

**Buford Highway Improvement Plan and Economic Development Strategy
City of Brookhaven, Georgia**

Buford Highway Steering Committee

Meeting 3 – Opportunities

Meeting Minutes

May 29, 2014 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Brookhaven City Hall - 4362 Peachtree Rd., Brookhaven, GA 30319

Steering Committee Members Present

Marie Garrett-City Manager, Staff Liaison

Susan Canon-Assistant City Manager, Director of Community Development

Luke Anderson-Chairman

Susan Coker-Committee Member

Glianny Fagundo-Committee Member

Bridget O'Donnell-Committee Member

Garry Sobel-Committee Member

Development Authority Members and General Public Present

Blair Belton-Brookhaven Resident

Jamie Cochran-Gresham, Smith and Partners

LaTria Garnigan-Brookhaven Neighbor Newspaper

Pat Hoban-Development Authority Member

Bruce Horng-Brookhaven Resident

Bates Mattison-City Councilman

Jessie Tinsley-Brookhaven Resident

Project Team Present

The Jaeger Company

Dale Jaeger, Principal Landscape Architect and Planner

Madie Fischetti, Senior Project Manager

Cameron Yates, Landscape Architecture Staff

Urban Partners

Jim Hartling, Partner (via phone)

Isaac Kwon, Senior Associate

Welcome, Introductions and Overview

Dale Jaeger

- Steering Committee, Development Authority, and members of the general public introduced themselves
- Introduced project team and reviewed meeting agenda
- Comments received during this meeting will influence the refined opportunities presented during Meeting Four, to be held June 12th, 7:00 AM-8:00 PM, as a joint open house with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan team at Oglethorpe University (Lupton Hall)
- Meeting Five to be held July 14th, 10:30 AM-12:30 PM, at Oglethorpe University (Lupton Hall) in order for the project team to present revitalization strategies and final plan to City and stakeholders
- Plan to be put before City Council for adoption on August 12th, 7:00 PM, at City Hall

Market Analysis Report

Isaac Kwon

- Presented report and summarized findings
- Began with demographics of Study Area, DeKalb County, and Atlanta Region
- Median household income within DeKalb is \$51,252; however, this figure ranges from \$30,382-\$90,625 between seven census tracts
- In 2010, 50% of residents within Study Area identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino; this percentage shifts to 10% in DeKalb County and 12% in Atlanta Region
- Total of 121 retail businesses occupying approximately 671,000 SF of store space; estimated annual sales of \$152,500,000
- Based on retail gaps not being captured within Study Area, there is potential for expansion of routine community serving stores (pharmacy, hardware, florist), specialty goods (specialty sporting goods; hobby, toy, and game stores; nurseries and garden centers), and international-themed stores (specialty foods, dining, gifts)
- Strong market for rental homes of varying rent levels in the market study area
- Newly built apartments along Buford Highway can command rents from \$900-\$1,700 per month
- Newly built homes in a gated townhome community on Buford Highway can command prices of \$275,000-\$375,000
- Based on significant vacancies and relatively low annual rents of \$16-\$20/SF, additional development of office space appears unlikely

- Buford Highway will be in position to absorb another hotel of 80-120 rooms every two to three years beginning in 2017

Questions and Comments:

- Are the recommendations for retail market expansion based on gaps/and deficiencies in the retail market? Yes, for specialty retail; No-for international market opportunities. This is an opportunity seen to expand retail potential in the area
- Is the assessment that Marquis properties are being improved based on observation or just on information from the company website? This is the strategy outlined by the company in their public relations information. They have not returned calls to the consultant. The city has verified that there have been some physical upgrades at some locations during on-site inspection
- Are tax revenue numbers available? City stated that they can provide this information
- Could multi-use development assist in attracting those interested in office space and is the current vacancy rate in line with national/Atlanta area trends?
Nationally, there is a reduction in demand for office space; however, multi-use development is one tool that can help spur interest. Nationally office utilization rate is stagnant and demand is down due to the changing landscape of the workspace (telecommuting, etc.)
- What is the hotel vacancy rate within the surrounding area and how does this compare to the national average? The local vacancy rate is just under 68% with 66% being the healthy industry standard
- Is there an opportunity to provide work force housing for those working within the service industry? The term work force housing can sometimes be misinterpreted and should be carefully used while working to maintain diversity of price points

