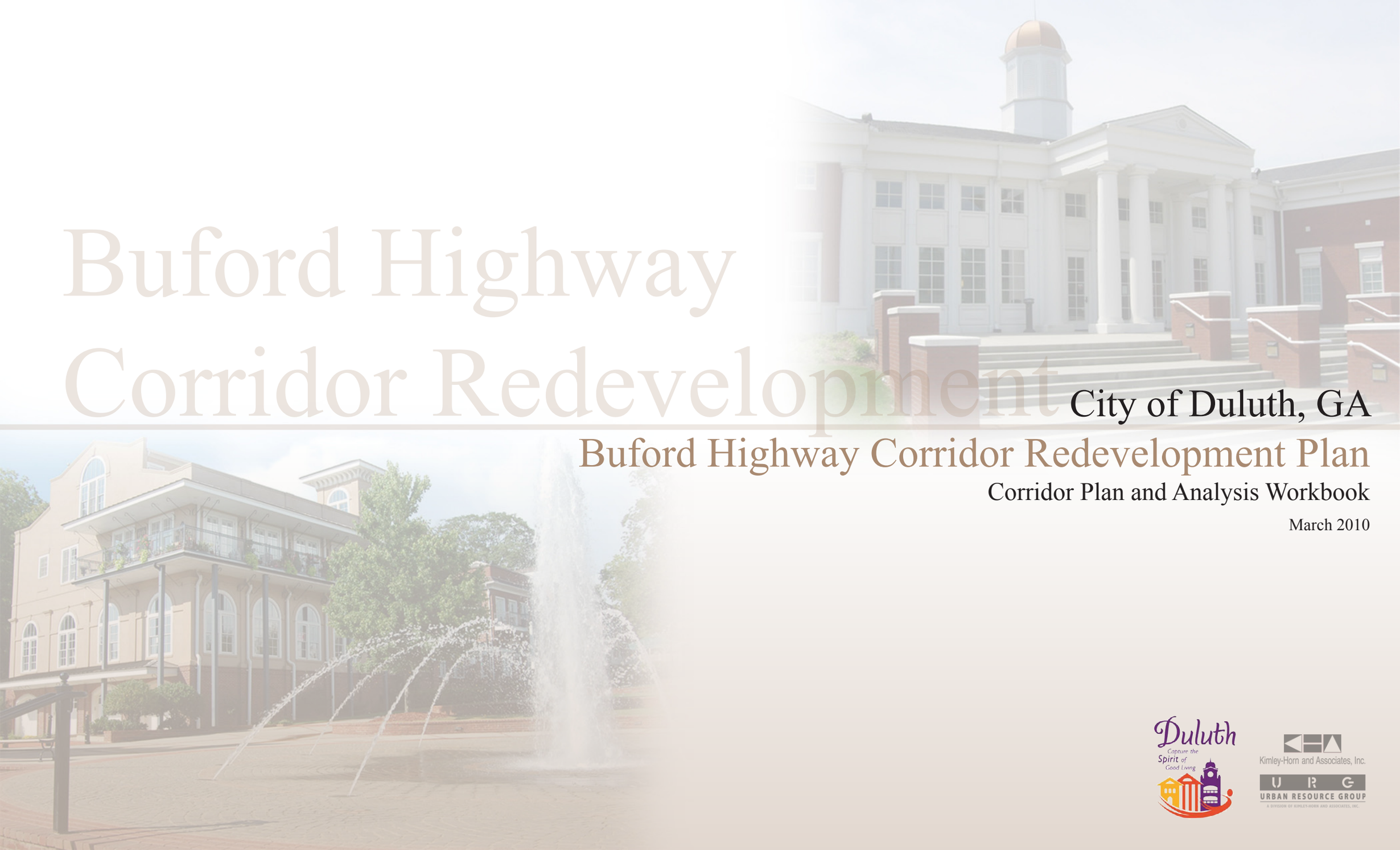

Buford Highway Corridor Redevelopment

City of Duluth, GA

Buford Highway Corridor Redevelopment Plan

Corridor Plan and Analysis Workbook

March 2010

Duluth
Capture the Spirit of Good Living

Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.

URBAN RESOURCE GROUP
A DIVISION OF KIMLEY-HORN AND ASSOCIATES, INC.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

View from Duluth's Town Green.

The City of Duluth was officially chartered on February 28, 1876. A lot has changed in the last 134 years. At that time, Duluth was the fourth official city in Gwinnett County and had been put on the map by its rail line. Today that rail line represents both a community sense of pride and a natural pedestrian barrier between the Downtown area and Buford Highway.

Duluth's key location as a shipping and trading center for the area around the Downtown attracted farmers from surrounding counties and gave merchants ample business for their goods. Today, Buford Highway (SR 13/US 29) is designated as an urban minor arterial on the State Highway system and currently functions as a major suburban thoroughfare through Gwinnett County. Single-day counts taken in 2009 indicated roughly 29,000 average daily trips (ADT). In its current form, a vast majority of these commuters utilize Buford Highway and pass right through the city limits without even thinking of stopping or even acknowledging that they have been through a special place. One important aspect of this redevelopment plan is to develop ideas that will start to change the way people drive through the corridor and allow the City to capture some of these commuters as shoppers, visitors and even future residents.

This Buford Highway Redevelopment Plan is an extension of the very successful Livable Centers Initiative Study completed in 2001 and the LCI 5-year update Report completed in 2005. It creates a general blueprint for the City to follow to ensure the Buford Highway Corridor's successful revitalization and improving the quality of life for its residents.

This redevelopment plan addresses the existing and future real estate market, transportation and land use, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, utility and infrastructure improvements along the corridor. It also identifies public projects and civic infrastructure needed to promote and stimulate this redevelopment. It establishes general guidelines for the character of private development that will help Duluth realize its vision of a more walkable, livable, Buford Highway Corridor which ultimately adds to the overall success and appeal of the City of Duluth.

The City of Duluth proposes to support this vision through a series of goals, several of which the City has already begun to address:

- Preserve and protect the historic structures and other community resources that make the City of Duluth so unique

- Encourage the development of compatible mixed-use, walkable development patterns

- Provide all types of transportation improvements that may include new streets, traffic calming measures, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, new crosswalks, new and enhanced intersections, all which helps improve connectivity

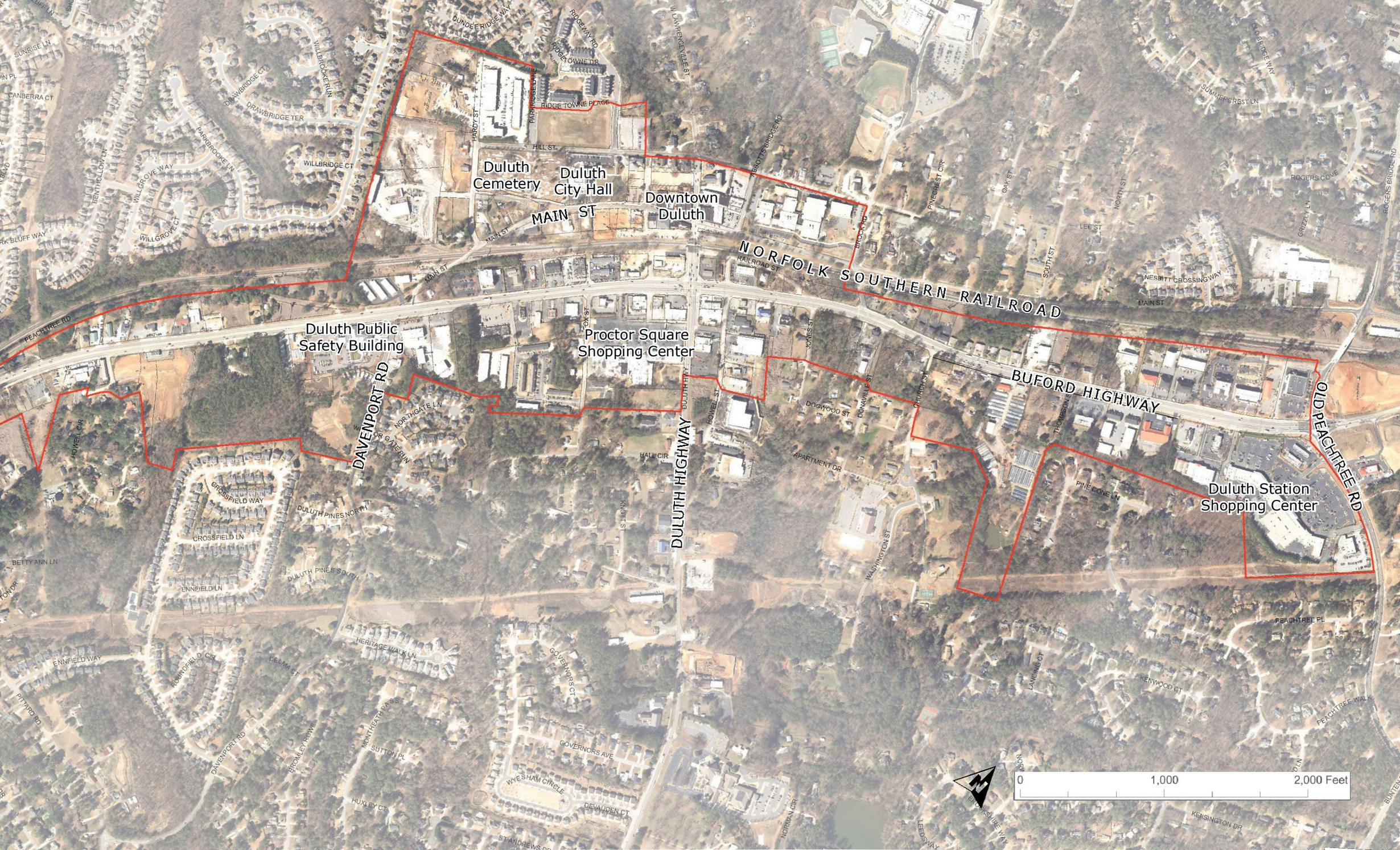
- Promote sustainable development that is designed to last long-term, with characteristics that emulate and respect the high quality of civic buildings in which the City has invested in to date

Study Area Definition

The Buford Highway Corridor Redevelopment study area (as shown in the figure 1.1, Buford Highway Aerial) starts at the intersection of North Berkeley Lake Road and Buford Highway and continues approximately 3 miles to the intersection of Old Peachtree Road and Buford Highway. The study area width follows a proposed TAD boundary that was determined by the City as they were working through that initial process. The Norfolk and Southern Rail line runs along the entire length of the corridor and its proximity to Buford Highway varies, thus creating varying depth parcels.

The study area encompasses a wide variety of commercial, retail, service and civic uses with a little bit of office, industrial and residential mixed in.

Figure 1.1, Buford Highway Aerial


Duluth Cemetery
Duluth City Hall
Downtown Duluth
MAIN ST
NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILROAD
Duluth Public Safety Building
Proctor Square Shopping Center
BUFORD HIGHWAY
DAVENPORT RD
DULUTH HIGHWAY
OLD PEACHTREE RD
Duluth Station Shopping Center
PEACHTREE RD
HILL ST
RAILROAD ST
HALL CIR
APARTMENT DR
PINE CONE LN
0
1,000
2,000 Feet

The first major section of the corridor, from North Berkeley Lake Road to Pleasant Hill Road, is mainly characterized by large vacant parcels, industrial and heavy commercial parcels and highway convenience retail and a gas station (see photos 1-4).

Photo 1

Photo 2

Photo 3


Photo 4

The next section from Pleasant Hill Road to Pittard Road contains medium to large parcels including the Duluth Middle School (which has no direct access or frontage on Buford Highway), Southeastern Railroad Museum and various light industrial and small warehouse and office parcels (photos 5-8).

Photo 6

Photo 7

Photo 5

Photo 8

From Pittard Road up to Davenport Road, this section is characterized mainly by highway strip commercial, predominantly on the eastern side of Buford Highway. Other than what exists today, the western side has limited redevelopment potential due to the close proximity of the rail line to Buford Highway and shallow depth of these parcels. There are some residential lots along Peachtree Road and other residential structures along Buford Highway that have been converted into small businesses on these very shallow parcels (see photos 9-12).

Photo 10

Photo 11

Photo 9

Photo 12

Starting with the new Public Safety Building at Davenport up to Highway 120, this portion of Buford Highway should connect to the downtown portion of the study area, but unfortunately it does not. Views to the new city hall building from Buford Highway are fleeting and sporadic (see photo 15). This section is characterized by more highway strip commercial and aging retail centers (see photos 13-16).

Photo 14

Photo 13

Photo 15

Photo 16

Leaving the downtown section and traveling north from Highway 120, the commercial area quickly transitions to smaller businesses and converted residential buildings. This section does have a couple of gems in the Duluth Historical Museum (Strickland House) and the Jubilate Café. This section continues up to Thompson Street and Woody's Landscape Nursery (see photos 17-20).

Photo 18

Photo 17


Photo 19


Photo 20

The final section, from Thompson Street up to Old Peachtree Road is characterized by an assortment of newer commercial development. Some of this newer commercial is even built to the quality standards of the City's civic buildings, as is the case with Gwinnett Community Bank. However, due to topography, lack of interparcel connectivity and visibility, there seem to be some leasing challenges even in the Publix anchored retail center at Duluth Station (see photos 21-24).

Photo 22

Photo 24

Photo 21

Photo 23

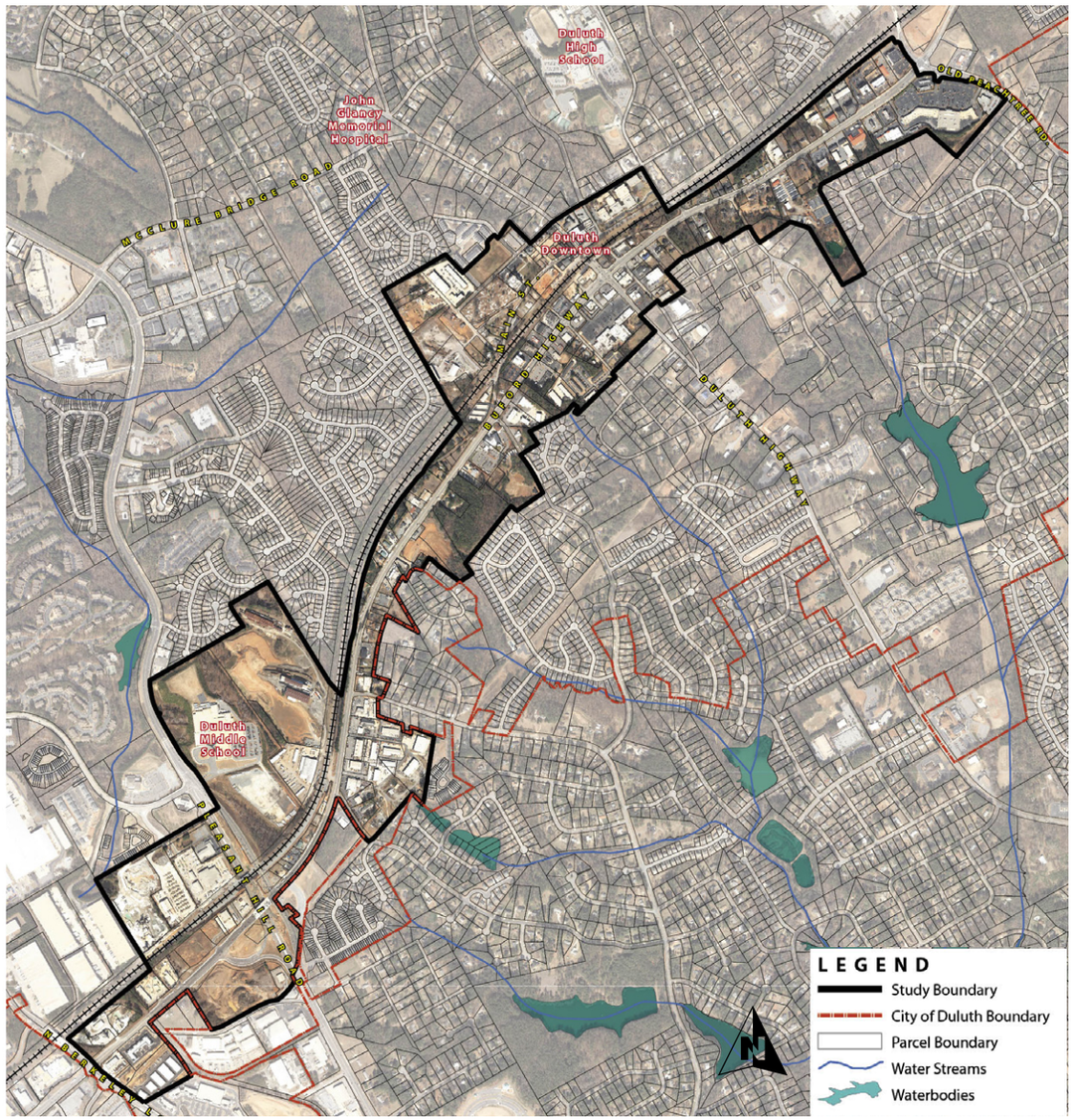


Figure 2.1. Context Map

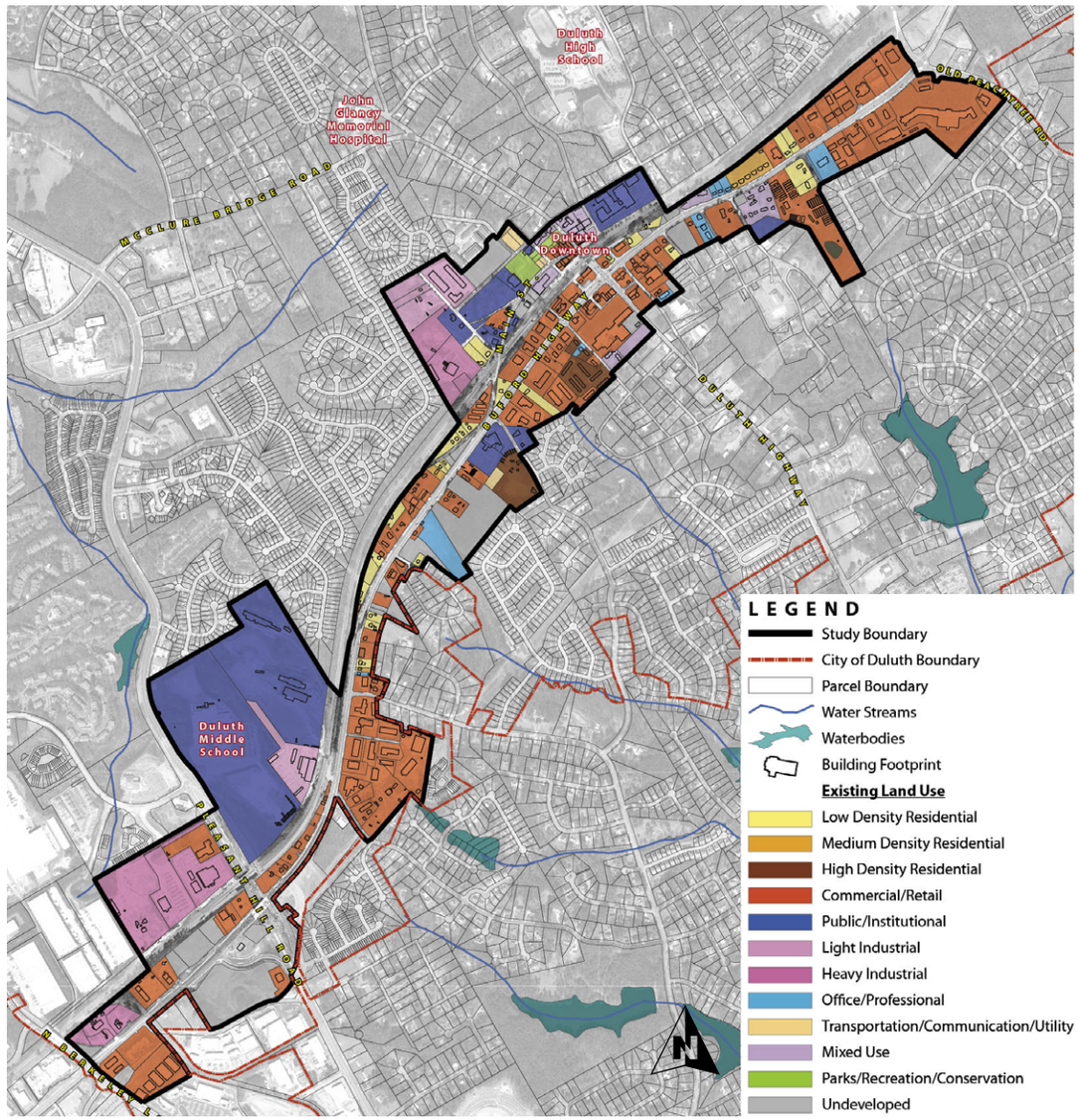


Figure 2.2. Existing Land Use Map

Description of Study Area

The Study Area as previously noted extends along a stretch of Buford Highway beginning at N. Berkeley Lake Road and extending northeast to Old Peachtree Road. As you can see from the Context Map (see figure 2.1, Context Map) Buford Highway is a vehicular thoroughfare with numerous commerical parcels strung out in a linear fashion, with an abundance of nearby single family neighborhoods.

