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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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

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:

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Memorial Drive Revitalization Corridor Plan

Memorial Drive

Revitalization Corridor Plan

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**

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**STEP 2**

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**

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.
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.
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Reinforcing this diversity and the immigrant nature of the corridor, there are parts of the corridor where up to 30 percent of households have limited ability to communicate in English.

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.

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).
MEMORIAL DRIVE
REVITALIZATION CORRIDOR PLAN

DEMOGRAPHICS

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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.

**Alternative 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.

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.

**Transit Commuting**

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. In part due 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.

**Traffic Demand (2015 & 2040)**

Source: Atlanta Regional Commission Activity Based Model

**Crashes (2014-2018)**

- Crashes Involving Pedestrians (102)
- Crashes Involving Bicyclists (5)
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**Crashes (2014-2018)**

- Less Crashes
- More Crashes
- 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.

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.
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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.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commercial Space by Land Use</th>
<th>Corridor</th>
<th>Market Area</th>
<th>DeKalb County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Buildings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>3,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>2,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/Flex</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>1,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Units</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average Rent/Square Foot</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>$10.70</td>
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MEMORIAL DRIVE
REVITALIZATION CORRIDOR PLAN

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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.
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).

**EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS**

*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 (2,595)

*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)

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

MEMORIAL DRIVE
REVITALIZATION CORRIDOR PLAN

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.

Join DeKalb County Planning and Sustainability tonight 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...
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.

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.
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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 an 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.
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To supplement the traditional community open house opportunities, the planning team conducted four pop up events over 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
- Nam Dae Mun – June 21, 2019
- DeKalb County Tax Commissioner Office – June 25, 2019
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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.
ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

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Over 13,000 visits to the website

Over 1,000 survey responses

Over 950 interactive map comments
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...
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In the Urban Scale exercise (conducted at the Visioning Open House, first BDAC meeting, and through the Online Interactive Map) participants were asked to indicated 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 spatial analyzed to visually understand the relative intensity of desire for more suburban or urban environments along the corridor.
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Similar to the Change & Preserve exercise, results were compiled and spatial 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.

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.
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**Development Priorities**

Though 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Type</th>
<th>Number of Dots Placed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Locations</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Attractions</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space &amp; Parks</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Options</td>
<td>923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Retail</td>
<td>796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Grocery Options</td>
<td>843</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Priority</th>
<th>Number of Dots Placed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streamline Permitting &amp; Approval Processes</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redevelop Blighted Properties</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalization, Not Gentrification</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing &amp; Branding of the Corridor</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactically Oriented Code Enforcement</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply Uniform Visual &amp; Aesthetic Enhancements</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consideration and Identification of Focus Areas**

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Types</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gateway West</td>
<td>◆◆◆◆◆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global City</td>
<td>◆◆◆◆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hambrick Village</td>
<td>◆◆◆◆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gateway East</td>
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- Entertainment
- Office Locations
- Housing
- Tourist Attractions
- Open Space & Parks
- Restaurant Options
- Retail Options
- More Grocery Options

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- Entertainment: 591 dots
- Office Locations: 405 dots
- Housing: 416 dots
- Tourist Attractions: 343 dots
- Open Space & Parks: 663 dots
- Restaurant Options: 796 dots
- More Retail: 843 dots
- More Grocery Options: 843 dots

Strategy Priorities

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

- Streamline Permitting & Approval Processes: 72 dots
- Redevelop Blighted Properties: 197 dots
- Revitalization, Not Gentrification: 174 dots
- Marketing & Branding of the Corridor: 68 dots
- Tactically Oriented Code Enforcement: 85 dots
- Apply Uniform Visual & Aesthetic Enhancements: 113 dots

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.

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<td>✓</td>
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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
- Restaurants
- Greenspaces
- Public Squares
- Office Space
- Apartments
- Cultural and/or Theatre

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 surfaces.

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

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.
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The area today is dominated by low density strip shopping centers with a tremendous amount of unused impervious surfaces. Through a façade improvement program that could be implemented corridor wide, an incremental step toward redevelopment could include aesthetic enhancements.
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.

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.

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.
GLOBAL CITY

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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. In contrast to today’s conditions, this rendering of a possible future reinforces the need for landscaping and tree coverage (along with some façade enhancements to the existing structure) to make this area more attractive.
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In contrast to today’s conditions, this rendering of a possible future reinforces the need for landscaping and tree coverage (along with some façade enhancements to the existing structure) to make this area more attractive.
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.

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.
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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.
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 actually 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross Income</th>
<th>Net Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Units x $ Rent</td>
<td>Operating Costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taxes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross Income</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Units x More Rent</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capital + Profit</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sales &amp; Marketing</td>
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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, coffee shops, 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.
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 actually 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 a great likelihood that their net income will increase substantially.

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.

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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? 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 178 new jobs every year for the next 20 years.

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Considering these factors, the most practical solutions to create a balanced and financially supportable environment for the revitalization of the Memorial Drive Corridor include the following guiding principles. These principles are expanded as specific action items in the following chapter.

- **Prune existing underperforming retail and commercial space through various refinements to Character Area and zoning along the corridor.**
  - Encourage the removal, redevelopment or re-purposing of the oldest or least desirable retail space into other uses.
  - 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.
  - 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.

- **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.

**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.
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, retail sales 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

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  - 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.
- 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.
- 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.