

# CITY OF NORCROSS



## BUFORD HIGHWAY MASTER PLAN JUNE 2021



CULTURAL PLACES • BEAUTIFUL SPACES







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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**011** INTRODUCTION

**021** STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

**063** PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

**079** RECOMMENDATIONS

**121** IMPLEMENTATION

**135** APPENDIX



# 11

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Buford Highway Corridor, within the City of Norcross, is a unique and diverse place. Land uses range from industrial, to commercial with cultural destinations such as the Jain Society of Greater Atlanta and Flint Hill, to civic amenities – Lilian Webb Park and the Gwinnett Public Library, to residential tucked behind auto-oriented retail. This key roadway is a major gateway into the City of Norcross and has the potential to tell the City’s story in a manner that reflects the character and vibrancy of Downtown Norcross, connect the community and providing space for economic and physical growth.

This plan will build from existing study area initiatives, to create a vibrant, multi-cultural, mixed-use, well-connected corridor, a destination. Working closely with the market analysis and transportation team, key redevelopment opportunities will be carefully selected and designed to improve the overall health (financially and physically) of this community.

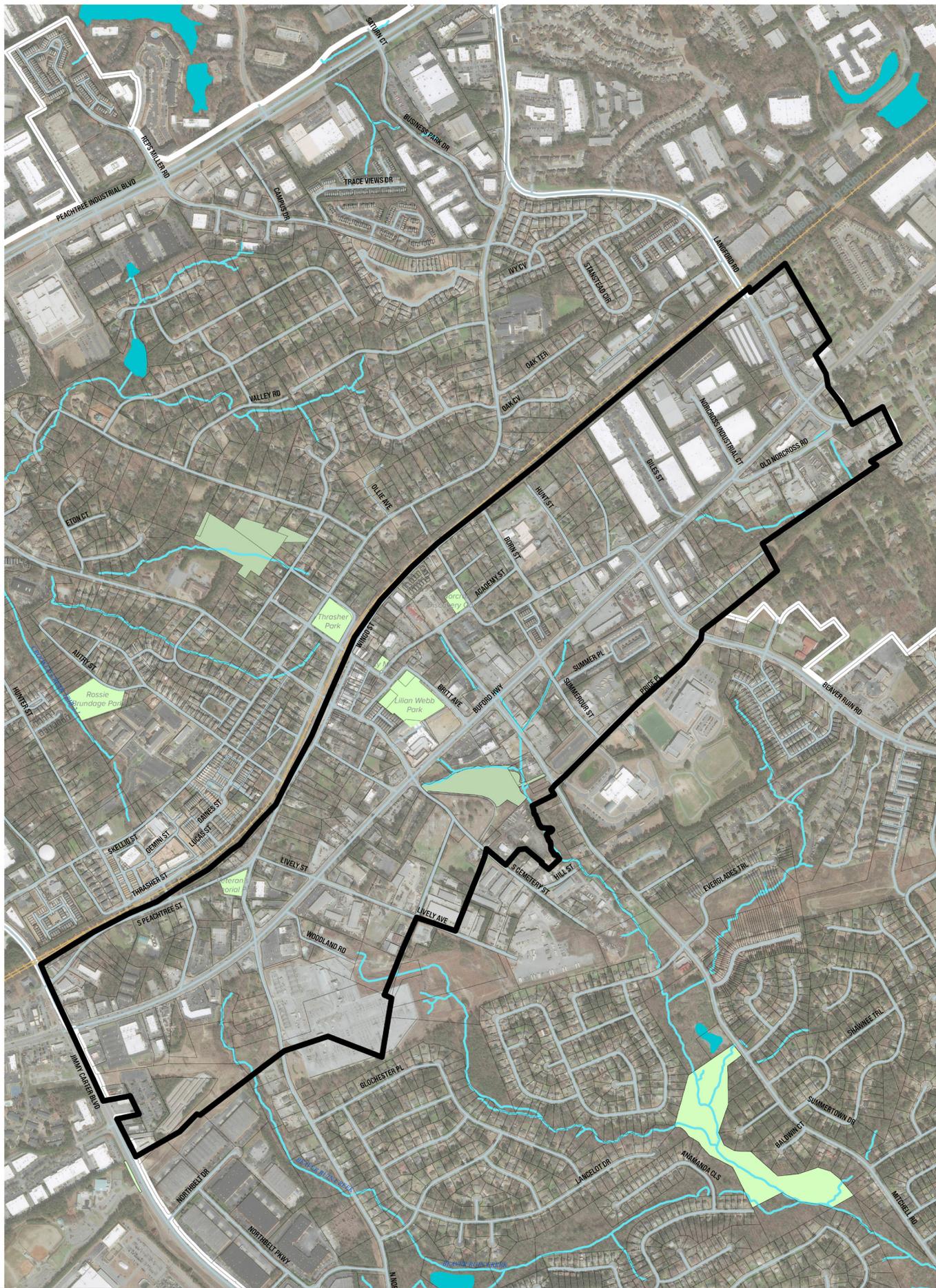
This seven-month planning process from August 2020 through February 2021 included analysis of existing conditions, market analysis, inventory of community assets, opportunities, and challenges, creation of an inclusive community vision and goals, stakeholder interviews, and master plan development.

## BACKGROUND

The study area includes the Buford Highway Corridor within the confines of the City of Norcross, including parcels fronting the corridor to the south and all property to the railroad to the north. Buford Highway is a regional transportation route more fully known as US Hwy 23. It is 1.85 linear miles in length within the City of Norcross with roughly 30,000 average daily trips and serves as a prominent gateway into Norcross.

Subdivisions and strip malls began to be constructed along Buford Highway and continued into the 1960s and 1970s. Expanding housing options and business spaces began to draw immigrant communities to settle in the area. This influx of new residents eventually transformed a six-mile piece of Buford Highway, including part of the Norcross area, into the vibrant International Corridor, a hub of international shops and restaurants. In 1979, a Cuban restaurant, the Havana Sandwich Shop, was the first of many immigrant-owned restaurants to open on Buford Highway. As of 2016, there were more than 1,000 immigrant-owned businesses and more than 18,000 single-family apartments surround Buford Highway.

This master plan study is focused on redevelopment of the Buford Highway corridor and its connection to Historic Downtown Norcross. Public and private investment has transformed Downtown Norcross into a community destination. Continuing this energy and character into the Buford Highway corridor is a primary goal of this plan.



**FIGURE 1.0A STUDY AREA MAP**



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A community engagement program was designed and undertaken with the goal of involving all stakeholders in the study process. Through this effort, a community-supported vision was developed, along with identification of various issues, needs, and aspirations to be addressed in the master plan. The community engagement included stakeholder and community meetings and visioning sessions. This collaborative effort is an integral part of gaining consensus and support from various stakeholders in the community. Below is a summary of the vision and goals identified through the community process.

## COMMUNITY VISION

A thriving multi-modal and multi-cultural corridor that serves the diverse Norcross population and connects to the character, charm, and beauty of Downtown Norcross.

## COMMUNITY GOALS

1. Preserve and enhance the community character: multi-cultural character of the corridor and the small-town historic character of Downtown
2. Create a destination, places to walk to
3. Connect to Downtown
4. Enhance transit along corridor
5. Increase safety for pedestrians and cyclist – crossings/intersections
6. Beautify
7. Green/open space is important to the community
8. Mix of incomes and affordability
9. Address parking



FIGURE 1.0B NORCROSS FESTIVALS





# CITY OF NORCROSS TOWN CENTER PLAN 2011 LCI UPDATE

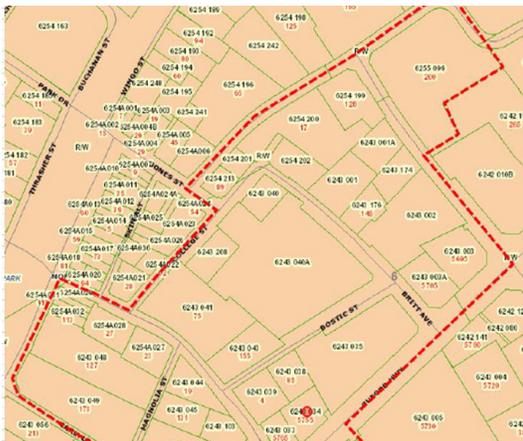
This 2011 study was the 10-year update to the original Town Center LCI Study of 2001. The update focused on improved land use and connectivity in and around Downtown, including:

- Mix of uses around the Lillian Webb Park
- New road infrastructure to spur redevelopment south of Buford Highway adjacent to Lillian Webb Park.



# 2012

# 2015 ▶

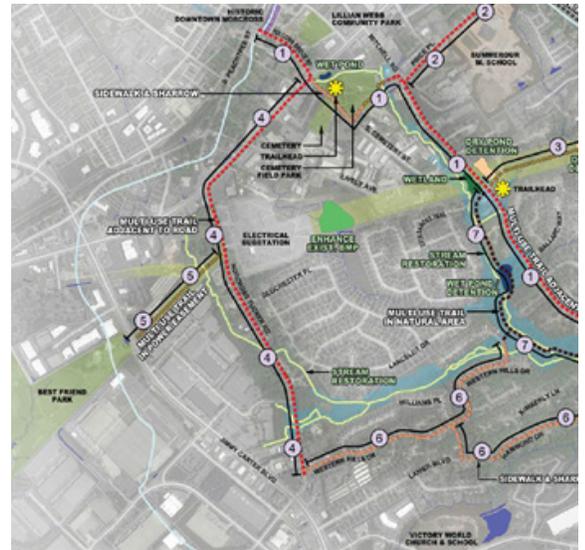


## DOWNTOWN NORCROSS REDEVELOPMENT PLAN - CITY CENTER EAST TAX ALLOCATION DISTRICT (TAD) RESOLUTION AND EXHIBIT

The City of Norcross passed the resolution creating the Downtown Redevelopment Area and the City Center East Tax Allocation District in April of 2015. It identified potential redevelopment locations around Lillian Webb Park and created a resolution for the City Center East TAD

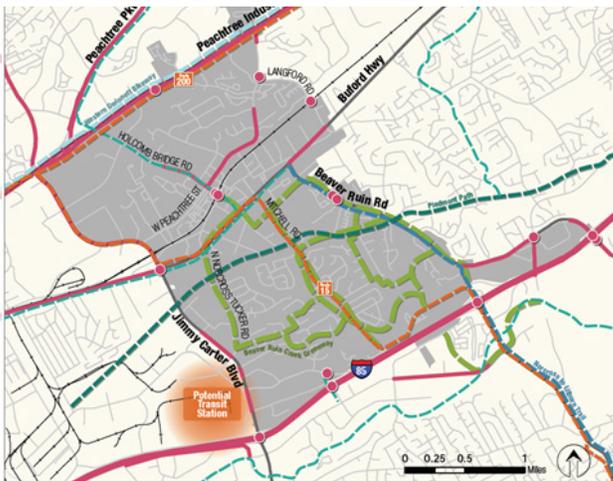
## NORCROSS LCI GREENWAY CONCEPT STUDY

This LCI study completed in 2016 looks at enhancing the bicycle and pedestrian network for the south side of Norcross. The plan also integrates the regional stormwater improvements to provide comprehensive community benefits like improved connectivity, reduced traffic congestion, better accessibility, and better public and environmental health. Relevant to this plan are: proposed multi-use trails cross Buford Highway at Holcomb Bridge Road and a trail segment adjacent to Buford Highway between S. Cemetery Road and Norcross Tucker Road.



# 2016

# 2019



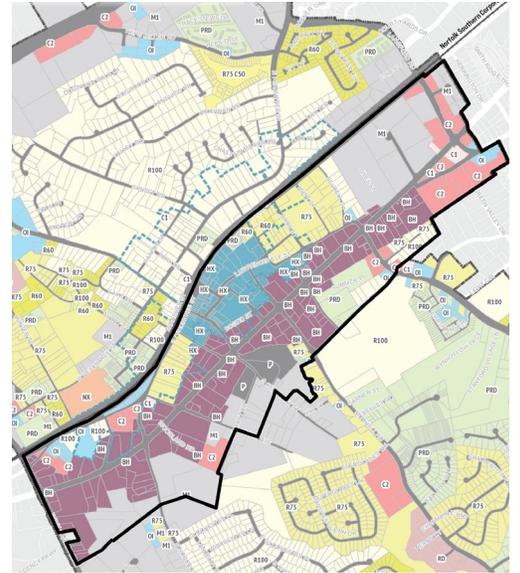
## NORCROSS “IMAGINE OUR FUTURE” 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

City of Norcross adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan in 2019. The plan lays out the future vision and goals for the community by looking at mission statement, policies, and action items for the City. The Buford Highway Master Plan study area sits within Character Areas 6, 7, and 8. It provides character area visions and goals and highlights infrastructure projects.

# CITY OF NORCROSS UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

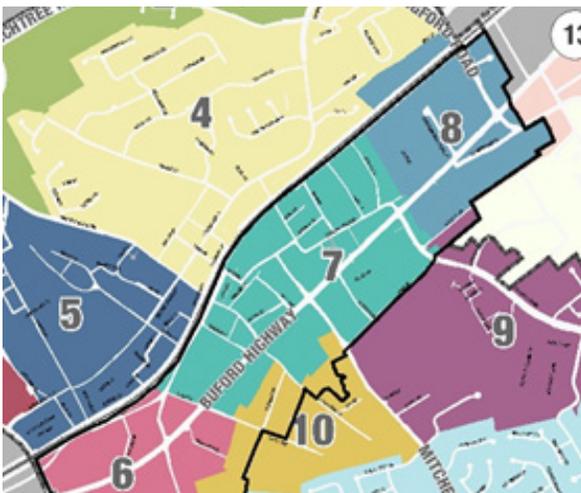
The City of Norcross also adopted the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) in 2019. The main objectives were incentivizing green building practices, incentivizing redevelopment of the Buford Highway corridor, expanding the variety of allowable housing options, and supporting the expansion of transit into the City. Buford Highway Zoning:

- Buford Highway (BH): Mixed-use medium to high density; 20' max setback; 72' max building heights
- Historic Mixed-Use (HX): Mixed-use low to medium density; 10' max setback; 35' max building heights
- M1 and C2: Light industrial and commercial; 50' max setbacks; 35' max building heights



# 2019

# 2020



## NORCROSS “IMAGINE OUR FUTURE” 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Urban Redevelopment Plan of 2020 is intended to implement the vision and goals of the 2040 Comprehensive plan. Buford Highway needs enhancement in the following categories:

- Building age
- Design and layout
- Retail market appeal
- Rental revenue generation
- Employment.



# 21

**2.0 STUDY AREA ANALYSIS**

## 2.0 STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

In order to have a strong understanding of the Buford Highway study area, the master planning team undertook a thorough analysis of existing conditions. This section includes analysis of the following:

- Public Facilities
- Demographics
- Market Analysis
- Development Trends
- Economic Development Tools
- Existing Land Use
- Future Land Use
- Zoning
- Topography and Hydrology
- Utilities
- Transportation





FIGURE 2.0A SCENES AROUND NORCROSS

# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.1 PUBLIC FACILITIES

Figure 2.1A marks the government facilities, libraries, parks, and schools in the study area.

**Lillian Webb Park** is a 4.2-acre park located in Historic Downtown Norcross. Visitors can enjoy ample greenspace, ball fields, and the signature water features. Large events are regularly held in the beautiful gazebo, especially with easy access to nearby restaurants.

**Betty Mauldin Park** is home to the century old towering “American Elm”, the second tallest of its kind in Georgia. Visitors can take a walking tour and enjoy all of the city’s 1,123 trees, guided by the illustrated Norcross Historic Tree Walk Brochure.

The **Discovery Garden Park (DGP)** is a place where all ages get the chance to play, learn and discover the natural world. Whether someone is interested in growing their own vegetables, understanding beekeeping, sharpening their culinary skills in a relaxed environment, or spending a morning painting, visitors will have a great time adding new skills to their lives.

**Norcross Elementary School** serves grades PK through 5th. Almost 1,000 students attend this Gwinnett County public school.

# PUBLIC FACILITIES

FIGURE 2.1A

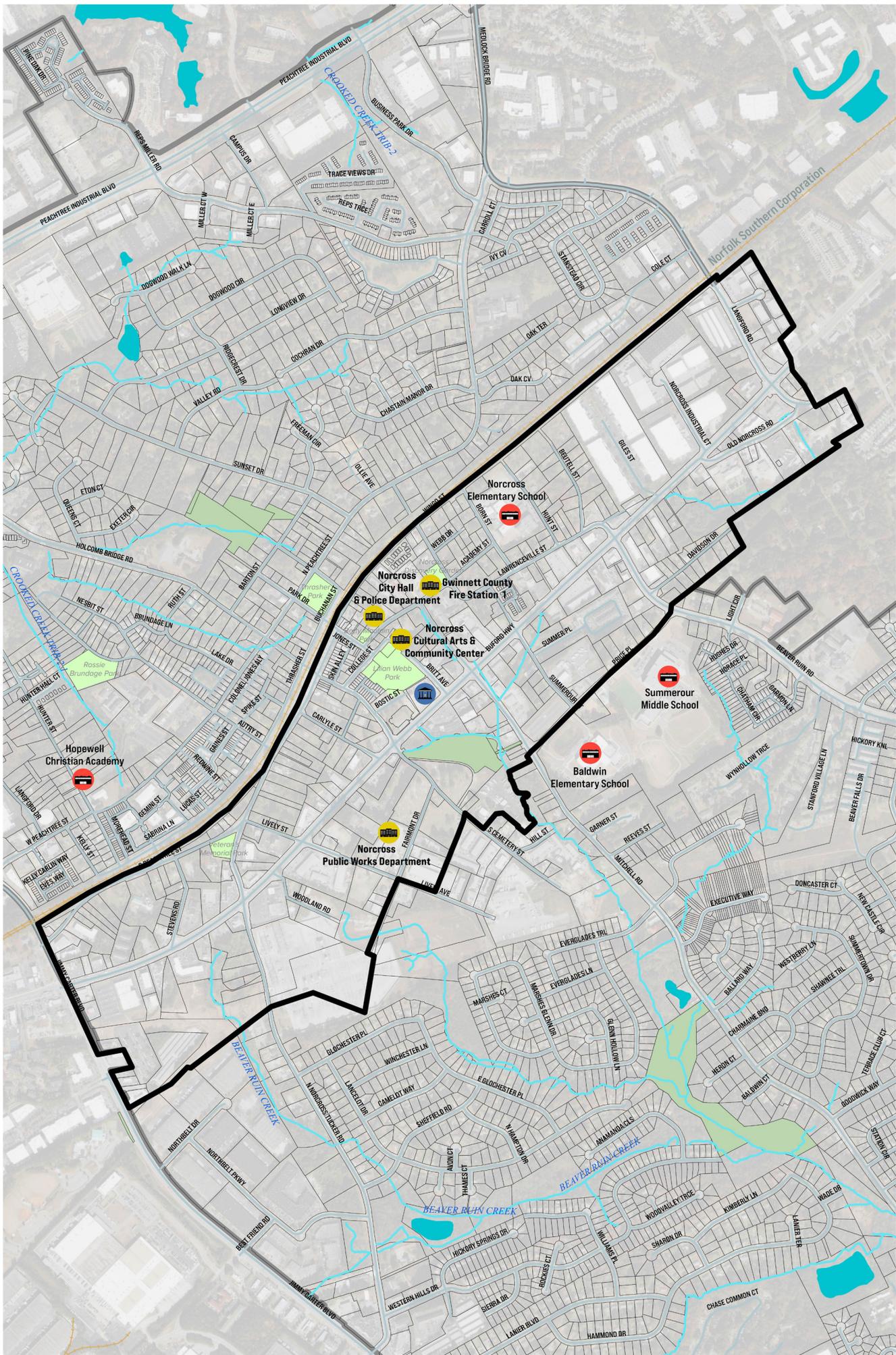
**Baldwin Elementary School** serves students in grades PK through 5th. More than 1,000 students attend the Gwinnett County public school. Both elementary schools feed into Norcross High School.

**Summerour Middle School** is the public middle school that both of the area’s elementary schools feed into. Children in grades 6th through 8th attend Summerour. There are more than 1,700 students at this middle school.

**Norcross City Hall** houses the city government and police department. It sits in the historic preservation district along with the fire department and the cultural arts and community center - the latter of which sits directly opposite to the Lillian Webb Park.

**New Gwinnett County Public Library** branch is under construction at the corner of Buford Highway and Britt Avenue. The new library will be on a 1.6-acre site. The building will be 22,0000 square feet, twice the size of the existing branch less than a mile away.

The **Norcross Cultural Arts & Community Center** offers numerous programs for citizens of all ages. Among the offerings have been theatrical performances, concert series, youth summer camps and yoga, as well as classes on various subjects throughout the year.

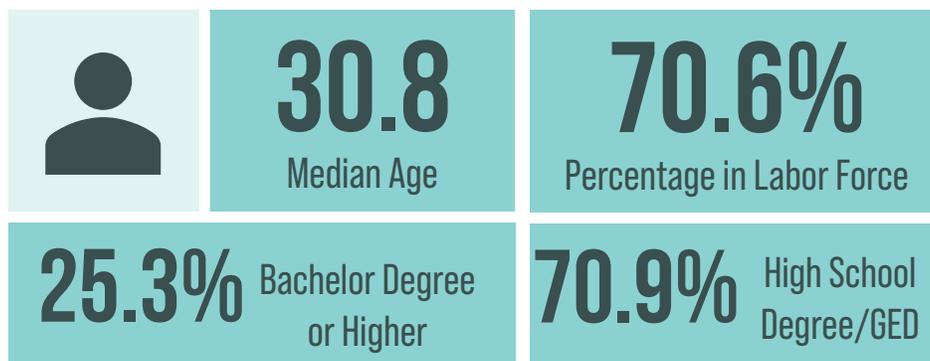
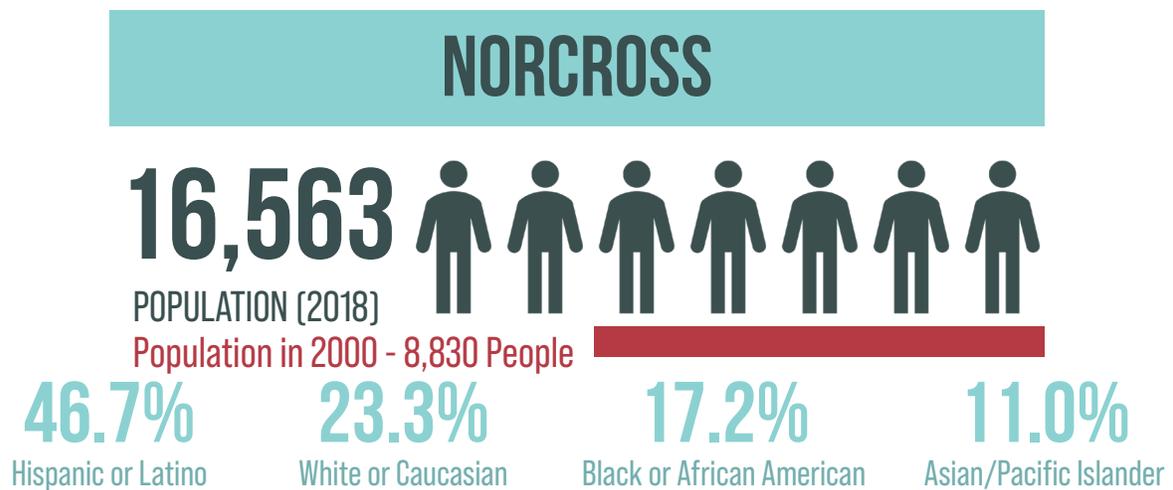


# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.2 NORCROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

Following is demographic information for the study area. All information is from the Atlanta Regional Commission's Neighborhood Nexus. The graphics include data about people: population numbers, race/ethnicity, median age, total jobs, and educational attainment.

