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Introduction and Summary

Smyrna is known as the Jonquil City. Its origins began around 1831 when a settlement was reached between the state of Georgia and the Cherokee Indians that deeded all the land now known as Cobb County to the State of Georgia. Soon the present site of the City of Smyrna became the center of the social and religious life for the surrounding area. Smyrna was originally called Ruffs Siding and later Varners Station. Eventually the area became known as Smyrna. The name comes from the book of Revelations.

The railroad played a significant role in the development of Smyrna. By 1842, the railroad line through Cobb County had been completed which changed Smyrna from a frontier village to a center of commerce. Smyrna's first employment base was the gristmills and factories established after the completion of the railroad. Before these industries located in Smyrna, the economy was primarily agricultural.

The Smyrna Institute, the City's first brick building, was built in 1850. The Institute was originally erected as a boy's academy and was used during the Civil War as an officer's training facility, a hospital and a house of worship. During Sherman's march through Cobb County in 1864 the Smyrna Institute was the only building left standing in the downtown area. Village Walk and the Smyrna Government Center now occupy the site where this building once stood.

In 1872, Smyrna was incorporated by the State of Georgia as a municipality. The boundary extended radially one mile from the Smyrna Institute, and the City's first election was held in 1873. The first female mayor in the State of Georgia, Lorena Pruitt, was elected mayor of Smyrna in 1946.

Smyrna has become a very popular place to live and work. The City was voted by Atlanta Magazine as one of the top 10 places to live in the Atlanta Area. The "small town" feel found in Smyrna is the type of lifestyle many people seek when deciding where to raise their families.



Ruffs Siding
Picture courtesy of Smyrna Historical Society



Smyrna is located near three interstates and intrastate highway systems: I-75, I-20 and I-285. Downtown Atlanta is approximately a 15-minute drive away and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport is a 30-minute drive away.

Vision, Goals and Objectives

In 2003, Smyrna engaged the services of a planning team headed by Altamira Design and Common Sense, Inc. and comprised of Huntley Associates, The Sizemore Group and Day Wilburn Associates to prepare a Study of “Downtown Smyrna” in support of the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Livable Centers Initiative (LCI). The LCI program was adopted in May of 1999 to provide funding for investment studies and transportation projects located in activity and town centers in the region.

The Atlanta Regional Commission’s three major goals for the LCI program are:

1. Encourage a diversity of uses including mixed income residential neighborhoods, employment, shopping, and recreation choices.
2. Provide access to a range of travel modes including transit, roadways, walking and biking to enable access to all uses within the study area.
3. Develop an outreach process that promotes the involvement of all stakeholders particularly low to moderate income and minority citizens.

The LCI program requires that communities, successful in obtaining study grants, address the following 10 items in their town center plans:

1. Land use mix appropriate for future growth.
2. Transportation demand reduction measures.
3. Internal mobility requirements – traffic calming, pedestrian circulation, transit circulation, bicycle and pedestrian circulation.
4. Mixed-income housing, job/housing match and social issues.
5. Continuity of local streets in study area and development of a network of minor roads.



Smyrna Institute
Picture courtesy of Smyrna Historical Society



Introduction and Summary



Early Atlanta Road
Picture courtesy of Smyrna Historical Society

6. Need/identification of future transit circulation system and line haul routes.
7. Connectivity of transportation system to other centers.
8. Center development organization and management, promotion and economic restructuring.
9. Stakeholder participation/support.
10. Public and private investment policy.

The Smyrna LCI Study Area is a one-mile by four-mile sector within the northern half of Smyrna. Study Area boundaries are Windy Hill Road on the north; Cobb Parkway on the east; Concord and Spring Roads to the south; and South Cobb Drive on the west. Surrounding the study area are older neighborhoods of Marietta; Dobbins Air Force Base; the East Cobb commercial district; and newer residential and mixed-use neighborhoods to the south and west.

The Vision for the Study Area began with and was largely influenced by public participation that included a series of meetings with community residents, where participants engaged in visioning exercises, visual preference surveys and a design charrette. In addition to the public input, the consulting team interviewed civic, community, business and government leaders, and completed research and analysis.

The Vision of the Study Area that ultimately emerged is one of a "city center": a destination where residents and visitors could live, work and play in a secure, attractive environment. This environment would feature passive open spaces and dedicated green space; a mix of land uses and development; owner housing available to households across the economic scale, and all built out at a pedestrian friendly scale. Community amenities would include attractive tree-lined sidewalks and bike paths that link to the rest of the community.



Concept Plan: Redevelopment

In channeling public preferences that showed underlying market support into suitable locations within the study area, the study team gradually came to focus on several promising locations for private-sector redevelopment, designating them “Activity Centers.” Four major Activity Centers are identified as follows:

1. Belmont Hills Mixed-use Development

The study team recommends the redevelopment of the existing Belmont Hills Shopping Center and adjacent apartment communities – a total of approximately 90 acres – into a mixed-use environment that includes retail, office and for-sale residential fronting Atlanta Road. This live-work-shop Activity Center includes additional greenspaces that are both passive and active and carry on the character of the existing Village Green. The study team projects the phased development of approximately 600 residential condominium units, 25 townhouse units, and 63 single-family detached units within the combined Belmont Hills site. Additionally, retail redevelopment is projected at 421,270 square feet, and office development at 104,800 square feet.