Land Use within the boundary is varied (see figure 2.2, Existing Land Use Map), but consists primarily of commercial, institutional and industrial typologies. Residential uses are an infrequent exception, and can be found almost exclusively in the immediate vicinity of Downtown Duluth. The zoning (see figure 2.3, Existing Zoning Map) is consistent with current use, though the recent overlay is shifting away from industrial towards mixed-use and higher densities.

View looking at existing buildings along the Corridor near downtown.

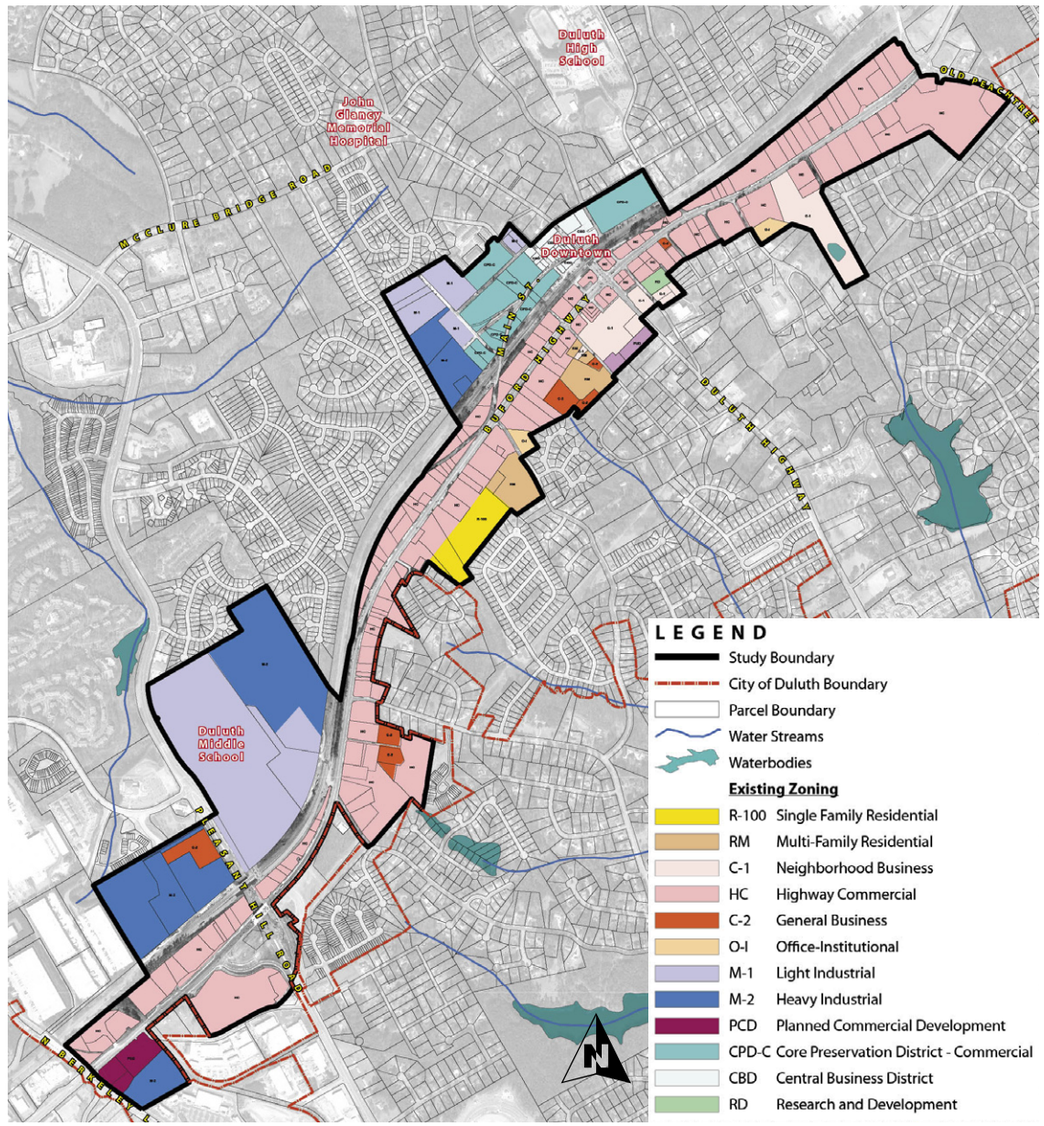


Figure 2.3. Existing Zoning Map

Evaluation of Existing Conditions

Transportation

Buford Highway (SR 13/US 29) is designated as an urban minor arterial on the State Highway System and currently functions as a major suburban thoroughfare through Gwinnett County. Due to the opening of the Pleasant Hill interchange in 2008 and current economic conditions, Buford Highway has seen a slight decrease in daily traffic volumes from peaks of 2006 and 2007 to current conditions of 2010. However, the reduction in volumes has not been drastic. Over the last 5 years, average annual daily traffic (AADT) on Buford Highway has ranged from roughly 23,000 AADT to 26,000 AADT(see figure 3.1). Single-day counts taken in 2009 indicated roughly 29,000 average daily traffic (ADT), which is not an "annualized" average. Typically, AADT is considered a more accurate measurement of traffic volumes; nonetheless, either of these data sets can be used to represent a general range of traffic volumes on the facility.

Buford Highway exists primarily as a five-lane, curb-and-gutter section throughout the limits of the City of Duluth. Additional lanes are found in the vicinity of major intersections along the corridor to provide additional turning lanes. Sidewalk exists only partially through the corridor, resulting in substantial gaps in pedestrian connectivity. Posted speed limits along Buford Highway are predominantly 45 mph, with a reduction to 35 mph between Davenport Road and SR 120.

For the purposes of this discussion, Buford Highway is assumed as a north-south corridor. Major intersections exist at North Berkeley Lake Road (a local roadway), Pleasant Hill Road (an urban principal arterial), SR 120 – Duluth Highway (an urban minor arterial), Brock Road (a local roadway) and Old Peachtree Road (an urban collector). The City Limits (and corridor study limits) along Buford Highway are defined by the intersections at North Berkeley Lake Road and Old Peachtree Road. These facilities serve as routes that provide sub-regional connections between the Peachtree Industrial Boulevard corridor and the I-85 corridor. Pleasant Hill Road is a major facility that connects the Peachtree Industrial Boulevard corridor to I-85, through the Gwinnett Place Mall area. Duluth Highway is a facility that provides a regional east-west route through central Gwinnett, including Downtown Duluth. Currently, these six intersections are signalized (including two separate intersections at Pleasant Hill Road for entrance and exit ramps). The largest spacing between signalized intersections occurs between Pleasant Hill Road and SR 120 (approximately 1.5 miles).

The signal spacing and cross-section, coupled with a lack of pedestrian facilities, results in a very "open-road" feel through the majority of study corridor. The cross-section also promotes relatively unrestricted access to properties fronting Buford Highway. No median treatments exist to deter left-turn ingress or egress from properties along the corridor.

Parking is largely provided by individual-use surface lots, prominently located at the front of the adjacent developments. Current parking is situated for maximum visibility and efficiency to serve single-trips from Buford Highway into the properties, and subsequent egress back onto Buford Highway. This parking scheme is typical of "auto-oriented" strip development.

Land Use

Buford Highway is an iconic corridor within Metro Atlanta. It extends from Buckhead, in the urban core, out into Gwinnett County, running almost 25 miles from southwest to northeast. As it courses out of the city, it takes on many different characteristics from higher density urban and residential to underdeveloped sectors and long stretches of strip retail in various stages of aging.

In the Study Area alone it exhibits several different facets of development (see figure 3.2, Urban Design Map). At the southwestern end, there is a cluster of new development at N. Berkeley Lake Road. Though the properties just beyond the study

Table 2
GDOT AADT for Buford Highway (US 23/SR 13) and SR 120

Roadway	Buford Highway	Buford Highway	SR 120	SR 120
Location	South of SR 120	North of SR 120	East of Buford Highway	West of Hill Street
Count Station	#0081	#0082	#0161	#0158
Year 2003	24,618	23,848	20,681	15,511
Year 2004	25,848	24,678	24,288	15,789
Year 2005	24,160	23,510	21,620	11,220
Year 2006	24,800	25,050	21,690	13,110
Year 2007	25,200	22,730	20,330	13,420
Year 2008	23,720	24,510	23,960	12,630

Figure 3.1, Average Daily Trips Table for Buford Highway and State Road 120

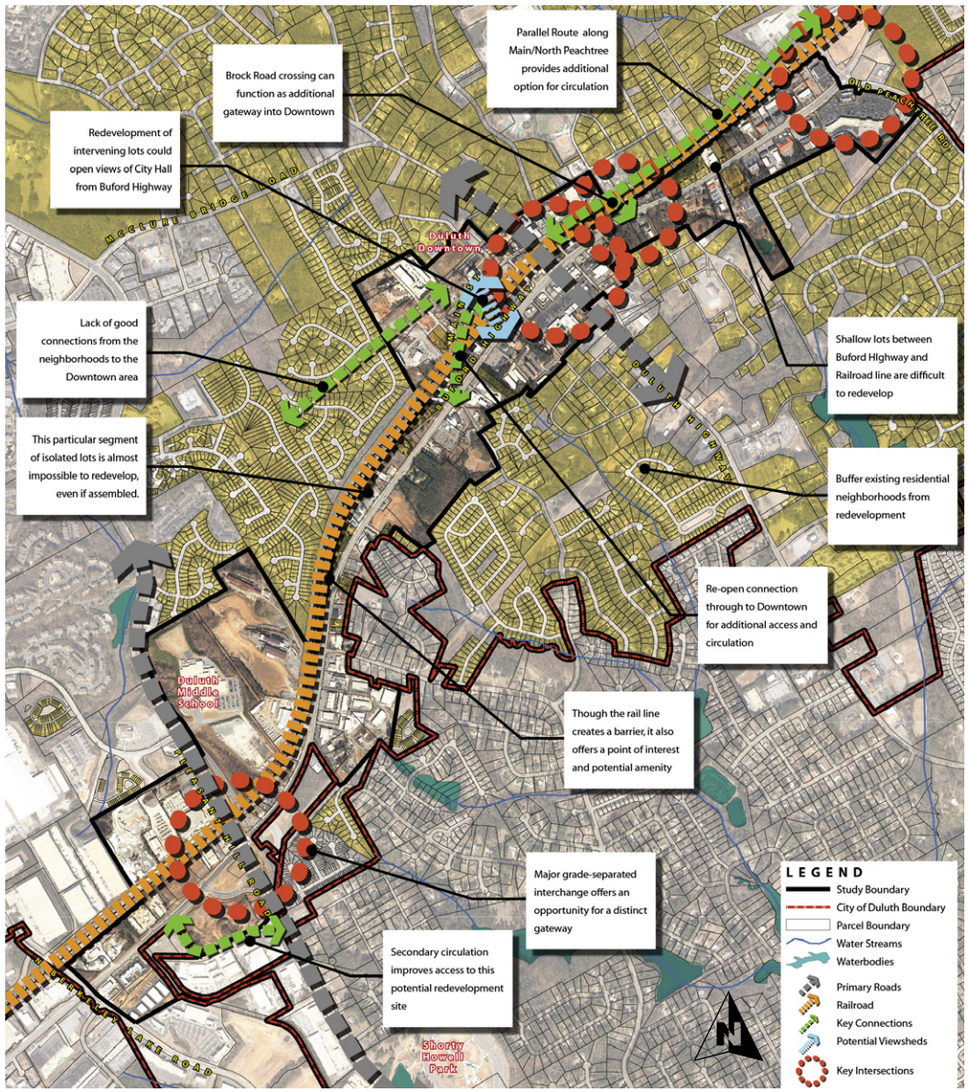


Figure 3.2, Urban Design Map

area limits are showing evidence of the economic downturn (new construction unoccupied), the location of the land around the Buford Highway/Pleasant Hill Road interchange may be prime enough to counterbalance market challenges. Much of the land (especially at the south west corner of the interchange) is vacant, and despite a large power easement, there is a fair amount of acreage available for redevelopment. It also has a secondary access road, which not only improves connectivity through the site, but also adds to the amount of developable frontage.

Moving northeast, the left side of the corridor is dominated by two tenants: Duluth Middle School and the Southeastern Railway Museum. While the former is unlikely to become a 'presence' on the corridor, the latter – assuming some expansion and renovation – could create a landmark situation on Buford Highway. Opposite the Rail Museum is a low-density commercial development that is aging but fairly well occupied. Its location might make it attractive to redevelopment, but it is less likely to be a priority into the near term.

The next section sees the Study Area narrow to a shallow single parcel, most of which is small-scale and out-parcel type commercial on the right, and undeveloped rail line buffer on the left. There is minimal redevelopment pressure along this stretch, but it should not be neglected. Aesthetic and connectivity improvements will be important to improving the general environment along this stretch, as well as creating a desirable 'entry sequence' to the Downtown core.

Approaching Downtown from the southwest, the unique character of Duluth begins to assert itself. The rail pulls a little farther away from the highway, leaving a parcel-depth strand between tracks and asphalt. Most of this is currently occupied by small, single-tenant commercial that transitions from a forested backdrop to a foreground for Downtown Duluth. This stretch is not just hemmed in by the rail, but also occupies a low point between rail and road, and in many cases sits well below the adjacent grade. In the area immediately adjacent to the Downtown, it makes connectivity efforts meet with extreme challenges. However, some of the businesses, particularly those closer to the Downtown, have a cultural and historical significance to the City; thus, despite the physical difficulties of the parcels themselves, targeted sites may be less inclined to redevelopment. Other parcels unlikely to redevelop within the corridor besides the cultural and historically significant buildings are the newer developments that are already classified as Class A space such as the BB&T Bank.

On the opposite side of Buford Highway from the Downtown area exist some of the best potential growth areas. Indeed, a new Public Safety Complex has already been built. There are under- or un-developed parcels nearby, and aging, large-scale strip centers approaching the intersection with Duluth Highway. The aging retail in particular is problematic from both an aesthetic and economic standpoint, but provides a very attractive target for redevelopment, particularly due to the fact that it mirrors Downtown Duluth across Buford Highway (see figure 3.3, Development Opportunities Map).

Beyond that key node at Downtown moving further northeast, the Study Area contracts again, and there are additional shallow lots that are trapped between the highway and the rail. These are a mix of residential and some commercial uses, the latter of which is often found in old housing. The grade is less of a challenge along here, but the depth of the lots still makes them less likely to change. The right side of the road is more attractive, with larger lots, though in general these would be more like 'targets of opportunity' and less like incentivized targets. The one exception, might be Woody's Nursery site, which is a large enough contiguous parcel to warrant some special attention.

The northeast anchor of the Study Area is at Old Peachtree Road. There is a fair amount of relatively new commercial development on both sides of the street, punctuated by Gwinnett Comunitty Bank Duluth Station, a 10-15 year old Publix-anchored strip development on the south corner of the intersection and the Gwinnett Community Bank. Of note for Duluth Station are the struggles of this commercial property, in terms of attracting tenants. A combination of current market inactivity, and a site with relatively poor visibility (it is significantly below the grade of the intersection) and poor access has resulted in empty storefronts sharing space with a major supermarket.

Regarding the section of Buford Highway within the Study Area, there are some characteristics that are applicable over most, if not all, of the corridor. In terms of land use beyond the boundaries, there is a large amount of residential land use, and it is overwhelmingly single-family. However, there are very few connections between the neighborhoods and the uses that line the corridor. This extends to all modes – car, bike and pedestrian. Sidewalks along the corridor are either non-existent or not particularly pedestrian-friendly; sidewalks between the neighborhoods are even less likely. However an exception to this would be in the northern most portion of the corridor where some pedestrian improvements have begun to take place along Old Peachtree and Rodgers Bridge.

From a standpoint of physical environment, the corridor runs a gently winding track among low, rolling hills. Apart from the Pleasant Hill interchange, there is a good bit of tree cover, especially among the established neighborhoods, and around Downtown. The railroad is a constant thread, but as a single line does not dominate the corridor. Indeed, though it serves as an obstacle at several points, it is also clearly viewed as something of an amenity and an iconic piece of Duluth's identity.

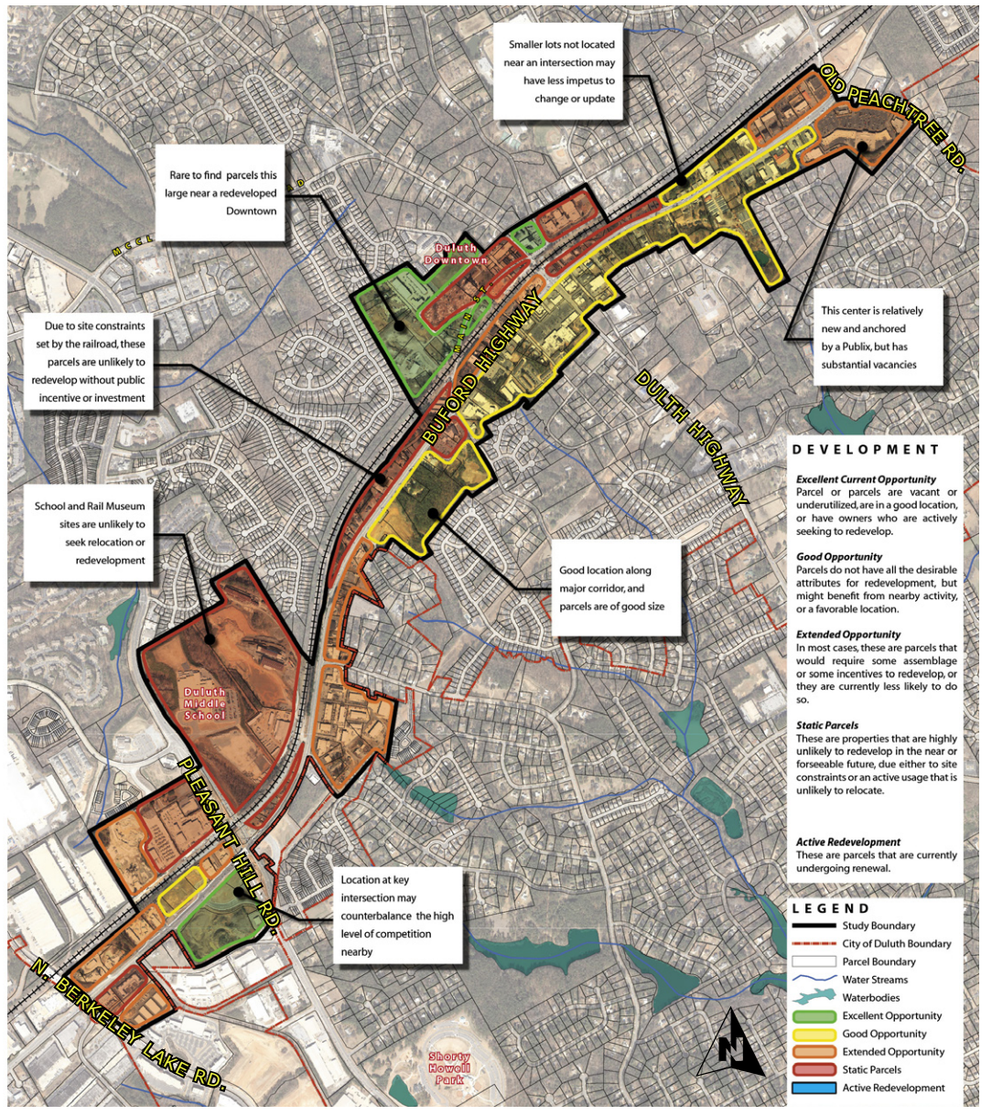


Figure 3.3, Development Opportunities Map

Real Estate Market Overview

Purpose of Overview

The purpose of this overview is to briefly review socioeconomic and real estate market trends; it is not meant to be an in-depth market evaluation. This information will help to determine how these trends may impact the potential for continued growth and improvement in the portion of the City of Duluth referred to in this document as the Study Area. The Study Area, for purposes of collecting demographic information, loosely follows the tad boundary in figure 3.3, however, it is slightly larger to take in pertinent adjacent uses.