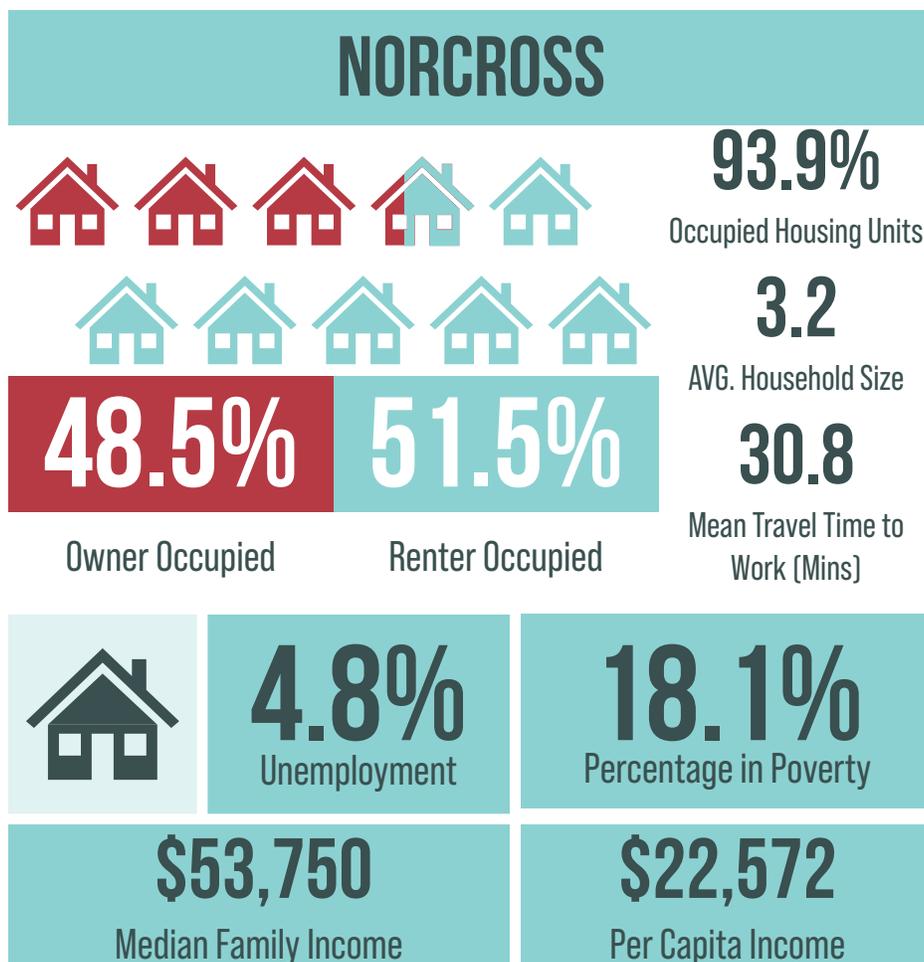
The City of Norcross has almost doubled in population from 2000 to 2018. The Hispanic or Latino community makes up 46.7% of the population and the next largest group is White or Caucasian at 23.3%.



\*2018

The median age is relatively low at 30.8 and more than 70% have a high school degree or GED. The average household size is larger than average at 3.2.

Norcross is unique in that it is almost evenly split between renter occupied properties and owner occupied. Also, almost 94% of housing units are occupied.



\*2018

# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.3 MARKET ANALYSIS

In order to develop a realistic vision, this plan utilized a thorough market analysis. Focus was put on identifying areas ripe for development in order to draw investment to the area. Refer to the Appendix for the complete market study report. Following is a summary of market findings.

### Redevelopment Potential

New construction land uses supported in the study area justify land values ranging from \$160-800k/acre depending on the use and density levels (refer to Figure 2.3A). While supported land values can be increased with mixed-use, the inability for any of the supported uses to justify structured parking costs (without any incentives) results in parking economics and density being the most constraining factors for redevelopment. As such, we believe townhomes and multifamily apartments are the best uses for justifying redevelopment at land values primarily above \$500k/acre across the corridor. Based on this we believe redevelopment is financially feasible on many of the existing centers within the study area including: The Buford Highway Auto Mall, Carter Crossing, Amigo Plaza, and Centro Norcross. Unfortunately several of these are too small to justify enough scale for a conventional multifamily community (given the inability to supported structured parking at these rents), and therefore only those approximately 5 acres or larger (or with assemblage potential) will make multi-family redevelopment sense - these include Carter Crossing and The

Buford Highway Auto Mall. Those that are smaller such as Amigo Plaza and Centro Norcross will find difficulty as multi-family, and are too expensive for townhome redevelopment.

### For Sale Residential Analysis

In Norcross, single family detached resales have seen consistent price increases as well as a steady sales volume with a peak in 2016 and 2017. Median sales price has been trending upwards since 2012.

New attached sales have fluctuated in Norcross recently seeing high deliverables on new townhome products. As with single-family detached resales, attached resales show a similar trend of rising resale value and sales volume.

Since the recession Norcross has seen few new attached deliveries. As land availability for new single family detached becomes limited we project a greater share of new, attached product within the Norcross primary market area will increase. While 2011 to 2019 saw an average of 10 new sales annually, it is projected this will improve to an average of 75 new attached sales annually.

While 2020 has seen a surge of single family detached deliveries, the team expects new, detached sales to return to levels similar to 2011 to 2019. Over the next five years it is predicted that the Norcross primary market area will average 37 new detached sales annually.

Land Use	Example Picture	Demand 2020 - 2025	Est. Pricing	Raw Land Value Supported	Estimated Density*	Land Value/Acre*	Parking	Notes/Comments
Townhomes		70-80 units of townhomes. Ranging from mid-market product of 1,600 SF up to luxury 2,800 SF	\$350,000 - \$550,000 Approx. \$200/SF	\$50,000/Unit	8-12 Units/Acre	\$500,000	2-car rear entry garages	High land value, but limited market depth. Good transitional use. Offer elevator options for EN downsizers, & under \$400k also great for starter families.
Rental Apartments (Conventional)		Up to 700 units likely in 2-3 offerings of 250-300 units each.	\$1.80/SF	\$20,000/Unit	30-50 Units/Acre	\$800,000	1.5/Unit or 1/bed	Strong opportunity to leverage existing mixed-use environment and provide for "missing middle" housing options - particularly for growing employment base.
Rental Apartments (55+)		Up to 200 units in one age-restricted 55+ community	\$2.20/SF	\$20,000/Unit	30-50 Units/Acre	\$800,000	1/Unit or 0.8/bed	Great product for today's changing tenure preference and existing Empty Nester households looking for convenient, low-maintenance homes.
Senior Housing (IL/AI)		One combined independent/assisted facility of up to 90 beds	\$4,000+/mo. depending on service level	\$24,000/Bed	10-15 Beds/Acre	\$300,000	0.5/bed	Aging demographic will continue to provide support for additional facilities.
Retail / Service		+/- 50,000 SF of boutique retail, heavily food and beverage and population servicing	\$20-25/SF NNN	\$20/SF	8,000 SF/Acre	\$160,000	5/1,000 SF (retail 3, but rest 10)	These rates will make stand alone new construction difficult unless value enhanced through park frontage or as ground floor of larger use.
Conventional Office		+/- 130,000 SF of multi-tenant professional sector firms, and population servicing office uses - medical, banking, investment, etc.	\$25-28/SF Full Service	\$20/SF	10,000 SF/Acre	\$200,000	4/1,000 SF	Among the strongest uses demanded along the corridor, but land values will make redevelopment difficult. Potential to capture in adaptive reuse and/or incentivize.
Lodging		Not likely to see positive demand by 2025 given COVID impacts and lack of demand drivers near this corridor.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Flex Commercial		Industrial demand not quantified given its rates do not justify new construction/land prices, however potential for existing product to be adapted into more creative/conventional office space.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	As previously mentioned there is potential to convert some of the existing flex into creative office/retail if existing owners are willing to sell/participate.

\*Densities and land values/acre shown as stand alone. Vertical mixed-use will increase both.

**FIGURE 2.3A SUMMARY OF FORECASTED DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE**

# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.3 MARKET ANALYSIS

### Multi-Family Analysis

The greater Norcross/Duluth combined submarket has seen an increasing capture of the OTP market since 2014, as many suburban cores reinvent themselves as more walkable “urban suburban” environments such as Downtown Norcross, Downtown Duluth, and the Sugarloaf core. Additionally, County wide efforts in Gwinnett to increase pedestrian trails and park access are paying off, creating greater value for multi-family developers to capitalize on infrastructure that residents want to have access to. We expect these captures to continue to grow, particularly as many competitive OTP areas (Alpharetta, Roswell, Johns Creek, etc.) become increasingly more restrictive on multi-family entitlements. The result is a forecasted annual average of over 400 units per year for the Greater Norcross/Duluth submarket.

An analysis of the most recent Class A deliveries in the competitive area shows that a potential study area new development of conventional apartments is well-positioned to command about \$1.80/SF. If a 55+ community was to be developed we believe it would command a 20% premium over the conventional for rents of approximately \$2.20/SF.

### Commercial Analysis

#### *Retail*

With new mixed-use space being added in Peachtree Corners (Peachtree Corners Town Center), newer tenants landing locations in the market (Lidl), and strong traffic counts along 141, Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and Buford Highway this submarket has consistently witnessed an average of 100,000 SF of net new space being absorbed to the market since 2014, including the pandemic year of 2020. With little to no new construction currently going, and a high concentration of local “mom and pop” businesses likely to continue to be hit by declining sales post-COVID, we do expect these levels to decline back to the 25% captures demonstrated in 2014-2017 (pre-Peachtree Corners Town Center) unless a major anchored center is announced (unlikely). The result is still an average of just over 30,000 SF of net absorption per year (2021-2024), and while the majority of this will continue to land in Peachtree Corners, we believe the Norcross study area has the potential to capture up to 20%, or 5-10,000 SF per year of this if the right product can be provided.

#### *Office*

The Norcross/Peachtree Corners submarket has been dominated by traditional office space in the various office parks in Peachtree Corners, along with a scattering of more flex and Class B space in Norcross. Historically the lack of walkability, lack of Millennial housing, and lack of new office space has made it

difficult for Peachtree Corners to compete in a marketplace of tenants increasingly desiring those components. Indeed several major tenants including FleetCor have largely left the submarket for more urban cores in recent years. That said, 2019 and thus far in 2020 a surge in leasing activity (Siemens, Soliant, SESCO, etc.) has proven recent changes in Norcross and Peachtree Corners (new multi-family, new parks, new mixed-use) is beginning to shift the tide, and discounted rents that the submarket has been known for will keep it well positioned to continue with high capture rates going forward post COVID. We believe this will enable the market to support between 100-120,000 SF of net new space per year, and while the majority of this will continue to land in Peachtree Corners, we believe the Norcross study area has the potential to capture up to 20%, or 20-25,000 SF per year of this if the right product can be provided.

# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.4 DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

Figure 2.4A provides a comprehensive view of sites with potential for redevelopment.

The map highlights where public and private investment have occurred recently, including The Brunswick, the currently under-construction Norcross Branch Library, and the Broadstone. The first two developments frame downtown and Lillian Webb Park while providing a new frontage to Buford Highway. With this investment in downtown, there is momentum to continue development surrounding the park and along the corridor in adjacent lots.

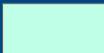
The map highlights in red outline, potential redevelopment sites as identified in the City Center East Tax Allocation District (TAD).

Properties outlined in blue are areas identified by the City as potential redevelopment sites. Sites with a star denote sites that were further identified by our market analysis team as feasible for redevelopment due to anticipated cost of land and low tenant occupancies.

This map provided the basis for development focus areas as identified in the recommendations section.

# DEVELOPMENT TRENDS & CONDITIONS

FIGURE 2.4A

-  RESIDENTIAL VACANT
-  COMMERCIAL VACANT
-  UTILITY VACANT
-  EXEMPT PROPERTY IMPROVED
-  CITY OWNED VACANT
-  REDEVELOPMENT AREAS SOURCE: CITY OF NORCROSS 2020
-  PROPOSED MULTI-USE TRAIL SOURCE: NORCROSS LCI 2016
-  POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT SOURCE: CITY CENTER EAST TAD
-  1 BRUNSWICK GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT
-  2 NORCROSS BRANCH LIBRARY
-  3 BROADSTONE NORCROSS
-  PRIORITY SITES



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

Between federal, state, and local entities there are many incentives and tools available for economic development of the study area. Figure 2.5A illustrates the location of the economic development incentives in the study area, including:

### Federal Qualified Opportunity Zone

Federal Opportunity Zones (FOZ) are economically-distressed communities where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. They are designed to spur economic development and job creation.

### Tax Allocation Districts (TAD)

The City Center East TAD is located in the study area. Also known as tax increment financing (TIF), tax allocation financing is a redevelopment and financing tool by which governments can provide financial assistance to eligible public and private redevelopment efforts within an officially designated area or TAD. Increases in property tax revenues, which are generated primarily from new investment in the district, are allocated to pay infrastructure costs or certain private development costs within the TAD.

### National Historic District - Historic Preservation District (City of Norcross)

Historic districts are designations of a group of buildings that together form a historically or architecturally significant area. The designation is intended to

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

FIGURE 2.5A

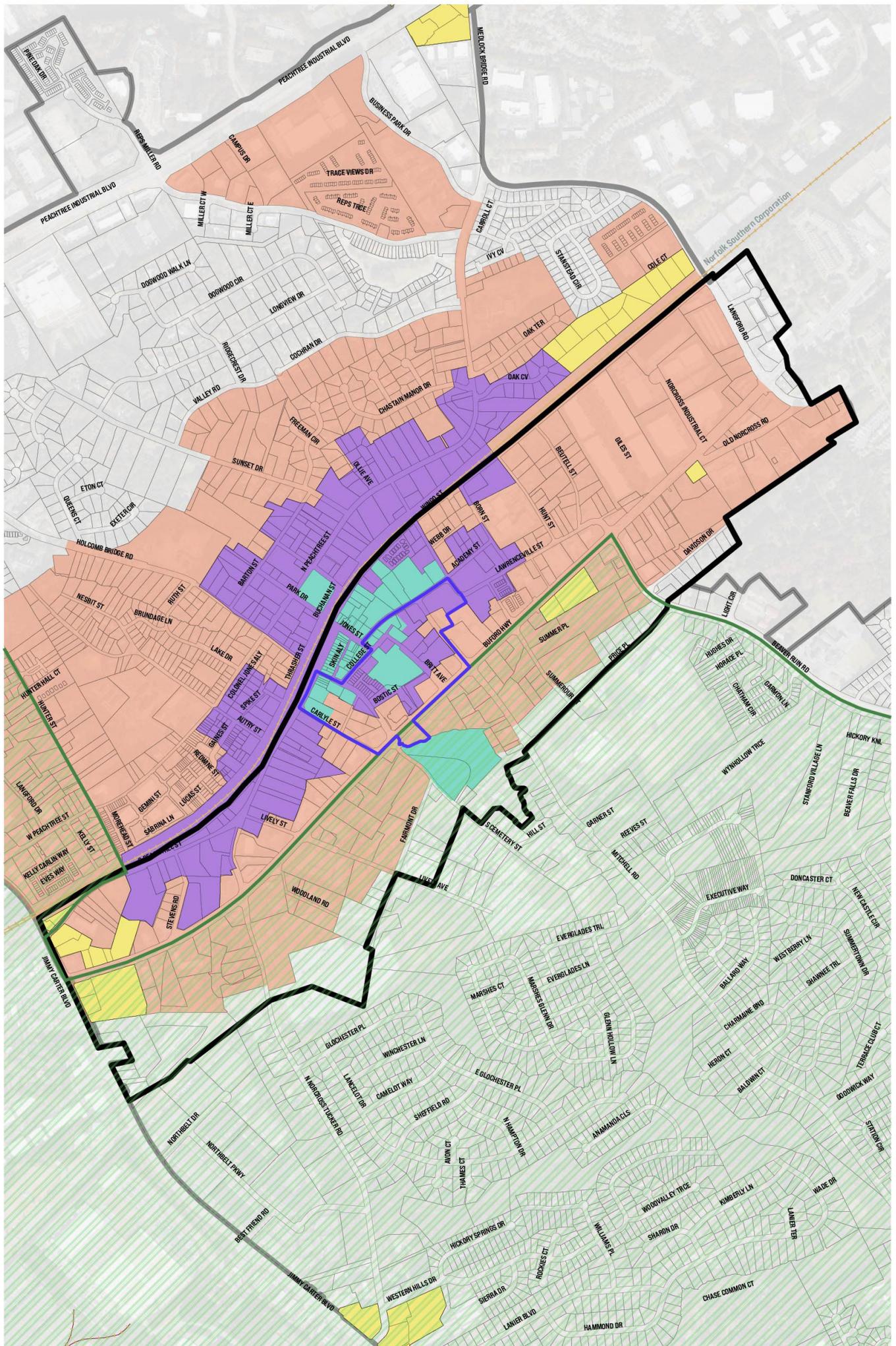
-  HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT
-  NATIONAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
-  DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AREA
-  PROPOSED STATE OPPORTUNITY ZONE
-  FEDERAL OPPORTUNITY ZONE
-  CITY CENTER EAST TAD

preserve the character of the significant area, but not freeze it in time.

The official National Register of Historic Places City of Norcross Historical Marker states: “The Norcross Historic District has been preserved as a 19th century railroad town, and its historical significance has been recognized by the U. S. Department of the Interior through its listing on the National Register of Historic Places on November 21, 1980. The Historic District sits along the eastern Continental Divide, which played a significant role in the early transportation and settlement of the area...”.

### Downtown Development Area (City of Norcross)

The downtown area of Norcross has been designated as the Downtown Development Area where the Downtown Development Authority focuses on the development, growth, and preservation of all business areas and works to advance projects.



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.6 EXISTING LAND USE

Figure 2.6A illustrates the current primary uses of the land within the study area. It also labels vacant parcels. This map paints a picture of the variety of uses within the area and helps illustrate if portions of the area have compatible or conflicting uses.

According to Figure 2.6A, this portion of Buford Highway has a majority of commercial uses along the corridor with some warehouse uses on the northeast edge. Many of these commercial uses are Auto Repair Shops, Body Shops, and other Automobile and Machine related businesses. There are also grocers and local restaurants. The City and the County own considerable amount of land near the Downtown area while utility parcels make up large portions of the southwest edge of the study area.

# LAND USE MAP

FIGURE 2.6A

## LEGEND

- RESIDENTIAL VACANT
- RESIDENTIAL
- RESIDENTIAL UNBUILDABLE LOTS
- RESIDENTIAL COMMERCIAL
- COMMERCIAL VACANT
- COMMERCIAL
- WAREHOUSE
- LIGHT INDUSTRIAL/COMMERCIAL
- UTILITY VACANT
- UTILITY
- CEMETERY
- SCHOOL
- AMUSEMENT PARK
- RELIGIOUS
- INSTITUTIONAL
- EXEMPT PROPERTY IMPROVED
- GWINNETT CO OTHER VACANT
- CITY OF NORCROSS



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.7 FUTURE LAND USE

The following map shows the Future Land Use for Buford Highway. The Future Land Use plans come from the City of Norcross 2020 Urban Redevelopment Plan and serves as a guide for future growth and development.

Comprehensive planning is the foundation for quality growth management. It is the community's vision for what types and densities of different land use are desired for future development.

According to the Urban Redevelopment Plan, Buford Highway is made of 3 Character Areas:

- **6 Buford Highway/Jimmy Carter**  
A medium density mixed-use node, consistent with the Jimmy Carter Boulevard/Buford Highway Redevelopment Plan.
- **7 Town Center**  
The civic heart of the community, the Town Center offers a wide variety of entertainment, dining, recreational and shopping options. Through redevelopment and public investment, the Town Center character is a destination for the Greater Norcross community.
- **8 Langford Road Industrial Center**  
The area is a hub of business and industrial innovation and creativity.

# FUTURE LAND USE MAP

FIGURE 2.7A

## LEGEND

-  MEDLOCK/PEACHTREE INDUSTRIAL BOULEVARD (2)
-  NORTH PEACHTREE STREET NEIGHBORHOODS (4)
-  HOPEWELL WOODS (5)
-  BUFORD HIGHWAY/JIMMY CARTER BOULEVARD ACTIVITY CENTER (6)
-  TOWN CENTER (7)
-  LANGFORD ROAD INDUSTRIAL CENTER (8)
-  SUMMEROUR (9)



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.8 ZONING

The majority of the Master Plan study area consists of:

### **Buford Highway (BH):**

BH is intended to encourage the redevelopment of Buford Highway in conformance with the vision for the corridor in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The district utilizes design standards and land use controls that will provide the necessary transition from the industrial and commercial character into the historic areas of the city, while maintaining opportunity for growth and economic vibrancy.

### **Historic Mixed-Use (HX):**

HX is established to provide for retail, service, office, public and semi-public uses, with the inclusion of limited residential uses, in a pedestrian friendly environment to promote live-work and mixed-use opportunities.

### **Light Industry (M1):**

M1 is comprised of lands that are located on, or have ready access to, a major street or state highway and are well adapted to industrial development but whose proximity to residential or commercial districts makes it desirable to limit industrial operations.

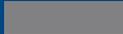
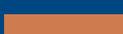
### **General Business (C2):**

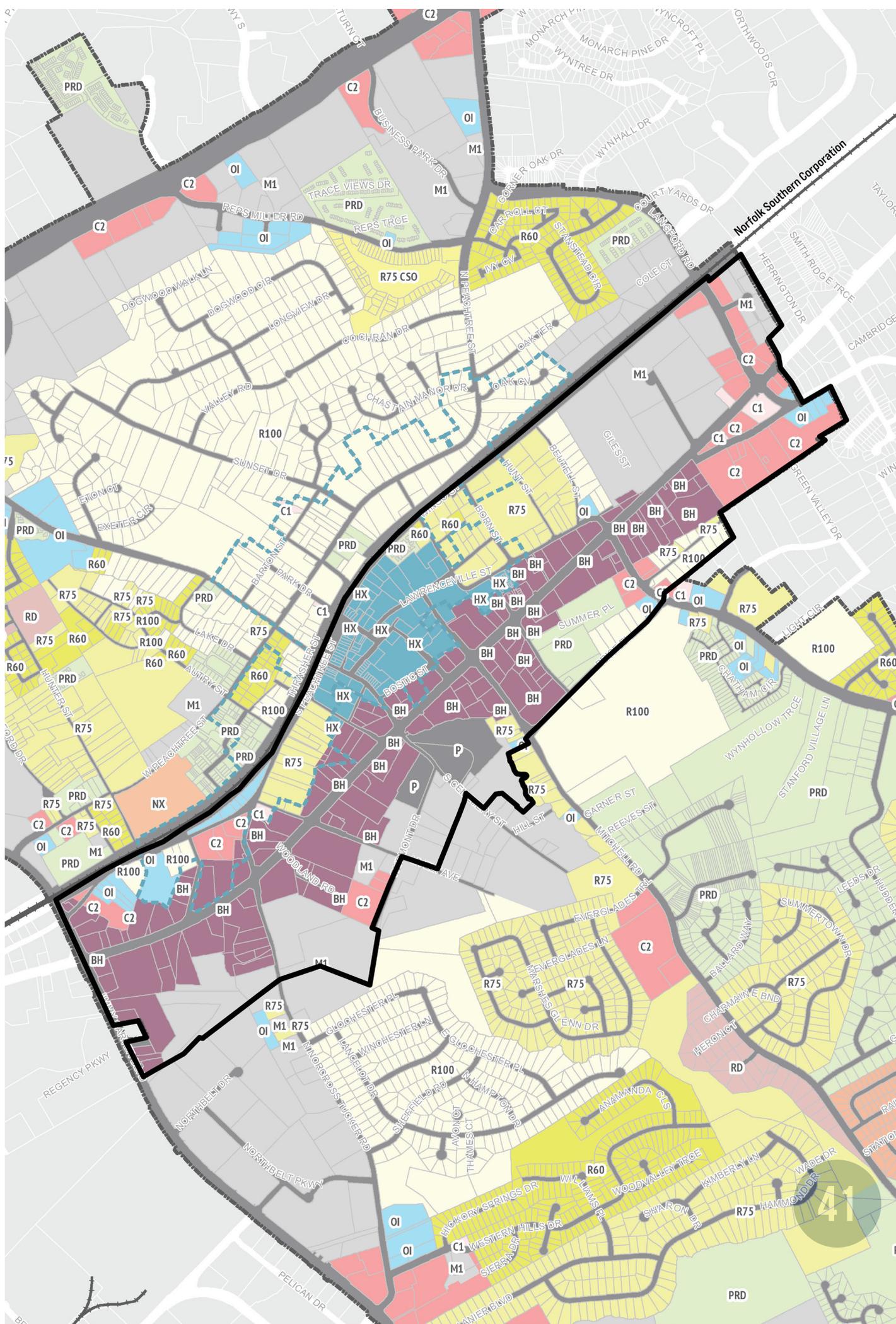
C2 is established to provide adequate space in appropriate locations along major streets, thoroughfares and at intersections for various types of business and service uses.

