

SOUTHSIDE MARKET REPORT

REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

Advocates see potential to renew Old National Highway

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Contributing Writer

A mix of public and private entities are working together to revitalize a five-mile-long stretch of road on the south side of Atlanta.

Running south from Sullivan Road in College Park about five miles to the Fulton County line near Georgia Highway 138, Old National Highway was a healthy commercial corridor up until the early-to-mid 1980s.

After these peak times, though, a series of economic jolts, including the 1989 demise of Eastern Airlines, combined with a flight of businesses and residents south to more suburban areas, left behind a blighted corridor that has long been badly in need of a major clean-up.

Numerous entities are now working together on plans for the Old National corridor.

These include the **Old National Merchants Association**, which earlier this year created an Economic Development Strategic Plan; **Aerotropolis Atlanta Community Improvement Districts**, comprised of two districts in Fulton and Clayton counties in the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport area; the **City of College Park**, home to the northern terminus of Old National Highway; **Urban Land Institute Atlanta**, which set up a mini-Technical Assistance Panel (mTAP) tasked with creating a "roadmap" of what the Old National corridor could be in the future and how to get there; the **Georgia Department of Transportation**; **Select Fulton**, the economic development arm of Fulton County; **Fulton County**; and the **City of South Fulton**, a

new municipality whose government opened its doors in May.

The creation of the City of South Fulton – which is home to much of the Old National corridor – is seen as a potential catalyst to corridor



Artie Jones III

revitalization.

"I think the new City of South Fulton is going to be huge for us," said **Don Winbush**, an area businessperson, 30-year resident, and head of the merchant association's Economic Development Task Force. Previously, much of the corridor was under the jurisdiction of Fulton County, he notes, "but with the new city, we now have home-grown representation that really believes in the area, understands the opportunities we're looking at, and are directly accountable to us."

In College Park, a redevelopment plan for the portion of the corridor located



JOANN VITELLI

Old National Town Center is located at Old National Highway & Flat Shoals Road.

within the city, an area that also includes much of intersecting Godby Road, is slated for completion and review in August, College Park Director of Economic Development **Artie Jones III** said.

Types of redevelopment the city is examining, according to Jones, includes mixed-use, multifamily, retail, hotel, "and a lot of infrastructure improvements."

College Park is working with Fulton County in making the Old National Corridor more pedestrian-friendly by putting in new sidewalks, upgrading lighting, and getting existing businesses to work more closely with police agencies in combatting crime, Jones said.

At the same time, expansion of the Aerotropolis CIDs' boundaries has allowed the organization to include more segments of the Old National Corridor in its weekly road maintenance efforts, which include mowing, trash removal, and removing illegal signs.



Thomas Kramer

"We want to have a very safe and secure corridor, and appearance plays a major role in that – and the Old National Corridor currently has the appearance of being unsafe," said **Gerald McDowell**, executive director of the Aerotropolis Atlanta CIDs. Cleaning up the corridor, he adds, is also the first step in implementing the CIDs' existing 24/7 safety program, which utilizes private security patrols and off-duty police officers.

At press time, the ULI Atlanta mTAP panel was wrapping up a report for Select Fulton and the City of South Fulton, reports **Thomas Kramer**, managing director of real estate strategist/consultant **The**

Concord Group LLC, and head of the ULI panel.

"We've been tasked to come up with a roadmap for what the future of Old National could and should look like," said Kramer, "and we're trying to provide Select Fulton and the city with an overview of what makes sense now, and what might make sense in the future – connected by 'how do you get there?'"

The report's recommendations will include what Kramer describes as "a year-or-two effort combining the efforts of local stakeholders, governments, and other interested parties to really spruce up Old National, creating a good brand and improving its reputation, so that when developers come and see it, they are more likely to become interested."

The City of South Fulton will be the primary driver of Old National revitalization efforts, noting that "they are right there 'on the ground,' they have the most stakeholders, and ultimately will have the most leverage over what happens," Kramer said.

From the City of South Fulton perspective, "our goal is to make the Old National Corridor 'Main Street South Fulton,'" said Mayor **William "Bill" Edwards**, "and we do that by taking over and improving the aesthetics of the corridor."

In addition to a physical facelift, the rejuvenation of the Old National Corridor will also involve attracting new businesses, and improving the existing mix of uses.

"From the economic development standpoint, one of the things that has been a detriment here is having what



OLD NATIONAL HIGHWAY

The highway runs south from Sullivan Road in College Park about five miles to the Fulton County line near Georgia Highway 138.

you can call "too many businesses of like kind," according to Edwards.

"We [i.e., the corridor] have been inundated by hair salons and liquor stores," said Edwards, "and we need to take steps to diversify the types of retailers we have, as well as move toward more residential development."

At the same time, the corridor boasts at least one unique attraction – World Changers Church International (WCCI) and its 8,500-seat World Dome, located near the intersection of Old National and Burdett Road.

The church generates activity that perhaps could, in turn, support businesses such as restaurants and retailing in the corridor.

"We haven't really taken advantage of [the church], which brings in hundreds of people every Sunday," Edwards notes. "One of the things we want to do is make sure we have some places on Old National where people can enjoy themselves when they get out of church on Sunday – or any other time of the week."

AIRPORT SOUTH CID - A LEADER IN THE AEROTROPOLIS CIDS

The Airport South Community Improvement District (CID) is the first CID in Clayton County and the second within the Aerotropolis area. The Airport South CID is jointly administered with the Airport West CID through a dynamic partnership called the Aerotropolis CIDs. The two CIDs work together to create an economically strong, safe, attractive and vibrant community surrounding the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

CID ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- MARTA stops added to Phoenix Blvd.
- I-285 & Riverdale Road cleanup
- SRTA GTIB application
- Traffic mitigation at I-285 & Riverdale Road
- Weekly cleanup along Camp Creek Parkway, Airport Blvd., Sullivan Road, Best Road and Forest Parkway



FUTURE CID GOALS

- Safety and security patrols
- Gateway enhancement
- Master planning
- Traffic improvements
- Wayfinding and signage



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