



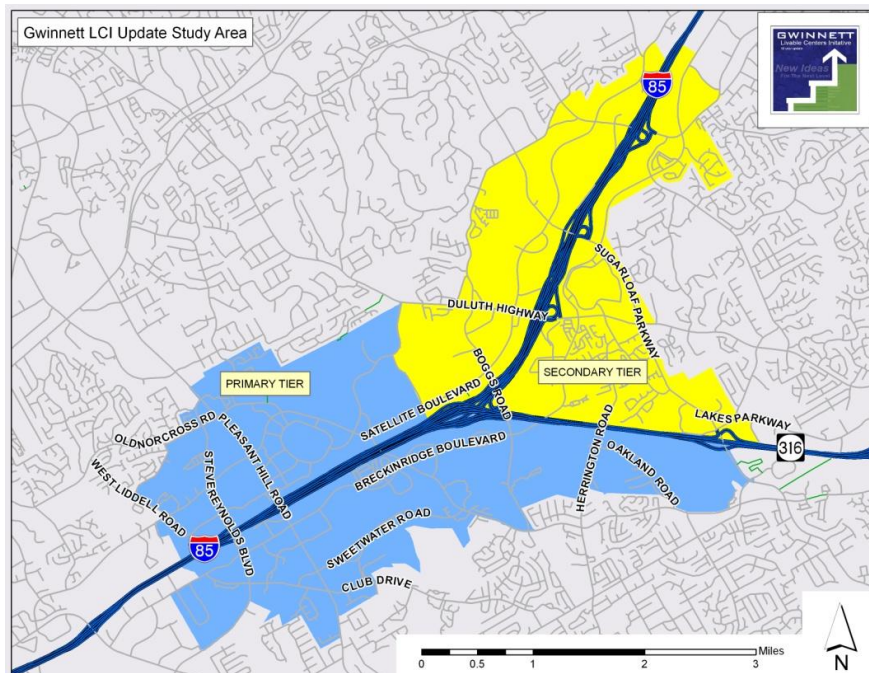
1. Introduction

Through its Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Program, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) in partnership with the region’s local cities and counties, strives to help the region’s major activity centers, town centers, and primary corridors become more well-rounded places – places where adults and children will want to gather to live, work and play well into the future. The LCI program seeks to help communities plan for and design places that are healthier all around – providing a robust jobs environment, safe and efficient transportation routes, and land uses that promote the diverse needs of a well-balanced place.

The innovative program is now in its second iteration in many communities, as is the case in the Gwinnett LCI area.

This 10-year update study builds on the initial Gwinnett LCI Study (2001) by laying out a pathway and plan for achieving **new ideas for the next level in the Gwinnett Place area**. The study focuses on the area around Gwinnett Place mall (Primary Tier, see blue area in **Figure 1.1**) but also includes the major landmarks of Discover Mills, Gwinnett Center, Gwinnett Technical College, and McDaniel Farm Park. Major roadways in the study area include I-85, SR 316, Pleasant Hill Road, SR 120, and Satellite Boulevard. The original LCI study focused on what is now called Secondary

Figure 1.1. Gwinnett LCI 10-Year Update Study Area.





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Tier, or the yellow area in **Figure 1.1**.

The Gwinnett Livable Centers Initiative 10-Year Update (Gwinnett LCI Update) is a joint initiative of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District (Gwinnett Place CID), Gwinnett County (County), and the ARC. The Study reflects the input of public and private partners and other community members that participated in the study process via various input opportunities.

A. Study Process

The Gwinnett LCI Update study process was designed with four primary objectives in mind:

1. **To build** upon original findings and recommendations contained in the original 2000 LCI Study
2. **To form** a unified vision for the Gwinnett LCI study area

3. **To establish** an implementation plan that is attractive to area stakeholders, potential public and private investors, and the region.
4. **To meet** the ARC's goals and objectives for LCI studies

The project occurred over a ten month period beginning in 2011 and ending in the spring of 2012. The overall steps of the study process are captured in the project schedule (Figure 1.2).

Key steps in the study process included the following:

1. Public Involvement
2. Analysis of Baseline Conditions (develop study, see Appendix A)
3. Development of a Conceptual Development Plan
4. Formalization of Implementation Plan & Final Report

Figure 1.2. Project Schedule.