# ZONING MAP

FIGURE 2.8A

## LEGEND

-  HX - HISTORIC MIXED-USE
-  P - PUBLIC
-  R100 - SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE
-  R75 - SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE
-  R75 CSO - SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION/OPEN SPACE
-  R60 - SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE
-  RD - DUPLEX RESIDENCE
-  RTH - TOWNHOUSE RESIDENCE
-  PRD - PLANNED RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT
-  OI - OFFICE-INSTITUTIONAL
-  C1 - NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS
-  C2 - GENERAL BUSINESS
-  BH - BUFORD HIGHWAY
-  NX - NEIGHBORHOOD MIXED-USE
-  CX - COMMUNITY MIXED-USE
-  M1 - LIGHT INDUSTRIAL
-  M2 - HEAVY INDUSTRIAL



41

# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.9 TOPOGRAPHY & HYDROLOGY

Natural features of the study area were examined as part of the planning process. Topography was analyzed to understand overall drainage and stormwater flow issues and to protect and enhance natural resources. The eastern and western edges of the area are the highest points, with the middle section near Lilian Webb Park being the lowest. This is also where a portion of Beaver Ruin Creek flows. Areas of flooding and the location of water sources were factored into the recommendations of this master plan. Existing natural resources can also provide areas for trails and parks.

# TOPOGRAPHY & HYDROLOGY

FIGURE 2.9A

## LEGEND

-  10 FOOT CONTOURS
-  10 FOOT CONTOURS
-  RAILROADS
-  ROADS
-  LAKES & PONDS
-  STREAMS
-  PARKS
-  A 100-YEAR FLOODPLAIN
-  AE 100-YEAR FLOODPLAIN
-  X500 500-YEAR FLOODPLAIN
-  HIGH ELEVATION POINTS
-  LOW ELEVATION POINTS



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.10 UTILITIES

### Sewer

Along with understanding how water flows through the area, knowing the location of utilities helps the Master Plan in identifying redevelopment recommendations. Figure 2.10A shows the sewage network in the area and the location of mains, manholes, and pump stations. Orienting development around existing sewage infrastructure can cut costs.

As seen on the map, as the entire study area has predominately been developed overtime, there is comprehensive sewage coverage throughout the area. However, as higher density developments are introduced, particularly on the south side of Buford Highway, sewage infrastructure and capacity will need to be further evaluated.

# UTILITIES - SEWER

FIGURE 2.10A

## LEGEND

 PRESSURIZED MAIN

 SEWAGE MANHOLE



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.10 UTILITIES

### Stormwater

Similar to the sewage map above, Figure 2.10B further paints the picture of how water moves and is treated within the Buford Highway study area. It lays out the location of stormwater infrastructure. It is important to understand how water flows and if there is flooding. Stormwater management needs can lead to strategic greenspace amenities and provide comprehensive stormwater management planning to attract regional development.

The study area, having developed overtime has stormwater infrastructure in place throughout. However, much of the infrastructure along the corridor was put in place when development first occurred in the 60s and 70s, leading to outdated stormwater management standards. As new development is proposed, stormwater facilities will need to be incorporated to adequately address stormwater needs and current regulations. Creation of regional retention facilities, in partnership with the City, can alleviate the additional and sometime restrictive costs associated with upgrading stormwater facilities on individual sites by individual developers.

# UTILITIES - STORMWATER

FIGURE 2.10B

## LEGEND

-  CLOSED CONDUIT LINE
-  NON CONDUIT LINE
-  HYDRO LINE
-  INLET
-  DITCH INTERSECTION



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.10 UTILITIES

### Water Supply

The water supply map shows how the residents, visitors, and workers in the area access potable water. The water mains, valves, and hydrants are clearly laid out in Figure 2.10C.

Similar to previous utilities, the water supply follows Buford Highway and provides access to the majority of the study area, which has previously been developed. As higher density developments are introduced, particularly on the south side of Buford Highway, water infrastructure and capacity will need to be further evaluated.

# UTILITIES - WATER SUPPLY

FIGURE 2.10C

## LEGEND

— PRESSURIZED MAIN

● VALVE

● HYDRANT



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.11 TRANSPORTATION

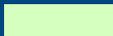
### Pedestrian Circulation

Key to this master plan is making sure that pedestrians can safely and easily access the Buford Highway study area. Figure 2.11A shows current sidewalks, whether on one side, both, or none of the above. The commercial areas have consistent sidewalks but the residential areas lack sidewalks. Lively Street is a prominent road that crosses Buford Highway that does not have any sidewalks. Knowing where sidewalks need improvements can help identify where safety and streetscape enhancements are needed to protect pedestrians. Sidewalk improvement will be prioritized to coincide with priority development areas as identified in this master plan.

# PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

FIGURE 2.11A

## LEGEND

-  TRAILS
-  RAILROADS
-  PARCELS
-  PARKS
-  EXISTING SIDEWALK
-  NO SIDEWALK
-  NO SIDEWALK - ONE SIDE



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.11 TRANSPORTATION

### Trails

As of the development of this master plan, the Norcross to Lilburn Trail is the only trail in the Buford Highway study area. However, there are proposed trails that would reach commercial and residential neighborhoods.

#### ***Piedmont Pathway***

The Piedmont Pathway is a priority trail for Gwinnett County's trail planning efforts. It will be an east-west path that crosses the county from Norcross east to Dacula. In Norcross, this trail is shown near the utility corridor roughly 0.5 miles south of Buford Highway.

#### ***Norcross to Lilburn Trail***

Building on the Safe Routes to School trail project on Beaver Ruin Road, the Norcross to Lilburn Trail will extend the system primarily along Indian Trail Road. This trail system will transform Indian Trail-Lilburn Road into a healthy and economically robust "spine" that connects five Livable Center Initiative areas (LCIs). With easy accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians, this project, led by Gateway85, is focused on better connecting communities. (Gateway 85)

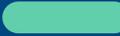
#### ***Western Gwinnett Bikeway***

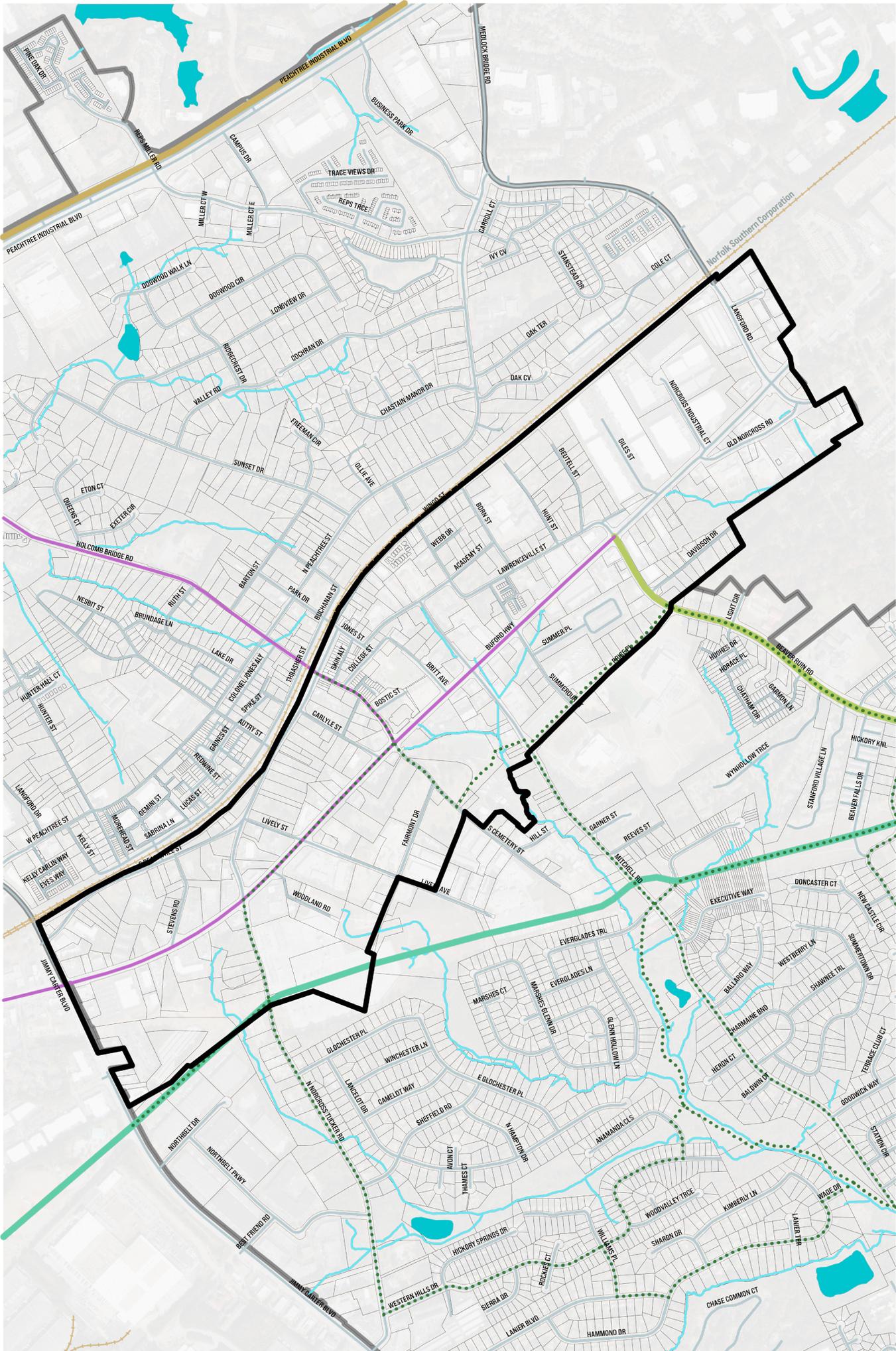
The Bikeway is also one of Gwinnett County's priority trails. It will be a bikeway that travels from Peachtree Corners/Norcross up to Suwannee. In Norcross, the Bikeway is part of the Peachtree Industrial Boulevard corridor.

# TRAILS

## LEGEND

FIGURE 2.11B

-  RAILROADS
-  PIEDMONT PATHWAY
-  NORCROSS TO LILBURN TRAIL
-  WESTERN GWINNETT BIKEWAY
-  OTHER PROPOSED TRAILS
-  PROPOSED MULTI-USE TRAIL (NORCROSS LCI)



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.11 TRANSPORTATION

### Transit

Currently, Gwinnett County Transit bus options can only be found on the main corridors in the area - Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Buford Highway, Mitchell Road, and Beaver Ruin Road. Buses arrive every 30 minutes. Additional routes are proposed on Mitchell Road. Service Areas:

#### **Route 10A**

Sugarloaf Mills to Gwinnett Place to Doraville MARTA Station

#### **Route 10B**

Sugarloaf Mills to Gwinnett Place to Doraville MARTA Station

#### **Route 20**

Norcross to Indian Trail-Lilburn Rd/Singleton Rd/Graves Rd Corridors to Doraville MARTA Station

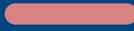
#### **Route 35**

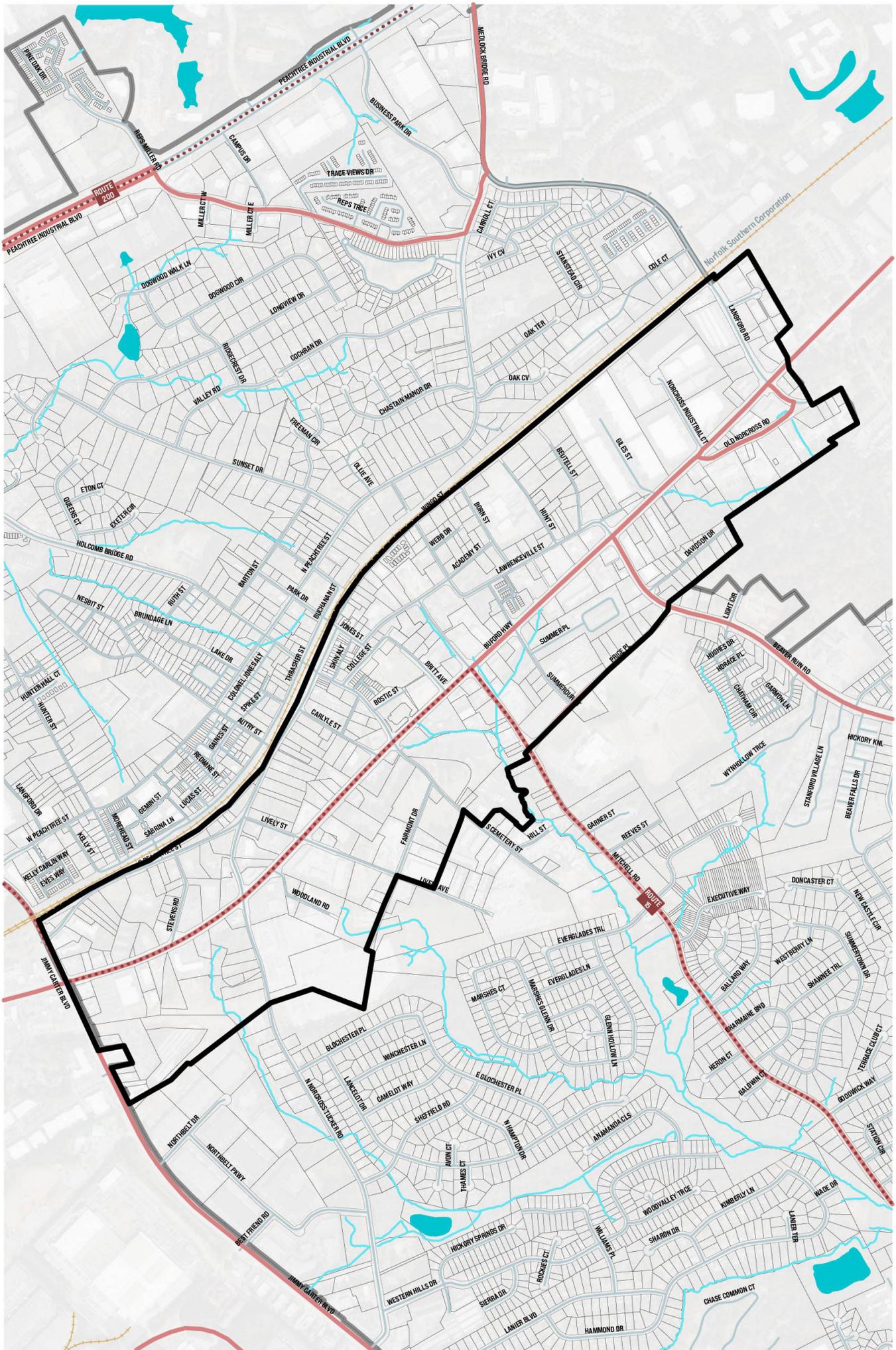
Peachtree Corners to Norcross to Doraville MARTA Station

It is also important to note that in November 2020 Gwinnett residents voted down the Gwinnett Transit Referendum – a 1% sales tax to fund transit projects in the County. While there is not a clear financial path forward currently, a transit future is still a possibility. Previous County Transit planning identified a transit center/hub at the former OFS site just around the corner from the study area on Jimmy Carter Boulevard. Transit was anticipated to extend along the I-85 corridor. Future plans may include more enhanced services on Buford Highway, so planning to accommodate current and future bus traffic and users along the corridor is considered in this report.

# TRANSIT

FIGURE 2.11C

-  EXISTING TRANSIT ROUTE
-  PROPOSED NEW TRANSIT



# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.11 TRANSPORTATION

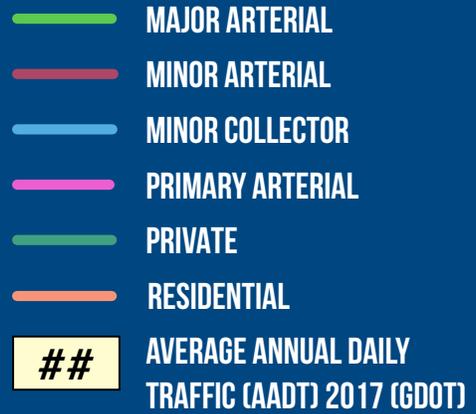
Figure 2.11D shows the Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) and the Road Function Classifications. AADT is a count of the total number of cars on a road each day. The Road Function Classification illustrates the type and size of the road which determines how it should be used to move traffic.

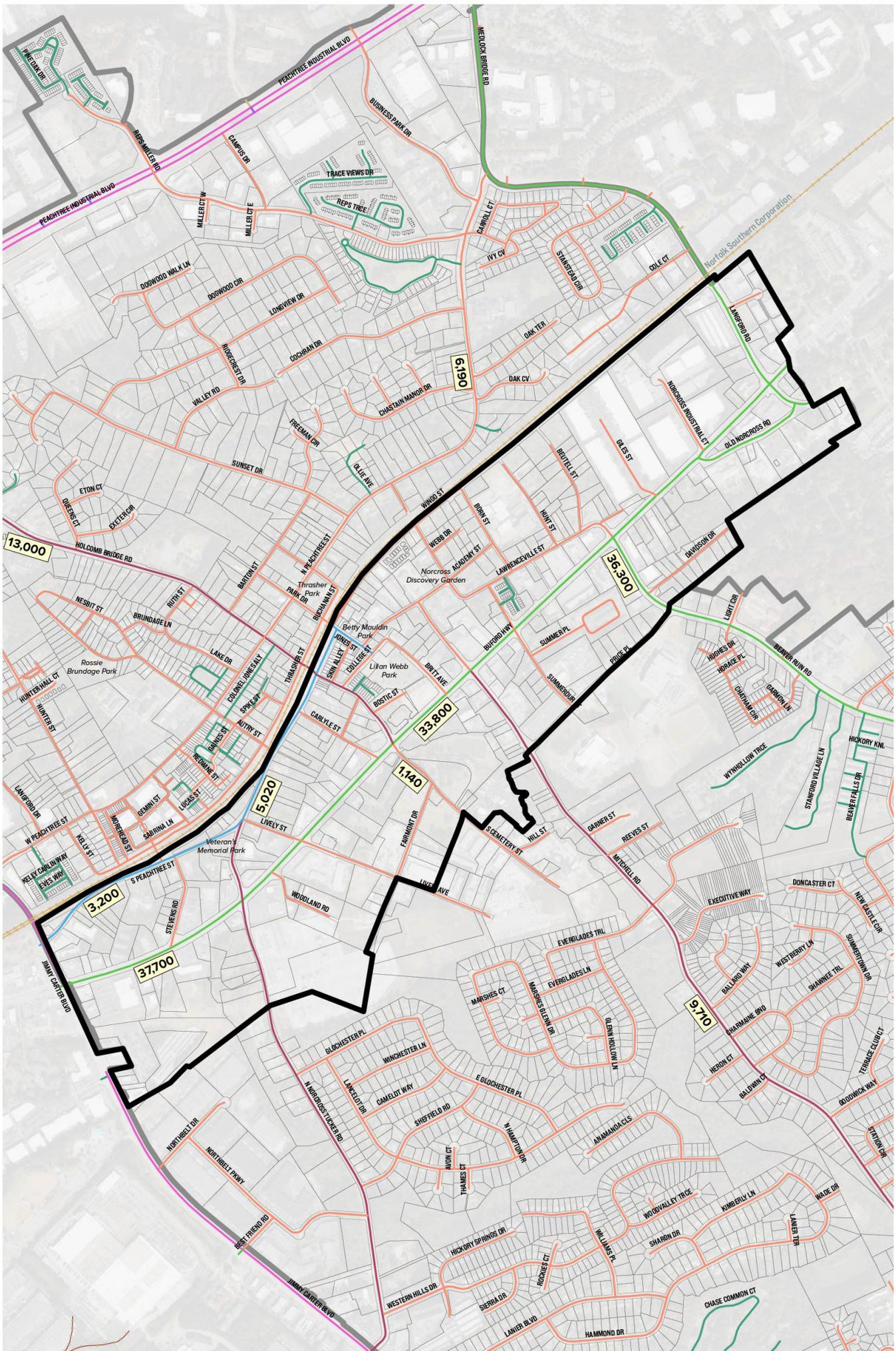
Beaver Ruin Road and Buford Highway are both Major Arterials and the highest trafficked thoroughfares in the area.

Mitchell Road and Holcomb Bridge Road are each Minor Arterials and handle almost a third of number of cars as the Major Arterials.

# VEHICULAR CIRCULATION

FIGURE 2.11D





# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.11 TRANSPORTATION

### **Previous Transportation Plans and Studies**

The objective for the City of Norcross is to identify opportunities to transform the SR 13/US 23 - Buford Highway corridor within the corporate limits of the City. Redevelopment of the aging retail and commercial areas into a revitalized and desirable destination is envisioned. The transformation of this corridor is envisioned to facilitate all modes of transportation, but greatly enhancing the non-vehicular experience. To achieve this vision, a review of previous studies and planning efforts in the Norcross area was performed. Additionally, relevant policies and requirements from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) were identified. Many previous studies and planning efforts have been completed. These studies all have components that would support this vision. The following is a summary of these studies:

#### ***1) Beaver Ruin Multi-Use Path (date unknown)***

This project is proposed multi-use path on Beaver Ruin Road from Buford Highway to Indian Trail-Lilburn Road. The intent of this project is to provide alternative transportation options to connect the densely populated corridor with commercial properties, churches, Gwinnett County Transit and governmental services, such as the Department of Labor and the Department of Family and Children's Services.

#### ***2) Industrial Area Truck Study (August 2007)***

This study focused on the impact of heavy truck traffic between I-85 and Buford Highway. This study made recommendations of alternate routes in the study area that avoid Jimmy Carter Boulevard. One of the recommendations was to pursue funding of Button Gwinnett Road from Buford Highway to Jimmy Carter Boulevard which is intended to make it an attractive alternate to Jimmy Carter Boulevard. It appears that this option could potentially direct more truck traffic to Buford Highway and may not be conducive to the intent of the Buford Highway Master Plan.

