What if the balance and mix of housing and commercial space in the corridor were to change?

Population, Household and Employment Forecasts

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) produces regional forecasts of population, households and jobs. These forecasts are prepared at the level of Counties and “Superdistricts.” DeKalb County is divided into eight Superdistricts, and the Memorial Drive Corridor and Market area are located in the “Northeast DeKalb” Superdistrict. This Superdistrict-level forecast can be used to extrapolate population, household and employment growth in the Memorial Drive Corridor and the Market Area based on existing forecast and market trends.

The forecast estimates that:

- The Memorial Drive Corridor Study Area (based on ¼ mile from Memorial Drive) can expect to see an average of 97 new residents, 37 new housing units, and 63 new jobs every year for the next 20 years based on existing development patterns
- The Memorial Drive Market Area can expect to see an average of 914 new residents, 354 new housing units, and 179 new jobs every year for the next 20 years.

Population	2010	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	Avg. Annual Growth 2020-2030
Memorial Corridor	8,463	8,914	9,399	9,883	10,368	10,768	97
Memorial Corridor Mkt Area	81,730	91,102	95,672	100,247	104,817	109,215	914
NE DeKalb Superdistrict	128,593	129,582	135,387	141,193	146,998	153,824	1,161
DeKalb County	691,839	699,105	733,490	767,878	802,263	842,045	6,877
Households	2010	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	Avg. Annual Growth 2020-2030
Memorial Corridor	3,124	3,407	3,592	3,773	3,958	4,177	37
Memorial Corridor Mkt Area	29,985	32,993	34,763	36,536	38,306	40,445	354
NE DeKalb Superdistrict	52,012	52,921	55,761	58,603	61,443	64,874	568
DeKalb County	271,809	276,400	291,780	307,155	322,535	342,045	3,076
Employment	2010	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	Avg. Annual Growth 2020-2030
Memorial Corridor	5,502	6,053	6,368	6,680	6,995	6,680	63
Memorial Corridor Mkt Area	15,735	17,311	18,206	19,105	20,000	19,105	179
NE DeKalb Superdistrict	77,584	85,356	89,776	94,200	98,620	94,200	884
DeKalb County	360,125	400,230	417,820	435,413	453,003	435,413	3,518

If we look at the demand from current households and retail spending, we find that:

- Households and businesses in the Market Area buy approximately \$1.2 billion in retail goods every year, both in the local area and outside the area.
- Stores and restaurants in the Memorial Drive Corridor sell \$208 million in retail goods every year.
- This means that stores and restaurants in the Memorial Drive Corridor capture 17% of market area spending. The remainder gets spent outside of the market area or online.
- This amount of spending should be able to support 700,000 - 850,000 SF of retail stores, or the equivalent of around six big-box stores.
- Currently, the Memorial Drive corridor has over 2.5 million SF of retail space, or nearly four times the amount of space that can reasonably be supported by current market conditions and population distribution in this part of DeKalb County.

Based on future growth forecasts, and average household spending estimates from the US Census, we can estimate that this population growth will generate demand for a modest amount of homes and commercial space:

- 3,500 housing units in the Market Area over 10 years.
- \$60 million in new retail spending in the Market Area over 10 years.
- Demand for 200,000 SF to 300,000 SF of new retail space in the Market Area over 10 years.
- Currently, retailers in the Memorial Drive Corridor capture 17% of the retail spending demand created in the Market Area. Based on household growth alone, the Memorial Drive Corridor can expect to see demand for just 30,000 to 50,000 SF of new retail space over 10 years, roughly the size of a small grocery store.



Conclusions & Strategies for Revitalization

This leads to several findings that can help guide priorities, goals, and policy decisions as part of this revitalization plan:

- The Memorial Drive Corridor currently has 2.6 million SF of retail space, enough to satisfy 56% of market area's retail demand, but it is currently capturing just 17% of that demand, leading to an “overhang” of nearly 2 million more SF of retail space than is supportable under current market conditions. This is why much of the corridor's commercial struggles to find top tenants and struggles with below market rents.
- There are at least four ways to rectify this retail imbalance:
 - Reduce the amount of retail space.
 - Capture a larger share of Market Area spending
 - Create more Market Area demand and spending by adding households, increasing the average household income, making the area more attractive to people outside the market area
 - Attract additional spending from outside of the Market Area.
- New household growth based on current trends will add demand for 30,000-50,000 SF of new space, less than 3% of the 2 million SF overhang.
- Should the changes and improvements in the corridor and the local market triple the amount of commercial activity in the area, by capturing a bigger share of local market, by drawing shoppers from outside the market area, or by bringing in more or higher-income households, this would create enough demand to support the corridor's 2.6 million of retail space. Only then would demand exceed supply, and a reasonable economic case could emerge for significant redevelopment, renovation, or net new commercial space.

Considering these factors, the most practical solutions to create a balanced and financially supportable environment for the revitalization of the Memorial Drive Corridor include:

- Prune existing underperforming retail and commercial space.
 - Enact policies to encourage the removal, redevelopment or re-purposing of the oldest or least desirable retail space into other uses.
 - Enact policies to replace excess commercial buildings with new housing at a wide range of price points and housing types, the Memorial Drive corridor could be a reasonable destination for a regional shortage of housing, particularly affordable and workforce housing with the right combination of policies and incentives.
 - Enact policies to convert existing retail space to job-supportive workspaces, particularly professional office, light-industrial and flex space.
- Support mixed use development and redevelopment as an overall guiding principle but take care to not over-supply retail. Retail in this case is best used sparingly as an amenity to increase the attractiveness and viability of housing, workspace and other non-retail uses.
- Enact policies to increase the overall attractiveness, safety, and public amenities in the corridor to that more people in the market area and beyond choose to spend their time and money in the corridor.
- Vastly improve the public realm in the corridor with parks, trails, and other amenities to help send the signal to the private sector that the County is an active participant in the general improvements in the area.
- Capitalize on public sector investments in the immediate and nearby areas, particularly Kensington and Indian Trail MARTA stations, County office functions, and post-secondary educational facilities. These public assets are activity generators and should serve as “anchors” to attract private sector development.
- Incentivize development through the use of public-private partnership/economic development tools.

In the next chapter, these strategies are discussed in terms of specific and actionable initiatives to pursue.

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