"Customer" Profile

When considering what developers, builders, and retailers are looking for when they make decisions to invest in a community, there are several important factors. Among the key determinants are growth rates, age structure, income levels, and daytime population. The data in the following table profiles current selected socioeconomic characteristics from the three most notable age groups. There are four key geographies that were reviewed: Study Area, City of Duluth, Gwinnett County, and Atlanta MSA. (see figure 4.1)

Growth Rates

Obviously growth is a key factor in what developers, builders, and retailers consider. The higher the growth rates, usually the better from a development perspective. However, the overall composition of the market is critical, and the primary factor they are looking for is no population loss.

- The Study Area has shown relatively consistent population gains since 1990. The growth between 1990 and 2000 was remarkable, though still lower than the City of Duluth and Gwinnett County. The Study Area's population change from 2000 to 2009 is actually just under a two percent loss. This will likely be viewed as a negative. However, because the decline is so small, some might view this as a static population.
- Over the next five years, a small population growth is expected in the Study Area. While this rate of growth is just below the national average, it is well below the City of Duluth and Gwinnett County.
- In terms of households, the Study Area reports similar trends to the population changes cited above.

Age Structure

Most developers, builders, and retailers desire age diversity, with strong youth populations, as it is many times an indicator of families in the area. Workforce-aged residents of 25 to 35 years usually represent young professionals and those starting families and they indicate a potential diversification in the marketplace.

- The Study Area is below the City of Duluth and Gwinnett County proportions for those aged under 18.
- The Study Area is above the City and County proportions for those aged between 25 and 35.
- The Study Area is above the City and County proportions, but below the metro and national proportions for those aged over 65.

Income Levels

Similar to growth rates, the reasons why developers, builders, and retailers are interested in income levels are evident. The higher the income levels, the better from a development perspective. But, what is also important is the breakdown within the income levels, particularly in terms of informing diversity of product in the marketplace.

- The per capita income (perhaps the most important statistic to review in terms of understanding how a community is really doing) for the Study Area ($26,436) is below the City

	Study Area	City of Duluth	Gwinnett County	Atlanta MSA
Size of Market				
Residents	1,168	25,396	814,743	5,494,339
Households	389	9,869	272,337	1,978,507
Daytime Population	681	15,161	432,573	2,791,002
Characteristics of Market				
Age				
Under 18	22.4%	26.2%	28.9%	26.8%
Between 25 & 35	17.2%	16.0%	13.8%	14.2%
Over 65	7.5%	6.2%	6.7%	8.6%
Income				
Per Capita Income (PCI)	$26,436	$30,431	$26,235	$27,898
PCI as % of National Average	100.1%	115.2%	99.3%	105.6%
Change in PCI since 2000	6.4%	3.0%	4.9%	12.6%
Household Incomes $25,000 - $49,999	20.3%	24.8%	24.3%	25.0%
Household Incomes Above $100,000	26.2%	24.8%	23.7%	22.5%
Average Household Income	$79,272	$77,838	$77,847	$76,784
Households				
Average Household Size	3.00	2.57	2.96	2.73
Single-Person Households	19.5%	26.2%	16.9%	22.4%
Owner-Occupied Households	76.1%	61.3%	75.7%	68.9%
Projected Growth of Market				
Population, 2009-2014	4.4%	8.5%	15.7%	13.0%
Households, 2009-2014	4.1%	8.4%	14.6%	12.5%

Figure 4.1, Profile of Study Area, City, County, and Metro Area.

of Duluth's, just above Gwinnett County's, and on par with the nation's.
•The Study Area's per capita income has increased at a more aggressive rate than the City or County, but well below the metro and national rates.
•The proportion of households earning less than $15,000 in the Study Area is higher than the City, on par with the County, but well below the metro and national rates.
•At the other end of the spectrum are the households earning over $100,000, the Study Area's proportion of these households is slightly higher than the City, County and metro area, and well above the nation.
•The average household income for the Study Area is $79,272. This household income is above the City, County, and metro area, and well above the nation.

Daytime Population

The daytime population is another important component for development decisions by developers, builders, and retailers. Businesses desire customers during both daytime and evening hours, so residents and employees are both important.
•The daytime population (employees) for the Study Area is almost 700. This accounts for a very small proportion of the City's employment, with just over four percent of total employees for the City of Duluth.
•Since 2000, the Study Area's employment has actually declined slightly (-1.3%), while the City's and County's employment base grew at a significant pace.

Residential

Metro Overview

The current national recession began with the housing sector. While the overheated markets of the West coast, the Northeast, and Florida were the first to feel the effects of the downturn, the market meltdown has now reached almost every region of the nation. With a massive number of foreclosures still bringing down values in many areas of the country, it is not yet clear when and at what level the market will reach a "bottom."

While metro Atlanta was not considered to be one of the residential markets with the most dramatic run-up in prices, it has, nevertheless, been greatly impacted by the current downturn. Because the metro area had been growing rapidly for years, the residential construction industry was a large part of the local economy. As demand for housing softened, the industry was not able to pull back quickly enough on providing new supply. The result has been a glut of unsold new homes throughout the metro area

Submarket Overview

The Study Area is located in Gwinnett County, a suburb of metro Atlanta that has historically been one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. According to Claritas, the County's population was approximately 350,000 in 1990. By 2009, it is estimated that the population has more than doubled.

Gwinnett County has seen a dramatic drop in new residential development in recent years. In 2008, the total number of new homes sold was 2,822, which is almost 70% lower than the 2005 total of 9,391. If trends from the first half of 2009 continue, new home sales this year will most likely be around 50% lower than 2008. The number of subdivisions with active sales has already dropped by half between 2005 and today. The average sales price increased steadily from 2005 ($258,996) to 2008 ($289,280), but has dropped back dramatically for year-to-date 2009 ($253,752).

Study Area Characteristics

Other than the Proctor Square Apartments and the townhomes and condominiums in downtown Duluth, there is very little residential development within the actual boundaries of the Study

There is, however, a great deal of residential development directly adjacent to the Study Area. The housing in this area, which is listed as the 389 households in the chart in figure 4.1, is very diverse. It includes both apartments and single-family homes with a wide variety of ages, styles, and price points.

Directly adjacent to the downtown area are historic single-family homes, many of which have been restored and are well-maintained. Surrounding this historic core are subdivisions of various ages and conditions. Some are newer neighborhoods that would be considered attractive to potential home buyers. Others are older starter-home neighborhoods that are beginning to show signs of disinvestment.

Residential Sales

The following table shows new home sales in the 30096 zip code from January 2005 through June 2009. These figures include detached single-family, attached single-family (townhomes), and condominium developments. The Study Area is located in the center of this zip code, and while the zip code is a great deal larger than the Study Area, it provides a good snapshot of new home development in the immediate area.(refer to figure 4.2)

Within the 30096 zip code, the decrease in the annual number of homes sold has been dramatic. In 2005, there were 490 new homes sold, but in the first half of 2009, there were only seven sold. Much of this drop-off can be attributed to the severe housing downturn seen across the nation. In addition, the 30096 zip code has been developing for quite some time; so much of the easily developable land has already been built on.

While the number of homes sold has been decreasing, the average sales price has actually been trending higher. There was a large spike in 2007, when the average sales price jumped almost $100,000 in one year. In 2008, the average sales price dropped back down to slightly above the 2006 figure. This anomaly is explained by home sales in one neighborhood, the River District at Berkeley Lake. In 2007, five homes sold in this neighborhood with an average sales price of $1.1 million.

There are almost no single-family homes within the boundaries of the Study Area. There are also very few newer single-family neighborhoods directly adjacent to the Study Area. Other cities in the metro area, such as Smyrna, Norcross, and Suwanee, have included new single-family development as part of their downtown revitalizations. Based on the experiences in these other communities along with conversations with local real estate agents, it appears likely that once the real estate market recovers, there will be a market for new single-family homes close to downtown Duluth.

The Town Place Park development in downtown Duluth includes 41 fee-simple townhomes. According to the listing agent, two of these townhomes remain unsold, and the foundations for three additional units remain unfinished and are currently owned by one of the project lenders. The original sales price for these townhomes ranged from $300,000 to $380,000. As the residential real estate market collapsed, the developer had to drastically reduce prices to sell the remaining units. The average sales price for recently sold units is now around $170,000. When the economy recovers, however, demand for this product type will most likely return.

The Town Park Place development has the only condominium units within the Study Area. This development includes 16 condo units located in one building, with parking underneath. Before the economic downturn, seven of these units sold in the low $300,000s. The nine remaining units are now owned by one of the project lenders. The prices on these foreclosed units have been reduced to between $165,000 and $195,000, but none have sold. According to the original sales agent, the buyers for these condominiums were empty nesters downsizing from a larger single-family home.

New Home Sales, Zip Code 30096, 2005-2009 YTD

Year	Subdivisions	Homes Sold	Sales Price
2005	20	490	$210,620
2006	14	298	$225,323
2007	12	101	$323,815
2008	7	65	$230,964
2009 (Jan. - June)	2	7	$243,218

Source: SmartNumbers and Market + Main.

Figure 4.2, Residential Sales.

This market has almost completely dried up because they can no longer sell their existing homes. There currently appears to be very little demand for condominiums in the area.

Residential Rental

The Proctor Square Apartments is the only apartment complex located within the boundaries of the Study Area, but there are several additional complexes within two miles of the Study Area boundaries. Market + Main surveyed five of these developments representing almost 1,500 units to understand the overall health of the local apartment market.

The average occupancy rate for the surveyed properties is 93%. While this overall occupancy rate is fairly strong, all of the complexes reported that their vacancy rates had increased over the past two years, and they had to either lower their rental rates or provide other incentives to attract tenants. Rents at the surveyed properties range from a low of $580 to a high of $1,370.

The most economically challenged apartment complex in the area appears to be the Proctor Square Apartments. This development is the oldest in the area, and has, by far, the lowest occupancy rate at 83%. According to management, they have been hit especially hard by the downturn, and occupancy has dipped as low as 62% over the past two years. Because the units are older, this complex competed by offering the lowest rental rates in the area. With the current decrease in demand, some of the newer complexes in the area have lowered their rents to be competitive with Proctor Square, while still offering a more desirable product.

Retail

Metro Overview

Just as the rest of the nation, metro Atlanta's retail market is under pressure from the current economic downturn. Since much of the performance of the retail market is heavily dependent on consumer confidence and the economy as a whole, it is not surprising that retail forecasts for the foreseeable future are discouraging. There are certainly many reasons that industry experts are expecting consumer spending and retail leasing activity to remain slow, such as foreclosures, high debt levels, and job losses, among others.

Recently, leaders in the commercial real estate industry in metro Atlanta were interviewed to get their predictions on the future of commercial real estate in Atlanta. The Executive Managing Director of Cushman and Wakefield of Georgia stated: "This (the retail sector) may be the most difficult area of recovery. Retail is clearly overbuilt in metro Atlanta and retailers have really struggled with the recession and changing consumer desires. Many retail properties have little future as they currently exist. Adaptive re-use will be a necessary strategy for many owners."

Submarket Overview

The Study Area is part of the Gwinnett Mall/Duluth Submarket. According to CoStar, this submarket contains 16.1 million square feet of retail space, accounting for 5.5% of the total retail space in metro Atlanta. Currently, the vacancy rate is 14.8%, which is well above the metro average. The average rental rate in the submarket is $17.60 per square foot. Over the first six months of 2009, the submarket had a negative absorption of almost 160,000 square feet. At mid-year 2009, there was an additional 24,000 square feet of space under construction.

Study Area Characteristics

According to CoStar there is approximately 986,000 square feet of retail space within or directly adjacent to the Study Area. Retail space in this area tends to be older, with an average age of 21.8 years, and most of this retail is located in strip centers spread up and down the Buford Highway corridor. There is also

a significant amount of retail space in downtown Duluth in both historic and newer buildings. Rents within the Study Area range from $12.00 to $29.00 per square foot, with an average of $15.00 per square foot. While the average rental rate is a good bit lower than the submarket, the vacancy rate is also lower at 11.1%. The average time that a space remains vacant is 12.4 months. Over the first six months of 2009, the space absorbed was negative 20,210 square feet.

Strip Centers

There is strip center development all along the Buford Highway corridor, with the newer shopping centers clustered near the northern end of the Study Area. Major centers include the Publix-anchored Duluth Station and the Big Lots-anchored Proctor Square.

Duluth Station is one of the largest shopping centers in the Study Area, and it is struggling in the current retail environment. According to a representative of the owner, Duluth Station has a vacancy rate over 20% and is having a difficult time filling the space, even though Publix is typically a strong draw for smaller tenants. Leasing agents for Duluth Station are receiving very little interest from potential tenants, and the calls that they are receiving are from third-tier uses, such as thrift stores and karate studios. This property has several challenges. The first is its location below grade; this limits the visibility of the smaller tenants. Additionally, with a total of 94,000 square feet, it is a great deal larger than the typical grocery-anchored shopping center. It's most serious problem, however, is the competition from more successful retail developments and environ along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, which runs parallel to and is in close proximity to Buford Highway.

The other major shopping center along the corridor is Proctor Square. It is located near the center of the Study Area and is one of the oldest retail developments. According to the owner, vacancy has greatly increased during the economic downturn. Until the middle of 2008, Proctor Square typically stayed 100% leased, but currently the center has 35,000 square feet available out of a total of 92,450 square feet. Because the center is in need of renovation, it is very difficult for the owner to compete with all of the vacant space opening up in newer shopping centers.

These challenges facing Duluth Station and Proctor Square are fairly typical of the strip centers in the Study Area. Much of the space along the corridor is vacant or occupied by tertiary uses. According to local leasing agents, these retail centers along Buford Highway struggle to attract and keep quality tenants for several reasons. First, and most importantly, the surrounding area is vastly overbuilt with retail space. With so much excess capacity, it is almost impossible for the retail centers in the Study Area to compete with the shopping centers located closer to higher-income areas or along heavier travelled roads. Another obstacle is the Study Area's location where several very different demographic groups intersect. There are very few businesses that can appeal to all of these groups and build sufficient consumer traffic. To the west is a very affluent residential base, but there is little reason for them to travel past other shopping opportunities to visit stores on Buford Highway. There is a Hispanic community in the center of the area, but its population is likely too small to support a great deal of retail. To the south and east is a thriving Korean retail market. It might be possible to pull some of these businesses up the Buford Highway corridor. There are limits, however, to the depth of this market, and it is likely that the opening of Mega Mart at Gwinnett Place Mall will act as a magnet to pull much of that type of development back towards the mall on Pleasant Hill Road near Interstate 85.

Downtown

Included in the Study Area is the City of Duluth's downtown

Photo of a festival in the Town Green (source www.pps.com)

retail district, consisting of both historic structures and recently-built developments. The centerpiece of the downtown is a large town green with an interactive fountain. According to CoStar, there are 23 commercial buildings in the downtown area with approximately 96,000 square feet of space. Currently, there are several vacancies, especially in the newer buildings. According to local leasing agents, downtown Duluth suffers from the classic "chicken or egg" situation: the area doesn't have the foot traffic necessary to draw specialty retailers, but the area needs more specialty retailers to increase foot traffic. Efforts to grow and improve retail in the overall Study Area have to begin and build in downtown Duluth. From a development standpoint, efforts should be made to clean up the surrounding area and develop the currently vacant lots to remove the many "gaps" in the streetscape. While some of this development could be commercial, it is also important to provide additional residential space to give the area nighttime activity. When the downtown is a successful, vibrant, and fully functioning town center, drawing people from a large trade area, it will then be possible for this positive retail activity to spill over onto the Buford Highway corridor.

Office

Metro Overview

The metro Atlanta office market consists of almost 140 million square feet of space. In the first half of 2009, the office market experienced negative absorption of close to 590,000 square feet, and overall vacancy rose to 18.0%. Approximately 643,000 square feet of new space was added to the market in the second quarter. At mid-year, 2.7 million square feet remained under construction. Quoted rental rates were relatively stable at $21.32 per square foot, but aggressive concession packages were increasingly available according to Cushman and Wakefield.

Submarket Overview

The Study Area is located in the Duluth/Suwanee/Buford Office Submarket. According to CoStar, this submarket is made up of 12.9 million square feet of space, representing 4.8% of the overall metro Atlanta office market. The current vacancy rate is 18.8%, which is higher than the metro average. The average rental rate is $17.98 per square foot, which is below the metro average. During the first half of 2009, there was 37,140 square feet absorbed by the market. At mid-year, there was 141,620 square feet under construction.

Study Area Characteristics

According to CoStar, there is approximately 429,000 square feet of office space located in or directly adjacent to the Study Area. The vacancy rate for this space is 25.1%, which is much higher than both the submarket and metro vacancy rates. On average, office space in the Study Area remains vacant for 17.8 months. In the first half of 2009, there was negative absorption of 1,430 square feet.

In general terms, office uses can be divided into two broad categories: local-serving tenants and regional tenants. Local-serving tenants are those whose primary customer base are local residents. Regional office tenants provide a service to other companies or individuals on a regional, national, or international basis. These are the office uses that bring outside dollars into a community. According to local leasing agents, small professional office spaces in the Study Area have historically performed fairly well, although the market is struggling now because of the economy. Almost all of the tenants, however, are local-serving office.

While there are many large regional office tenants in the greater Duluth area, they are not located in the Study Area and most likely will not locate there in the foreseeable future. Office development for regional office tenants does not perfectly follow a pattern, as perhaps retail following residential tends to. This

type of office space is actually one of the most difficult land uses to recruit. There are stringent requirements for access, amenities, location, and agglomeration that are used as guidelines. This basically means that office begets office; office is a use that most often clusters together. There does not appear to be sufficient demand for additional office space in the Study Area at this time. Even when economic conditions improve, vacant retail space will provide strong competition for the local-serving office tenants.

Industrial

Metro Overview

The metro Atlanta industrial market consists of approximately 499 million square feet of space in 6,618 buildings. For the first half of 2009, the industrial market experienced negative absorption of 641,000 square feet. Vacancy rose slightly to 9.6%. At mid-year 2009, approximately 200,000 square feet of space had been added to the market with an additional 182,160 square feet under construction. Direct quoted rental rates averaged $3.88 per square foot, according to Cushman and Wakefield.

Submarket Overview

The Study Area is located in the Duluth/Suwanee/Buford Industrial Submarket. According to CoStar, this submarket is comprised of 44.5 million square feet of space, representing 7.3% of the metro Atlanta industrial market. The vacancy rate in the submarket is 12.8%. The average rental rate is $4.68 per square foot, which is above the metro average. In the first half of 2009, there was negative absorption of 552,130 square feet. At mid-year, there was no new industrial space under construction.

Study Area Characteristics

According to CoStar, there is approximately 2.37 million square feet of industrial space in or directly adjacent to the Study Area. The average age of these industrial buildings is 20.9 years. The vacancy rate is currently 14.4%, and the average time that vacant space remains on the market is 14.7 months. The average rental rate is $3.60 per square foot. In the first half of 2009, there was negative absorption of 54,280 square feet.

Heavy Industrial

Most of the industrial space is located at the southern end of the Buford Highway corridor, near its intersection with North Berkeley Lake Road. To the west of Buford Highway, much of the development is heavy industrial, with direct railroad access. While these buildings will most likely remain in use for quite some time, transportation constraints will greatly limit future development of heavy industrial in the area.

Light Industrial/Flex Space

To the east of Buford Highway there is a great deal of light industrial or flex space. Most of these buildings have been built within the last two decades. They have brick and glass on their front facades, which creates an office park appearance. Often, these spaces have office up front with warehouse space in the rear. According to local leasing agents, the typical tenant is a small, family-owned business that uses the space for distribution. The buildings are typically multi-tenant with spaces ranging from 2,400 square feet to 16,000 square feet. Tenants include businesses dealing with textiles, shoes, and consumer products. Rents range from $2.00 to $8.00 per square foot.

Most of the tenants are small businesses that have been greatly affected by the credit crunch and the reduction in both customer purchases and their credit lines. The occupancy rate at one of the developments has dropped from 97% to 85% over the past two years.

According to the leasing agent for one of the larger light industrial properties, approximately 50% of the tenants are Korean-owned, and this has been the case for the past three to four years. Many of


Photo of a festival in the Town Green (source www.makli.com)

these Korean-owned businesses were previously located in Doraville. They relocated to Duluth because often the owners already lived in the area and because of the critical mass of Korean-oriented retailers that are located nearby. Up until the start of the economic recession, this light industrial/flex space performed very well in the Study Area. As economic conditions improve, there will most likely be demand for additional space. It should be possible to draw this type of development further up the Buford Highway corridor in new buildings on currently vacant or underutilized tracts.