#### ***3) Jimmy Carter Boulevard Corridor Study (2007)***

##### ***Jimmy Carter Boulevard LCI (Corridor Study) 5 Year Update (2012)***

##### ***Jimmy Carter Boulevard LCI (Corridor Study) 10 Year Update (2018)***

These studies were conducted under the Atlanta Regional Commission Livable Centers Initiative program. Through extensive analysis socio-economic, demographic and infrastructure analysis produced a vision and project list for the Jimmy Carter Boulevard corridor. Of particular importance to the Buford Highway Master Plan is the "Buford Highway/Jimmy Carter Node Plan". The node study area at Buford Highway lends itself to improvements for pedestrians, transition to mixed use development, intersection improvements, addition of housing units and greenspace linkages among new and existing residential, work opportunities and potential outdoor recreation. This type of development would have the "village" concept with a mix of residential and residential over commercial

with freestanding retail. Aesthetic improvements to Buford Highway coupled with Jimmy Carter Boulevard at Buford Highway intersection improvements will be dramatic as the transition continues to this node.

#### **4) Norcross Activity Center Livable Centers Initiative (2008)**

This study builds on and compliments work completed in other LCI's (Downtown Norcross LCI, Indian Trail LCI and the Jimmy Carter Boulevard Corridor Study). The LCI was very similar to the Jimmy Carter Boulevard Corridor Study in looking at socio-economic, demographic and infrastructure. It contains a list of projects specific to Buford Highway such as; (1) improvements to the Buford Highway at North Norcross Tucker intersection, (2) access management improvements, such as the installation of a raised median along Buford Highway and adoption of policies that restrict the number of driveways or encourage the use of inter-parcel access, and (3) signal timing improvements.

#### **5) Revisiting the Concept of Expanding Rail Transit into Gwinnett County (2007) Feasibility Study for Bus Rapid Transit along Buford Highway (2005) I-85 Corridor Light Rail Feasibility Study (2009)**

All of these studies are in support of potential future transit options in the Buford Highway Corridor/City of Norcross. These are all regional transit projects that would be implemented through a federal/state/local partnership. These plans have not moved beyond initial feasibility or scoping. However, if any of these were to emerge as viable options, they have the potential to complement the desired outcome of the Buford Highway Master

Plan. Regional transit connections can foundationally alter the development patterns and offer the opportunity to support the live/work/play developments. Buford Highway is designated as State Route (SR) 13 and United States Route (US) 23, known collectively as SR 13/US23. As such, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has an interest in protecting the operation of the corridor. GDOT has numerous policies and regulations that would be applicable to any type of transformational effort. These include:

#### **Complete Street Policy:**

[http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/PolicyAnnouncements/Complete%20Streets%20Policy%20-Chief%20Engineer%20\(9-20-12\).pdf](http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/PolicyAnnouncements/Complete%20Streets%20Policy%20-Chief%20Engineer%20(9-20-12).pdf)

The GDOT Complete Streets Policy establishes standard warrants requiring that accommodations for pedestrian, bicycle and transit modes of transportation be provided under specific compelling conditions along transportation projects with GDOT oversight (wherever practical to do so). Chapter 9 in the GDOT Design Policy Manual is further defined as:

It is the policy of the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to routinely incorporate bicycle, pedestrian and transit accommodations into transportation infrastructure projects as a means for improving mobility, access and safety for the traveling public. Accordingly, GDOT coordinates with local governments and

# STUDY AREA ANALYSIS

## 2.11 TRANSPORTATION

planning organizations to ensure that bicycle, pedestrian and transit needs are addressed, beginning with system planning and continuing through design, construction, maintenance and operations. This is the “Complete Streets” approach for promoting pedestrian, bicycle and transit travel in the State of Georgia.

The concept of Complete Street emphasizes safety, mobility and accessibility for all modes of travel and for individuals of all ages and abilities. The design of transportation projects for multiple travel modes requires balancing the needs of each mode. This “balance” must be accomplished in a context sensitive manner appropriate to the type of roadway and the conditions within the project and surrounding area.

GDOT’s primary strategy for implementing Complete Streets is to incorporate bicycle, pedestrian and transit accommodations into roadway construction and maintenance projects. Local governments and planning agencies can also implement Complete Streets by partnering with GDOT, and by initiating and managing their own locally-funded projects and programs.

### ***Pedestrian and Streetscape Design Guide:***

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/TrafficOps/GDOT%20Pedestrian%20and%20Streetscape%20Guide.pdf>

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Pedestrian and Streetscape Guide contains guidelines and best practices for the design of streets and roadways that support safe multimodal travel. The Guide focuses on design of pedestrian and streetscape facilities, but good design is one component of a successful pedestrian facility. Conscientious planning, effective education programs and consistent safety and law enforcement also contribute to improving our communities for everyone.

The anticipated users of the Pedestrian and Streetscape Design Guide include planning and design practitioners, elected officials, developers, advocates, public works departments and many others. The Guide provides information on how to design pedestrian infrastructure, build out a connected pedestrian network and create a comfortable environment for people to walk.

***Regulations for Driveway and Encroachment Control:***

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/Encroachment/Driveway.pdf>

The Regulations for Driveway and Encroachment Control, or Driveway Manual, was created to formally define the process required to obtain GDOT permission to perform work inside GDOT Right of Way (ROW), to preserve the functional integrity of the State Highway System and to promote the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

A permit is required prior to performing and construction work or non-routine maintenance within the State Highway ROW. This includes, but is not limited to the following: grading, landscaping, drainage work, temporary access to undeveloped land or the construction of a development.

The process described in the Driveway Manual would be required for any work inside of the SR 13/US 23 - Buford Highway ROW that is being pursued and funded solely by the City of Norcross.



# 63

**3.0 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

# 3.1 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## Overview

Rooted in meaningful engagement, the Norcross Buford Highway Master Plan speaks for the broad spectrum of stakeholders who live, work and play in the community. Public input built from community meeting feedback obtained during the 2019 Norcross Comprehensive Plan update, which provided relevant visioning and goal setting for this effort. In addition, this master plan focused engagement on the following.

## Engagement

Public engagement focused on informing and educating the community on the purpose and objectives of the planning process while engaging a Steering Committee and the broader public. The Project Team (PT), was also established. The PT met every other week virtually to discuss the progress of the project. All community engagement meetings were hosted virtually, to ensure public health safety during the COVID Pandemic.

## City Council

The project kicked off with the first of two City Council presentations on September 21, 2020. During this meeting, the Council was introduced to the project, the process, and anticipated deliverables.

## Downtown Development Authority

On October 1, 2020 the Master Plan team presented to the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). During this meeting, the DDA was given a similar presentation to the City Council that included an introduction to the project, the process, and anticipated deliverables. Post

presentation discussion focused on market feasibility and ensuring a realistic plan.

## Steering Committee Engagement

The Steering Committee was formed to help guide the process and provide input on the overall direction of the plan. The Steering Committee was committed to providing guidance, vision, and promoting the public meeting. The following organizations were represented as members of the Steering Committee:

- City of Norcross
- Business Owners
- Gateway85 CID
- Allegiance Bank
- Residents
- Historic District Residents
- Real Estate Agents

The Steering Committee meeting was held on October 22, 2020. The purpose of the study and public engagement was outlined. The majority of the meeting focused on a visual preference survey and discussing the broad vision for the study area.

## Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder Interviews were conducted with a focus on understanding the potential of the Buford Highway corridor from the development community. Area developers, brokers, and CID representatives were interviewed for input on what types of development may be appropriate on the corridor, opportunities and barriers to development, and what partnerships and incentives may attract new development. At each interview the stakeholders were asked the same questions. A summary of those interviews along with the results can be found below.

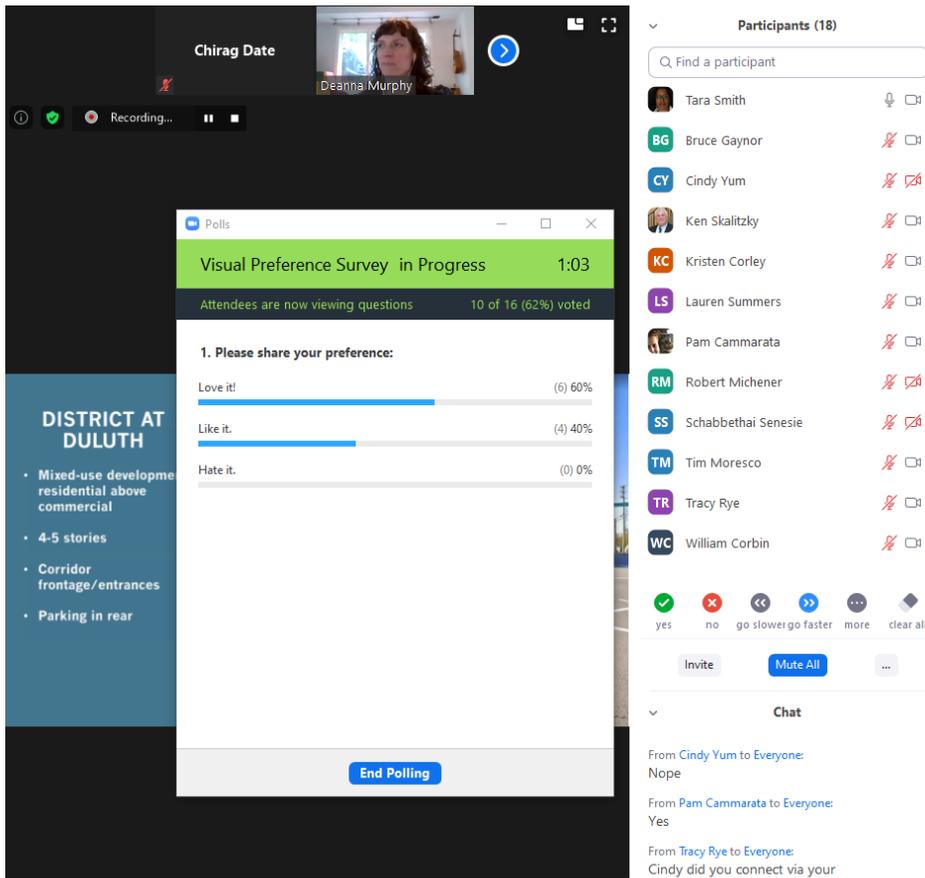
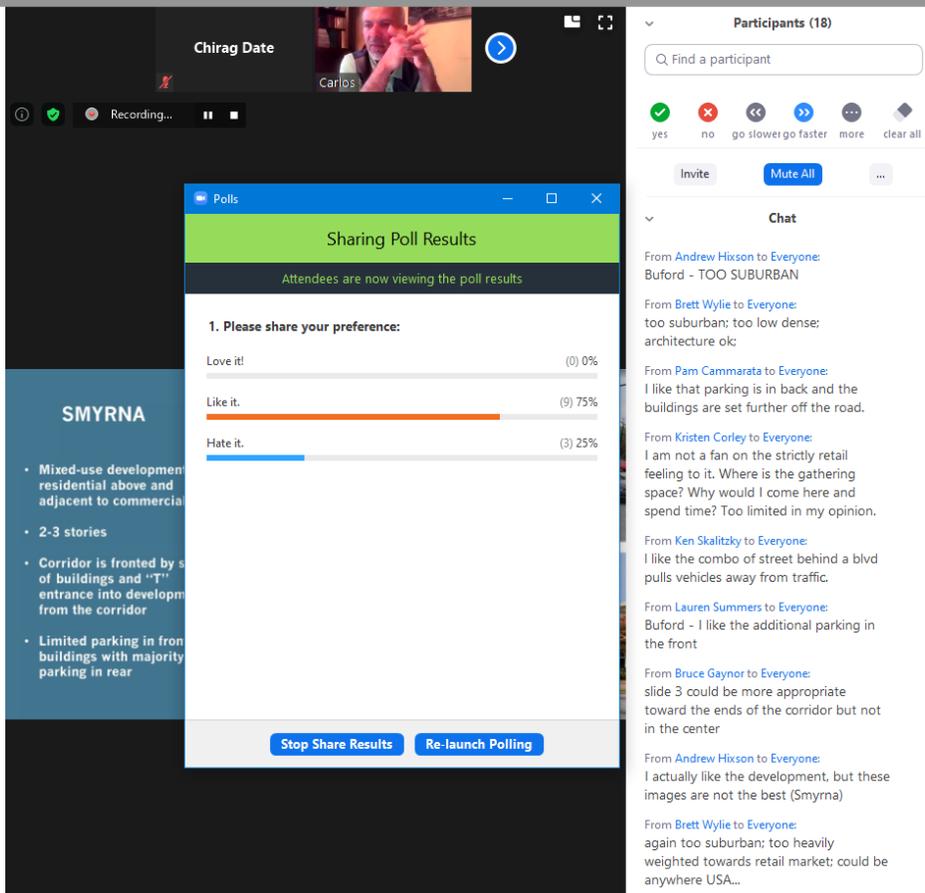


FIGURE 3.1A COMMUNITY MEETING SCREENSHOTS



# 3.1 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

### **General Comments:**

- Surface parked sites are more economical and preferred to structured parking in current post COVID market.
- Industrial and Multifamily uses are doing great post COVID. Retail and Office are suffering. Adaptive reuse projects for Office market are working fine. New construction is hard.
- Ground floor retail drives cost and needs to be cost effective. Scale and cost of construction matters. 20% retail on multifamily is challenging to make work. Consider lower retail ground floor requirements.

### **What would you say are the strengths of the Buford Highway/City of Norcross area as far as attracting new development is concerned?**

- Quaint downtown with gorgeous park and new modern library project.
- Historic downtown is getting better and has more identity as it expands towards the highway without letting generic development enter back from the highway.
- City should concentrate development closer to downtown in the near term. Expand on the downtown energy.
- Build up Buford Highway around the downtown and pick a node or two to focus on.
- Proximity to transportation corridors – Buford Highway, I-85, I-285.
- City has shown good leadership.

- Growth must be organic. What drives Norcross? Which way will it grow?

### **What would you say are some of the barriers/weaknesses in the area as far as attracting new development is considered?**

#### *Design Barriers:*

- Tight/small sites along the corridor.
- Stormwater costs are high.
- Environmental issues along Buford Highway.
- Buford Highway lacks identity. High traffic corridor lacking character.
- Lot of destination places are tucked in. Need better exposure, connection, and access.
- Crossing Buford Highway is challenging.
- Buford Highway is considered to be more of an economic cliff. Must bridge the gap.

#### *Market Barriers:*

- Getting projects of scale to actual affect the values.
- Many land owners makes assemblage and financing hard.
- Educating developers on the process.
- Established rents in such submarkets are not sufficient for market deals without a partnership.
- Listen to the market experts. Follow their road map.

#### *Leadership Barriers:*

- Political undercurrents – bias for some developers through inside connections
- City has a reputation of being hard to work with.

- Be careful about irrational visions. Cannot always get what you want. Choose things that will pay for themselves and have multiple uses.

***What kind of assistance/incentives/funding/tools, in what form would encourage you to invest in the area? How can the City make it easier to invest?***

- Tax abatement for or subsidized parking decks built/sponsored by the City.
- Bonds for Title (Industrial Development Bonds).
- TADs might not be very useful as the area has no projects of a scale large enough to create any value. Also, School board is not tied to the TAD.
- Help with land assemblage. DDA buying land and helping with assemblage and getting the site ready.
- Free or discounted land.
- Protection for developers in this high-risk post COVID market.
- Master Plan and Vision
  - Have a concrete master plan with implementation timeline. Stick to it.
  - Help developers understand the vision – Education and exposure.
  - Be cooperative as a partner. City should invest in real work like beautification, signage, streetscapes, sewer, and infrastructure along with studies and reports.
  - Follow-up with developers after the study.

***Do you have any case studies of any projects your company did in similar areas that could provide a reference for new development here?***

- Chamblee and Buford Highway
- Suwanee
- Duluth (District at Duluth’s retail is not the strongest. Parking in the back is not conducive)
- Sugar Hill
- Sandy Springs
- Lawrenceville – bought chunks of land strategically and used them for development over time
- Greenville Downtown
- Woodstock
- Project on Holcomb Bridge/Buford Highway
- Oliver at Chamblee – vertical mixed use where commercial has struggled. Does not work everywhere.
- Kennesaw – Parking exchange.
- Sugar Walk Apartments – retail and residential separated – 70% leased.
- Meadow Walk apartments – surface park approach.

The following pages provide images of the examples mentioned above.

# 3.1 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## COMMUNITY MEETING

### **Public Engagement**

The community meeting was hosted on November 10, 2020 online via Zoom. 42 community members attended this meeting. Attendees included study area residents, business owners/representatives, city officials, city staff, and nonprofit organizations. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the community to the study process, the goals of the study, and to gain feedback on vision and development potential. Meeting attendees were engaged in a visual preference survey and Zoom Breakout Rooms for open discussion. Following is a summary of the visual preference survey and Breakout Room Discussion

### **Visual Preference Survey**

The Zoom meeting utilized the Poll feature to gather input on several case study examples of development types and streetscape characters. The results of the voting provided the team with a better idea of the mix of uses, scale, and character of development and streetscapes the participants prefer. Participants were also asked to provide comments of why they loved, like, or hated an image in the Zoom Chat Box feature.

Figures 3.1B through G provide summary notes and feedback from the Visual Preference Survey.

### **Breakout Room Discussion**

Following the Visual Preference Survey exercise, participants were divided into four breakout rooms to discuss the following questions: What are the area strengths? What is working that you would like to keep? What is not working that you would

like to see changed? What is missing that you would like to see in the study area? What are the barriers to implementation and growth in the study area?

Following is a summary of the breakout room discussions:

What are the area strengths? What is working that you would like to keep?

- Retain existing businesses, international businesses.
- Diversity
- Location and access.
- Small town charm in Downtown.
- Downtown investment: greenspace, library.
- Great parks/greenspace.

What is not working that you would like to see changed?

- Building facades need to be beautified along the corridor.
- Beautify streetscape, make more walkable, improved landscaping.
- Improve pedestrian crossings along Buford Highway.
- Concern with new development removing small, businesses and unique international character along the corridor.
- Blocked views of the park from new development.
- Too many auto-oriented businesses.
- Lack of parking in Downtown.

# PROJECT GOALS

What is missing that you would like to see in the study area?

- Transit: large employers are attracted to better transit access.
- Connect Buford Highway to Downtown - how to pull traffic off the corridor into downtown; trail connectivity; wider sidewalks; pedestrian crossing improvements on Buford Highway
- Parking deck to address lack of parking in downtown.
- Gateway signage.
- Inter-parcel connectivity.

What are the barriers to implementation and growth in the study area?

- Existing traffic on Buford Highway, impacts walkability and access.
- Creating a consensus
- Market challenges: used car market works; existing shopping centers cash flow positive - little incentive to sell/redevelop.
- Land acquisition.
- Displacement of small businesses - how to retain existing small businesses.
- Funding.

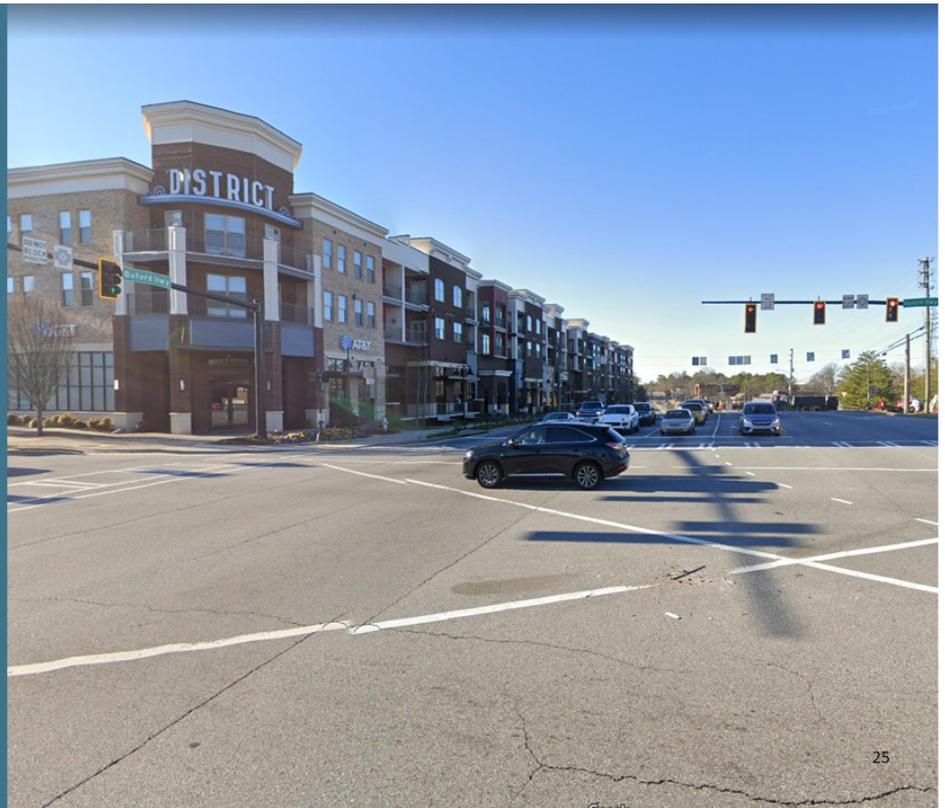
Based on the feedback provided by the City Council, DDA, Steering Committee and Public, the following goals were identified to drive recommendations in this master planning process.

1. Preserve and enhance the community character: multi-cultural character of the corridor and the small-town historic character of Downtown
2. Create a destination, places to walk to
3. Connect to Downtown
4. Enhance transit along corridor
5. Increase safety for pedestrians and cyclist – crossings/intersections
6. Beautify
7. Green/open space is important to the community
8. Mix of incomes and affordability
9. Address parking

## DISTRICT AT DULUTH

Love it! = 6%  
Like It. = 79%  
Hate it. = 15%

**Notable comments from chat window:** Looks good. But also looks like every development in Georgia; Like it. When we are up there, I feel the sidewalks are too small to enjoy walking there with cars zooming by. Needs wider sidewalk to make it feel less intimidating and confined.



25

FIGURE 3.1B VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS DEVELOPMENT

## SUWANEE TOWN CENTER

Love it! = 47%  
Like it. = 41%  
Hate it = 13%

**Notable comments from chat window:** With a greenway along Buford Highway, this would be great; the greenspace is visible from street. The openness you feel when visiting and walking the area.



27

## BUFORD

Love it! = 11%  
Like it = 64%  
Hate it = 25%

**Notable comments from chat window:** Like the setback from the main highway but it still looks very inviting; Norcross corridor does not have the land compared to Buford. Parking would be impossible along with traffic; underground power lines along Buford Highway would be great; Don't like parking in front. Feels generic like every other mini shopping area. Missing charm.



FIGURE 3.1C VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS DEVELOPMENT

## SMYRNA

Love it! = 17%  
Like it = 43%  
Hate it = 40%

**Notable comments from chat window:** I visited Smyrna a while ago and felt comfortable parking and walking around the space without worry of being run over; Love the streets and shrubs; the street lights make for a consistent look for the area.



## NORTH DECATUR

Love it! = 6%  
Like it = 29%  
Hate it = 65%

**Notable comments from chat window:** too close to the highway; sits too close to the road, doesn't have a cohesive feel; this is a safe way to handle the mixed use since the residential is separated from the commercial. The streetscape along the commercial areas.