Previous Plans and Strategies

Madie Fischetti

- Reviewed previous plans created by others that relate to the Study Area
- *ARC 2040*-Identifies Buford Highway as a “redevelopment corridor”
- *ARC, Multi-Modal Corridor Study, Buford Hwy, 2007*-most important applicable goals are to increase safety, protect and improve the environment, and to work toward a sustainable multimodal transportation facility that meets the needs of its users
- *DeKalb Master Active Living Plan*-Recommends trail along North Fork Peachtree Creek, improvement of pedestrian facilities and crossings along Buford Highway,

identification of commercial areas for redevelopment, and positioning commercial areas for eventual redevelopment by adjusting existing driveways and parking lots to provide pedestrian connections between the buildings and the corridor

- *DeKalb County's Greenway Trails, 2000 (PATH)*-Identifies two corridors for greenway development within the study area: North Fork Peachtree Creek Trail and Skyland Trail

Context and Existing Conditions

Cameron Yates

- Discussed mass transit infrastructure providing service to Study Area
- The three nearest MARTA rail stations are Brookhaven/Oglethorpe, Lenox, and Lindbergh Center
- MARTA bus routes provide service to the area with buses running every 15 minutes; there are also private buses that use the same route
- Current GDOT project is under construction along Buford Highway from Lenox Road to Afton Lane with another project in the preconstruction phase from Afton Lane to Shallowford Terrace
- This project includes the installation of 5' sidewalks, 2.5' stamped concrete visual buffer, retaining walls where necessary, and an 8' stamped concrete median with five signalized mid-block crossings at strategic location from Lenox Road to Afton Lane; more of these are to be installed within the next phase
- The most separation that the current improvements offer from vehicular traffic is provided by a 6" concrete curb
- No plant material is to be installed other than along disturbed slopes outside of the proposed sidewalks
- Map of existing conditions was shown illustrating sidewalks (currently being installed and those in preconstruction) and mid-block crossings (currently being installed), existing bus stops, and bus stop zones suitable for possible expansion and improvement as pocket parks or small plazas
- Pedestrian circulation can be extremely dangerous along the Study Area with many residents being forced to walk along the roadway; the current GDOT plans do provide sidewalks, but the need to provide further means of safety and comfort to pedestrians should be emphasized and expanded upon throughout the design phase
- The natural features of the site were discussed, along with the identification of parcels for possible parks space and redevelopment

- There is a comfortable amount of tree canopy along North Fork Peachtree Creek and within residential neighborhoods but there are very few trees immediately adjacent to Buford Highway
- The presence of North Fork Peachtree Creek within the study area provides the opportunity for the connection of vacant parcels (possible park space), schools, and other amenities
- Plant material present is that typically found along apartment housing signage; opportunity to create a unique plant palette that is indicative of the area

Questions and Comments:

- Currently, the designated bus lane (part of the ARC study) is not a priority and is unfunded; however, this study could influence its implementation
- The private bus lines that run along Buford Highway are, in many cases, preferred over the MARTA buses by local residents; the ride is around \$1.00 cheaper, MARTA buses have not been as reliable regarding the route schedule in the past, there have been issues with the treatment of passengers and the lack of Spanish speaking MARTA drivers along the route