Task	2011					2012				
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
1 Public Involvement										
A-Community Design Workshop			x							
B-Open House						x				
C-Study Management Team Mtgs	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
D-Core Team Meetings	x	x	x		x					
2 Develop Study										
3 Update Concept Plan										
4 Prepare Implementation Plan										
5 Prepare Project Deliverables										
A- Baseline Report		x								
B- Concept Plan				x						
C- Draft Summary Report								x		
D- Final Summary Report										x

B. Report Structure

This Final Report, other than eventual implementation, is the primary product of the Gwinnett LCI Update. The report is divided into four chapters:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Provides basic information about the study process, key findings, desired outcomes, and guiding values

Chapter 2 - Public Involvement Overview

Summarizes the key elements of the public outreach process, including the Core Team, public meetings, and other communications; this section is supported by information found in **Appendix B**.

Chapter 3 - Conceptual Master Plan

Provides a conceptual development plan for the study area, focusing on the primary tier of the study area as shown in **Figure 1.1**; includes comprehensive overview of vision for the area from land use, transportation, urban design, and market perspectives.

Chapter 4 - Implementation Program

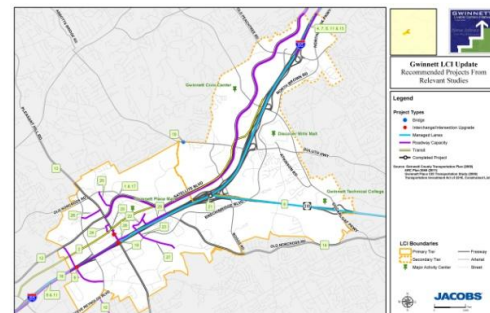
Lays out general, economic development, and funding strategies for achieving the vision for the study area; culminates with a short and long term action plan with specific projects listed for regional funding.



Group Discussion at the Community Workshop



Drawing from the Conceptual Master Plan



Map of Transportation Recommendations



C. Key Findings from Baseline Report

As shown in the project schedule, a separate Baseline Report was prepared about half way through the study process to help inform the preparation of the concept plan. The Baseline Report included a detailed analysis of each of the following:

- Existing Plan Assessment
- Real Estate Market
- Land Use
- Transportation
- Urban Design
- Review of Implementation Issues

Below are some of the key highlights from each of these sections of the Baseline Report. For more details on any of these facts please refer to the separate report.

Existing Plan Assessment

Since the completion of the original LCI in 2001, a lot has happened within the study area and a number of initiatives have been implemented that will continue to guide its growth in the coming years. Many of these accomplishments are outlined in the 10-year Action Plan Review, a copy of which can be found in **Appendix A**.

Reflective of overall trends in the economy, the number of development permits issues annually in the study area declined significantly from active levels in 2001, with steady overall decline from 2005 to 2010. Most of the new construction built during this period was in the form of apartments, townhouses, and office buildings.

Known as the Gwinnett Civic and Cultural Center in the original LCI report, the Gwinnett Center changed its name in 2003 with the construction of an 13,000 seat state of the art Arena, and a 21,600 square foot Grand Ballroom. A Master Plan for Gwinnett Center was completed in 2007. It envisions expanding the Convention Center to 125,000 square feet, constructing an on-site hotel, and adding parking decks. Three new driveway entrances are also contemplated.



Gwinnett Center is a major asset to the area.

There have been a number major transportation projects completed within study area since 2001, including:

- I-85/ SR 316 interchange reconstruction
- I-85 HOV lanes
- ATMS projects on Pleasant Hill Road, Satellite Boulevard, and Old Norcross Road
- Several sidewalk and streetscape improvements
- Improvements to both local commuter bus service



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In addition there are several major transportation projects currently in the planning stages, including:

- I-85/Pleasant Hill Road interchange improvements, converting the current design to a Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI)
- Redesign of the Pleasant Hill Road/Gwinnett Place Drive/Venture Drive Intersection
- West Liddell Road/Club Drive Connector
- Streetscape and landscape improvements in the Gwinnett Place CID

Several planning studies have been completed or are currently underway that have helped to guide development and public investment in the area. Most of these studies were undertaken by Gwinnett County government, but in 2005, the Gwinnett Place CID was organized, which has provided a new champion for local initiatives in the study area. Just a sampling of these studies and initiatives includes:

- Gwinnett LCI 5-year Update
- Gwinnett 2030 Unified Plan
- Gwinnett County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)
- Gwinnett County Open Space and Greenway Master Plan
- Gwinnett County Zoning Ordinance Amendments
- The Gwinnett Place Area Redevelopment Plan
- CID-RAD Ordinance
- Gwinnett Place Tax Allocation District
- Gwinnett Place Transportation Study

- Gwinnett Place Parking Management Study
- Various I-85 transit feasibility studies.