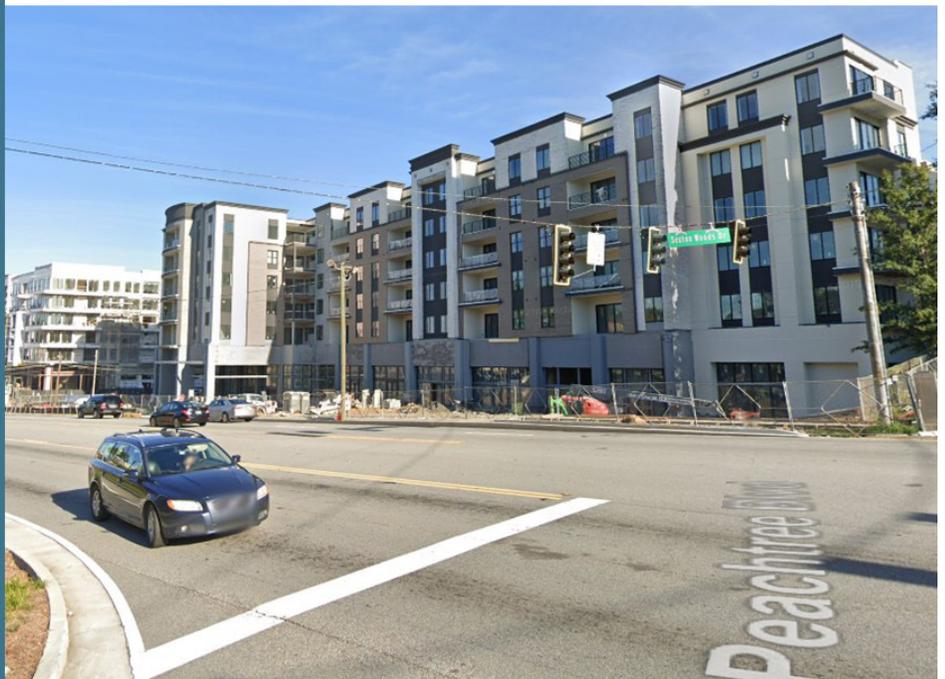


FIGURE 3. 1D VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS: DEVELOPMENT

## CHAMBLEE

Love it! = 6%  
Like it = 39%  
Hate it = 56%

**Notable comments from chat window:** too close to the highway; way too dense. Perfect for near transit, but not in historical city



## Buford Highway Chamblee

Love it! = 15%

Like it = 70%

Hate it = 15%

**Notable comments from chat window:** love the sidewalks and trees. The matching light poles. Like the benches; like the wireless street signal lights; our area of BuHi should be pedestrian only.



FIGURE 3.1E VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS: STREETSCAPES

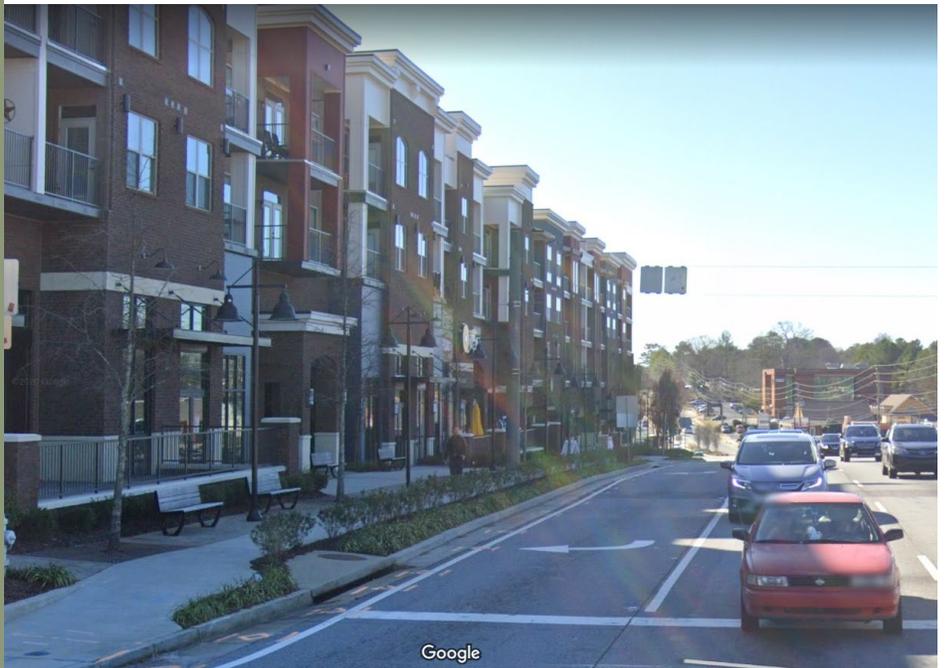
## Buford Highway Duluth

Love it! = 18%

Like it = 59%

Hate it = 24%

**Notable comments from chat window:** love the benches, sidewalk, lighting; love the brick and the trees. Hate the claustrophobic feel; dislike the lack of space between the buildings to the street.



## Buford Highway Suwannee

Love it! = 0%  
Like it = 26%  
Hate it = 74%

**Notable comments from chat window:** not inviting, would not enjoy walking along the road. Does not have any curb appeal; narrowing roads will create more traffic bottlenecks.



42  
sizemoregroup

FIGURE 3.1F VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS: STREETSCAPES

## Magnolia Avenue Knoxville

Love it! = 47%  
Like it = 38%  
Hate it = 16%

**Notable comments from chat window:** I like the well-defined sidewalks; looks like a college campus; traffic is too heavy on BuHi to consider a bike lane/dangerous; love the bus pull-in idea. Like the buffer of trees between sidewalk and street.



46  
sizemoregroup

## McDonough Street Decatur

Love it! = 23%  
Like it = 57%  
Hate it = 20%

**Notable comments from chat window:** would love to see bike lanes incorporated somewhere, not sure about this one; would love bike paths but a 1.5 mile stretch is useless if not part of a much larger bike trail system; I love it but cannot see it in the corridor due to space.



size more group 44

**FIGURE 3.1G VISUAL PREFERENCE RESULTS: STREETSCAPES**

# 3.1 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## DESIGN WORKSHOP

### *Design Workshop*

The Design Workshop was held on December 1, 2020 virtually, via Zoom. The intensive 4-hour hands-on format brought together the consultant team and City of Norcross staff to create development and transportation concepts based on feedback received from the City Council, DDA, Steering Committee, and community.

The workshop began with a welcome and project overview of previous studies, site analysis, stakeholder and community input, land condition findings, market analysis, and transportation findings of the study area. The remainder of the time was a hands on work session, in which the team developed recommendations for the Buford Highway Master Plan study area. Discussions during the workshop included:

### *General Points Of Discussion*

- Identity:
  - Bring architectural materials and character from Downtown Norcross to the corridor.
  - What would make this corridor unique?
- How do you make Buford Highway more walkable?
  - Can we lower the speed limit through downtown on Buford Highway? Suwannee was able to reduce speed limit to 35 mph.
  - Can we get enough separation from the street to make development walkable?
- Transportation/Landscape:

- Inter-parcel connectivity.
- Shade structures/trees along the corridor.
- Do not take away lanes – could narrow; median.
- Bus schedule: One every 30 minutes to one/hour. Has high ridership for the County system. Consider enhanced bus shelters.
- Beautification needed along the corridor.

### *Market Potential:*

- Consider Townhome development 70-80 units.
- Apartments 700 units in the 5-year demand (2-3 offerings).
- 55+ Apartments 200 units.
- Senior Housing 90 beds.
- Keep multi-family along Buford Highway.
- Retail 50,000 Square Feet.
  - Mostly food/beverage/service (some ground floor retail or independent) - local servicing; residential will increase this demand or become a regional draw; leverage historic downtown to draw destination appeal.
- Conventional Office 130,000 Square Feet.
- New construction is difficult – consider incentive programs; mixed use environment on ground floor of residential; retail centers to convert; creative office environment could be a future adaptive reuse on industrial in area.

- Lodging: Do not anticipate anything in 5 years.
- Flex Commercial: Industrial currently performs really well – likely not to be converted anytime soon.
- No market for Grocery Store.
- Parking: structured needs offset for pricing.
- Avoid retail products like Oliver at Chamblee where retail is on major corridor, set back, with no parking in front of it.
- Following parcels were added to the list of “A” Sites as per Consultant Team suggestion. These are potential sites ready for redevelopment.
  - Carter Crossing – Ripe
  - Amigo Plaza – Ripe
  - Norcross Plaza – Close to ripe
- Possibility of a performance arts/cultural arts center.
- Centered around “Imagine Buford Highway” theme.
- Family-feel.
- Map of where restaurants are along Buford Highway?
- Food fair at Lillian Webb Park .
- Pocket parks – connect along the corridor – outdoor eating/play.

### *Conceptual Development Strategies*

- Connect Magnolia Street through residential to allow for accessory dwelling units.
- Focus on a few main sites for redevelopment.
- Strategies to get the ball rolling – activate strip mall parking lots.
  - Night markets; vendors in parking lots; events; annual city-wide festival – streets alive – event in street on Buford Highway.
  - Tactical urbanism for pandemic environment.
  - Traffic Control Plan during road closures for events.



# 79

**4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.1 CONCEPT PLAN OVERVIEW

This section presents the Norcross Buford Highway Master Plan recommendations and design concepts for redevelopment. Recommendations focus on redevelopment potential, corridor beautification, and creating a community identity.

The Plan aims to create a collective vision to guide the future of the Buford Highway study area, particularly focused on key commercial nodes, with a goal of developing a walkable, attractive corridor - a gateway into Norcross - that highlights the history of Downtown Norcross and the cultural heritage of the corridor. It is also critical to the success of the master plan to honor and enhance the historic and unique immigrant communities that strengthen the study area.

The plan aims to achieve this goal through three areas of focus:

- Development Nodes
- Corridor Enhancements
- The Norcross Identity

## 4.2 DEVELOPMENT NODES

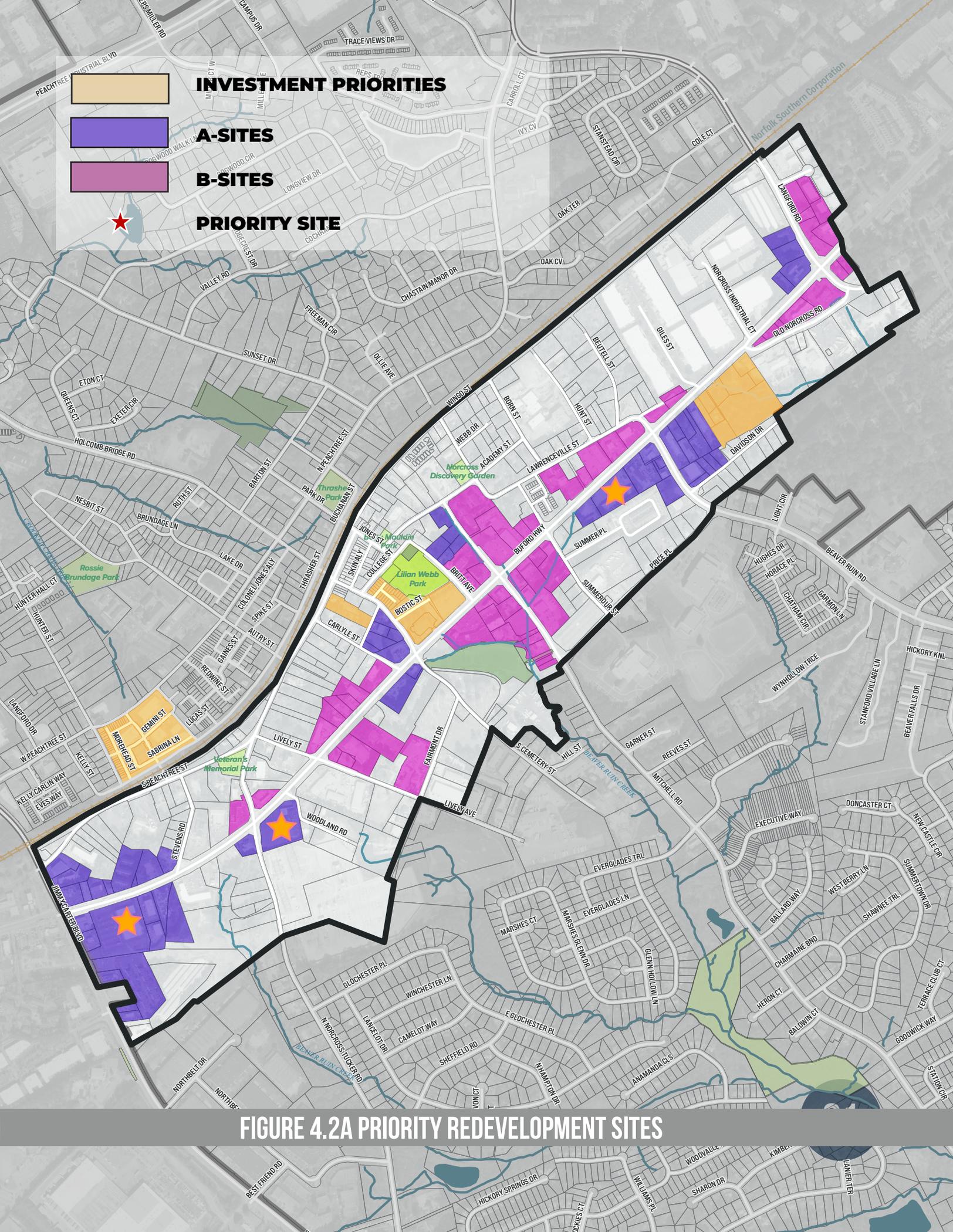
### Development Nodes

Sites with redevelopment potential were identified throughout this process and were the bedrock of focus and recommendations. Figure 4.2A identifies priority, or A-sites, and secondary, or B-sites, for redevelopment. A-sites are defined as such due to their location - at major intersections or parcels adjacent to downtown

**A thriving multi-modal and multi-cultural corridor that serves the diverse Norcross population and connects to the character, charm, and beauty of Downtown Norcross.**

investment, site and building conditions that lack investment, and/or high vacancies/tenant turnover. A-sites with a star have been further confirmed as key redevelopment sites due to land/building values being within a range that aligns with the cost of development within current market constraints - to put it simply, these sites have the potential to move quickly in today's market. B-sites are identified due to their adjacency to A-sites and have site and building conditions that have not seen recent investment. These sites are anticipated to see reinvestment/redevelopment after the A-sites have successfully redeveloped/reinvested.

Based on the site identification and key gateways into the City of Norcross, three development nodes were identified. Each node has its own character and opportunities based on its location and proximity to existing assets and amenities.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.2 DEVELOPMENT NODES

All nodes focus on opportunities for mixed-use, mixed-income redevelopment - housing, retail, office, and civic, while identifying buildings that can be preserved and offer retrofit options. Based on market analysis, it is understood that new-build stand alone office and retail is not feasible in the current market. However, based on existing land values, new build higher density residential - townhomes or multi-family - are the most economical, financially realistic option. Office and retail can be incorporated into residential developments to create a true mixed-use environment, while penciling out on development proformas. Existing buildings lend themselves to be retrofitted for creative office, restaurants and retail. It is recommended to find opportunities to retrofit current buildings, as appropriate.

The key nodes of focus in this report are:

### **1. Downtown Node**

The Downtown Node continues to build from the investment and energy in downtown by infilling key sites in and surrounding the historic downtown area. This node bridges over Buford Highway with infill development on the south side of the corridor connected with improved pedestrian crossings.

### **2. Jimmy Carter Node**

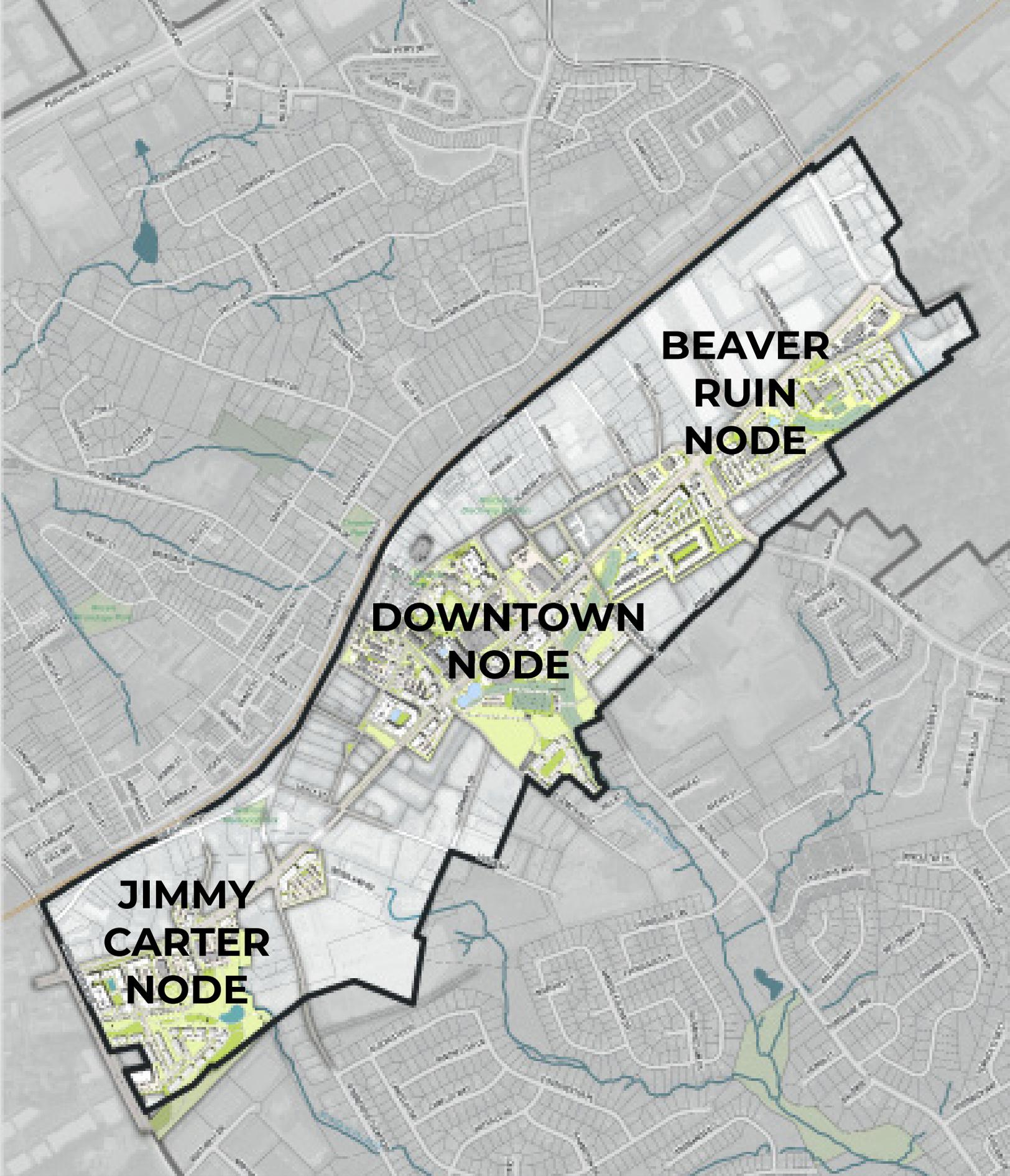
The Jimmy Carter Node is centered on the southeastern portion of the intersection of Buford Highway and Jimmy Carter Boule-

vard. Proposed development is centered around greenspace and trails that connect to the greater proposed trail systems and parks in the area.

### **3. Beaver Ruin Node**

The Beaver Ruin Node is focused at Buford Highway and Beaver Ruin Road. This node introduces higher density mixed use development intermingled with retrofit of existing buildings into creative office and commercial space.

The following sections provides detail on the redevelopment node recommendations.



**FIGURE 4.2B DEVELOPMENT NODES**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.2A DOWNTOWN NODE

The Downtown Node is focused on building from the energy and investment in Downtown Norcross to infill underutilized sites, particularly around Lillian Webb Park, and to extend the downtown vision to Buford Highway.

### Development

The Downtown Node is envisioned to be a walkable, connected, lively district with a mix of uses. Highest densities are focused along the Buford Highway corridor, with a transition of height and density to the north and south as development integrates with the historic downtown character, to the north, and residential character to the south. Refer to Figure 4.2D.

To support the proposed higher density along Buford Highway in this node, parking decks are incorporated into high density, mixed use development concepts. While the market does not currently support parking decks, it is recommended for the City to help supplement parking structures in and near Downtown to allow for the activity that higher density will bring and to address lack of parking concerns in the Downtown district.

The vision for this node also takes into account preserving and reutilizing existing buildings. The market analysis indicated that new building office and retail is not feasible with current land values, so reuse of existing buildings will allow for a diverse economy and mix of uses in this node. Additionally, preserving existing structures allows for the preservation of existing businesses, maintaining the character and

feel of Norcross. This can most notably be seen in the Skin Alley Extension, noted as “8” in Figure 4.2D, where existing industrial buildings are reutilized, and south of Buford Highway at Centro Norcross Shopping Center, where much of the existing buildings are maintained and the parking lot infilled with new high density development.

The Norcross Cultural Arts & Community Center lies within this node. This master plan recommends enhancing this existing asset into a more robust community center, preserving the historic portion of the building and the rectory and incorporating a new building into surrounding redevelopment. This new building may accommodate a new, larger theater space, event venue, and/or meeting rooms.

In addition, this plan considers the option of a new performing arts center. Several locations for this new facility are proposed in the Figure 4.2D, including next to the existing Cultural Arts Center, just north of Lillian Webb Park, and on Buford Highway. This facility could serve as a destination attractor and complement the existing cultural event spaces to create a more visible performing arts district. It can also catalyze development - restaurants often accompany this type of venue and create potential to attract more restaurants in addition to those Downtown. However, it should be noted, that a larger performing arts center, in many cases, requires supplemental funding from the jurisdiction. A feasibility study is recommended to ensure a larger venue is marketable and to understand the cost to build and maintain such a facility.

### Walkability

Walkability and connectivity is highlighted in this concept with enhanced crossings at Mitchell Road and Buford Highway and Holcomb Bridge Road and Buford High-

way. A pedestrian bridge is proposed to cross Buford Highway either near Holcomb Bridge and/or at the new library to provide a conflict free crossing. This also provides an opportunity for gateway signage and branding as travelers enter Downtown Norcross from the west on Buford Highway. Additionally, alleyways are incorporated into new development as an acknowledgment of Skin Alley and the historic block structure of Downtown, while also providing improved pedestrian access and opportunities to create unique and engaging pedestrian environments. Alleyways may incorporate lighting, art, outdoor dining, seating, and become places for events and gatherings.

### Regional Retention

To address stormwater management in the area and as an incentive to attract development, this study proposes investment in regional retention along Buford Highway. Many of the properties along the corridor were developed prior to current stormwater regulations being enacted and, therefore, will need to be updated to meet today's standards when redeveloped. This carries an additional, and sometimes detrimental, cost to new development. It is recommended that the City, in partnership with the Gateway85 CID and GDOT, consider developing regional stormwater facilities along the corridor. In the Downtown Node a regional retention pond was identified in the Beaver Ruin Creek Trail Concept Study at Buford Highway and South Cemetery Drive. This retention pond is located at the proposed trail head, identified in this same study. As it is also a highly visible site, connecting the north and south sides of Buford Highway, it is recommended to develop the regional retention pond in manner that creates a destination park similar to the Historic Fourth Ward Park in Atlanta. Refer to Figure 4.2C.



FIGURE 4.2C HISTORIC FOURTH WARD PARK

### Trails

As mentioned above, this plan incorporates the trail recommendations per the Beaver Ruin Creek Trail Concept Study with a trail head location at the corner of Buford Highway and South Cemetery Drive. The trail is proposed to follow Beaver Ruin Creek. This plan proposes to extend trail access along the creek tributary to the north-east as well. The Beaver Ruin Creek Trail Concept Study also proposes a trail extension into downtown along a portion of Buford Highway. This plan proposes a multi-use trail along the entirety of the corridor to increase access and mobility. Refer to Section 4.3 for more information on the proposed trail connectivity.

### Phasing

The Downtown Node vision as depicted in Figure 4.2D is a long term 20 year vision. As discussed in Section 4.2 priority sites were identified that have the capability to move sooner. A-sites are likely feasible in the next 5 years, while B-sites may follow in 5-15 years and further infill, as shown, is anticipated to happen later. Figure 4.2D denotes the A-sites to provide a visual of how this overall development concept is anticipated to happen overtime.