2. Hawthorne Residential Community Development

The study team recommends a redeveloped residential community of single-family detached homes in an area generally bounded by Windy Hill Road, Dixie Avenue, Hawthorne Street and Reed Street. The “Hawthorne Community” central street contains a broad median and links the park to Belmont Hills via a greenspace that will contain a multi-use trail. The streets are 22 feet wide, and parallel parking is encouraged to serve as traffic calming devices. The plan could include alleys for most of the lots. The study team proposes 380 lots with 40 townhomes along Hawthorne Avenue. The gross density of the proposed neighborhood is 5.6 units per acre with over 10 acres in open space.

3. Jonquil Plaza Mixed-use Development

The study team recommends a mixed-use redevelopment of the existing Jonquil Shopping Plaza, Post Properties Landscape complex, and various automotive services fronting Atlanta Road. The Study Team projects approximately 174 condominium units with deck parking, approximately 100,000 square feet of retail, and 41,560 square feet of office, with both landscaped surface and on-street parking in addition to the deck parking. Pedestrian connections to nearby neighborhoods, townhouses and greenspace are also considered desirable.

A central feature of the redeveloped Activity Center is a new “frontage road” running diagonally from Spring Road just east of the Atlanta Road intersection to Atlanta Road approximately 150 yards north of the Spring-Atlanta intersection. This road, while functioning to improve site access and egress, would frame a landscaped park that would provide a wonderful entry at this gateway intersection into the City Center area. Additionally, the multi-level parking deck in the rear of the development would block a substantial amount of the frequent railroad sound from the Railway Corridor bordering the site.

4. Cobb/Concord Mixed-use Development

The study team recommends a phased redevelopment of the existing Western Market Plaza Shopping Center and surrounding retail into a mixed-use community of approximately 139 residential condominium units, 122,596 square feet of replacement retail, and 32,548 square feet of office above certain portions of that retail. Retail and office would rely on surface parking. The residential units would have parking beneath the approximately ten clusters of mid-rise condominium buildings anticipated.



One additional sites with Activity Center potential would include the following:

1. Atlanta Road Commercial Development

There are indications that the market could support a mid-size (25-40 rooms) boutique hotel or, more likely, expanded Bed-and-Breakfast facility with meeting space. The western portion of Atlanta Road between the Market Village and the Atlanta-Spring intersection would serve as a good location, given its proximity to Market Village, as well as a large collection of churches. Overall, it appears to the study team that the overall redeveloped site could contain, in addition to the hotel and meeting facility, approximately 35,000 square feet of street-level retail and 35,000 of second-floor offices.

Concept Plan: Transportation

The transportation plan indicated in the paragraphs that follow is supportive of the land use modifications and activity center plans recommended for the Smyrna LCI area. Together these improvements support the LCI study objectives.

The following programs are recommended for implementation in the short-range (2004 through 2009) as part of the five-year implementation plan:

- Provide pedestrian improvements to create a “Main Street” on Atlanta Road.
- Enhance pedestrian and bicycle access in and around activity centers.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle travel to link activity centers and neighborhoods.
- Provide ADA compliant sidewalk on sections not scheduled for multi-use trail implementation.
- Prepare sidewalk development program for upgrading and expanding sidewalk system.
- Upgrade signalized pedestrian crossings.

- Determine feasibility and concept design for reducing travel lanes and implement where feasible.
- Enhance connectivity of activity centers to existing street system and neighborhoods.
- Modify existing transit routes to serve local needs.
- Upgrade existing speed humps.
- Determine feasibility and concept design for prohibiting train whistle in LCI study area and implement if feasible.

The following programs are recommended for implementation in the mid to long-range (beyond 2009):

- Provide pedestrian and bicycle travel to link activity centers and neighborhoods.
- Expand sidewalk network to local street system.
- Connect multi-use trail facilities to regional trail network.



Implementation

Fully utilizing its existing Downtown Development Authority and Community Development staff and resources, the City should explore all available economic incentives – including direct grants and loans, tax and impact fee abatements and deferrals, bond financing, land write-downs and infrastructural support – that can be used to facilitate recommended projects within the study area. In particular, it is strongly recommended that the City actively pursue two major sources of funds that can prove instrumental in generating desirable, “livable” communities in and around Smyrna’s City Center:

1. Secure the ability to utilize tax increment financing through the State’s Redevelopment Powers Law. This will allow the City to issue non-recourse bonds that can be used to provide land, infrastructure and other essential project requirements within defined “Tax Allocation Districts” in the study area, thus creating an attractive incentive to private developers and investors to develop within these study area districts. It is projected that such a TAD could support as much as \$31.9 million in bond financing for recommended Activity Center redevelopments.
2. Apply for ARC implementation grant funding in support of the eligible transportation improvements recommended in this report.