The recommendations and findings of these studies helped inform this update.

Real Estate Market Analysis

The analysis found that the area's population has grown and diversified significantly since 1990. Roughly one in ten Gwinnett residents currently lives in the LCI study area. The area is also marked by a lower median household income and a relatively high concentration of multi-family housing compared to the rest of Gwinnett.

Additionally, the area continues to exhibit a robust commercial real estate market and serve as a major employment center. The LCI study area contains the largest concentration of employment in Gwinnett County. It is home to 3,399 firms employing over 50,000 people.

Population

- The study area's population in 2010 was 81,348, up from 27,615 in 1990. If the study area were incorporated, it would be the 9th largest city in Georgia, between Roswell and Albany.
- Population in the area is projected to continue to increase at a steady 2.2% over the next five years, still exceeding county-wide, region-wide and State-wide growth. The study area population is projected to grow to 103,000 by 2020.
- Gwinnett County, in general, and the LCI study area in particular, have

seen a remarkable shift in racial and ethnic composition over the past ten years. In 2000, whites accounted for 55% of the study area's population. By 2010, non-whites accounted for the majority of residents in the study area (65%), with 29% African-Americans, 18% Asians, and 18% other racial groups. Hispanics and Latinos currently make up 31% of the population.

Housing and Income

- Multi-family housing accounts for 44% of all units in the study area, significantly higher than the 20% county-wide.
- Household incomes in the study area tend to be lower than county and regional averages, with a median household income of \$53,084 compared to \$64,304 for Gwinnett County and \$60,647 for the metro region.



Housing in the study area

Residential Real Estate

- New home sales volumes and prices have declined significantly in Gwinnett County due to the lingering effects of the Great Recession and other factors. Median home prices peaked in 2007, at \$196,000, and have since declined to \$137,000, a decrease of 30% in three years.
- The LCI study area's apartments are a substantial component of the housing inventory. The study area contains 13,994 multi-family housing units, most in structures of 5 or more units.

Commercial Real Estate

- The study area is a super-regional retail center with over 10 million SF of retail space, with 7.7 million SF in the Gwinnett Place area and 2.5 million SF in the Sugarloaf area.
- The study area has 24 shopping centers of 50,000 SF or more, representing a total of 4.8 million SF.
- The study area contains a major concentration of industrial development with 15.7 million SF of industrial space, divided evenly between the two tiers.
- There is approximately 7 million SF of space in the study area in 182 buildings.



Land Use

Commercial/retail uses occupy the largest percentage of land within the study area, at around 17%. In all, the employment based uses, such as industrial and office, occupy over 40% of the total study area. Less than 10% of the study area is undeveloped.

Zoning

Zoning primarily supports commercial and industrial activity (70% of total study area). Multi-family residential zoning accounts for most land area that is not zoned for commercial or industrial use. Some zoning changes have occurred since the 2001 LCI Study.

- A Civic Center Overlay District now regulates aesthetics and some transportation elements of the area around the Civic Center.
- A new High-Rise Residential (HRR) District was adopted and some limited areas (10.5 acres) within Tier 1 of the study area were rezoned for this use.

Development Opportunities Map

The study team identified a range of development opportunities, extending from excellent opportunities to static parcels, by considering a variety of factors, including parcel size, ownership, vacancy rates, and undeveloped parcels. The resulting map shows select number of excellent current opportunities throughout the study area and a notable number of good opportunities. The map speaks to the area's overall need for redevelopment.

Key Land Use Findings

A key land use finding is that the location and design of future density will be critical to the success of transit-oriented development (TOD). Additionally, an audit of the area's suitability as an ARC "lifelong community" finds that there are a few senior living facilities in the study area – identifying the need to improve in this area moving forward.



Commercial/retail uses occupy the largest percentage of land within

Transportation

Almost 500,000 motorists pass through the study area on a typical weekday. This includes 230,000 vehicles a day using I-85, converging with another 85,000 vehicles per day passing along GA 316. Major arterials with interchanges in the study area include Steve Reynolds Boulevard with about 45,000 vehicles per day, Pleasant Hill Road with about 53,000 vehicles per day, Duluth Highway with 34,000 vehicles per day and Sugarloaf Parkway with about 40,000 vehicles per day.