- 1 - MIXED-USE MIXED-INCOME RESIDENTIAL/  
OFFICE/RETAIL
- 2 - TOWNHOMES
- 3 - NEW PUBLIC LIBRARY
- 4 - THE BRUNSWICK
- 5 - PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (POTENTIAL)
- 5a - PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (POTENTIAL)/  
RESTAURANT
- 6 - RESTAURANT
- 6a - COMMUNITY FACILITY
- 7 - REGIONAL STORMWATER PARK  
& TRAIL HEAD
- 8 - SKIN ALLEY EXTENSION
- 9 - NEW ALLEY NETWORK



EXISTING DEVELOPMENT  
 NEW DEVELOPMENT  
★ A-SITE

1a - Any proposed residential development at these locations will require review, feedback and direction from Norcross Mayor and Council for conformity with the current City of Norcross Comprehensive Plan before moving to preliminary design.



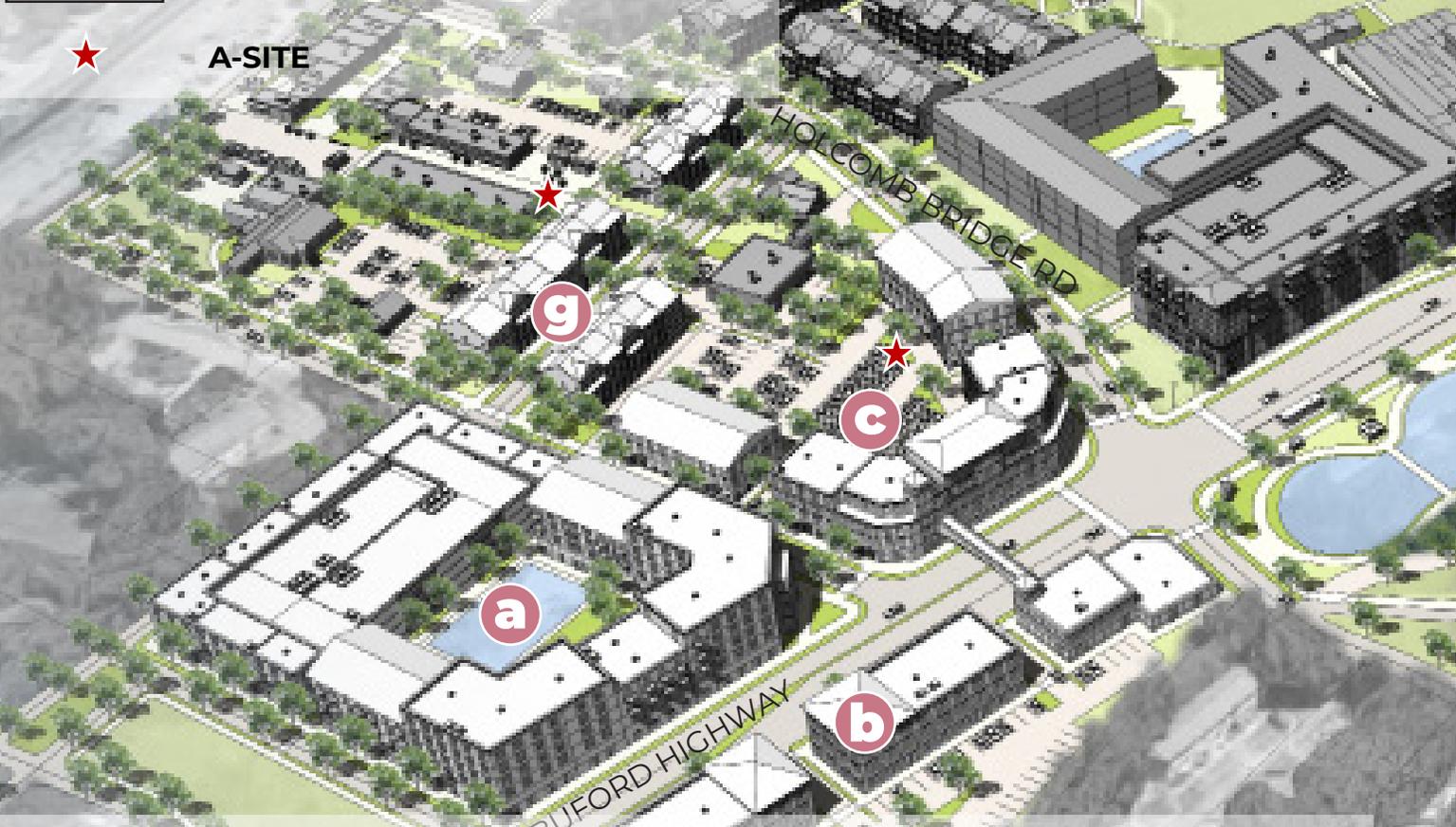
FIGURE 4.2D DOWNTOWN NODE

- a - 150 units (Multi-family)
- b - 35 units (Multi-family)
- c - 90 units (Multi-family)
- d - 30 units (Multi-family)
- e - 70 units (Multi-family)
- f - 15 units (Residential over Retail)
- g - 15 units (Townhomes)
- h - 11 units (Townhomes)
- i - 30 units (Townhomes)
- j - 38 units (Townhomes)
- k - 8 units (Townhomes)
- l - 37 units (Townhomes)

 EXISTING DEVELOPMENT

 NEW DEVELOPMENT

 A-SITE



Market analysis shows a demand for the entire study area over the next five years:

- 70-80 units of townhomes
- 700 units of rental apartments, likely in 2 to 3 offerings of 250-300 each
- 200 units of age-restricted 55+ community
- 90 unit assisted senior housing

These are likely to develop first at the priority sites identified within this plan, starting with downtown opportunities that leverage downtown's investment and energy.

A-sites, which align with the 5-year market projections and are highlighted with a star in the graphic above, show approximately 105 total multi-family units (including 15 residential units over retail) and 15 townhomes in the Downtown Node graphic.



FIGURE 4.2E DOWNTOWN NODE: RESIDENTIAL UNITS



NORCROSS



**FIGURE 4.2F DOWNTOWN NODE: BUFORD HIGHWAY**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.2B JIMMY CARTER NODE

The intent of the Jimmy Carter Node is to create higher density, walkable development along Buford Highway, focused on A-sites that have the greatest potential for redevelopment and greatest visibility to improve the overall look and feel of the corridor.

### **Development**

The Carter Crossing Shopping Center at the southeast corner of Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Buford Highway was identified as a key site for higher density mixed-use mixed-income redevelopment. This site is located at a highly trafficked intersection with great visibility and stands as a gateway into the City of Norcross, making it an ideal site for growth.

This plan recommends housing above retail and office to line the two corridors while parks and water retention can serve as public space in the interior of the parcels. This proposed greenspace takes advantage of the existing Georgia Power utility corridor, undevelopable land, by creating accessible park space for the community. New development can also front this proposed greenspace making it even more desirable.

The parcels south of the proposed greenspace, including the existing Home Towne Studios and Public Storage, become underutilized land with a new park system in place. The plan identifies these areas as having potential for redevelopment into townhome and missing middle housing. Missing middle housing is a range of

house-scale buildings with multiple units, compatible in scale and form with detached single-family homes.

This plan encourages the preservation of existing buildings that can be renovated to creative office or light industrial uses - to keep the market diverse, as well as to maintain spaces for existing businesses to remain in place. Building new commercial construction may prove to be too costly due to current market values.

It should be noted that the Jimmy Carter Node plan does not show much redevelopment on the north side of Buford Highway. These properties will be more difficult to redevelop as they are small parcels with individual owners.

### **Walkability**

Walkability and connectivity is highlighted in this concept with an enhanced crossing at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Buford Highway - an initiative already underway by the Gateway85 CID. A new internal street grid and trail connectivity is incorporated into this plan to ensure walkability is enhanced throughout the area. Additionally, alleyways are incorporated into new development, similarly as mentioned in the Downtown Node, to provide improved pedestrian access throughout, and as opportunities to create unique and engaging pedestrian environments. Alleyways may incorporate lighting, art, outdoor dining, seating, and become places for events and gatherings.

## **Regional Retention**

Similar to the Downtown Node, many of these parcels were developed prior to current stormwater regulations being enacted and, therefore, will need to be updated to meet today's standards when redeveloped. To address stormwater management in the area and as an incentive to attract development, this plan proposes investment in regional retention. In the Jimmy Carter Node a regional retention pond is proposed at a low point of the site within the Georgia Power utility corridor. This pond is recommended to be developed as an amenity to the proposed park space, making it attractive and accessible to the community. Consider partnerships with the Gateway85 CID, Georgia Department of Transportation, and Georgia Power.

## **Trails**

Trail connectivity is proposed within the utility corridor greenspace, connecting to the proposed trails from the Beaver Run Creek Trail Concept Study to the east and to Gwinnett County's Best Friend Park to the west, increasing the community's regional access and the site's development lure. Further trail connectivity is envisioned along Buford Highway with a proposed multi-use trail along the entirety of the corridor. Refer to Section 4.3 for more information on the proposed trail connectivity.

## **Phasing**

The Jimmy Carter Node vision as depicted in Figure 4.2G is a long term 20 year vision. As discussed in Section 4.2 priority sites were identified that have the capability to move sooner. Figure 4.2G denotes the A-sites to provide a visual of how this overall development concept is anticipated to happen overtime.

- 1 - MIXED-USE MIXED-INCOME RESIDENTIAL/  
OFFICE/RETAIL
- 2 - TOWNHOMES
- 3 - COMMERCIAL
- 4 - COMMUNITY GREEN
- 5 - REGIONAL STORMWATER PARK
- 6 - TRAIL NETWORK
- 7 - PUBLIC STORAGE FACILITY



EXISTING DEVELOPMENT



NEW DEVELOPMENT



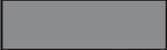
A-SITE





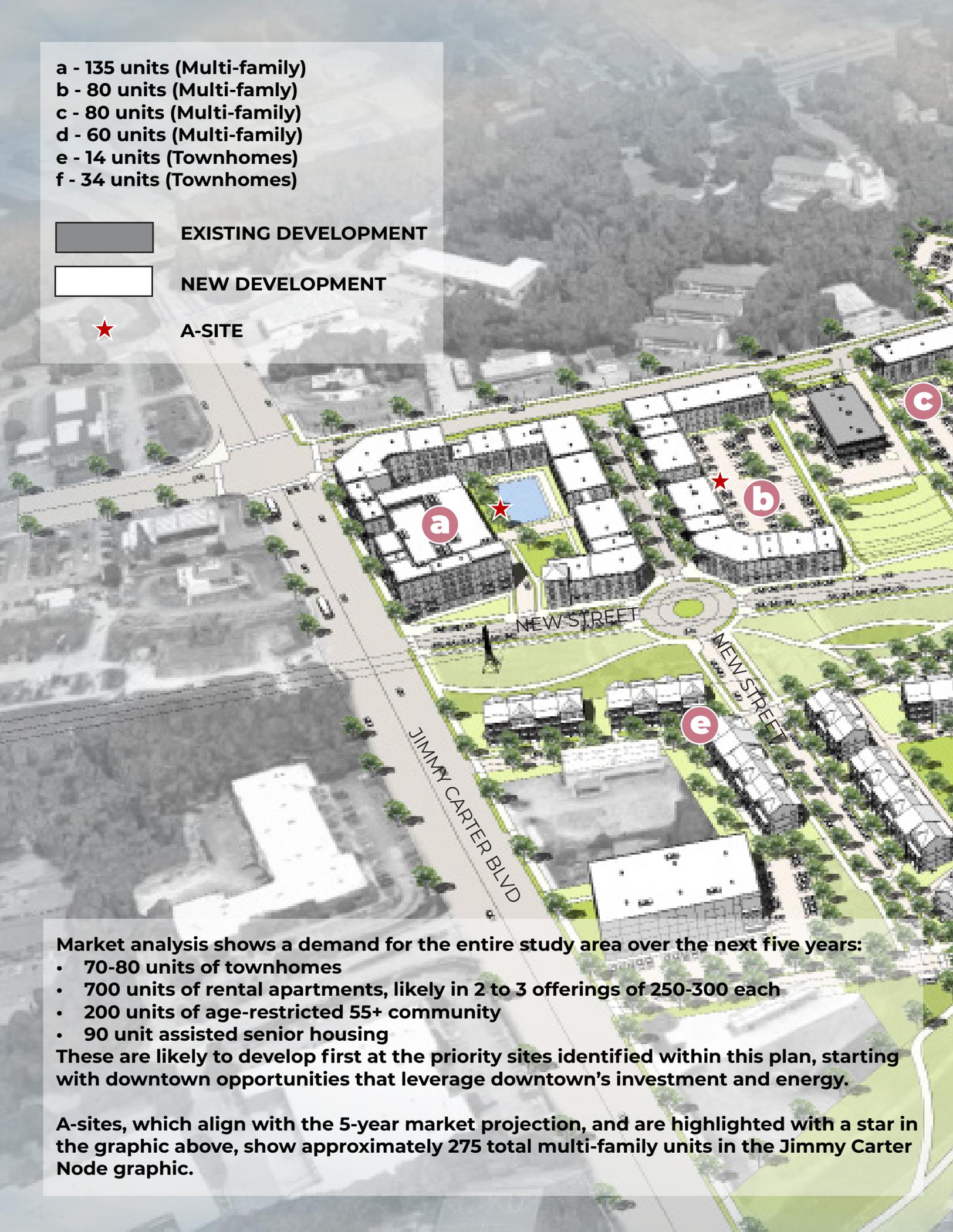
FIGURE 4.2G JIMMY CARTER NODE

- a - 135 units (Multi-family)
- b - 80 units (Multi-family)
- c - 80 units (Multi-family)
- d - 60 units (Multi-family)
- e - 14 units (Townhomes)
- f - 34 units (Townhomes)

 EXISTING DEVELOPMENT

 NEW DEVELOPMENT

 A-SITE



Market analysis shows a demand for the entire study area over the next five years:

- 70-80 units of townhomes
- 700 units of rental apartments, likely in 2 to 3 offerings of 250-300 each
- 200 units of age-restricted 55+ community
- 90 unit assisted senior housing

These are likely to develop first at the priority sites identified within this plan, starting with downtown opportunities that leverage downtown's investment and energy.

A-sites, which align with the 5-year market projection, and are highlighted with a star in the graphic above, show approximately 275 total multi-family units in the Jimmy Carter Node graphic.



FIGURE 4.2H JIMMY CARTER NODE: RESIDENTIAL UNITS

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.2C BEAVER RUIN NODE

Similar to the Jimmy Carter Node, the Beaver Ruin Node is focused on creating higher density, walkable development along Buford Highway, focused on A-sites that have the greatest potential for redevelopment and greatest visibility to improve the overall look and feel of the corridor.

### **Development**

The Beaver Ruin Node focuses new development at the corner of Beaver Ruin Road and Buford Highway. This highly trafficked intersection provides a great opportunity for mixed-use development, providing needed visibility and access for retail and restaurant uses. The new development labeled “1” in Figure 4.2I, is proposed housing above retail on a portion of the ground floor. Office may also be intermixed into this development. A restaurant is proposed on the western edge of the development to front the greenspace and new townhome development infills to the south. Along Beaver Ruin Road lower density retail/office with some residential is proposed. This lower density balances with parking requirements in a surface parked environment. As the market does not support parking decks, unless subsidized, this entire node is designed in a manner that meets surface parking requirements and balances land use and density accordingly.

The gas station at the corner of Buford Highway and Beaver Ruin Road is shown as remaining, as this type of land use is difficult to change due to cost of land and environmental clean-up. It is also a necessary use along the corridor and service the

community utilizes. However, this corner and the adjacent corners at the Buford Highway and Beaver Ruin Road intersection should be leveraged for their visibility and incorporate gateway signage and enhanced landscaping to welcome visitors and establish a unique destination.

This plan aims to preserve existing buildings, as appropriate, to safeguard existing businesses and provide opportunities for creative office and light industrial along the corridor. This can be seen at the southeast corner of Buford Highway and Beaver Ruin Road where commercial buildings are preserved and infilled with new development. Additionally, the buildings at Buford Highway and Lawrenceville Street are preserved and circulation is enhanced with inter-parcel connectivity and improved landscaping.

Townhome infill is recommended in this node to maximize currently underutilized lots. The proximity to the Boys and Girls Club and their playing fields can be a further attraction for townhome development.

### **Walkability**

As with the other nodes, walkability is important. Improved streetscapes, a mid-block crossing on Buford Highway between Beaver Ruin Road and Summerour Street, enhanced crosswalk at Beaver Ruin Road and Buford Highway, and connectivity to surrounding developments will improve safety and create a more desirable walking environment.

## **Regional Retention**

Regional retention is proposed to be established at the low point of the node near the existing stream at the intersection of Buford Highway and Summerour Street. Much of this property is undevelopable due to the stream and associated buffers, therefore, it is recommended to leverage the retention pond to create a pocket park on this corner site. This park amenity has the potential to attract development as proposed. Consider partnerships with the Gateway85 CID and Georgia Department of Transportation.

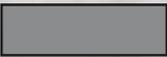
## **Trails**

Trail connectivity at the Beaver Ruin Node, is proposed to incorporate the trail system as identified in the Beaver Ruin Creek Trail Concept Study which extends north on Beaver Ruin Road along Buford Highway. As mentioned previously, Buford Highway is recommended to incorporate a multi-use trail on both sides of the roadway along it's entire length through the City. Refer to Section 4.3 for more information on the proposed trail connectivity.

## **Phasing**

The Beaver Ruin Node vision as depicted in Figure 4.2I is a long term 20 year vision. As discussed in Section 4.2 priority sites were identified that have the capability to move sooner. Figure 4.2I denotes the A-sites to provide a visual of how this overall development concept is anticipated to happen overtime.

- 1 - MIXED USE MIXED-INCOME RESIDENTIAL/  
OFFICE/RETAIL
- 2 - TOWNHOMES
- 3 - CREATIVE FLEX OFFICE/RETAIL
- 4 - RESTAURANT FRONTING A POCKET PARK
- 5 - GATEWAY SIGNAGE
- 6 - MID-BLOCK CROSSING
- 7 - REGIONAL STORMWATER PARK
- 8 - BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

 EXISTING DEVELOPMENT

 NEW DEVELOPMENT

 A-SITE





FIGURE 4.21 BEAVER RUIN NODE

- a - 70 units (Multi-family)
- b - 8 units (Multi-family)
- c - 8 units (Multi-family)
- d - 82 units (Townhomes)
- e - 48 units (Townhomes)
- f - 14 units (Townhomes)

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT

NEW DEVELOPMENT

A-SITE



LAWRENCEVILLE STREET

BUFORD HIGHWAY

SUMMEROUR STREET

BUFORD HIGHWAY

EXISTING TOWNHOMES

a

f



Market analysis shows a demand for the entire study area over the next five years:

- 70-80 units of townhomes
- 700 units of rental apartments, likely in 2 to 3 offerings of 250-300 each
- 200 units of age-restricted 55+ community
- 90 unit assisted senior housing

These are likely to develop first at the priority sites identified within this plan, starting with downtown opportunities that leverage downtown's investment and energy.

A-sites, which align with the 5-year market projection, and are highlighted with a star in the graphic above, show approximately 78 total multi-family units in the Beaver Ruin Node graphic.

**FIGURE 4.2J BEAVER RUIN NODE: RESIDENTIAL UNITS**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.3 CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

Corridor enhancements are focused on creating a more attractive, safe, and connected Buford Highway. Strategies include streetscape beautification, inter-parcel connectivity, safe pedestrian and bicycle crossings, and trails connectivity.

### Streetscape Beautification

Beautification of the public right-of-way along Buford Highway can go a long way to improve the look and feel of this corridor. Figures 4.3A and B highlight an improved streetscape with a multi-use trail on either side of the corridor, street trees and improved landscaping and a landscaped median extended along the entire corridor. This vision works within the existing right-of-way and keeps the curb in place to avoid high cost reconstruction of curb and gutter.

The streetscape section consists of a five-foot landscape strip from the back of the curb, a ten-foot divided sidewalk for pedestrian foot and bicycle traffic, and a varying landscape furniture strip from the back of sidewalk to the edge of the right-of-way.

There are many benefits of having the five-foot landscape strip between the roadway and sidewalk including increased safety and comfort for pedestrians, an enhanced visual aesthetic along the roadway, and protection from vehicular spray.

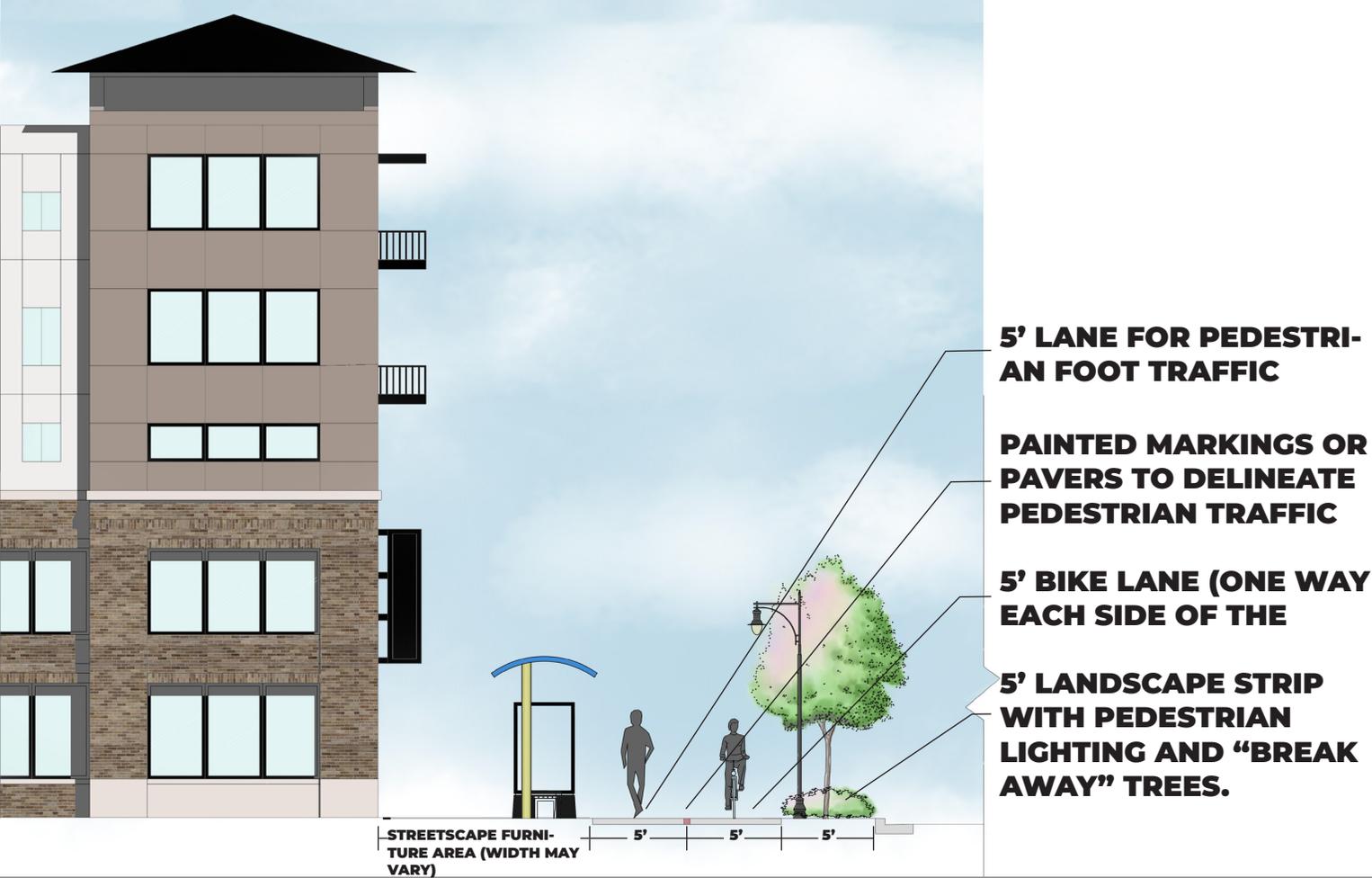
The ten-foot divided sidewalk will allow pedestrians on foot and on bike to safely share the path by using markings and signage to delineate the lanes. In the Decatur



FIGURE 4.3A DECATUR STREETScape EXAMPLE

case study, Figure 4.3C, bike flow is separated by having one lane going in each direction on opposite sides of the street. This helps with traffic flow and safety at intersections where accidents may occur. Having the bike lane closest to the curb eliminates bicycle traffic from having to cross foot traffic when making a left turn.