Auto-Related Uses

To the north of Pleasant Hill Road along Buford Highway are various small industrial buildings. Most of these are leased to businesses associated with auto repair. While many of these buildings are unsightly, these properties represent some of the most successful developments in the Study Area, from a market standpoint. Because market pressure for other commercial uses is weak, it will be difficult to replace these businesses with higher-end uses. From an economic development standpoint, it may be wise to leave these businesses in place, but greatly improve the aesthetics and screening of the buildings.

Related Development Outside Study Area

There are very few newly completed or planned major developments within the boundaries of the Study Area, but there are several that are directly adjacent. The two mixed-use developments with the most potential impact on the Study Area are Point Berkeley International Village and Greene Village at Pleasant Hill.

Point Berkeley International Village

Point Berkeley is a multi-phase commercial development by the NorthPoint Group. Phase I is complete and includes 34,000 square feet of office space and 81,000 square feet of warehouse/showroom space. Construction on Phase II is also complete and it consists of approximately 170,000 square feet of retail space. The commercial units in both phases are being sold as condominiums. According to the onsite agent, less than ten percent of the space in Phase I is still available, and approximately 35 percent of the space in Phase II is available. Phase III is a seven-story office building that will also be marketed as commercial condominiums. The construction of the building shell is complete, but NorthPoint has not yet begun to market the units. Future phases are slated to include a hotel and additional retail space.

The Point Berkeley project is noteworthy not so much for its size, but for the demographic changes and economic development that it has brought to the local market. The overwhelming majority of businesses in this development are oriented to Korean immigrants. The area now has a critical mass of Korean businesses that are in turn attracting additional immigrants and their businesses.

Greene Village At Pleasant Hill

The Greene Village development was envisioned as essentially a small town to be located along Pleasant Hill Road near its intersection with Buford Highway. The developer for this project, Greene Investments, has assembled approximately 25 acres. Original plans called for 467,000 square feet of retail, 240,900 square feet of office, 790 residential condominiums, 32 townhomes, and a large-scale hotel. If this development were to successfully move forward in the future, it would have a significant impact on the market potential of adjacent real estate. However, after speaking to Gwinnett County planning officials and one of the project consultants, it appears that this development is on hold indefinitely.

Community Participation Process

Photo from January 21, 2010 Public Design Charrette

Photo from January 21, 2010 Public Design Charrette

Duluth Community Involvement

The Kimley-Horn team has extensive experience with a wide variety of community participation efforts, as well as, creating unique and successful public outreach programs tailored to meet the specific needs of a community. The key to any successful plan is the degree to which affected stakeholders take "ownership" of the plan. Without built-in consensus of plan recommendations, planning efforts frequently sit on the shelf in a perpetual struggle against competing agendas, and or a lack of funding. Our team prides itself on the lengths we go to in order to arrive at meaningful participation and consensus throughout the planning process from a wide variety of stakeholders, rather than simply trying to build consensus at the conclusion of the plan.

We are glad to report that our team, in working with the City and the steering committee, has not encountered any of the above negativity, but rather have found a collaborative community spirit that in spite of minor differences, wants to work together for a common solution – to improve the Buford Highway Corridor and ultimately the City of Duluth.

Creating the Participation Plan

The Kimley-Horn team met with the City staff on May 6, 2009 and started work on the overall project schedule, milestone dates and community participation plan. It was during this initial kick-off meeting that the City established the idea of reaching out to a representational citizen group made up of business owners, property owners, developers, residents and established community leaders as a "Steering Committee". This steering committee would be a valuable resource to our team, not only as a source of historic and current community information but also as a sounding board for our initial ideas and redevelopment strategies. The city had indicated that they would assist our team by allowing the use of their city web site to post important information and meeting dates to help keep the general public informed during the project. At this kick-off meeting, our team also started the collaborative process with Mr. Ken Bleakly, of Bleakly Advisors, who was a TAD (Tax Allocation District) consultant that was hired separately by the City to initiate the process of creating and applying for a TAD District for the Buford Highway Corridor.

After our team went through a thorough data collection and mapping exercise and an overall Real Estate Market Overview, our team was ready to hold the first community meeting. This first community meeting was held on August 20, 2009 in the community room of City Hall and included a good representation of community stakeholders mentioned above. The agenda for this first meeting consisted of the following:

- Team Introductions
- Project Introduction and Description
- Traffic and Transportation
- Existing Conditions
- Market Analysis Overview
- SWOT Exercise / Public Input
- Next Steps / Next Meeting

With a majority of the first meeting spent on laying the groundwork and presenting the information that our team had come up with, we would like to highlight two areas of positive community feedback. The first was the Market Analysis Overview. We think the participants appreciated the frank and common sense approach our team put into delivering what would amount to "not very good news" as far as the current market is concerned. Even as bad as the current market is, our study was able to point out Duluth's relative successes and unique position in relationship to the overall City of

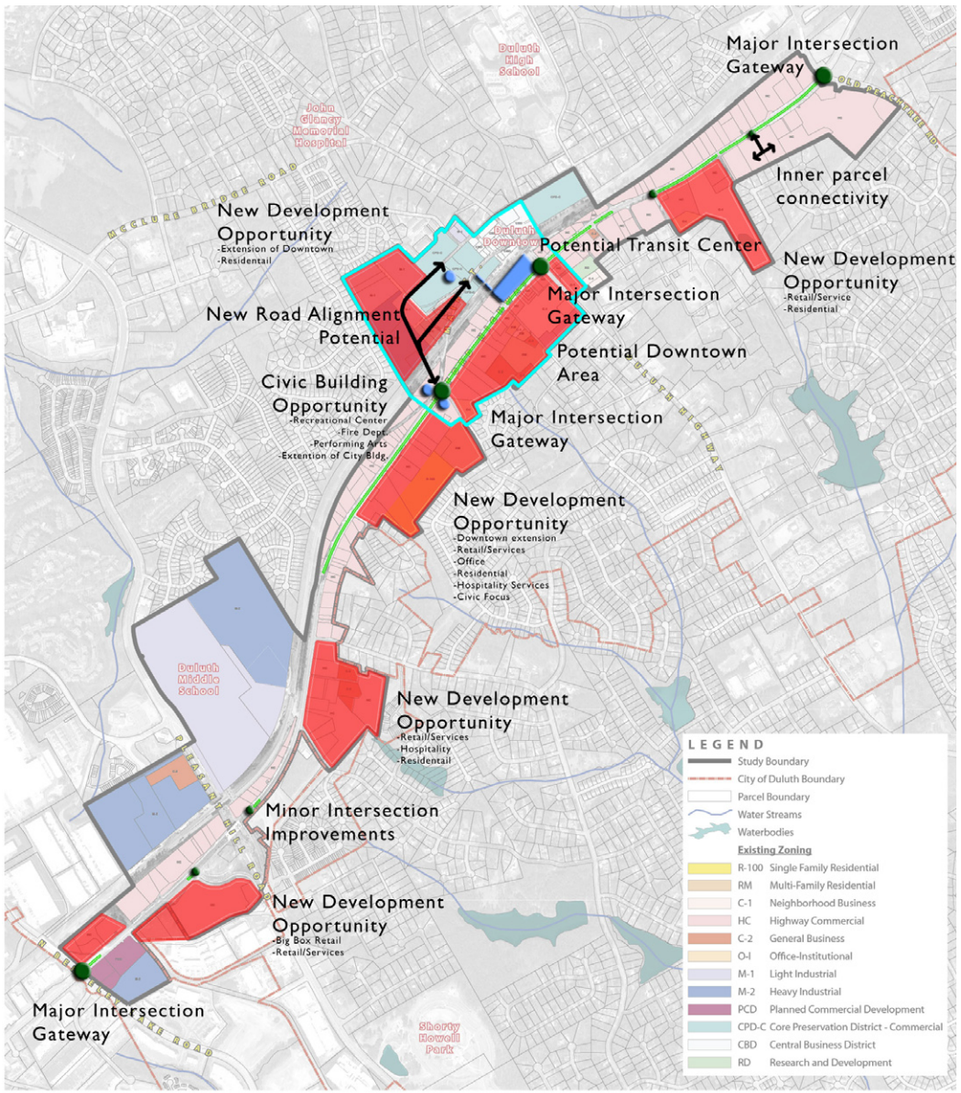


Figure 5.1, Potential development exhibit presented at August 20, 2009 community meeting.

Duluth, Gwinnett County and finally to the Atlanta MSA. This was a hard, yet very critical and important message to deliver and get across, as it will continue to be the realistic basis of design for the redevelopment plan.

The second area we would like to highlight was the SWOT exercise / Public Input portion of the meeting. This is where our team was first introduced to what a wonderful and proud community the City of Duluth is. Just about every stakeholder had something to say and participated in this exercise of identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Buford Highway Corridor. The following are just a short example of the positive comments and valuable input that our team received that night:

Opportunities

- Capture the "traffic"
- Community pride / landmarks
- Landscaping / medians
- Add pedestrian network – more sidewalks
- Single family access to downtown and corridor

Weaknesses

- Railroad
- Old, outdated buildings
- Lack of sewer
- Non-conforming uses
- Lack of pedestrian environment

Strengths

- Rexall Drugs
- Strickland House / Historical Museum
- Positive political climate / strong leadership
- Downtown / Town Center
- People / residents
- Railroad

Immediately after this first community stakeholder meeting, our team met with the City Staff for a working session, on September 2, 2009, to review and assess the information that our team gathered from the public input. We also started to develop our list of key "big ideas" for us to develop and refine in order to present at our next public meeting. Some of these included:

- Traffic issues, adding medians, road diet
- Gateways (1 vs 2 vs 3 locations)
- Expand downtown and connections to Buford Highway
- Discuss "sub-character" districts
- Discuss linear park for narrow parcels
- Economic and market realities

In an effort to broaden our community outreach and involvement, the City decided to have the next public meeting as part of a monthly city wide HOA meeting on October 14, 2009. At this meeting we presented a shorter version of our data collection and market analysis overview but we also unveiled some of our redevelopment concepts that we started to illustrate in an overall corridor diagram (see figure 5.1). This redevelopment diagram captured graphically some of our initial "big ideas" that we developed from stakeholder and city input, such as:

- Mark the City boundaries (north and south) with two major gateways
- Add landscaped medians in the center turn land to "green the corridor"
- Facilitate the "expansion & connection" of the downtown out to Buford Highway
- Highlight the four large parcels that could accommodate major redevelopment
- Increase connectivity from the existing single family neighborhoods to the corridor
- Create a more "sustainable" mixed-use and walkable development pattern
- Increase the quality of life aspects of the corridor

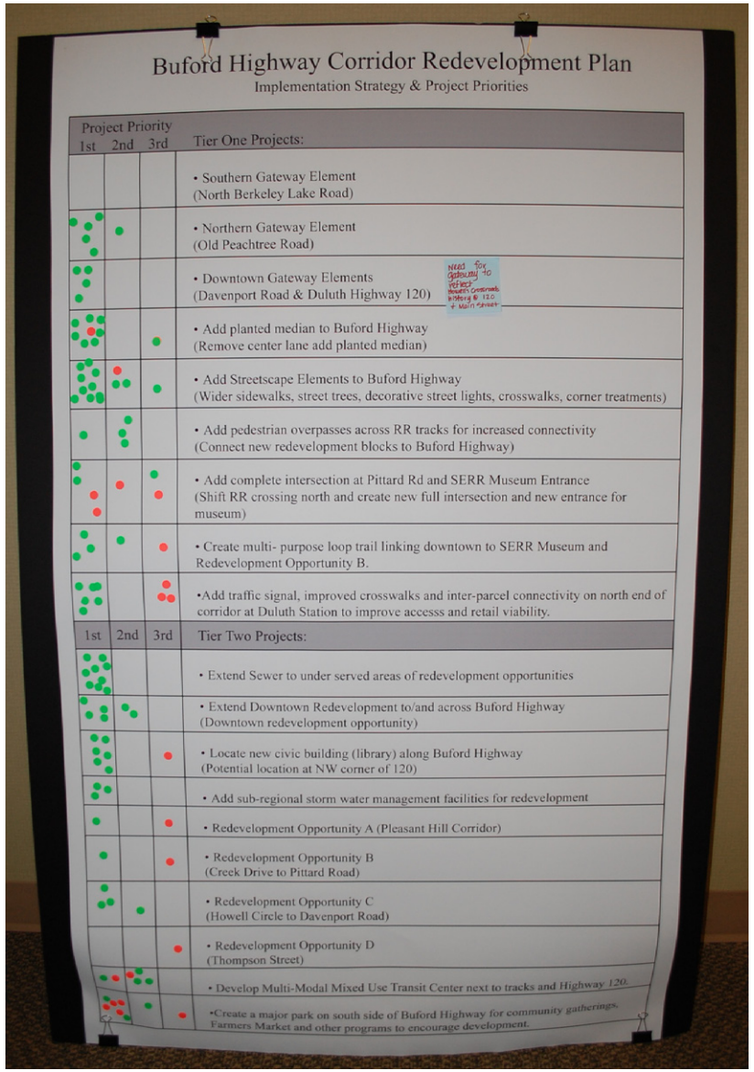


Figure 5.2, Two-tiered action plan board with public comments/dots at the January 21, 2010 public meeting.

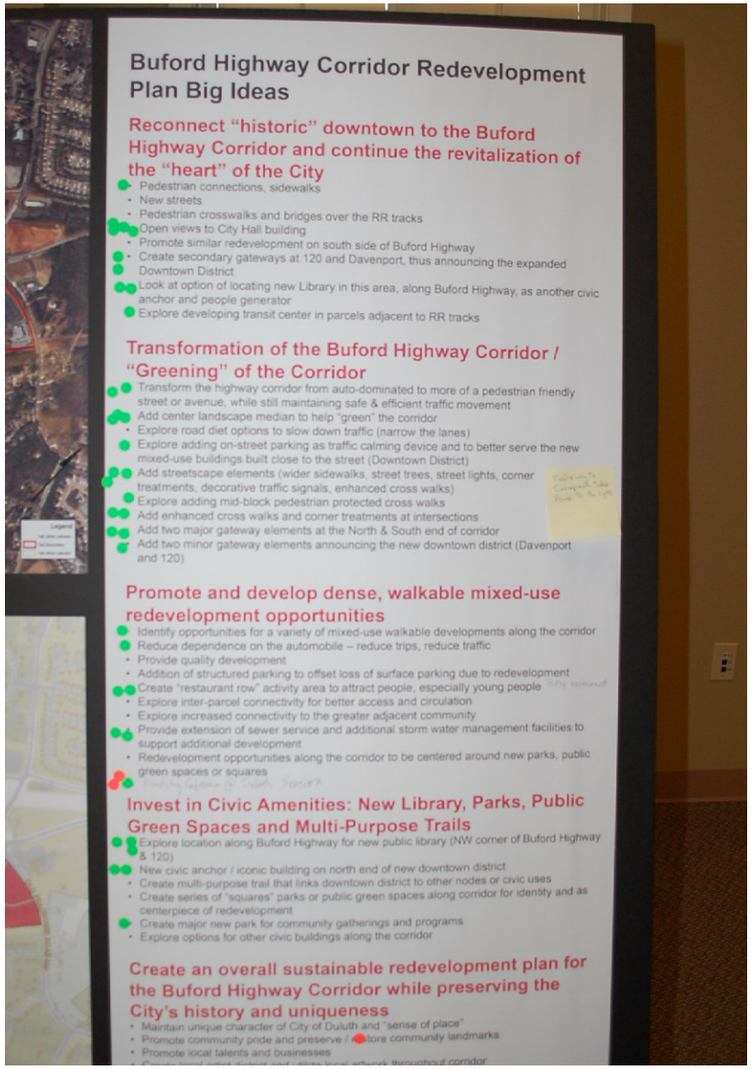


Figure 5.3, "Big Idea's" board presented at the January 21, 2010 Public Design Charrette.

Open House / Design Charrette

The largest public meeting was held on January 21, 2010. The format for this meeting was more of an open house combined with a design charrette. The important part of this meeting, after some introductory remarks and instructions, was for the stakeholders and the general public to have "hands-on" experience coming up with ideas and solutions and to be able to weigh-in on what the corridor should look like in the future. Our team assembled five different stations to engage and solicit community interaction and responses to a variety of corridor redevelopment issues.

- Overall Corridor / Big Ideas
- Downtown Redevelopment Opportunities
- Major Redevelopment Opportunities
- Corridor Elements
- Action Plan / Projects List

As part of the open house process, the community stakeholders were encouraged to visit each station and provide their input. Stakeholders were given green (positive) and red (negative) dots to vote on a variety of issues from our final list of "big ideas" to our two-tiered action plan and projects list (see figures 5.2 – 5.3). Our design team had developed conceptual diagrams and site plans that showed the possible redevelopment potential for the new expanded downtown area and the four other major redevelopment parcels along the corridor (see figure 5.4 and 5.5)

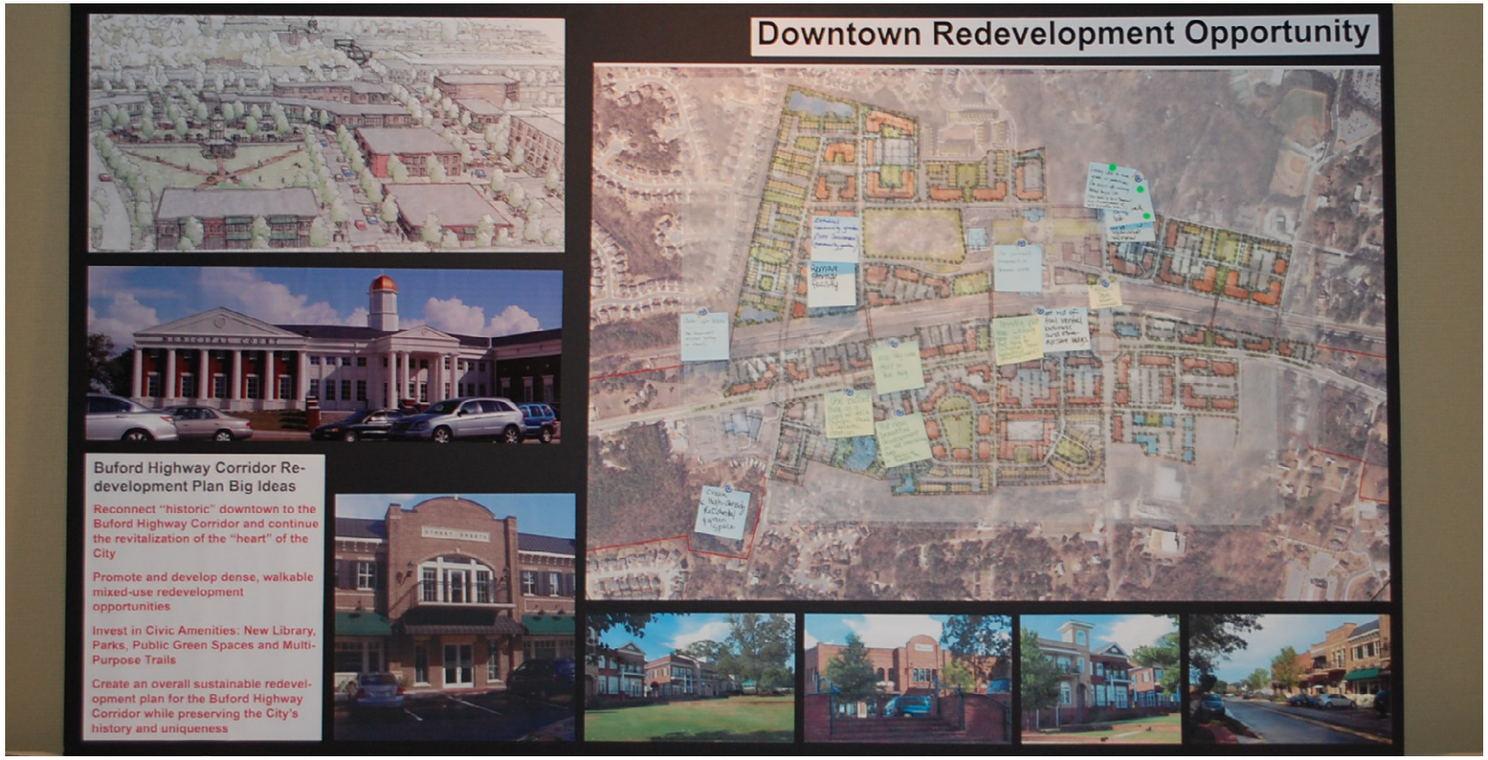


Figure 5.4 Downtown redevelopment board presented at the January 21, 2010 Public Design Charrette.