Issues and Opportunities

Madie Fischetti

- Multiple trails (existing, under construction, and proposed) converge just south of the 400 and I-85 intersection; existing trails are both hard surface and natural trails
- With a small link, there is great opportunity to extend across Lenox Rd. and connect the Study Area with this existing trail network, including the BeltLine and the PATH 400 Trail
- Dependent upon available space and necessary surface type, the area along North Fork Peachtree Creek presents a great opportunity for a trail within the Study Area
- Pedestrian routes to connect schools within the Study Area to local amenities and residential areas are critical
- Civic institutions, such as the Salvation Army and the Latin American Association should be provided connections to possible trail and/or pedestrian circulation systems
- There is opportunity for gateway features on either end of the Study Area; as seen in multiple area along this stretch of Buford Highway, the North Gateway in particular offers strong views of Midtown/Downtown Atlanta

- This study has broken the stretch of Buford Highway within the project limits into five zones: South Gateway, North Druid Hills/Corporate, Northeast Plaza, Montclair/Drew Valley, and North Gateway
- Key Enhancement Opportunities include bike and pedestrian facilities, bus shelters and bus lanes, multi-use trails and linear parks, parking and circulation, and gateways
- Existing street section was shown to illustrate that the right-of-way space does exist to create a complete street along Buford Highway; this would require the reduction in the number of travel lanes on either side of the existing median from three to two; this system could safely support motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians, while allowing for a widened, landscape median and a vegetative buffer between vehicular traffic and bicyclists/pedestrians
- Bus shelters can be seen as a way to define the character area of Buford Highway; can be an opportunity for public art; strategic bus stops can be expanded to allow for public plaza space and can become more than just bus stops; can evolve into nodes for social interaction and activity
- There are many surface options for multi-use trails; depending upon space and sensitivity requirements, trails can range from a natural surface to a grid-stabilized, permeable surface
- Parking and circulation opportunities exist with multiple opportunities for plant material and bus stops/plaza spaces to separate parking lots from pedestrian and vehicular use
- Possible gateway treatments can take on many forms; signage, monument, sculpture, plant material, etc.
- If a halt to the installation of the currently planned GDOT lighting standards is to occur, action must be taken as soon as possible; the GDOT proposed standard is the same light used further north along Buford Highway, throughout Chamblee, and is not appropriate for the modern characteristic of Buford Highway; the project team has worked with a lighting consultant and has identified multiple options that would be more suitable for Buford Highway and that can work within the existing infrastructure

Questions and Comments:

- Access management in the corridor is an issue
- Complete Streets approach is not addressed in GDOT's 2007 study but has since (2013) been adopted by GDOT for future projects
- "Road diet" would be easier if Buford Highway not used as alternate route for I-85

- Studies have shown that pedestrians feel more comfortable and are more likely to walk and utilize sidewalks if landscape buffers existing between sidewalk and road

Opportunity for Revitalization

Jim Hartling

- There are currently around 40 vacant properties; many with opportunities for landscape and other improvements
- Eight major opportunity sites were identified
- The first four sites span from west of North Druid Hills Road to east of Corporate Boulevard
- Site One is owned by three separate entities, which may present a challenge for assemblage; site could work as a hotel space with a possible international theme providing office space to visitors; similar use is possible for Site Two
- Site Three and Site Four offer the opportunity for new housing; which would not be appropriate for Sites One and Two). One development could be sales housing (condominiums) while the other could add units to the rental market
- Site Four could also be considered for the location of a hotel with conference space dedicated to the international community
- Site Five and Site Six are candidate sites for retail locations for a retail operation such as a national drugstore chain
- Site Seven, Parke Towne North Apartments, can be redeveloped using higher density, diverse housing; however, it is critical that a careful planning process be implemented in order to disrupt the current residents as little as possible; possibility of internal relocation with phased construction; the goal here is to minimize displacement and to provide physical improvements for the current residents while also attracting new residents to the area
- Site Eight, Northeast Plaza, now primarily features healthcare and social services; this site is underutilized (majority of the site is dedicated to parking) there is an opportunity here to create mixed use housing and retail development
- Another site (currently occupied by the Red Roof Inn) was identified as a prime site for future development of a high-end multi-story condominium development—as this site offers excellent views to downtown Atlanta.