A landscape furniture strip adjacent to the sidewalk gives space for street trees, utilities, pedestrian seating as well as transit stop shelters. This space will extend to the edge of the right-of-way as a transition from public to private property. The width of this strip may vary along Buford Highway depending on the available right-of-way.



**FIGURE 4.3B PROPOSED STREETSCAPE**



**FIGURE 4.3C PROPOSED STREETSCAPE**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.3 CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

### Inter-parcel Connectivity

Inter-parcel access is described as a connection between adjacent properties that allows for vehicular access without utilizing the roadway facility. This is an important operational and safety feature that can greatly enhance a community. By providing connections between parcels, the number of driveway access points is reduced. This reduces the number of conflict points for vehicular traffic exiting the driveways and it also reduces the number of locations where vehicular traffic would conflict with bicycle and pedestrians. An additional benefit of inter-parcel access is that by reducing the number of access points, the need for providing opportunities for left turning traffic is diminished. This allows for more efficient flow on the roadway and would allow for additional landscaped medians to be installed.

It is important to note that inter-parcel access may result in the existing developments having to reconstruct or adjust their current parking and circulation so as cross traffic doesn't conflict or cause safety concerns. Another challenge is the possibility of differing elevations between adjacent parcels. If the elevation difference is significant, then an inter-parcel access impact may be prohibitive.

One important consideration is at the median break locations, the ability to accommodate a U-turn must be evaluated. One technique is to provide an "eyebrow" or additional width on the shoulder that

would allow a longer wheel-base vehicle the ability to make the U-turn without encroaching over the curb and onto the sidewalk. It has been observed on facilities without "eyebrows", vehicles do drive up on the curb or, alternately, back up and make a staged turn. Both of these operations are unsafe and can be mitigated by providing this additional width. Refer to Figure 4.3D for an example of an "eyebrow".

Figures 4.3 G and H provide examples of how inter-parcel connectivity can be achieved along the Buford Highway corridor. In tandem with the City's inter-parcel connectivity ordinance, these diagrams provide guidance on how and where this strategy may be achieved. The full packet of inter-parcel connectivity diagrams can be found in the appendix.

### Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety

Buford Highway can be a dangerous environment for pedestrians and cyclist, therefore, this plan prioritizes safe pedestrian crossings. Strategies to improve the pedestrian environment include:

- **Enhanced Crosswalks** Painted and beautified crosswalks with pedestrian signals can be placed on city-owned streets, but state roads, such as Buford Highway, are limited to simple striping or painted brick style crossings as shown in Figure 4.3E.
- **Mid-block Crosswalks** Mid-block crossings with HAWK signals, pedestrian hybrid beacon signal, or Rapid Flashing Beacon signals should be considered a strategic crossing locations along the corridor. This plan recommends placement within the node development plans.



FIGURE 4.3D U-TURN “EYEBROW” EXAMPLE



FIGURE 4.3E PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLIST SAFETY

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.3 CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

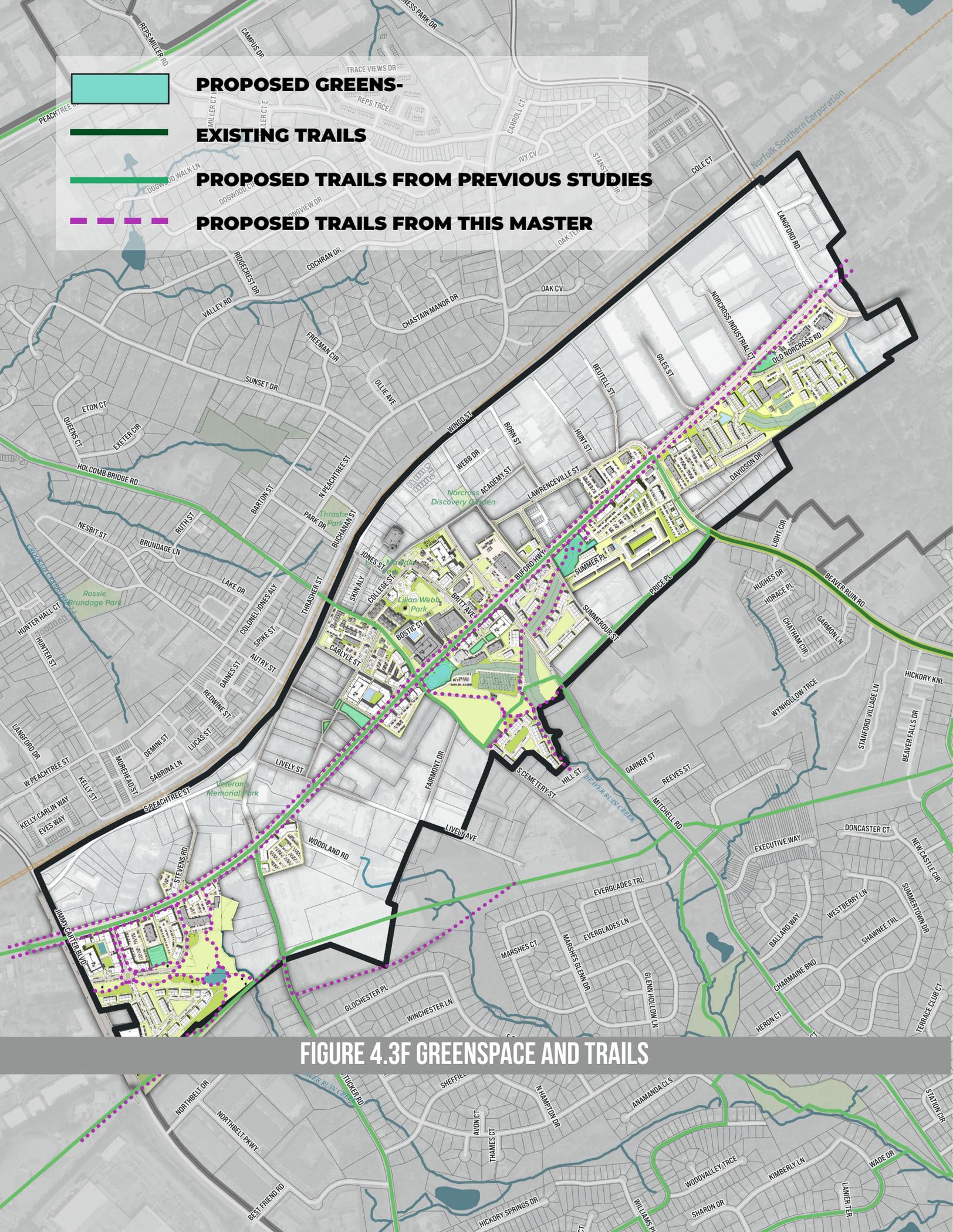
- **Pedestrian Bridge** A pedestrian bridge is a more expensive option, but it can provide a conflict-free crossing for pedestrians/cyclists across Buford Highway. A pedestrian bridge is recommended in the Downtown Node and can act as a welcome sign and feature into Downtown Norcross. If the City goes with this option, it should be implemented along with new development on both sides of the Highway so it provides destinations on both sides. Refer to Figure 4.3F for an example of a pedestrian bridge in the City of Peachtree Corners.



FIGURE 4.3F PEACHTREE CORNERS BRIDGE

### Trails

Trail connectivity is an important element to creating a walkable and bicycle-friendly Buford Highway community. Building from the Beaver Run Creek Trail Concept Study, this plan proposes further connectivity by creating a multi-use trail on both sides of Buford Highway through the city limits. The streetscape enhancement section further describes the dimensions and elements proposed within this multi-use trail. Figure 4.3F highlights the existing proposed trail system with the newly proposed Buford Highway multi-use trail.



**FIGURE 4.3F GREENSPACE AND TRAILS**



**FIGURE 4.3G INTER-PARCEL CONNECTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS**





**FIGURE 4.3H INTER-PARCEL CONNECTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.4 THE NORCROSS IDENTITY

Community and stakeholder input overwhelmingly indicated that as new development occurs, it is important for new building to fit the identity and character of Norcross, maintaining what makes Norcross a one-of-a-kind community and avoid becoming “Anywhere, USA”. To address this physical features were identified that make Norcross unique, examples of which can be found in Figures 4.4A and B:

- Historic Downtown Architecture
- Walkability/Alleyways
- Greenspace
- Events

### Historic Downtown Architecture

Historic Downtown Architecture consists of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commercial buildings. These buildings are generally one- and two story brick masonry structures which share party walls. Brick is used decoratively as well as structurally in the form of piers, pilasters, stringcourses, parapet walls, corbelled cornices, and flat and segmental arched windows. Some of the brick facades have been painted and/or stuccoed, and some storefronts feature cast-iron columns. Some storefronts have been remodeled with aluminum and plate glass. A Neo-classical bank building featuring cut-stone detailing stands at the corner of Peachtree Road and Jones Street. An early-twentieth-century service station stands at the corner of Peachtree Road and Cemetery Street. The depot is a long, low, early-twentieth-century wood-framed building with

two-story bay office windows trackside and wide-bracketed eaves all around.

- **Buildings** To incorporate the historic architecture we recommend providing design standards for preferred types of materials and styles, while keeping this flexible enough to allow for a variety of building styles. Figures 4.4D and E illustrate examples of recent developments in Lawrenceville and Chamblee that honor the historic character and architecture of the area.
- **Creative Bus Shelters** A more tactical approach is to update bus shelters along the corridor with unique shelter design that is representative of the downtown architecture, shown in Figure 4.4C. This plan encourages working with Norcross artists on designs and implementation of these shelters. It is recommended to focus these efforts in the Downtown Node first, as artistic bus shelters cost approximately four times as much as traditional shelters.

The idea for the creative bus stops is to create a unique design for each stop by using variations of colors, materials, and shapes. This will give the corridor an appealing and easily identifiable aesthetic. These shelters should be considered at existing bus stops, near intersections, and any mid-block signal locations to provide shade and seating opportunities for pedestrians to take a rest.

### Walkability and Alleyways

Downtown Norcross is already a walkable destination and improving walkability along Buford Highway and areas adjacent to Downtown is critical to the success of this master plan. All development concepts



FIGURE 4.4A HISTORIC BANK OF NORCROSS



FIGURE 4.4B BETTY MAULDIN PARK



FIGURE 4.4C CREATIVE BUS SHELTERS



FIGURE 4.4D LAWRENCEVILLE DEVELOPMENT



FIGURE 4.4E CHAMBLEE DEVELOPMENT

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.4 THE NORCROSS IDENTITY

encourage walkability through increased access - sidewalks and alleyways; creating reasons to walk - interesting views, places to stop and greenspace and gardens; and places to go to - incorporating development in key areas along the corridor.

- **Alleyways** Skin Alley is an iconic destination in Downtown Norcross, as shown in Figure 4.4H. Due to the historic block/grid structure of Downtown, there are other existing alleyways that could be, and currently are being explored, as places for social interaction and entertainment - including outdoor seating, live music, art, lighting, and events.

Development concepts per this master plan incorporate alleyways into the blocks to provide more pedestrian access and to create unique spaces that can be activated and provide that Norcross feel - see Figure 4.4F and G.

### Greenspace

The parks and public greenspaces - Lilian Webb Park, Betty Mauldin Park, Thrasher Park, Norcross Discovery Garden Park - of Downtown Norcross are a source of pride for the community. This plan continues to make greenspace a focal point in each development node to honor the investment in greenspace throughout the city.

- **Stormwater Retention** Most existing development along the Buford Highway corridor was built prior to current stormwater management regulations. As large sites redevelop they will require

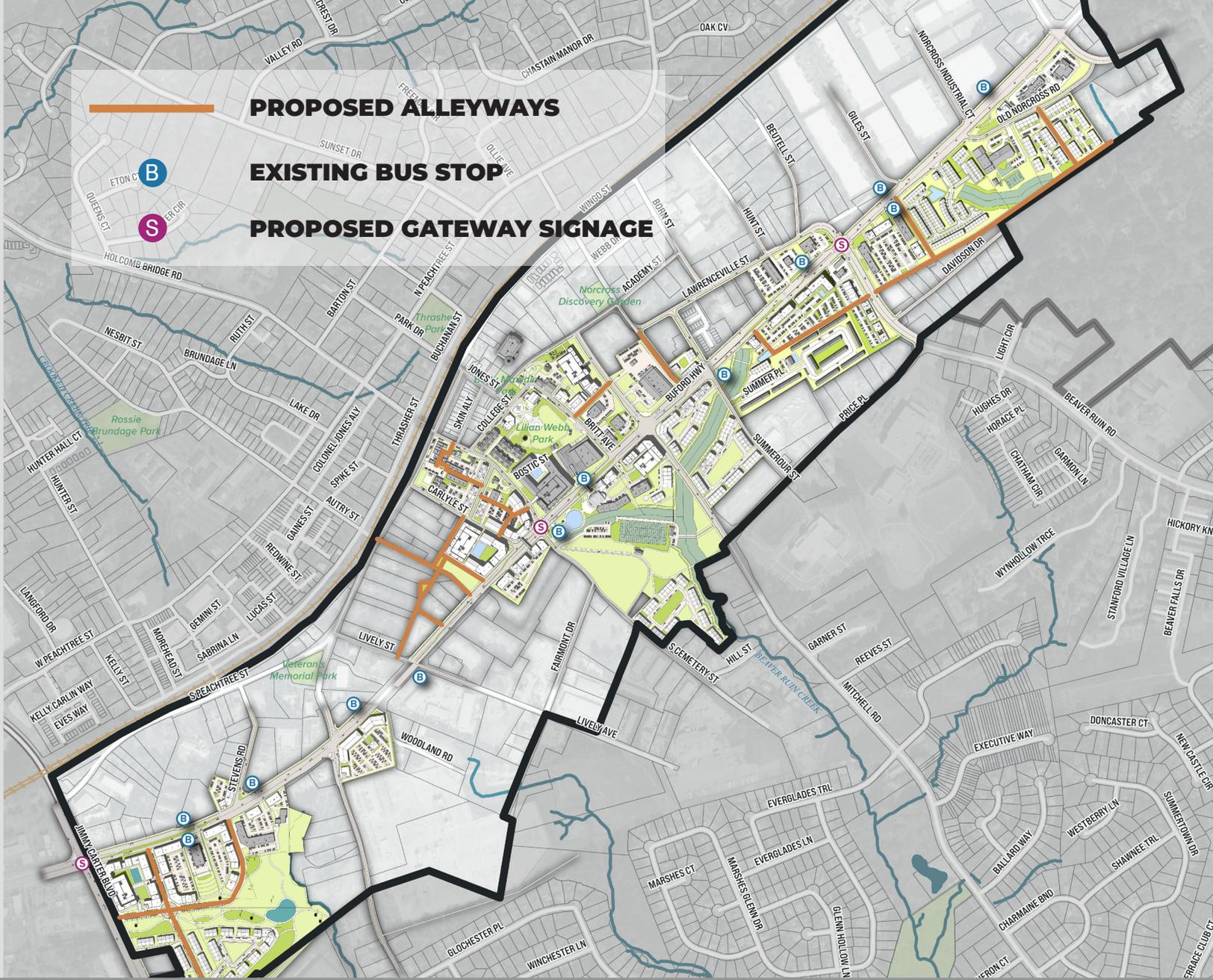
improved stormwater management, including retention ponds. Retention ponds can become an amenity if designed in a way that is accessible and attractive. The City can play a role in developing regional retention facilities along the corridor to assist with costs and attract redevelopment.

The Beaver Ruin Creek Trail Feasibility Study identified a retention pond at the corner of Buford Highway and South Cemetery Street. We have incorporated this proposed stormwater retention site as well as other potential sites into this master plan. Refer to Figure 4.4J and K for examples of stormwater parks.

- **Pocket Parks** Similar to alleyways, pocket parks provide small, unique opportunities to share the character of Norcross. All development concepts incorporate pocket parks to create places for the community to gather. Pocket parks can be as simple as a small flower garden to visit with friends, a rain garden to address stormwater on site, to an outdoor dining area for restaurants to share. An example of this is the pocket park in Downtown Woodstock that sits between two restaurants, providing a place to pause or wait for a table. Refer to Figure 4.4I.

### Events

The City of Norcross has a tradition of bringing the community together in Downtown with well-attended and engaging events - Gateway International Food and Music Festival, Art Splash and Wine Festival, and Bluesberry and Beer Festival, among others. To bring the community out to celebrate the international Buford Highway corridor and help bridge the gap



**FIGURE 4.4F ALLEY MAP**



**FIGURE 4.4G POST ALLEY, SEATTLE**



**FIGURE 4.4H SKIN ALLEY, NORCROSS**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.4 THE NORCROSS IDENTITY

between the north and south sides of the corridor, consider having events on Buford Highway. These events could occur in large parking lots of shopping centers fronting the corridors or could even close Buford Highway to automotive traffic and allow for festivals to engage directly in the road right-of-way. To celebrate the diverse culture along the corridor, events could partner with local ethnic businesses and organizations, such as WeLoveBuHi, Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ), and/or Latin American Association (LAA). Refer to Figures 4.4M and N for examples of WeLoveBuHi's Guide to Buford Highway and an image of an International Night Market.

The process to close down Buford Highway to through traffic for a day-long festival requires approval from Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The application for this request is included in the appendix of the report. The application will require a detour map to ensure Buford Highway through traffic has an alternative route. Please see Figure 4.4L for a recommended detour plan. This plan can be utilized for multiple events that celebrate the corridor right on its pavement. The special events route will detour vehicular traffic on Buford Highway at Jimmy Carter Boulevard / SR 140 and at Beaver Ruin Road / SR 378. The detour will take traffic from either point and re-route to I-85 along these state routes. From there, traffic will continue to the other state route and back to Buford Hwy.

### **Enhance, Preserve and Celebrate the Multi-Cultural Community**

The multi-cultural and immigrant heritage along Buford Highway is an important part of the Norcross history and an important part of preserving the unique character of the Buford Highway corridor. To preserve this character it is recommended to work with small immigrant and multi-cultural businesses along the corridor to ensure they are not displaced as new development occurs. Strategies may include:

- Enabling existing businesses to remain by working with the property owner to offer incentives addressing profitability while maintaining existing tenants. Specifically, density bonuses for projects that maintain existing tenants, reduced parking requirements, and/or flexible design standards to accommodate the changing market.
- Preserve existing buildings and structures and focus on facade and site improvements - this can be through a facade grant program administered through the City or Downtown Development Authority or, similarly, a placemaking grant to improve the site. Site improvements might include pocket parks, outdoor seating, signage, and landscaping.

In addition, events are a great way to celebrate and enhance the multi-cultural character of the corridor. It is also recommended to share the history and important sites with signage, historic markers or plaques and art - murals and sculptures. Buford Highway history walking tours could accompany the historic markers or plaques.



**FIGURE 4.4I WOODSTOCK GA POCKET PARK**



**FIGURE 4.4J STORMWATER RETENTION POND**



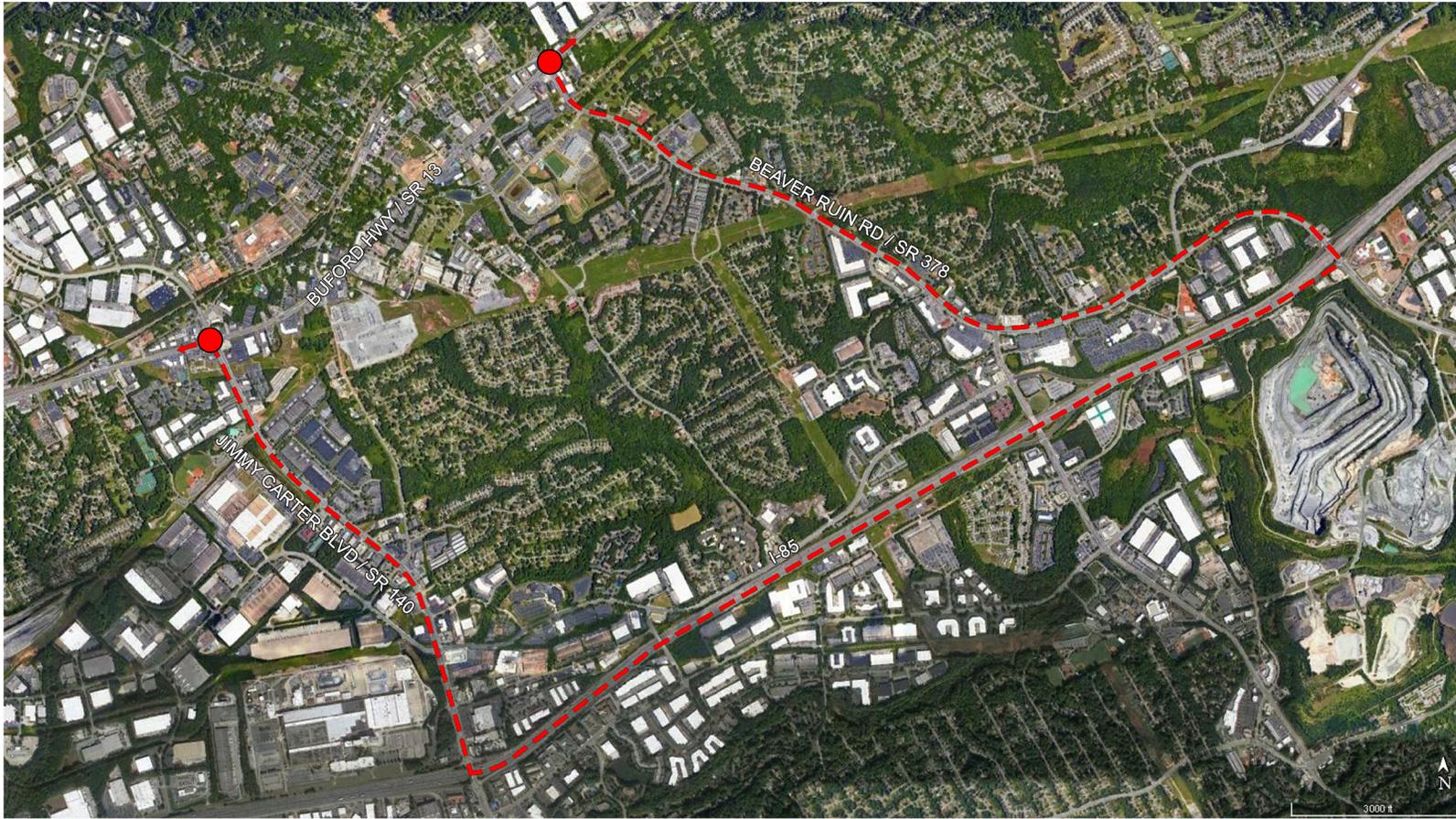
**FIGURE 4.4K STORMWATER PARK**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.4 THE NORCROSS IDENTITY

### **Signage**

Key to establishing a neighborhood identity is delineating Norcross along the Buford Highway Corridor with welcoming and inviting signage at key intersections. This plan recommends signs, public art, landscaping, and painted sidewalks to announce to visitors and residents that they have entered the unique Norcross community. As mentioned previously, a Welcome to Norcross pedestrian bridge is an opportunity for a grand gateway sign across Buford Highway.