Figure 5.5, Redevelopment opportunties board presented at the January 21, 2010 Public Design Charrette.

Corridor Redevelopment Plan-Big Ideas

Pedestrian and Vehicular Connectivity

Existing Vehicular Connectivity

Existing vehicular connectivity within the Buford Highway corridor can be viewed in three different categories, detailed below.

Through-Connectivity

The current use of Buford Highway is oriented predominantly toward the concept of through-put. Connectivity between the limits of the study area is high. With two travel lanes in each direction, Buford Highway is a high-volume artery focused on moving "through traffic."

Connectivity to Attractions Along the Corridor

In addition to the two lanes of through-put capacity in each direction, Buford Highway provides a two-way left-turn lane in the center of the cross-section which provides nearly-continuous accessibility to properties fronting Buford Highway. This accessibility is usually impeded only by the volume and speed of opposing traffic.

As a result of the open-road characteristics of Buford Highway, land use adjacent to Buford Highway has been developed to favor an "automobile in, automobile out" type of access pattern. The driveway accesses and parking configuration are oriented to promote maximum efficiency for allowing single automobile trips to access the property from Buford Highway, conduct business, and then efficiently exit the property to get back onto the high-volume roadway. In short, the development along Buford Highway has developed to complement the current function of Buford Highway – pass-through trips. Much of the current development adjacent to Buford Highway simply does not promote destination trips.

While there are currently many "destinations" along Buford Highway, our use of the term destination trip refers to the opportunity to promote redevelopment that would capture multiple vehicle trips into a "destination or node" that would allow the user to park their vehicle and walk to other services to satisy daily needs.

While vehicular connectivity from Buford Highway to individual properties is high, vehicular connectivity between adjacent individual parcels is more of a challenge. Many parcels have been developed to efficiently move single automobile trips to the property from Buford Highway, and vice versa. Limited inter-parcel access or "node" development does not promote destination vehicle trips or a "park and walk" behavior. The result is a high-volume of individual driveway connections and a corresponding high-volume of driveway traffic entering and exiting Buford Highway. While the ease of access is convenient and beneficial to properties adjacent to Buford Highway, the high-volume of ingress and egress traffic applies "side friction" to the operations of Buford Highway. Furthermore, each driveway presents another obstacle in the pedestrian route and the amount of traffic using these driveways does not promote a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Connectivity to Attractions Adjacent to the Corridor

Vehicular connectivity from Buford Highway to the one of the area's most significant attractions – Downtown Duluth – is also a challenge. Considering that Downtown Duluth is only one block removed from Buford Highway, there are only three existing connection points to access the Downtown area from Buford Highway – old Main Street, Brock Road, and SR 120.

The old Main Street connection is accessible at an intersection with Buford Highway, just north of the Davenport Road intersection. This is not a favorable route into Downtown due to the skewed alignment of old Main Street at the Norfolk Southern RR grade crossing. Accessing the new Main Street requires crossing the RR, making a left-turn onto Hardy Street, and then making a right-turn onto Main Street.

The Brock Road connection to Downtown is also challenged by geometrics. Access to Brock Road occurs at an intersection with Buford Highway just north of the SR 120 intersection. Access to Downtown requires a RR at grade crossing, then an immediate left-turn onto Main Street to travel roughly ¼ mile to the Downtown core.

The SR 120 intersection is the most-used point of entry to the Downtown area. The intersection is signalized and provides two lanes in each direction between Buford Higway and Main Street. With geometrics that are superior to the other two connections, this access point presents the opportunity for a pedestrian and vehicular gateway to the Downtown area. This access brings approximately 13,000 vehicles per day to the front door of the Duluth Downtown area. While this is a tremendous advantage, it is recognized that local traffic accessing the Downtown area has to compete with a large volume of traffic on SR 120 that wishes to continue west of Buford Highway toward the Peachtree Industrial Boulevard corridor. Operational improvements along SR 120 between Buford Highway and Main Street, including signalization at the SR 120/Main Street intersection, represent an opportunity to balance both interests.

Local traffic wishing to access the Downtown area also has the option to use either old Main Street or Brock Road. While the geometrics of these accesses are less desirable than SR 120, they are functional and allow for some separation of local traffic from the SR 120 through-traffic. Improvements at the old Main Street intersection with Buford Highway represent another opportunity to provide further-enhanced access to the Downtown area.

Existing Pedestrian Connectivity

As discussed above, Buford Highway has primarily developed as a vehicular corridor, focused on moving through-traffic and providing high-efficiency vehicular ingress and egress patterns for adjacent development. As previously noted, some of these conditions do not provide for a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Connectivity to Attractions Along the Corridor

Pedestrian connectivity along the corridor is represented predominantly by sidewalk facilities alongside Buford Highway. Sidewalk is relatively continuous along the east side of Buford Highway from the North Berkeley Lake Road intersection to the Old Peachtree Road intersection. Sidewalk is also continuous along the west side of Buford Highway near the Davenport Road intersection to the Old Peachtree Road intersection. Sidewalk along the west side of Buford Highway also exists intermittently between North Berkeley Lake Road and the entry to the Southeastern Rail Museum. There is a substantial gap in sidewalk facilities along the west side of Buford Highway from the museum entry to Davenport Road. Thus, pedestrian connectivity along each side of Buford Highway ranges from good to fair.

With only four (4) signalized intersections along this portion of Buford Highway, there is a shortage of controlled, marked pedestrian crossings linking the east side of the corridor to the west side of the corridor. Thus, Buford Highway acts as a significant pedestrian barrier and does not promote pedestrian connecitivity across the corridor.

Connectivity to Attractions Outside the Corridor

Furthermore, pedestrian linkages from Buford Highway to attractions just outside the corridor are very limited – particularly in the Downtown area. Sidewalks extend only a few hundred feet away from Buford Highway along SR 120 in either direction. No sidewalks exist along the old Main Street connection to the western portion of Downtown. While the Brock Road intersection does have pedestrian facilities, the sidewalk connections end immediately west of Buford Highway.

Another key feature of adjacent connectivity would be the ability to bring pedestrians from residential areas to the Buford Highway corridor or into Downtown. A large single-family residential core exists north of Pleasant Hill Road and west of Buford Highway. Significant portions of this core are less than ¼ to ½ mile from City Hall and the Downtown attractions. Yet, no pedestrian connections have been made due to the existing barriers of industrial land-use between Downtown and the residential area. This area represents a significant market opportunity for Downtown merchants.

A similar condition exists along Davenport Road east of Buford Highway, with residential neighborhoods that are ½ mile or less from Buford Highway but currently under-served by intermittent sidewalk facilities. Connecting this residential area to the corridor is a critical need, and would set up well with potential future improvements at the Davenport Road intersection improvements and extension across Buford Highway into the Downtown area.

Finally at the northern end of the study area another large concentration of residential areas exists off of Rogers Bridge Road. The neighborhoods of River Brooke, Olde Towne and Carriage Gate are located between Buford Highway and Peachtree Industrial. Portions of these neighborhoods are wintin a half-mile walking radius of the old Main St. and Buford Highway.

Corridor Elements and Implementation

Transportation elements along the corridor can be planned to provide desirable vehicular and pedestrian behavior, as well as changing the visual appeal and atmosphere of the corridor. The elements discussed herein are considered to be multi-purpose – enhancing efficiency and connectivity for vehicular and pedestrian transportation modes while also improving the transportation experience within the corridor.

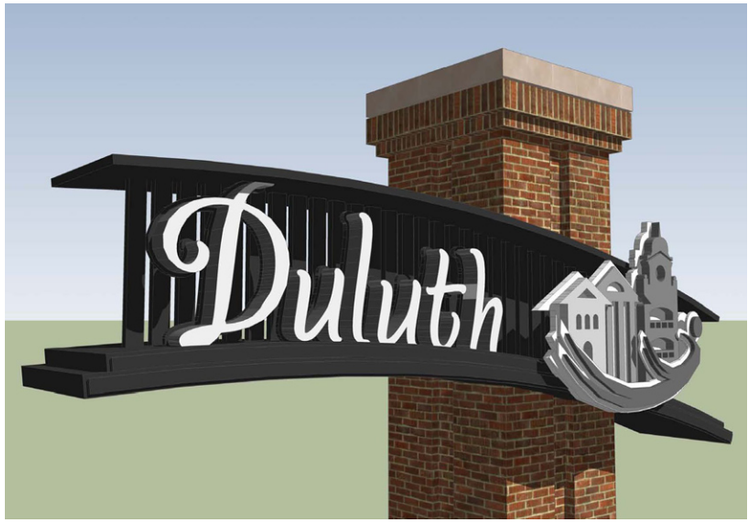
It is the intent that these corridor elements may be implemented with a relatively low construction impact to the highway and right-of-way.

Gateway Intersections

Gateway intersection treatments could include a variety of improvements, including enhanced crosswalks, landscaping, hardscaping, medians, and aesthetic treatments such as monumentation and decorative signal assemblies/lighting. The gateway intersections are intended to “announce” entry to a significant area along the corridor (i.e. character areas or districts) and, by the design of the improvements, encourage a certain desired transportation behavior within that significant area.

Architectural and landscape elements incorporated at gateway intersections (such as monuments) should be planned and designed to be consistent with desired re-development architecture and with overlay districts that apply to those gateway areas.

Gateway intersections are best applied at significant intersections (i.e. signalized intersections) that represent a significant entry or exit point from the corridor. Through the public workshop process, it was evident that public opinion favored the initial-phase construction of gateway intersection improvements on intersections near the



Conceptual gateway elements for the City of Duluth (Images from Sky Design)

Downtown core (SR 120 intersection and future Davenport Road intersection). Thus, programming of these improvements should follow a tiered-priority approach, with priority established for the Downtown district intersections. As future funding is available and other portions of the corridor begin to re-develop, then mid-term to long-term implementations could focus on intersections away from Downtown – such as at Old Peachtree Road, North Berkeley Lake Road, or at the Duluth Historical Society building near the Brock Road intersection.

A key consideration for gateway components will be the long-term sustainability and maintenance characteristics of the materials. Landscaping materials should be indigenous and drought-tolerant. Architectural and streetscape materials should be consistent with any maintenance requirements stipulated as part of overlay districts or zoning.
The requirements of GDOT Policy 6755-9 Landscaping on DOT Right of Way will govern for gateway construction and materials within the Buford Highway right-of-way or any other State roadway facilities. This policy guidance sets forth requirements for irrigation, plant material types, and planting locations.

Landscaped Medians

Construction of landscaped medians along Buford Highway or any other State facilities will also be subject to the approval of GDOT in accordance with the requirements of GDOT policy.

Due to clear-zone requirements that set minimum set-backs for trees from a face of curb for this type of facility, it is anticipated that a minimum 16-foot raised median width would be required to accommodate tree plantings that will exceed 4” caliper at maturity. The existing center turn-lane width on Buford Highway is approximately 14 feet. Thus, simply converting the existing center turn-lane to a linear raised median would only be feasible if plantings do not include trees. Otherwise, to accommodate tree plantings, it may be necessary to modifications to lane striping or the outside curb lines to accommodate the additional median width and maintain appropriate travel lane widths. Nonetheless, it would appear that this could be achieved with relatively minor construction operations. Again, it would be dependent on the type of planting material selected.

The traffic operations impacts of median construction have been previously discussed. It is anticipated that median construction improvements would be most readily-accepted by adjacent property owners if incorporated as part of a large-scale parcel re-development, with access patterns and development style that would integrate with managed access. Part of the re-development planning and engineering could include traffic studies to determine if a median opening or signal is warranted by the proposed development.

Streetscape Elements

Streetscape elements may be constructed, primarily to improve the pedestrian experience. The materials and construction of these facilities would also be subject to GDOT approval to the extent they are constructed within the State right-of-way. Further, the streetscape materials and construction should comply with overlay district or zoning requirements.

Streetscape elements could include a variety of components, including enhanced sidewalks, landscaping, street furniture, informational kiosks, wayfinding or district signage, and pedestrian-level lighting. Tree plantings along the outside edges of Buford Highway will be subject to less-stringent set-back requirements than plantings in a center median. Thus, the installation of heavier landscape elements on the “streetscape” side may be more readily accommodated by the existing roadway cross-section and right-of-way widths.

A decorative “street sign topper” initiative could also be incorporated into the streetscape elements and applied corridor-wide. This type of initiative would be feasible as a first-implementation project, possibly as part of a City wide signage and branding campaign.

It is also recommended that streetscape implementation reference to GDOT’s Pedestrian and Streetscape Guide as a guidance document. This document is not a code or policy document.

View of existing conditions down Buford Highway.


Photo edit down Buford Highway with potential median, streetscape, and redevelopment enhancements.


Photo Evolution of Streetscape Enhancements to Buford Highway

Figure 6.1, SR 120 Improvements

Traffic & Transportation

The City of Duluth currently has several significant transportation projects in various stages of development. The following summarizes these projects, including a brief description of the project and current status.

Project 1 – SR 120 widening, sidewalk, and intersection improvements

This project seeks to improve traffic operations and pedestrian connectivity on SR 120 (Abbotts Bridge Road) from Buford Highway to Hill Street (see figure 6.1 SR 120 Improvements). Key features of this project include:

- sidewalk improvements to provide pedestrian connectivity from Buford Highway to Hill Street,
- intersection enhancements to provide a "gateway" intersection treatment,
- widening/realignment to improve traffic operations and provide for free-flow right-turns at the intersection of SR 120 and Main Street, favoring a more efficient movement for through traffic continuing north toward Peachtree Industrial Boulevard,
- signalization of the existing three-way stop at the intersection of SR 120 and Main Street, and
- landscape median and island treatments on SR 120 just north of Buford Highway to complement the intersection enhancements and soften the entry into downtown.

The SR 120 improvements are approximately 50% complete in the design stage. Current activities include environmental documentation and development of preliminary plans. This project uses a variety of funding sources, including federal grants and SPLOST proceeds.

Project 2 – Hospital Connector

This project seeks to provide a new east-west connection north of downtown by building a new-location roadway from West Lawrenceville Street to SR 120. Key features of this project include:

- four-lane, divided cross-section to provide vehicular and pedestrian connectivity from West Lawrenceville Street to SR 120, in the vicinity of the new Duluth High School driveway, and
- intersection improvements to provide for an "interim" intersection at SR 120 with the ability to upgrade the intersection in the future for consideration of potential future widening and realignment on SR 120 north of Hill Street.

The Hospital Connector improvements are approximately 60% complete in the design stage. Current activities include environmental documentation and development of preliminary plans. This project uses federal grant funding.

Project 3 – Davenport Extension

This project seeks to extend existing Davenport Road by creating a new signalized intersection at Buford Highway and constructing a new-location roadway north of Buford Highway (see figure 6.2 Davenport Extension). This roadway would connect with Hill Street at Hardy Street to provide a more efficient transportation connection to the western end of the downtown area. Main Street would also extend westward to intersect with the Davenport extension. Key features of this project include:

- constructing a new railroad grade crossing and removingthe existing Main Street grade crossing to dramatically improve vehicular safety at the railroad crossing,

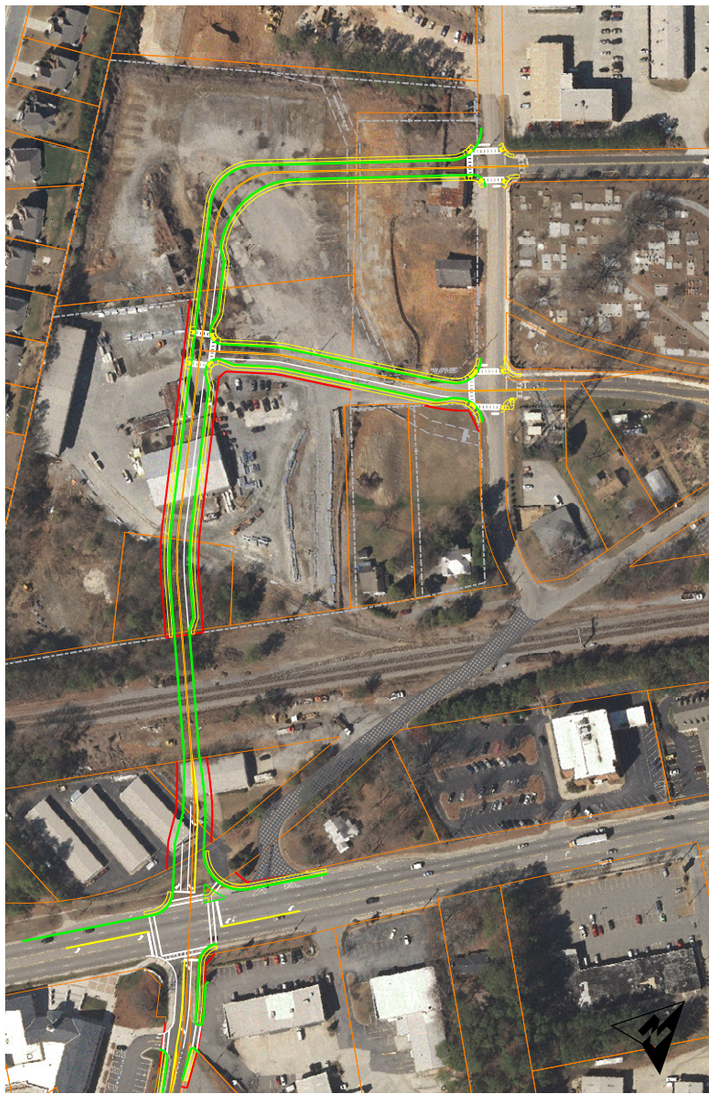


Figure 6.2, Davenport Extension

- intersection improvements at Buford Highway to provide for a four-way signalized intersection, and
- sidewalks for pedestrian connectivity from Buford Highway to the downtown area.

The City has recently completed conceptual alignment studies for this project and the City has secured the necessary right-of-way to construct the project through the Capital Materials industrial site. This project has federal grant funding allocated to it; however, the City is considering funding a portion of the project locally to accelerate design and construction.

Project 4 – Buford Highway Median/Enhancements

This project is programmed for the purpose of constructing medians or landscape enhancements along Buford Highway anywhere within the Duluth City Limits. The exact locations of these improvements have not yet been established, pending completion of this re-development study. It is anticipated that this project would include:

- potential intersection gateways (landscaping, hardscaping, upgraded cross-walks and pedestrian facilities, aesthetic mast-arms for signals, and/or monumentation) or
- linear median construction including landscaping.

The design stage for these improvements has just reached inception. This project has federal grant funding.

Project 5 – Davenport Sidewalks

This project seeks to construct continuous sidewalk facilities along both sides of Davenport Road from Buford Highway eastward to approximately Bromley Rowe. These facilities will provide pedestrian connectivity from residential areas along Davenport Road to Buford Highway.

The Davenport sidewalk improvements are approximately 75% complete in the design stage and right-of-way acquisition activities are currently on-going with construction anticipated to begin in the fall of 2010.

Utilities and Infrastructure

Stormwater Management

The majority of the Buford Highway Corridor and/or the Norfolk Southern Railroad are located along the Eastern Continental Divide that separates the drainage basins to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Many of the existing developed properties were constructed before the instigation of stormwater management regulations; therefore storm runoff leaves these properties at greater rates and with potentially more pollutants than the pre-existing natural condition of the land. There are no floodplains that will impact redevelopment of properties within the Buford Highway Corridor.

As properties within the Buford Highway Corridor redevelop, the new landuses will have the opportunity to incorporate state of the art stormwater management facilities that complies with current City of Duluth Stormwater Regulations. The provision of stormwater detention to control peak runoff rates, downstream channel protection to prevent degradation of natural streams due to increased runoff and water quality treatment to allow harmful pollutants to settle out and be safely removed prior to entering natural streams and lakes can be incorporated in an aesthetically pleasing fashion.