Transit

Existing transit service within the study area includes three circulatory local bus routes and four express commuter routes that originate at study area park-and-ride lots. The local routes are operated by Gwinnett County Transit (GCT) and connect Gwinnett Place and Discover Mills Malls with greater Gwinnett County, the GCT Transit Center, and the MARTA heavy rail system at Doraville Station.

The area is moving forward in planning for potentially significant future transit investments in the area. In conjunction with the Gwinnett Village CID, Gwinnett Place CID completed the I-85 Corridor Light Rail Transit Feasibility Study in 2010. Additionally, an Alternative Analysis (AA) is currently being conducted as the first step in the Federal project development process to be eligible for New Starts funding, which provides funds for construction of new fixed guideway transit systems or extensions to existing transit systems.

Pedestrian Mobility

Although the 2001 LCI Implementation Plan placed significant emphasis on pedestrian mobility in the study area, a limited number of improvements have been made to the pedestrian network due to limited availability of implementation funding.

Recent and Planned Projects

A number of relevant transportation projects have been completed since the Gwinnett Place LCI Study in 2001 including incorporation of Intelligent Transportation System/ Advanced Transportation Management System along major routes, reconstruction of the I-85 and SR 316 Interchange, and managed lanes along I-85, including the recent conversion from High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes to High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. Additionally, several study area transportation projects have been recognized in ARC's PLAN 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) or are already programmed in ARC's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).



Gwinnett County Transit has made notable improvements since the original study



Urban Design

The character of the study area is dominated by auto-dependency with large distances between functionally related uses, making walkability difficult for the average person. Buildings in the study area are typically setback far away from the street and do not create a relationship with the streetscape – further encouraging auto-use for even short trips. A supplementary Baseline Conditions Map highlights design features within the Primary Tier of the study area that influence its overall functionality. These features include major thoroughfares (including I-85 and GA 316) that divide the area, extensive parking lots, low one-story buildings, and limited greenspace and civic uses.



Although there is no unified architectural character or design theme within the study area, the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District (CID) has located banners and wayfinding signage in the right of way that have begun the branding process at strategically located gateways.

The Gwinnett Place CID has also provided landscape improvements to prominent gateways to I-85 and has implemented several streetscape improvement projects on Pleasant Hill and Old Norcross Roads. These attractive streetscape elements are a promising start to beautifying the study area and providing the framework for a cohesive, unified design theme.

Some desirable design improvements identified in the baseline analysis include improved bus stop locations, bicycle lanes, and ongoing streetscape improvements in the likeness of those initiated by the Gwinnett Place CID. Although the Gwinnett Place CID has made much progress in implementing signage and wayfinding elements for the area, there is also a very limited amount of pedestrian-oriented signage.



The Gwinnett Place emblem has helped brand the area.

Review of Implementation Issues

The 10-year study update has the benefit of gaining intelligence from those successes achieved and challenges faced in the past ten years. Successes included the construction of the Gwinnett Center, development of a transit hub and park-and-ride lot, and several amendments to the County's 1985 Zoning Ordinance that facilitate development of mixed use and high density development. The biggest challenge faced was that the 2001 LCI project list was out of scale with realistic funding potential.

The Baseline Report highlights four key reasons why the 10-Year Update should experience greater success than the original study:

1. The LCI Update changes the focus to the Gwinnett Place area, where the Gwinnett Place CID can provide strong leadership to pursue funding and support for LCI-type projects;
2. Gwinnett County has a new Unified Plan that stresses importance of multi-modal mixed use centers;
3. Recent transportation initiatives will increase traffic access to the study area; and
4. The Atlanta Region has expressed strong support for regional public transportation system in the I-85 corridor.

Potential barriers to implementation still exist; they include the following:

1. Physical challenges of the study area.
2. The extremely slow economy that began to decline in 2006 and has not shown signs of a strong recovery.

3. The virtual "build out" of the study area in a classically low-density suburban framework leads to several related implementation barriers.