BUFORD HWY DETOUR ROUTE: SR 140 / JIMMY CARTER BLVD TO I-85 TO SR 378 / BEAVER RUIN RD

### FIGURE 4.4L EVENT DETOUR MAP



FIGURE 4.4M WE LOVE BUHI, TASTE OF BUHI



FIGURE 4.4N INTERNATIONAL MARKET



# 121

**IMPLEMENTATION**

# IMPLEMENTATION

This section provides key next steps necessary for implementation of this plan. While implementation of this visionary plan is long range in nature, a priority project list is provided below to give community leaders a series of actions that are immediately implementable and provide some short term “wins” to establish momentum for future efforts and initiatives. Implementation priorities focus on public sector improvements, including regulatory and policy recommendations, infrastructure improvements and economic development strategies to prepare the area for proposed and future development, which will have to be initiated by the private sector.

Following are implementation strategies for priority projects, key partnerships, economic development strategies, and funding strategies.

## 5.1 PRIORITY PROJECTS

### Development

- Focus efforts on the priority development sites as identified in this plan, the ***A-sites, particularly within the Downtown Node***. It is recommended to ***work with the Downtown Development Authority (DDA)*** to acquire key parcels. This will allow the City to have control over the future of key sites, while also leveraging city incentives and financing mechanisms to incentivize and attract development.

### Corridor Enhancements

Corridor beautification and safety enhancements can help to further attract new investment and development. As the City invests in the public right-of-way, the development community sees added value and benefit to investing in the private realm. Key next steps for corridor enhancement include:

- ***Streetscape Beautification***: The first recommended step is to begin conversations with Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to discuss potential funding opportunities and timelines for streetscape improvements. The Gateway85 Community Improvement District (CID) may also be a great partner in implementing streetscape improvements. Refer to Section 5.4 for more information on potential funding opportunities.
- ***Inter-parcel Connectivity***: With new City regulations encouraging inter-parcel connectivity and with the help of diagrams generated for this master plan, the City can continue to promote inter-parcel connectivity. This can be most successful as part of negotiations during redevelopment/investment in existing properties.
- ***Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety***: Similar to above, begin discussions with GDOT to identify funding mechanisms for crosswalk improvements and mid-block crossings. The design and implementation of crosswalks and mid-block crossings will likely be incorporated into an overall streetscape project, including sidewalks and safer crossings.
- ***Trails***: The City is encouraged to continue to work with the Gateway85 Community Improvement District (CID) to implement the Beaver Ruin Creek

Trail system, with a focus on connecting to Downtown and the proposed stormwater retention pond/park at Buford Highway and S. Cemetery Street. Additionally, trail connectivity will be greatly enhanced by moving forward with the streetscape beautification projects.

### Identity

- **Architectural Character:** To regulate architectural character, the City is encouraged to develop design standards for the Buford Highway corridor that provides guidance on architectural materials, colors, and forms for new construction. Consider partnering with the Atlanta Regional Commission's Community Development Assistance Program (CDAP).
- **Creative Bus Stops:** The creative bus stops that are designed in a manner reflective of Downtown's architectural character, are one of the lower cost and more implementable projects proposed. It is recommended to focus efforts near Downtown and extend efforts along the corridor overtime. Consider partnering with Gwinnett County Transit and the Atlanta Regional Commission.
- **Alleyways:** Alleyway recommendations are predominantly a product of private development. The City is encouraged to incorporate alleyway design into the Buford Highway Design Standards, as mentioned above.
- **Greenspace:** The City is encouraged to begin exploring funding opportunities for regional stormwater retention ponds/parks along the Buford Highway corridor. The Gateway CID and GDOT have strong interests in this type of investment and will make great

partners moving forward.

Pocket Parks will larger be part of private development and are recommended to be incorporated into the Buford Highway Design Standards.

- **Events** To begin exploring event potential, particularly ones that celebrate the diverse businesses and community along Buford Highway, the City is encouraged to reach out to potential partners, including WeLoveBuHi, Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ), and Latin American Association (LAA). A night market in an existing active shopping center parking lot may be a great first event, post-COVID.
- **Enhance Multi-Cultural Community** The City is encouraged to consider incorporating recommendations about how to retain existing small, local, and immigrant businesses into current zoning regulations.
- **Signage** The first step in incorporating gateway signage will be to identify funding opportunities and partners. The Gateway85 CID may be a good partner in this project, as they have implemented CID signage throughout their District.
- **Cultural Arts and Community Center Renovation:** The expansion of the Cultural Arts & Community Center should focus on a programming study to identify space and program needs.
- **Performing Arts Center:** If a Performing Arts Center is deemed the preferred vision for the City, it is recommended to

# IMPLEMENTATION

conduct a feasibility study to examine the market feasibility of a Center, with associated venue sizes, and to develop a space and programming needs assessment along with how this might fit on preferred sites.

## 5.2 PARTNERSHIPS

To implement this plan, key public and private partnerships will be necessary. The City of Norcross can lead efforts as defined in the plan, however, it will take additional partners, land owners, developers, and community members to realize a true and sustainable transformation of the Buford Highway study area. Key partners include:

### ***Development***

Downtown Development Authority  
Norcross Development Authority  
Gateway85 CID

### ***Corridor Enhancements***

Georgia Department of Transportation  
Gateway85 CID

### ***Identity***

Gwinnett County Transit  
Atlanta Regional Commission  
Gateway85 CID  
WeLoveBuHi  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice  
Latin American Association

## 5.3 TOOLS FOR ATTRACTING AND RETAINING BUSINESSES AND DEVELOPMENT

As noted in the master plan, retaining existing local, owned and small businesses is important to preserving the character of the community. Similarly, attracting appropriate new businesses and development will help to create an economically thriving community, with a diversity of land uses and development typologies. Following are considerations for the City in regards to business retention and attraction.

**Retaining small, local and immigrant owned businesses:** The City is encouraged to consider incorporating recommendations about how to retain existing small, local, and immigrant businesses into current zoning regulations.

**Retain industrial uses:** To support a diverse economy, the City is encouraged to retain existing industrial land uses, particularly larger and active facilities, such as the Norcross Industrial Court Distribution Center. This facility provides much needed last mile connectivity for distribution and is a service beneficial to the area.

**Smart City Technology:** The City is encouraged to continue conversations regarding smart city technology and fiber optics. Fiber optics, access to high speed internet, can serve as a business incentive to attract and retain businesses in the City. Fiber optics can be incorporated into public projects that involve utility and public right-of-way construction.

**Transit:** While the recent transit referendum did not pass, the City is encouraged to consider conversations with the County and the Gateway85 CID to be a part of future transit plans, particularly on the Buford Highway corridor.

**Development Incentives:** Working closely with the Downtown Development Authority, the City should consider leveraging development incentives to help attract and make feasible the right development deals. Tools to utilize include:

- City Center East Tax Allocation District (TAD)
- Bond Financing
- Tax Abatements
- Public Private Partnerships for structured parking and utilities
- Development Density Bonuses
- Federal Opportunity Zone

## 5.4 FUNDING

The following section lays out funding opportunities to support the implementation of the recommendations within this plan.

### Identity

The following funding is focused on implementing identity ideas as discussed in Section 4 of this report. In particular, these sources may help in financing the following projects:

- Cultural Arts & Community Center Redevelopment/Renovation
- New Performing Arts Facility
- Creative Bus Stops
- Alleyways with art installation or programming
- Pocket Parks with art installation or programming

- Creative Signage
- Trails and Greenways
- Greenspace with Water Retention Projects
- Beautification
- Events

**Municipal:** There are certain funding opportunities that are available only to local governments. Having access to these funding sources can generate substantial capital to build facilities and implement the identity ideas.

An early step towards funding this vision should be a thorough exploration of the municipal funding options available; these options include:

- Volunteer a percentage of private development projects towards the arts. New developments can volunteer to provide 1% of construction cost to the arts.
- A portion of TAD investment dollars can be used for identity projects - such as functional street art, streetscape beautification, or greenspace project. .
- Consider use of SPLOST funds for public projects - such as a performing arts center, functional art, creative bus stops, greenspace, trails, streetscapes, and greenspace.
- Environmental mitigation funds could be utilized to enhance the arts and identity projects.
- The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) has potential arts and identity programming and funds/grants through the Livable Centers Initiative

# IMPLEMENTATION

(LCI) or Community Development Assistance Program (CDAP).

- The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has potential arts funding/grants.
- The Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce may have funding available to promote the arts and identity.
- Create Local Cultural Council (LCC) that has the authority and tax status to raise money, but functions as a branch of city government; all funds are kept in a municipal account.

**State:** There are other funding opportunities that are handed down from government agencies on the state level. State organizations to pursue for the funding of established identity idea projects include:

- The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)
- The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
- The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP)
- The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA)
- The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDECD)
- The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD)

**Federal:** There are certain funding opportunities that may be pursued from federal government agencies. These government agencies include:

- The Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- The National Park Service
- The National Fish and Wildlife Service

**Nonprofit:** Existing Grant Funders that a 501(c)(3) organization can pursue include:

- The Georgia Council for the Arts
- The National Endowment for the Arts
- The Georgia Council for the Humanities
- Robert W. Woodruff Foundation
- Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund
- Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta's Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund

**Public-Nonprofit Partnerships:** There are certain funds available specifically for partnerships between 501(c)(3) organizations and governmental agencies. They are as follows:

- Art Place Grants (NEA): funded planning grants for collaborations between cities or counties and arts organizations. NEA grants, at their core, have the intention to fund artists and the cultural assets they bring to communities.
- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers Community Development and the Arts grants.

**Crowd Sourced Funding:** The City of Norcross should consider starting a funding campaign once the concept and ideas are complete and well-illustrated. Visuals and architectural renderings of the vision will help funders understand the vision and garner support.

**Identified Funding Sources or Programs:** Here are specific grants and funding programs to be pursued by the City of

Norcross:

- The EDA Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs solicits applications from applicants in rural and urban areas to provide investments that support construction, non-construction, technical assistance, and revolving loan fund projects. This could be used for the Cultural Arts Center construction.
- Our Town is a grant program administered by the National Endowment of the Arts. These grants are specifically directed towards projects that integrate arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities by advancing local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes. These grants can be significant and help to support innovative collaborations between art organizations and city governments. This can be used for the Cultural Center planning and construction.
- The Environmental Protection Agency provides grants through the Urban Waters Small Grants program every two years providing award amounts up to \$60,000. This could be used for water retention projects.
- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Resilient Communities Program was designed to prepare for future environmental challenges by enhancing community capacity to plan and implement resiliency projects and improve the protections afforded by natural ecosystems by investing in green infrastructure. This can be used for regional retention projects.
- The NPS' Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Program provides funding for trail construction, trailhead construction, trail maintenance, assessment of trail conditions, or trail property acquisition.
- Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program provides funding for projects that support state parks and trails; support local parks and trails of state and regional significance; provide stewardship of conservation land; or acquire critical areas for the provision or protection of clean water, wildlife, hunting, fishing, military installation buffering, or for natural resource-based outdoor recreation.
- The Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Recreation Trails Program supports recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses.
- The Georgia Department of Transportation's Roadside Enhancement and Beautification Council provides funding for roadside enhancement and beautification projects along Georgia's roadsides. The funds may be used only for landscape plant material and its installation for the furtherance of roadside enhancement and beautification projects along state routes in Georgia.
- Community Resilience Grant Program through Bank of America supports non-profits and municipal agencies expand the tree canopy in urban communities and strengthen neighborhoods against the impacts of changing climate. This can be used for beautification and tree planting.

# IMPLEMENTATION

## Corridor Enhancements

This section discusses the plan's general approach to pairing the proposed transportation improvement projects with appropriate funding sources at the Federal, State and Local levels of government. The section concludes with a summary of the anticipated funding levels and sources that will be used to implement the recommended projects through the plan horizon.

When developing a funding strategy for any given transportation improvement, it is important to consider the eligibility requirements associated with each funding source, as well as the anticipated scale of the benefits that will result from the improvement. The use of federal and, to a more limited extent, state funding always comes with certain stipulations. For example, any project that makes use of Federal funding is subject to a host of federal legislation, most notably, the environmental review process as required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Compliance with relevant federal and state processes tends to add cost, time and complexity to a project, as detailed impact analysis must be completed for a variety of natural and cultural resources, many of which are subject to approval from at least one federal or state agency. In addition, most federal funding programs require a local contribution to the project. Generally, the local match for a phase of work will be 20%

of the project phase. For instance, a 20% match on the construction phase may sound financially reasonable. However, if the local government is also responsible for the preliminary engineering and any right-of-way costs, the actual match over the overall project cost is very high. Additionally, any given improvement that seeks to use federal and/or state funding sources must compete with myriad other transportation projects throughout the country and the state that are similarly vying for a chance to secure a large sum of non-local funding.

Securing discretionary funding from federal and state sources can most definitely assist in delivering high cost transportation improvements that are typically beyond the ability of the City to pay. However, given the "strings" attached, the City should strategically seek federal and state funding for projects that have a substantial cost and, more importantly, the potential to generate significant benefits at the national, statewide, or regional level. Improvements that address a regional need are best suited for competing for funding at the regional level. Local funding can be used to elevate the priority of these regional projects by providing some or all of the match requirement relieving the state of that requirement or by adding funding in excess of the local match requirement making the project less costly in terms of the Federal funding share. Given that localized improvements, such as the widening of a local street or the installation of a single traffic signal, are unlikely to generate significant benefits that extend outside the City's boundary, funding for these projects is likely to only come from the City.

***In creating a program of projects, the City should first prioritize the individual improvements and then develop potential funding scenarios based on the project's total cost, scale of benefits, and desired time for implementation.***

To plan most effectively for non-local, discretionary funding at the federal state and regional levels, the City should first identify high-priority projects that stand to realize significant benefits on a statewide or regional scale and set aside a level of local funding sufficient to exceed or, at a minimum, meet the match requirements. After the potential to leverage non-local funds has been maximized, the remaining local funding should then be used to implement local projects based on their identified priority.

### ***Where Are We Now?***

Currently, the City's primary funding source for transportation improvements is the Gwinnett County SPLOST. This funding, while substantial, is subject to volatility in the economy as seen recently with the COVID-19 pandemic. Volatility leads to unreliable revenue streams, thus making it difficult to effectively plan and execute a transportation plan. As it stands right now, SPLOST funding alone will not support the Norcross-Buford Highway Corridor transportation needs. Several other sources exist currently that are available to the City, such as:

#### ***GDOT Federal Aid Program***

The majority of federal funding for transportation facilities comes through the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) which is supported through motor fuels excise taxes levied at the Federal level on gasoline (18.4 cents per gallon)

and diesel fuel (24.4 cents) and, when necessary, transfers from the General Fund. The HTF includes an account for highways which is administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Through a stewardship agreement, GDOT manages all federal funds for roadways in Georgia.

#### ***ARC TIP Solicitation***

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is responsible for developing the metro Atlanta region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Long-Range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) since they are the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for this area. This document assumes that the majority of funding for large-scale transportation improvements along federal and state highways, as well as projects that would span multiple counties, would be provided through Federal and state funding sources via the inclusion of these improvements within ARC's TIP and RTP. ARC solicits projects for funding in the TIP under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG). This program includes funding subcategories such as Livable Centers Initiatives (LCI) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) projects. Sponsors may apply for federal funding to add new projects to the TIP, supplement funding for existing TIP projects and submit proposals for studies and related initiatives which do

# IMPLEMENTATION

not result in the construction of physical infrastructure.

## ***Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Program***

Aside from programming federal and state transportation dollars, the ARC also administers regional transportation funding for the creation of subarea studies through its Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program. Local governments and nonprofit organizations are eligible to submit grant applications for the planning and implementation of enhancements to existing centers and corridors. Since 2000 ARC's LCI program has been utilized by municipalities to implement improvements such as the installation of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, safety enhancements, and streetscaping. In FY 2020, ARC is making \$2,000,000 in total grant funding available for this program.

## ***Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program***

The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program is a flexible funding source that promotes conformity with the requirements of the Clean Air Act of 1990 and compliance with its National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. CMAQ funding can be applied to any project included within the ARC's TIP that aims to reduce congestion and thereby improve regional air quality. Projects that

address the following goals are eligible to utilize CMAQ funding:

- Establish traffic monitoring, management, and control facilities;
  - Improve traffic flow (e.g., signalization, HOV lanes, intersection improvements, turning lanes);
  - Improve incident and emergency response;
  - Improve mobility (e.g., programs offering real-time traffic and transit data); and
  - Manage or reduce traffic demand by shifting demand to nonpeak hours or other modes (e.g., provision of rideshare programs, telecommuting policy).
- Funding across the entire ARC region in FY 2020 was \$28,400,000.

## ***Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Program***

Georgia DOT partners with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in facilitating and providing an opportunity for local governments to pursue non-traditional transportation related activities such as pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian streetscaping projects. TAP improves the quality of life for citizens in communities across the state by providing local governments the means to pursue projects that might not otherwise be possible.

Projects eligible for TAP funding include:

### ***Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities***

- Connect and develop documented regional or statewide non-motorized transportation networks
- Are appropriate for the need and user types targeted

- Benefit state tourism or economic development initiatives
- If locally significant, have strong transportation connection and involve planning efforts or serve as connectors to regional networks
- Are a priority on GDOT, county or regional non-motorized transportation plans
- Address documented pedestrian/bike deficiencies
- Are part of a broader non-TAP funded non-motorized system

#### *Streetscape Improvements*

- Are located in established traditional downtowns or historic districts
- Use a creative design approach that enhances pedestrian safety and takes into account the community identity, history, context, and the human environment
- Accomplish multiple goals (traffic calming, enhancement, aesthetics, pedestrian safety, tied with other initiatives, etc.)
- Receive input and support from citizens, local businesses, economic developers, traffic engineers, etc.

#### ***What Might Be Available?***

Funding discussions at this time can be a challenging, but encouraging, as revenues in gas tax are returning to pre-pandemic levels.

#### ***Federal Infrastructure Funding***

Currently, the Federal Government is debating the necessity of an infusion of funding in the national infrastructure, including the transportation sector. Additionally, the impact of worldwide pandemic that started in the 1st

quarter of 2020 is reinforcing these discussions. It is reasonable to expect that a significant infusion of funding at the federal level will be realized in the near term. There remain details that must be addressed at a national level in regard to how to appropriately fund such an increase in federal funding. The federal gas tax has not been increased in 37 years. All that said, some type of infrastructure stimulus might be anticipated. As such, it would be beneficial for the City of Norcross to position itself to capture some of these funds to implement the improvements on Buford Highway.

#### ***State Funding***

The motor fuel tax structure that was implemented under the Transportation Funding Act of 2015 (TFA) significantly restructures the way that motor fuel tax was collected. The TFA eliminated the sales tax component and instituted a 26 and 29 cent per gallon excise tax on the purchase of gasoline and diesel, respectively. Unlike the previous mechanism, which was based on a fixed percentage sales tax that could not be raised without an action by the General Assembly, the revised structure features a more resilient excise tax that is indexed based on inflation and fleetwide fuel economy standards.

#### ***Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) Programs***

The Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) is a grant

# IMPLEMENTATION

and low-interest loan program administered by the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA). Since inception, GTIB has provided over \$125 million in grants and loans to highly competitive transportation projects that have enhanced mobility and driven economic development in local communities. The most recent application window (awards expected to be announced in the second quarter of 2020) is expected to award up to \$25 million in grants and loans.

## ***Local Funding through regular SPLOST***

The current SPLOST, which is a one (1) percent sales tax levied on the purchase of goods and services, became effective on April 1, 2017 and will expire in six (6) years. Therefore, it will be a recurring funding source until 2023. A renewal of the SPLOST must be passed by a majority of voters in a referendum, which the citizens of Gwinnett County have historically supported since the SPLOST was passed in 1985.

## ***Community Improvement District***

Another potential funding source is a Community Improvement District (CID). A CID is authorized by Article IX, Section VII of the Georgia Constitution, and is a mechanism for funding certain governmental services including street and road construction and maintenance, parks and recreation, storm water and sewage systems, water systems, public transportation systems, and other services and facilities. The

administrative body of the CID, which can be the city governing authority, may levy taxes, fees and assessments within the CID, not to exceed 2.5 percent of the assessed value of the real property. Such taxes, fees and assessments may only be levied on real property that is used for non-residential purposes and revenues may be used only to provide governmental services and facilities within the CID. Bonded debt is permitted, but such debt may not be considered an obligation of the state or any other unit of government other than the CID.

CID's have proven to be very effective mechanisms for addressing transportation needs. A CID that targets high growth and congestion areas are able to leverage locally generated funds with state and/or federal funds to advance transportation projects.

## ***Impact Fees***

In 1990, the Georgia Development Impact Fee Act (DIFA) was enacted into law. DIFA significantly affected the way local governments in Georgia pay for public services and facilities. Impact fees are one-time fees charged to land developers to help defray the costs of expanding capital facilities to serve new growth. DIFA enables local governments to charge new development for a proportionate share of infrastructure capacity it requires. However, the Act places restrictions on the categories of capital facilities for which new development can be charged. It also establishes rules under which impact fees must be calculated, collected, expended, accounted for and administered.

In the past, many local governments have offset certain costs of expanding their infrastructure systems by charging utility hook-up fees or attaching exactions to their land development regulations. Under DIFA, many exactions previously required of developers by local governments are illegal. Thus, complying with the requirements of DIFA requires many local governments to make changes to their land development regulations and associated administrative activities. DIFA also has major implications for water and sewer authorities, by limiting collection of capital improvement costs. For communities experiencing significant growth, impact fees can be a substantial source of revenue for financing needed capital improvements.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Office of Planning and Quality Growth offers local governments professional assistance and guidance for implementing impact fees.

### ***Tax Allocation Districts (TAD)***

Georgia's Redevelopment Powers Law was adopted by the general assembly in 1985 and gives local governments (cities and counties) the authority to sell bonds to finance infrastructure and other redevelopment costs within a specially defined area, a tax allocation district or TAD. The bonds are secured by a "tax allocation increment" which is the increase in the property tax revenues resulting from redevelopment activities occurring. As public improvements and private investment take place in a TAD, the taxable value of property increases. The city/county collects those revenues,

putting the increase due to the new investment into special fund to pay off bonds or loans that financed the public improvements in the district.

### ***Bonding or Other Funding Vehicles***

A municipality may borrow funds to meet operating expenses and to finance capital expenditures. Commonly used instruments include tax anticipation notes. These short-term loans must be repaid by December 31 of the year in which they were issued and are generally used to fund maintenance and operation expenditures until property tax receipts are collected later in the year. Other borrowing mechanisms include general obligation bonds, certificates of participation, multiyear installment purchase agreements, and revenue bonds. Bonds, certificates, and installment contracts are repaid from either general city funds or from a particular source of revenue, such as an enterprise fund.

A municipality is required to hold a referendum prior to issuing general obligation debt. This debt is backed by the full faith and credit of the city and is typically repaid through a dedicated millage rate or from SPLOST funds, if a SPLOST was approved in conjunction with the general obligation debt. Revenue bonds are repaid solely from specific revenue generated by public works facilities purchased or constructed with the bonds and, by law, are not debts of the municipality. The borrowing of funds is subject to numerous legal restrictions, procedures, and requirements. Voter approval is not required for temporary loans, revenue bonds, certificates of participation, or multiyear installment purchase agreements.



135

**APPENDIX**