To provide for the most efficient utilization of the valuable land within the Buford Highway Corridor, it is desired to incorporate regional stormwater management where practical to consolidate stormwater management thus use the minimum land and share the construction cost of these expensive facilities. Another benefit to regional stormwater management is more attention to maintenance

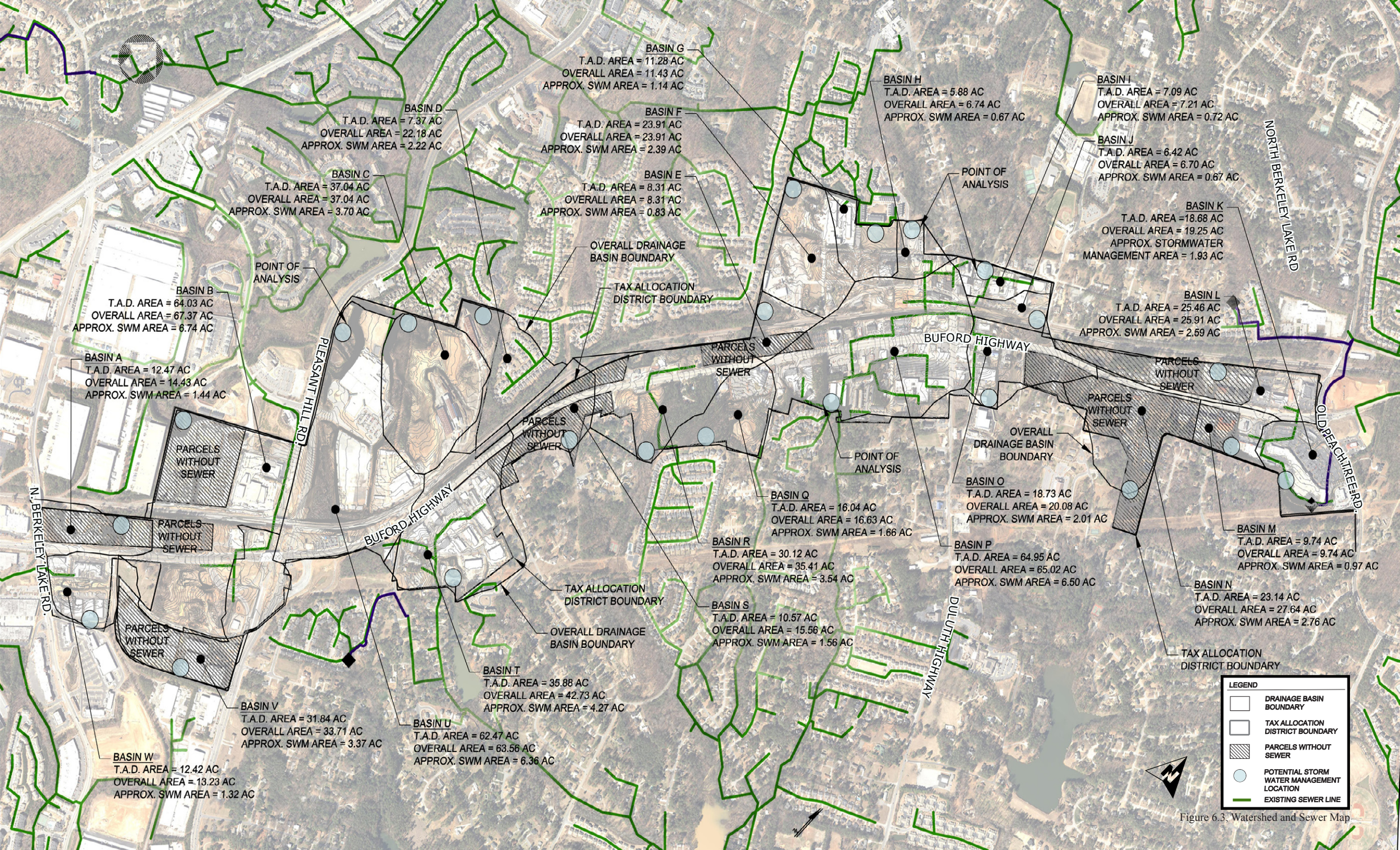


Figure 6.3. Watershed and Sewer Map

of fewer facilities; thus reducing long term on-going cost and improving water quality.

The larger properties along Buford Highway with the most depth are the logical redevelopment opportunities where regional stormwater management makes the most sense. The stormwater management facilities would be sited at or near the lowest elevations of the properties, which generally will be near the rear of the properties that front on the Buford Highway Corridor. An approximate size of these potential stormwater management facilities and has been provided for planning purposes (see figure 6.3 Watershed and Sewer Map). Storm sewer easements can be established between properties of different ownership to transport storm runoff to the regional stormwater facilities.

The smaller properties along Buford Highway with shallower depths are not as compatible with a regional stormwater management approach. In order to facilitate a regional facility it may be necessary for the City to act as a catalyst by purchasing all or a portion of a property to construct the regional facility and be reimbursed as the adjacent properties develop.

Wastewater Collection

As is the case with storm water runoff patterns most of the properties along the Buford Highway Corridor slope away from Buford Highway towards the rear properties which often abut developed properties down slope. Many of the existing developed properties were constructed without the benefit of a gravity sewer collection system and therefore are served by septic tanks and drainfields. As redevelopment densities increase septic systems are not practical.

Portions of the Buford Highway Corridor are currently served by the Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources, therefore all redevelopment opportunities will have the opportunity to connect to the Gwinnett County system without the need for off-site sewer extensions. The remainder of the Buford Highway Corridor lacking sewer service is depicted in figure 6.3.

Extension of sanitary sewers to un-servered redevelopment properties will often require the acquisition of off-site easements and construction of outfall gravity sewers or pump stations and force mains which will eventually serve more than one property owner. Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources policy does not lend itself to reimbursement of expenditures by one developer, once subsequent developments come on line, which are served by the improved wastewater collections system. Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources imposes an economic disincentive to construction of pump stations and force mains due to the long term maintenance and operational expenses. In order to equitably distribute the expense of off-site improvements and make redevelopment affordable, it may be necessary for the City or its Urban Redevelopment Agency to pre-position some of these off-site sewerage collection system extensions to incentivize redevelopment. Sewer service availablity could potentially be pre-positioned with the use of the Tax Allocation District (TAD) or Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) revenues.

The Norfolk Southern Railroad line presents somewhat of a barrier to providing gravity sewer service to the unsewered areas in the northwest and southwest portions of the Corridor. A gravity sewer could potentially be bored under the railroad to serve these two areas, or potentially a wastewater pump station could be utilized although the coordination with Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources to explain the physical constraints will be paramount. A comparison of the most cost effective solution for these two areas is recommended. The remaining unsewered areas appear to be capable of being served via off-site gravity sewer extensions.

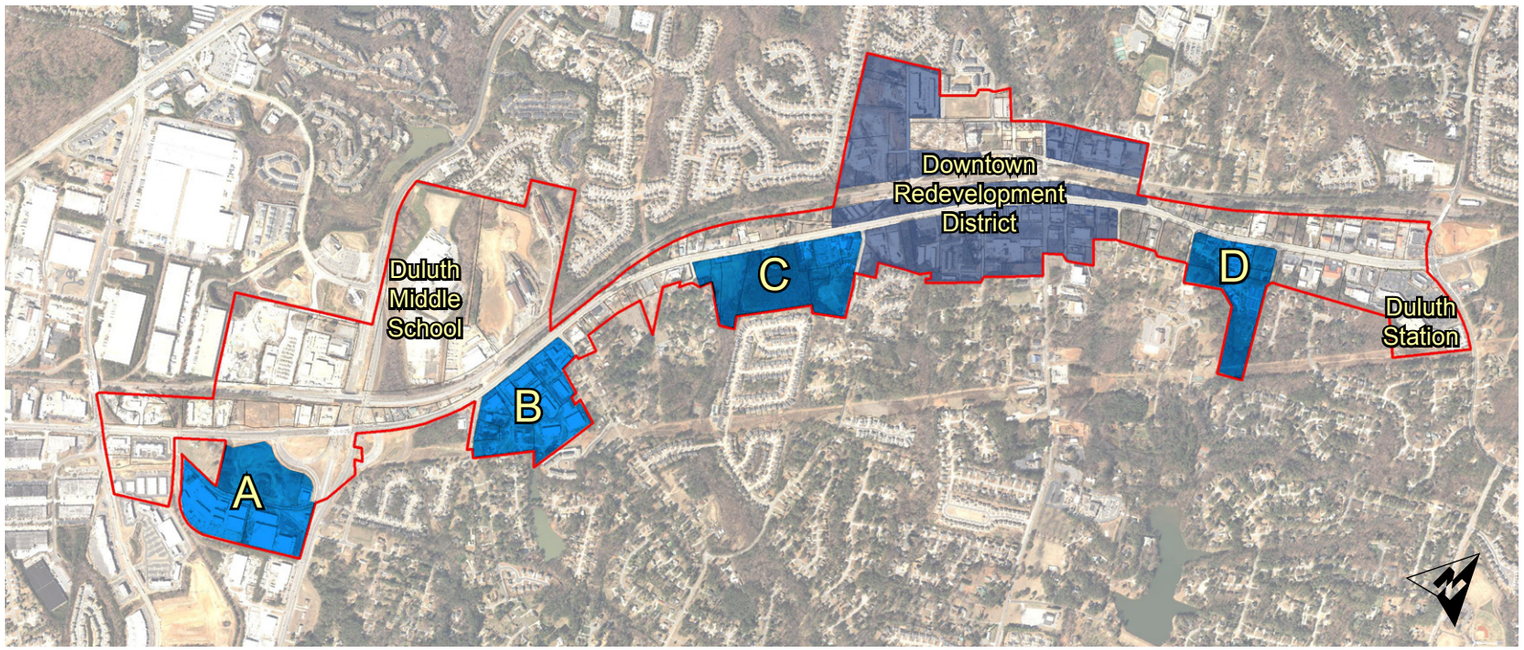


Figure 6.4, Overall diagram of potential large redevelopment areas along Buford Highway Corridor.

Legend

- Retail/Commercial
- Mixed-Use
- Residential
- Civic/Institutional
- Industrial
- Office
- Stormwater Management
- Greenspace

Land Use Legend for Study Area Diagrams (A-D)

Study Area Redevelopment Opportunities

At the Open House / Design Charrette public meeting, our team presented some rough conceptual master plans for the "expanded downtown area" and four other redevelopment areas along the corridor. The purpose of these master plan diagrams was to graphically illustrate the stakeholder and citizen input and design ideas that we received during previous public meetings. These conceptual graphics were then used to elicit public feedback and comment on a wide range of topics such as:

- Development pattern & scale
- Mix of uses
- Walkability
- Pedestrian connectivity (across railroad tracks)
- Green space / open space
- Gateway elements
- Pedestrian connectivity to adjacent single family neighborhoods
- Character of new Buford Highway "main street" section

Through the course of this redevelopment plan effort, the design team and the community have four key focus areas that are most likely and/or most accommodating to change. This assessment is based on a variety of factors, including:

- Relative location within the Study Area;
- Adjacency to areas that are actively redeveloping, or which are primed to do so;
- Size of parcels, or potential for contiguous assembly;
- Vacancy or relative underdevelopment of parcels;
- Political considerations such as status of ownership or amenability to redevelopment.

Based on the above, four development areas were identified and

Figure 6.5. Redevelopment A Diagram

were tentatively identified as Development Opportunities A, B, C, and D (see figure 6.4). Same as the Downtown Redevelopment Area, the Other Development Opportunities were presented to the public at the Open House/Design Charrette as rough conceptual master plans where input was received on each opportunity.

Study Area A

Development Opportunity A is centered on the southwest corner of the interchange at Pleasant Hill Road (see figure 6.5, Redevelopment A Diagram). Its location has the potential to serve not only as a redevelopment location but also as an iconic moment along the corridor, functioning as a formal western gateway into the heart of Duluth.

Conceptual master plans show the site as being developed heavily in retail due to its relationship to both Buford Highway and Pleasant Hill. The site could potentially complement the major projects planned for the Pleasant Hill corridor towards Highway 85. Opportunities for Development A to complement the Pleasant Hill corridor include the potential for a high-rise residential tower. The site is also large enough to create a "big box" or mixed use village that could help anchor the residential tower and create a unique community for the Buford Highway Corridor. Plans also show the fronting of retail or mixed use buildings on Buford Highway to help create character and sense of arrival to the City of Duluth when traveling north. A limitation to the site is a high-tension power easement bisecting the site; the easement might double as either parking or greenspace, depending on indications of the program.

New development along Buford Highway can be designed to echo the character of that found in the heart of Duluth, thereby extending the identity of the City, even if there is not a contiguous connection. It reinforces the function of the gateway with a consistent stylistic message. Redevelopment on Old Berkeley Lake Road could take a number of shapes, but might be most attractive as a "secondary

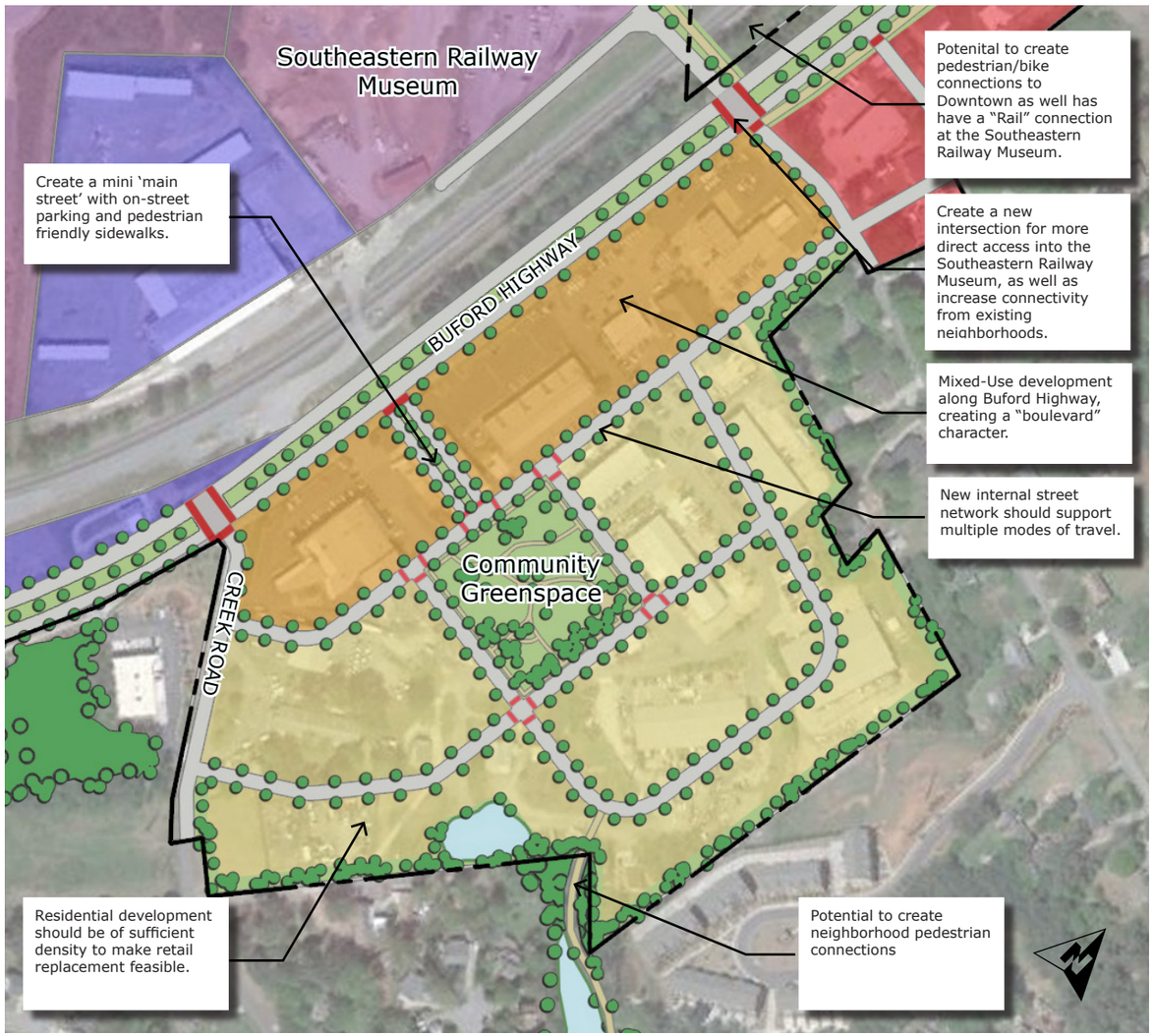


Figure 6.6, Redevelopment B Diagram

main street", with an articulated street frontage and parking tucked behind the new uses. This also has the potential – based on its access to transportation corridors – to be a very high density (ten stories plus) project. This will depend on the desire of the community and the comfort of the market.

Study Area B

Development B is centered along the stretch fronted by the Southeastern Railroad Museum (see figure 6.6, Redevelopment B Diagram). Though this is not an existing 'hardpoint', it does have some potential to become more of an attraction. The Southeastern Railway Museum, which is designated as a State Transporation Museum, is extremely valuable as far as creating interest in Duluth. By reinforcing the presence of the museum along the corridor, and potentially making a rail/trolley connection to downtown which will further increase the drawing power of the Museum.

The conceptual master plans for this development show retail being moved towards the street, continuing the Development A theme of "extending Duluth's aesthetic influence" farther down the corridor – and additional investment return could be found in adding new residential uses in the areas behind. By developing residential, it creates a smoother transition between the corridor and the neighborhoods beyond. To help add value to these residential developments, community greenspaces or a village square could be created that would serve as the key organizing element of the neighborhood and street network. Another opportunity that exists in Development B is to create a multi-use path loop that begins at this development and travels to the historic Downtown. This would help promote pedestrian circulation in the development and give residents a safe and enjoyable route to walk to Duluth's Downtown.

Study Area C

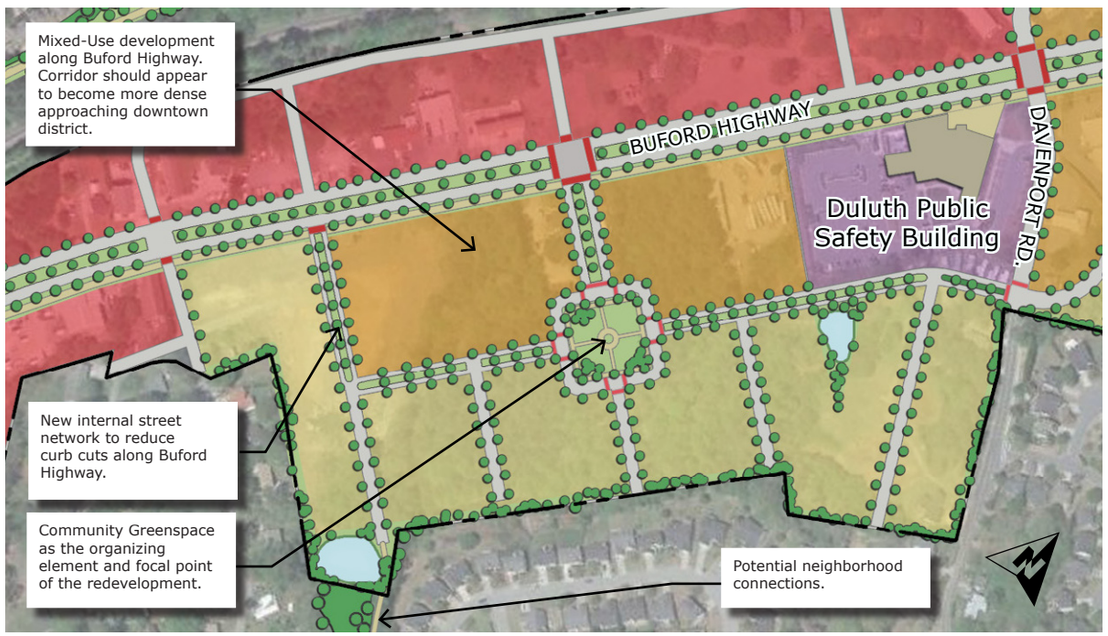
The third Development Opportunity is C which is within the closest proximity to the existing Downtown Duluth giving the site numerous potential project opportunities. The site is shared with Duluth Public Safety building but the rest of the site is mostly undeveloped at this time.