A relatively new development within the study area



D. Desired Outcomes

The ARC, the Gwinnett Place CID, and Gwinnett County supported the development of the 10-year update to the Gwinnett LCI Study. In doing so, there were many desired outcomes in mind. First and foremost, the study should be considered an important step in implementing the Gwinnett County Unified Plan, which identified the area as a major Activity Center. Aside from this directive, the Gwinnett LCI Update has several intended outcomes:

- Refine vision for the study area
- Identify needed regulatory framework
- Promote ARC, Gwinnett County, and CID Goals
- Leverage ARC transportation funding
- Build public-private partnerships

Refine Vision for the Study Area

The Gwinnett LCI study area is as large as it is complex. The area is a major center in Gwinnett and is likely to continue as one should the right investments and community infrastructure be put in place. In order to do this, it was essential that the vision for the study area be clarified. This study provides the conceptual ideas and implementation actions that lay out a clear vision of how the area would most desirably move forward.

Identify Needed Regulatory Framework

As identified during the Community Design Workshop, in order for the Gwinnett LCI study area to move forward, development processes cannot carry on as they typically have in the past. Allowance of different

densities, mixes of uses, and incentives to promote desirable community development should be put into place. The process for redevelopment must be easier.

The timing of the Gwinnett LCI Update is perfect. It is being carried out at the same time that Gwinnett County is completing a re-write zoning and development regulations, which, when completed and adopted, will form the new the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). The County intends to incorporate the regulatory recommendations of the Gwinnett LCI Update, as appropriate, into the new text of the UDO.

Promote ARC LCI Goals

The LCI program has several goals that ultimately lend themselves to developing a network of activity centers and corridors in the region that are multi-modal and accommodating to people of all ages and backgrounds. The recommendations of the study have been vetted against these goals and ultimately work to promote them. The following section clarifies those guiding values of the study recommendations that will help promote ARC LCI goals as implementation occurs.



Bus stop within the study area

Leverage ARC Transportation Funding

The awarding of the ARC Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grant is the first step in a local/regional partnership that prioritizes LCI goals with the region's priority transportation projects. By completing and adopting the 10-year update, the County's multi-modal transportation projects will rise in importance from a regional perspective and become eligible for special ARC LCI implementation funding. This new pool of money will help expedite study area transportation project priorities.

Build Public Private Partnerships

A key desired outcome of the LCI 10-year update is to lay the foundation and a solid footing for growth of public private partnerships. The study shows the public's commitment to the area and clarifies those areas in which the community intends to invest. By doing so, a more certain development and redevelopment environment is formed. The Core Team's involvement in the study process (see Chapter 2 Public Involvement) is the first of many steps in developing the partnerships necessary to see the community's vision forward.

E. Guiding Values

The overarching values that are reflected throughout the Conceptual Development Plan and the Final Report recommendations demonstrate those characteristics that the Gwinnett LCI study area community and the region view as essential.

Catalyst-Driven Redevelopment

The primary tier of the study area contains a wealth of property that is aging with such characteristics as excess parking, lack of vegetation and trees, auto-centric, low-density, and limited features to accommodate pedestrians. This final report reflects the general belief that public and private catalyst projects will drive



Eliminating excess parking and improving pedestrian facilities are important redevelopment goals



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redevelopment in the area.



International Linkages

The Gwinnett LCI study area reflects the crossroads of diverse cultures and nationalities. This awareness is captured in the Gwinnett County Unified Plan. Maintaining and strengthening this international presence and environment was a top priority voiced by participants in the LCI study. Study recommendations seek to embrace these international characteristics, and as implementation occurs, ideas and strategies that are accommodating and attractive to the international community and international investment should be given priority.

Green Communities

The ARC has established a Certified “Green Communities” Program for municipalities and counties, which aims to assist local governments in reducing their overall environmental impact. The ARC encourages incorporation of the principles of the program in its LCI studies. Because Gwinnett County has achieved ARC Green Community status (bronze category), the LCI study area has a leg up in achieving these green principles via its location within the County.

The transformation of the Gwinnett LCI area can be done in such a way that promotes the ideas behind the Green Communities program.

The Green Communities initiative areas include the following:

- Green Building
- Energy Efficiency
- Green Power
- Water Use Reduction and Efficiency
- Trees and Greenspace
- Transportation
- Recycling and Waste Reduction
- Land Use
- Education
- Innovation

Lifelong Communities

Similar to green communities, Lifelong Communities is a program embraced by the ARC. The goal is to begin redesigning our communities so that they are accommodating for individuals and families to live in throughout their lifetime.

The following are the key goals of the Lifelong Communities program:

- Promoting Housing and Transportation Options
- Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles
- Expanding Information and Access to Services

In addition to encouraging these principles at the local level, communities wishing to implement Lifelong Communities goals may be eligible for additional staff support at ARC to help encourage and implement related programs and ideas.





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