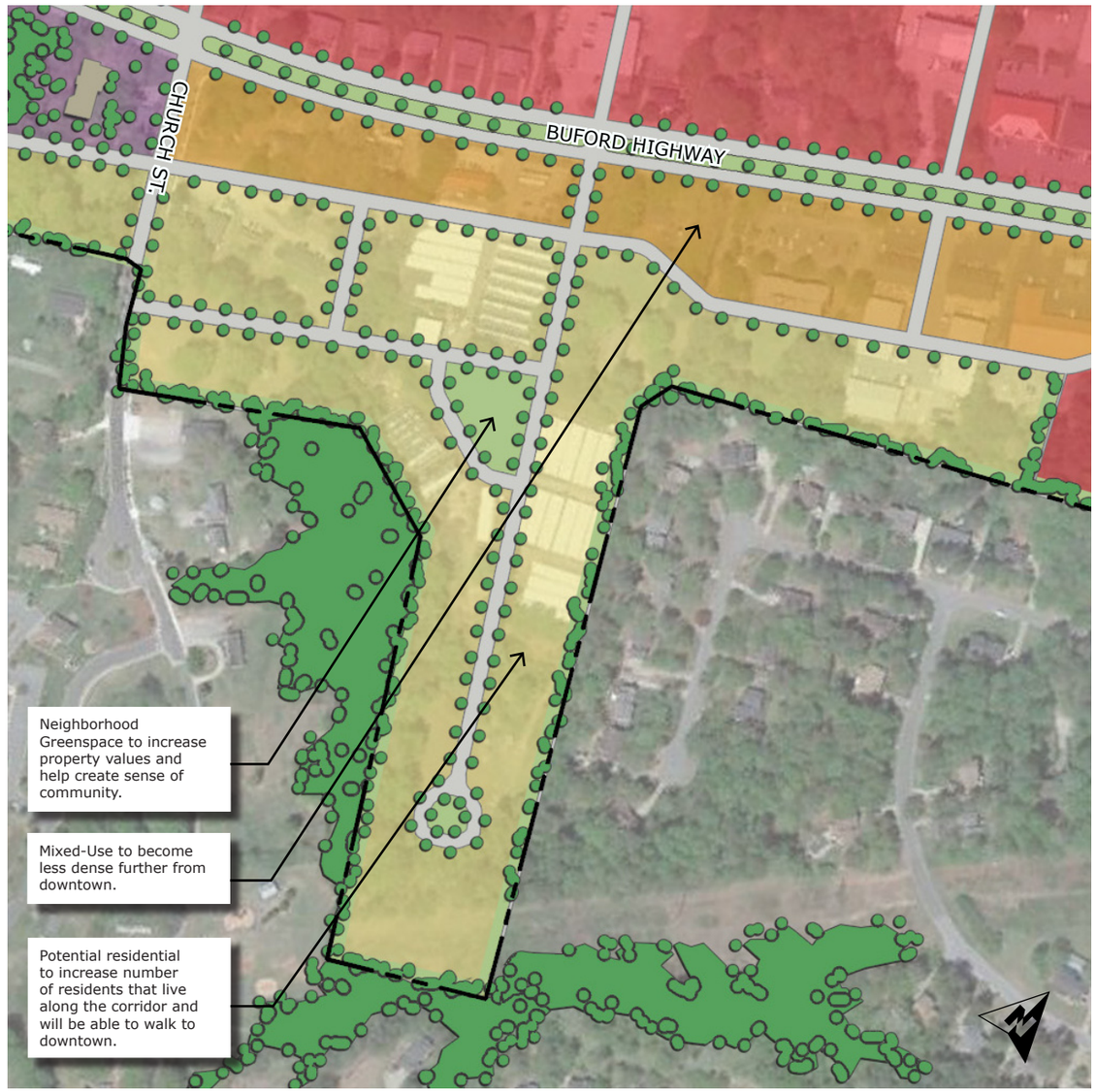
The conceptual master plans for Development C for the most part show retail/mixed-use fronting Buford Highway and developing the remainder of the site in residential. Again just as in Development B, there is the opportunity to complement the residential development on this site with a village square that could also be developed to anchor the retail/mixed-use developments as well. Other opportunities that exist for Development C is the potential to transition the shallow

parcels between the highway and the railroad into a large linear park that could help serve as the multi-purpose trail that connects Development B to the historic Downtown. This park would be both a pubic space amenity and a visual gateway immediate to the center of Duluth. Obviously, a move like this assumes available resources for acquisition and maintenance, but it is of sufficient impact to be worth consideration.

Study Area D

The last currently identified potential development opportunity along Buford Highway is D. Development D is a combination of several parcels and an existing tree nursery that stretches along Buford Highway. Anchored by proximity to Strickland House and office buildings, Development D has sewer nearby.Concepts for this development illustrate opportunities to front Buford Highway with retail and the remainder of the site being developed retail, or a concept where there is primarily residential for the majority of the development. With Development D there are also several opportunities to establish new connectivity links with existing developments that have the potential to help increase the overall street network of the city.





Overall Corridor Redevelopment Opportunities

The Buford Highway Master Redevelopment Plan (see figure 6.7) was also an exhibit presented to the public at the Open House/ Design Charrette. The exhibit helps show the public the overall mass of the corridor and what areas outside of the "focus redevelopment areas" as explained in pages 27-30 might be best suited for.

Starting at North Berkeley Lake Rd. to Creek Dr. there are several large plots of land along the corridor, however due to a various limitations, many of these parcels are seen to have limited redevelopment value. The limitations range from access from Buford Hwy. to visually disconnection due to railroad to overall distance to downtown. Most potential redevelopment uses in this area are seen as industrial, flex industrial, and highway commercial.

From Creek Dr. to Davenport Rd. there are several tracts of land that are roughly +/-200 feet deep outside of the focus areas. These tracts could potenitally develop individually through time with the Buford Highway Corridor Standards to fill in the pieces between downtown and the potenital large redevelopment areas.

Once past downtown to the end of the corridor at Old Peachtree Rd., there are several mixed use opportunities from Development D, but the majority of redevelopment is seen as being highway retail and use Old Peachtree Road's connection to Highway 85 serve as a catalyst for growth and access.

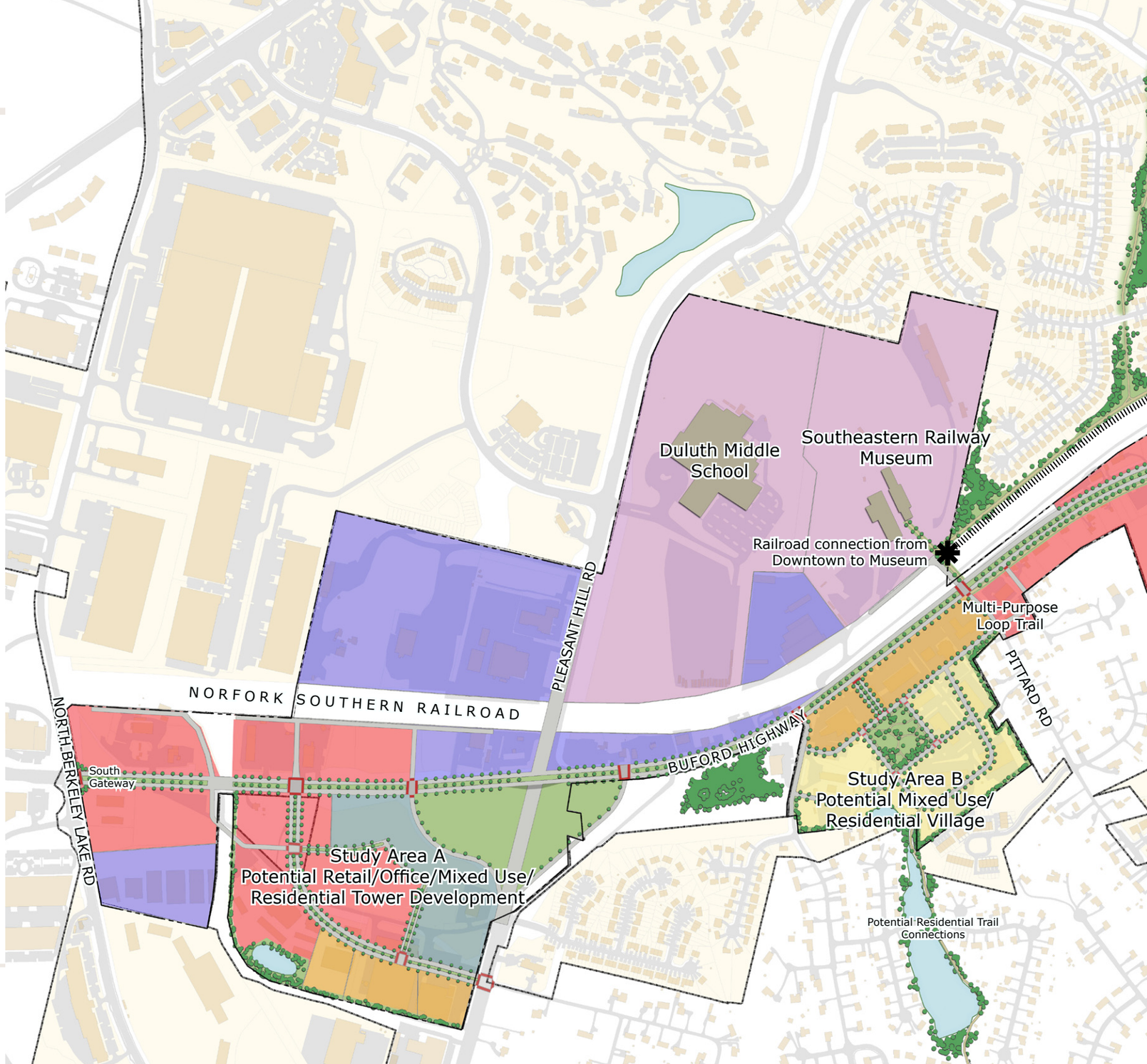
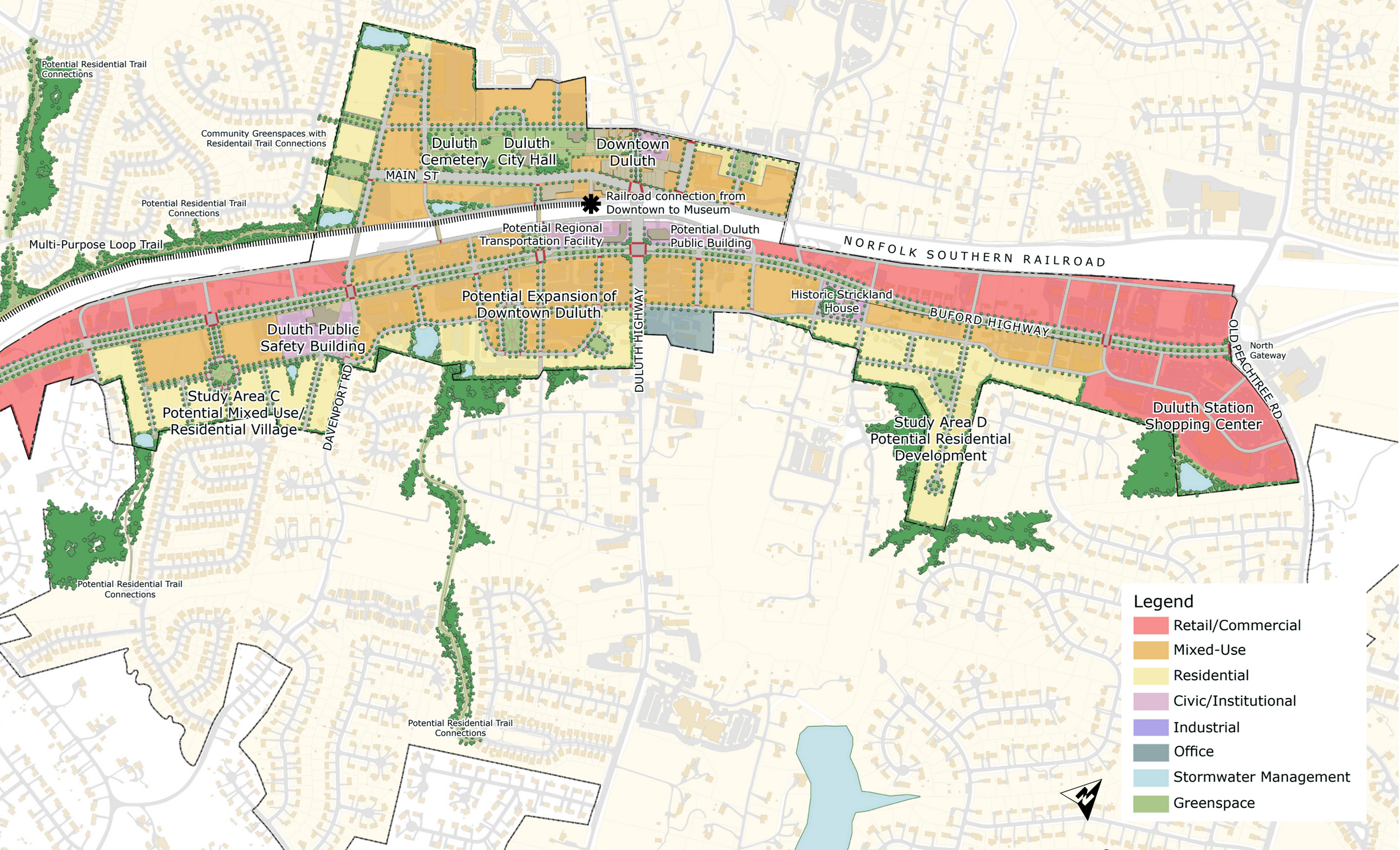


Figure 6.7, Conceptual Master Plan of Redevelopment for Buford Highway


Potential Residential Trail Connections
Community Greenspaces with Residentail Trail Connections
Duluth Cemetery
Duluth City Hall
Downtown Duluth
MAIN ST
Railroad connection from Downtown to Museum
Potential Residential Trail Connections
Multi-Purpose Loop Trail
Potential Regional Transportation Facility
Potential Duluth Public Building
NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILROAD
Potential Expansion of Downtown Duluth
DULUTH HIGHWAY
Historic Strickland House
BUFORD HIGHWAY
OLD PEACHTREE RD
North Gateway
Duluth Public Safety Building
DAVENPORT RD
Study Area C Potential Mixed-Use/ Residential Village
Study Area D Potential Residential Development
Duluth Station Shopping Center
Potential Residential Trail Connections
Potential Residential Trail Connections
Legend
Retail/Commercial
Mixed-Use
Residential
Civic/Institutional
Industrial
Office
Stormwater Management
Greenspace

Downtown Redevelopment Opportunities

Key components of the concept master plan, as well as, input from the charrette included making sure that we first focus any redevelopment opportunities on completing the existing downtown before moving on to other areas. However the concept of "extending" the success of the downtown out to Buford Highway, and ultimately to the retail center on the south side, was very well received (see figure 6.8) . The Downtown master concept plan also illustrates the opportunity to locate another civic building along Buford Highway – a new public library. The proposed location at the northwest corner of Highway 120 was an attempt to anchor and create the northern gateway to the new expanded downtown district.

The downtown conceptual master plan also proposes creating multiple pedestrian connections from the existing downtown out to Buford Highway across the railroad tracks. This will increase the pedestrian connectivity and synergy of these two areas. This can be accomplished, depending on grade, with either a pedestrian overpass (bridge) or a pedestrian underpass (tunnel). Other pedestrian connections will present themselves on-grade with the extension of Davenport Road and any other proposed road connections.

The proposed extension of Davenport Road will create a new major signalized intersection and allow increased pedestrian connectivity from the single family neighborhoods to the south into the downtown. This new intersection will also allow for a new gateway marking the southern start of the new expanded downtown district.

The downtown conceptual master plan illustrates the type of small, appropriately scaled mixed-use buildings that the

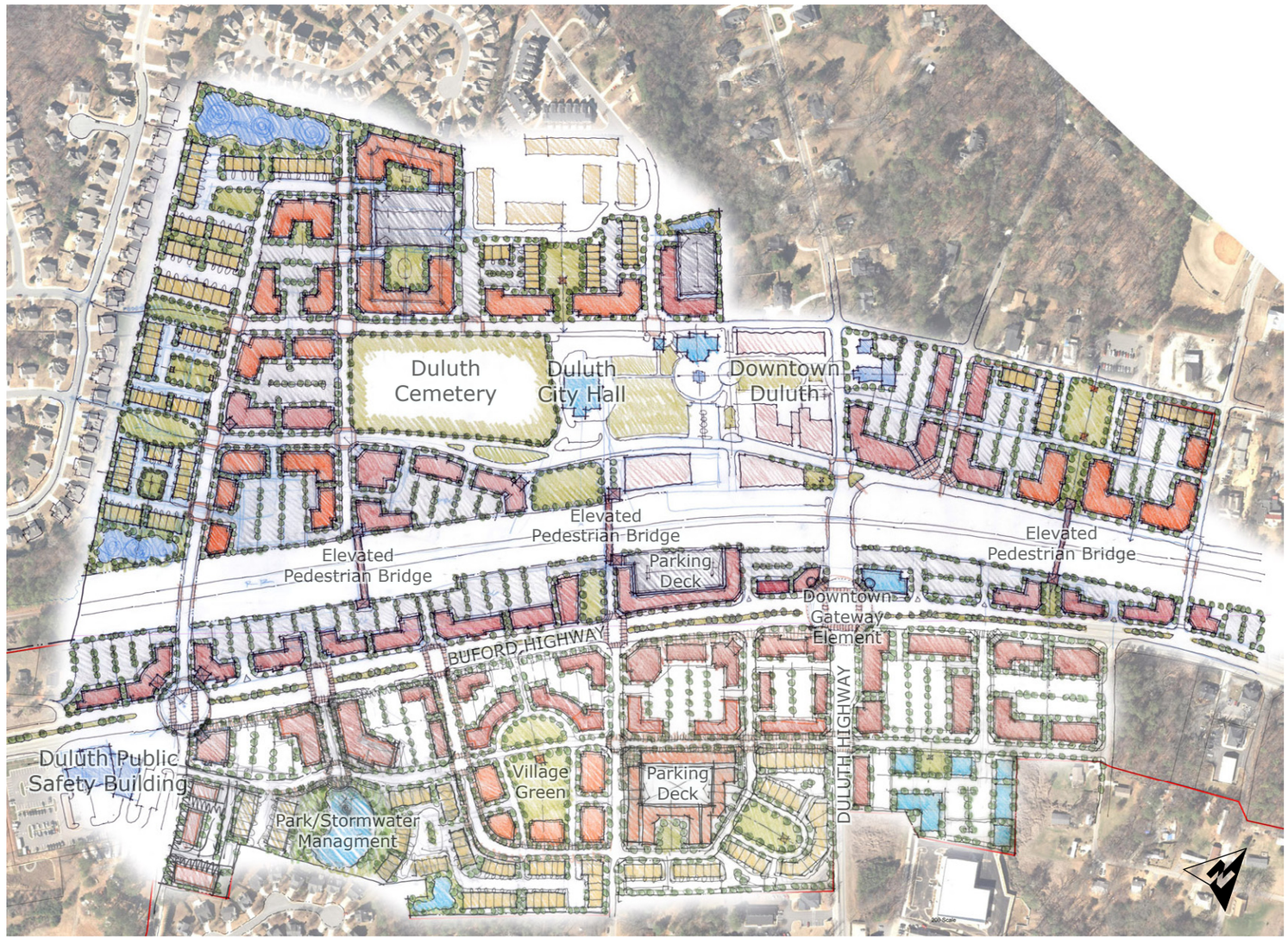


Figure 6.8, Conceptual Plan of "New Downtown" Development.

stakeholders said was right for Downtown Duluth. These mixed-use buildings add additional ground floor retail and services while adding needed residential above. This formula, created in a walkable community pattern, will have the ability to attract young singles and small families to the downtown that want more of a village lifestyle in a dense and walkable community. Adding to this pattern is a series of green spaces or "squares" that anchor each block or new neighborhood (see figure 6.9). These new squares become the new community "living room" where residents walk to, enjoy and meet each other on a daily basis.

Strategically located throughout this new conceptual redevelopment plan we would look to provide multi-purpose storm water management facilities. These would double as additional informal green spaces and passive recreational opportunities for the new residents, all while serving a much broader community function in capturing and controlling storm water.

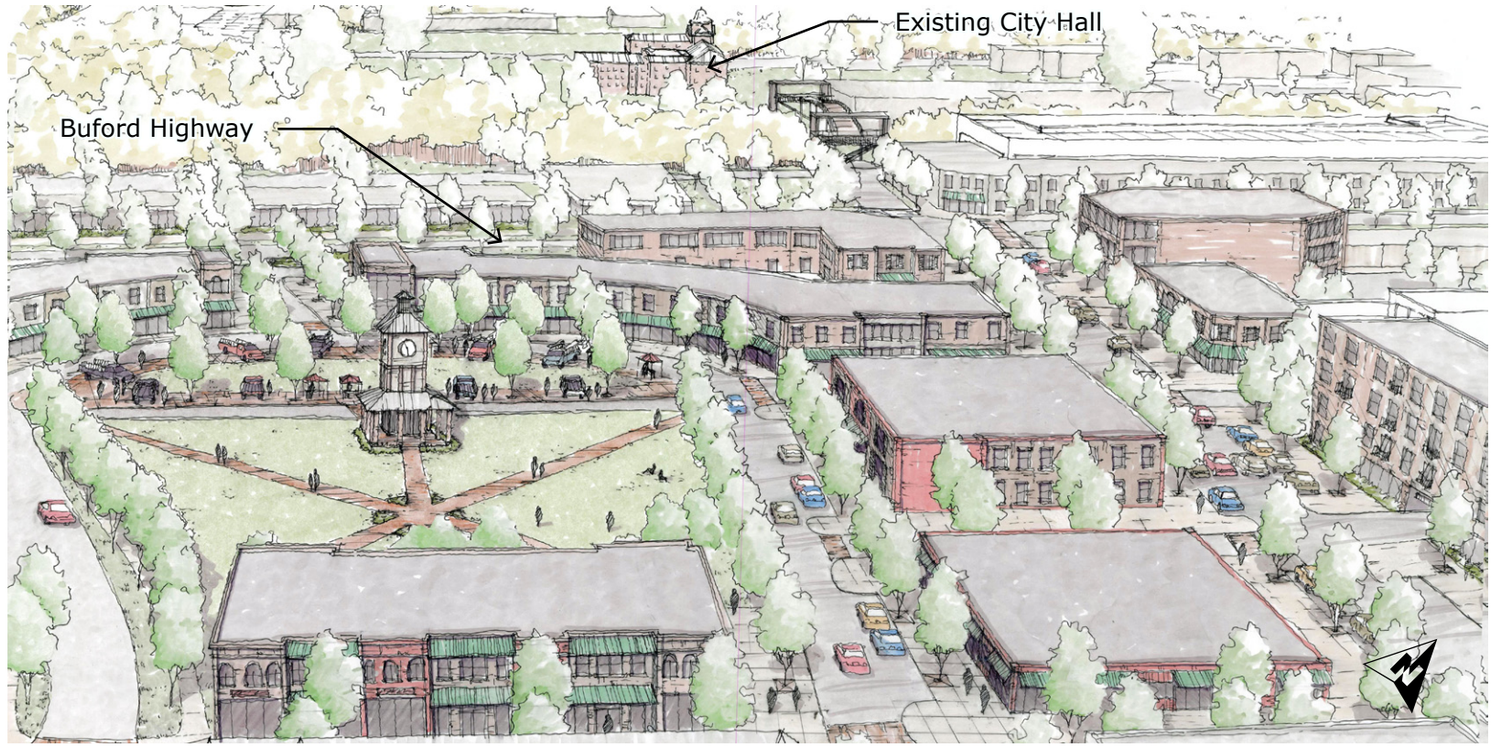


Figure 6.9, Conceptual perspective of "New Downtown" redevelopment looking west towards Duluth City Hall.

Tier 1 Projects

•Southern Gateway Element (North Berkeley Lake Road)

•Northern Gateway Element (Old Peachtree Road)

•Downtown Gateway Elements (Davenport Road & Duluth Highway 120)

•Add planted median to Buford Highway (Remove center lane add planted median)

•Add Streetscape Elements to Buford Highway (Wider sidewalks, street trees, decorative street lights, crosswalks, corner treatments)

•Add pedestrian overpasses across RR tracks for increased connectivity (Connect new redevelopment blocks to Buford Highway)

•Add complete intersection at Pittard Rd and SERR Museum Entrance (Shift RR crossing north and create new full intersection and new entrance for museum)

• Create multi- purpose loop trail linking downtown to SERR Museum and Redevelopment Opportunity B.

• Railroad connection from downtown to Southeastern Railway Museum.

•Add traffic signal, improved crosswalks and inter-parcel connectivity on north end of corridor at Duluth Station to improve accesss and retail viability.

Tier 2 Projects

•Extend Sewer to under served areas of redevelopment opportunities

•Extend Downtown Redevelopment to/and across Buford Highway (Downtown redevelopment opportunity)

•Locate new civic building (library) along Buford Highway (Potential location at NW corner of 120)

•Add sub-regional storm water management facilities for redevelopment

•Redevelopment Opportunity A (Pleasant Hill Corridor)

•Redevelopment Opportunity B (Creek Drive to Pittard Road)

•Redevelopment Opportunity C (Howell Circle to Davenport Road)

•Redevelopment Opportunity D (Thompson Street)

• Develop Multi-Modal Mixed Use Transit Center next to tracks and Highway 120.

•Create a major park on south side of Buford Highway for community gatherings, Farmers Market and other programs to encourage development.

Two-Tier Project List Priority

Realistic Market Feedback

The following is a summary of Market + Main's reactions to the proposed redevelopment projects included in the Buford Highway Redevelopment Plan being prepared for the City of Duluth. These market reactions are based on the information and findings in the Market Overview prepared in September 2009, and on the opportunity to create a new TAD (tax allocation district) and leveraging of SPLOST funds.

Study Area/Corridor

This planning process is designed to serve as a guide for long-term redevelopment, we have assessed the market feasibility of the proposed development scenarios over a twenty-year period. For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that the economy will recover within the next three to five years, and will gradually return to growth rates close to historic norms.

One of the most difficult issues facing the entire corridor is the retail market. The Study Area has too much retail space. This is not projected to change, even when looking at the long-term trends. This oversupply of retail space is not unique to the local area; it is a metro- and nation-wide problem. Because the oversupply of retail space is very likely to continue even after economic recovery, it is appropriate and necessary to look for other potential uses along the corridor.

Another issue that must be overcome is the established development pattern of the Study Area. For the most part, development along Buford Highway has followed a typical suburban strip center model, with a shallow line of commercial uses spread out along the corridor, and fairly low density residential located behind. Successfully redeveloping this portion

of Buford Highway with a mix of uses will require a movement towards nodal development clustered at major intersections.

The proposed redevelopment scenarios call for greatly increased densities. Although Gwinnett County is suburban in nature, its rapid growth over recent decades has left little undeveloped land within or close to the Study Area. As metro Atlanta continues to grow, there will be additional demand for redevelopment in the Study Area, which likely means that it can support future development that is more dense than the first generation properties in the area.

Subarea A

Subarea A is located at the intersection of Buford Highway and Pleasant Hill Road. From a market perspective, this area relates more to Pleasant Hill Road than downtown Duluth. The Pleasant Hill corridor has seen a remarkable growth in Asian-oriented businesses over the past few years. This growth has fueled the redevelopment of older properties, and also spurred a great deal of new construction. If this market continues to grow and advance further along Pleasant Hill Road, it is possible that Subarea A could be redeveloped in a much more dense pattern, with properties geared towards the Asian community. This type of development will depend on three things: (1) a very large growth rate for the local Asian market; (2) a gradual shift in this market's "center of gravity" from the Gwinnett Place Mall area towards Buford Highway; and (3) foreign capital sources willing to make large investments in the area.

If pressure from a growing Asian market is not strong enough to create a denser node of development in this subarea, another feasible use for this property would be the creation of an attractive industrial area geared to the automobile-related market. Currently, these businesses are the most economically viable in the Study Area. Although they have historically created an unsightly presence along the corridor, proper development controls could ensure that future development for this use is attractive and aesthetically pleasing, as well as allowing these businesses to make positive economic contributions to the local economy.

Subarea B

The Southeastern Railway Museum is one of the greatest untapped resources within the Study Area. This museum has the potential to serve as the heart of a mixed-use development node in Subarea B. Reaching this potential, however, will require the museum to have improved access from Buford Highway, a greatly enhanced entrance, and improved destination appeal.

The area across Buford Highway from the Southeastern Railway Museum is proposed to include a mix of fairly dense commercial and residential uses. While these plans appear to be reasonable from a long-term market standpoint, commercial development will most likely have to be limited in size and clustered at the new intersection leading to the museum. A mix of townhomes and rental multi-family units would likely be supportable in this subarea.

Subarea C

This subarea is depicted with increased densities along both sides of Buford Highway, with the existing Public Safety building serving as an anchor. From a market standpoint, planning for increased densities in this area is reasonable. The area adjacent to the Public Safety building is an appropriate site for multi-family housing and townhomes. However, redevelopment of the properties across the street for commercial uses is unlikely because of the narrow lot depth between Buford Highway and the railroad right-of-way, and because of infrastructure constraints.

From a market perspective, a public linear park would prove to be a better use for this narrow area with development challenges. This green space would not only improve the aesthetics of the corridor,

but would also serve as an amenity for the residents in the new developments across the street. It would make those new properties easier to develop and more likely to remain successful over the long-term. Dependent upon the level of programming, the park could even become a revenue generator for the City.

Subarea D

This subarea provides an opportunity to add single-family homes to the Buford Highway corridor. While the single-family market is currently weak locally and nationwide, it will most likely be the first segment of the for-sale residential market to resume growth. Single-family development in this subarea would probably require small lots and dense development to justify the cost of the land. A denser development of townhomes would also be feasible for this subarea.

Old Peachtree Road Intersection

The area around the intersection of Buford Highway and Old Peachtree Road has some of the newest retail space along the corridor. Unfortunately, even these newer centers have not been immune to the negative changes in the market. There are significant vacancies in the Duluth Station Shopping Center, and competition from newer centers along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard will continue to cause problems for this area. Stronger inter-parcel access would help, but retail uses for this property will most likely continue to struggle because of a lack of visibility created by the dramatic difference in grade between Buford Highway and the buildings.

Downtown Duluth

The proposed development scenarios for downtown Duluth call for a great deal of new commercial and residential development in both the existing downtown and along Buford Highway. While some scale of this total square footage of new development is likely to be supportable over the long-term, many of the areas proposed as mixed-use would likely have to be developed as primarily residential.

Redeveloping the area as envisioned will be very difficult to accomplish. Newer projects will have to build off of and be integrated with earlier developments, and the existing downtown buildings will have to be filled, and successful, before moving on to new projects. Once projects become economically viable, development can gradually move from the existing downtown across the railroad tracks and onto Buford Highway. The proposed library could help bridge the gap between the existing downtown and Buford Highway, but in order to accomplish that goal, it would need to be located at the Highway 120 intersection.

Retail in the downtown area currently struggles because of a lack of foot traffic, and additional retail can only be supported if there is a dramatic increase in the number of residential units. Over the long-term, the downtown area should be able to support these additional residences. The majority of this new residential product would most likely be townhomes and rental multi-family units. Eventually, the local market may also support condominiums, but this product type will only become viable once the area has become a much more vibrant activity center. While the plans do not call for additional single-family homes in the downtown area, they would be supportable from a market standpoint and would also serve to make the townhomes and multi-family properties more desirable. Small pockets of new single-family, cottage-style/zero lot line homes could also serve to jumpstart the residential market once economic conditions improve.

The development scenarios depicted for downtown Duluth would almost certainly require structured parking. Parking decks are very expensive and only make sense when land values

are fairly high. Rental multi-family developments are likely the only product type that might be able to make structured parking work financially for the Study Area. Even these developments would most likely require municipal subsidies or shared public parking arrangements.

Transportation Connectivity Recommendations

As stated in the previous section, there are many pedestrian and vehicular connectivity issues related to Buford Highway. Recommendations to enhance connectivity are proposed to address existing shortcomings in the categories discussed above. Note that the existing connectivity conditions were discussed as separate categories of "vehicular" and "pedestrian." Proposed recommendations are discussed as combined vehicular and pedestrian improvements, since it is intended that both modes be integrated into future improvements along the corridor.

Through-Connectivity

With its designation as a US and State Route, Buford Highway's primary function is viewed as mobility (i.e. its ability to move traffic from point A to point B). GDOT's primary objectives with any improvements to Buford Highway will likely be safety and preserving/enhancing mobility.

With that understanding, it is difficult to envision reducing the number of through lanes on Buford Highway. Two lanes in each direction are considered appropriate to handle the approximately 25,000 vehicles using the facility each day. With I-85 and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard operating at high volumes also, it is unlikely that traffic patterns will re-distribute to accept a lane reduction on Buford Highway without significant detrimental impact to these other two facilities.

Thus, this study makes no recommendations for improvements to enhance through-connectivity. However, through-connectivity may require study at some point in the future should traffic volumes begin to increase. It is also noted that through-connectivity may be indirectly affected by some of the recommendations for other connectivity improvements within the corridor. It is acknowledged that any improvements on the corridor will require further study and close coordination with GDOT for approval and permitting.

Connectivity to Attractions Along the Corridor

Improvements are needed to enhance connectivity to attractions along the corridor; specifically, the ability to connect between adjacent parcels without having to re-enter Buford Highway.

Recommendation: Construct inter-parcel access in context with existing properties and/or in association with planned re-development.

Recommendation: Consider inter-connectivity strategies such as "nodal" development to promote internal capture of separate trips.

The benefits of providing inter-connectivity include:

1. Reduction in number of driveway cuts and volume of ingress/egress traffic.
2. Reduction in driveways enhances the continuity of pedestrian routes.
3. Reduction in "side friction" on Buford Highway operations.

The "nodal" development strategy tends to center a mix of land uses around a particular intersection or vehicular access point. This strategy promotes a "park and walk" experience where the initial automobile trip is captured and the remaining trips are internally-captured as walkable trips. For example, currently a traveler on Buford Highway may require three different stops to drop-off dry-

cleaning, pick-up a take-out dinner order, and purchase groceries. With nodal development, only one automobile trip to the "node" is required. The trips to the three distinctly different attractions are captured internally. It should be noted that in many cases, the development node includes residential and office land uses, which serves to increase the number of "initial" trips that are walkable.

Recommendation: Consider raised medians at appropriate locations and/or as part of planned re-developments along the Buford Highway corridor.

Raised medians with landscaping will promote a different driving behavior on Buford Highway. For instance, the current speed limit between Davenport Road and Buford Highway is 35 mph. However, the physical characteristics of the corridor are not consistent with a 35 mph prevailing speed. Raised medians within a "character area" such as this will more powerfully enforce the reduced speed limit. In fact, reducing the existing speed limit below 35 mph may not even be required.

Raised medians also promote pedestrian crossings by providing refuge areas and facilitate the use of mid-block crossings. A higher sense of safety and comfort are provided by such refuge areas. These improvements would reduce the "barrier" effect of Buford Highway on pedestrian crossings.

Nodal development or inter-parcel connectivity can create an intensity of ingress/egress traffic to the extent that a fully-directional median opening or even signalization is warranted. This creates a form of "access management" along the corridor, where access patterns are consolidated and managed. There is a relationship between a corridor's mobility characteristics and its accessibility characteristics. Generally speaking, as accessibility to a corridor increases, the corridor's mobility decreases. Currently, there is essentially unlimited "accessibility" to Buford Highway. Therefore, it is likely that promoting inter-parcel connectivity and the subsequent reduction of driveway access points and widespread vehicular access movements will actually benefit Buford Highway's ability to move through-traffic. With GDOT's focus on preserving the safety and mobility of the Buford Highway corridor, it is important to acknowledge that any improvements on the corridor will require close coordination with GDOT for approval and permitting. However, it is quite possible that these improvements will result in a direct benefit to the safety and efficiency of Buford Highway.

Connectivity to Attractions Outside the Corridor

The primary attraction outside the corridor is Downtown Duluth. This area already provides a critical-mass of restaurant, retail, and entertainment attractions. However, it is critical to provide efficient and safe connectivity between Buford Highway and these attractions if that momentum is to spread to Buford Highway.

While improvements to the SR 120 connection to downtown are proposed, there is still a significant amount of daily traffic that will continue to use the SR 120 arterial route as an east-west through route. Local traffic using SR 120 to access Downtown Duluth will still have to compete with this heavy through-traffic.

Recommendation: Enhance vehicular and pedestrian connectivity to Downtown attractions from Buford Highway by constructing a Davenport Road Extension.

Recommendation: Enhance pedestrian connectivity by constructing continuous sidewalk facilities from Buford Highway through the residential areas along Davenport Road east of

Buford Highway.

The construction of these improvements would create a full-movement, signalized intersection at the existing Davenport Road / Buford Highway intersection, would extend Davenport Road on its existing alignment across Buford Highway to the west, and would provide continuous pedestrian connection from residential areas to the Buford Highway corridor and into the Downtown area.

The alignment of the extension would to create a new RR grade crossing at an approximate 90-degree angle and continue westward approximately ¼ mile before turning toward the north to connect into the approximate existing alignment of Hill Street at the Hardy Street intersection. The existing RR grade crossing at the old Main Street connection would be removed, thereby eliminating a major safety issue.

The connection would provide a direct and efficient connection into the City Hall area at the west end of Downtown. The new intersection at Buford Highway would also form a "gateway" intersection that could begin a Downtown "character district" along Buford Highway. The Buford Highway intersection, as well as the Davenport Road extension, would provide full pedestrian facilities to give pedestrian connectivity between Buford Highway and the Downtown area – which would also link to the pedestrian improvements on Davenport Road to the east of Buford Highway.

The construction of these improvements will provide a viable alternate to SR 120 and Brock Road for efficient vehicular and pedestrian connection into the Downtown area from Buford Highway. These improvements will also promote pedestrian connectivity

Recommendation: Continue development of SR 120 widening and operational improvements.

This project is currently in development and proposes to create a signalized intersection at the existing three-way stop intersection of SR 120 and Main Street. Operational improvements at the new signalized intersection will also provide a more efficient "free-flow" movement for the SR 120 through-traffic, in an attempt to improve operations at the Main Street / SR 120 intersection and encourage local traffic to access the Downtown attractions. This project also proposes to construct sidewalk connections along SR 120 from Buford Highway to Hill Street, linking a pedestrian connection to the Downtown area. While the project will not add capacity to the existing Buford Highway / SR 120 intersection, pedestrian and aesthetic enhancements will be constructed at this intersection to improve the overall pedestrian experience and promote "crossings" of Buford Highway to reduce the current barrier effect of Buford Highway. These intersection enhancements should also serve to create a visual connection to the Downtown area.

TAD Update

In a parallel effort with the redevelopment planning process, the City of Duluth analyzed the potential of forming at tax allocation district for the Buford Highway Corridor redevelopment area. The boundaries of the TAD were designed to correspond with the redevelopment area identified in the planning process (see figure 7.1). The effort was spearheaded by Bleakly Advisory Group and resulting in the creation of The City of Duluth's Tax Allocation District #1: Buford Highway Corridor on December 14, 2009. Since obtaining city council approval, Duluth is currently working with Gwinnett County and the Gwinnett School Board to obtain their concurrence to the approved TAD redevelopment plan and commitment of their millage from new development. The city has established a goal of completing the concurrence process with the

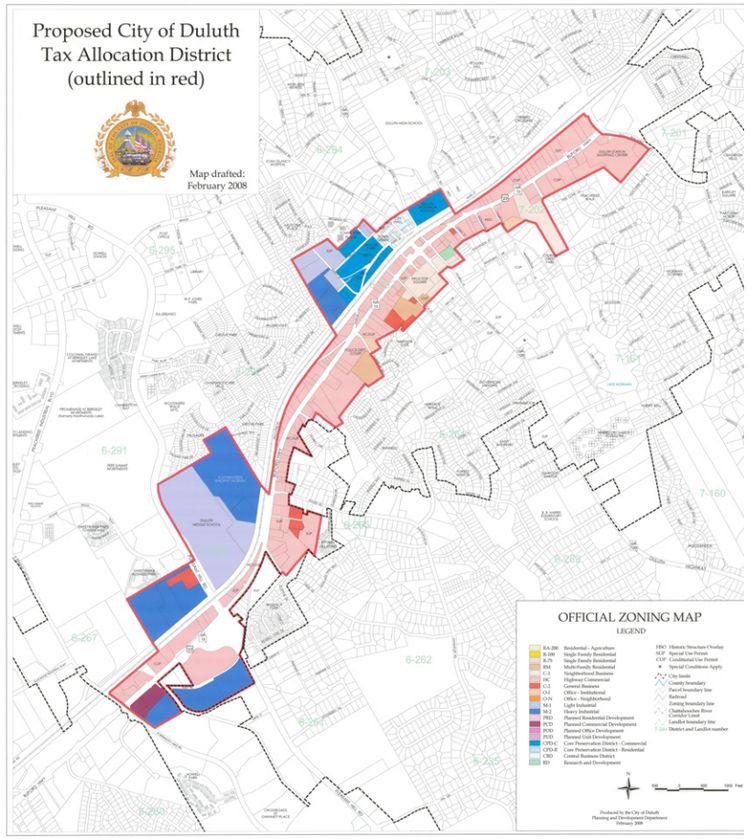


Figure 7.1, Proposed TAD Exhibit drafted as of February 2008.

County and School Board by the end of June, 2010, at which time the TAD will be fully operational.