

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT:

Strategy to Redevelop and Revitalize
the Lexington Road Corridor

May 2015

ULI **Urban Land Institute** **Atlanta**

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FORWARD

The Panel's Assignment

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia (UGACC) requested the assistance of the Atlanta District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to advise and make recommendations concerning the continued vibrancy of a commercial area along Lexington Road extending from Georgia State Route 10 (Athens Loop) to Southeast Clarke Park (Lexington Road Corridor or the Corridor). ULI, through its Technical Assistance Program, convened a Technical Assistance Panel (Panel or TAP) on May 11 – 12, 2015 to review and address the issues. The Panel consisted of experts from a variety of disciplines connected with land use and real estate development, including city planning, landscape architecture and civic design, real estate development, economic development and civil engineering.

The UGACC asked ULI for its assistance in exploring ways to develop the Corridor while maintaining green-space, attracting new business and enhancing the appearance and flow of this vital area. To accomplish these objectives, the TAP evaluated the components necessary for a successful Lexington Road Corridor and

recommended steps the UGACC could take to promote vitality in this gateway Corridor. The primary objectives of the TAP were to advise the UGACC in:

- Evaluating the highest and best use of the Lexington Road Corridor
- Attracting both short- and long-term business
- Facilitating future development in the Corridor without over-development
- Improving the design of Lexington Road for connectivity and flow
- Leveraging the Athens-Ben Epps Airport to support land use goals

The panel discussion begins after hearing from the community stakeholders and touring the site.



Executive Summary

The Lexington Road Corridor is one of the main entry points into Athens from the east. It should provide a vibrant, welcoming entry into Athens – a "gateway" from the more pastoral surroundings to the east. At present, however, the Corridor falls significantly short of this goal. It lacks an identity, a sense of place. Instead of being a destination, the Corridor is a transportation route through which one drives to reach a destination beyond the Corridor. The Corridor lacks energy and is largely defined by its many empty storefronts. Yet, there is hope. The Panel sees enormous potential for the Lexington Road Corridor and believes there is a great deal UGACC can do to stimulate the Corridor's redevelopment.

The Corridor provides great access and connectivity to downtown Athens and the Loop. The Panel envisions the Corridor as a hub for entertainment and recreation. The foundation for this already exists within the Corridor with the presence of two parks and a movie theater, and there is ample space to add more recreation and entertainment options. Two large, thriving retail anchors are already present in the Corridor. UGACC needs to capitalize on all of these assets to spur further development.

Through the TAP, UGACC sought recommendations for strengthening the retail presence along the Corridor and creating a strategy to address underutilized areas. The central question was how to transform the Lexington Road Corridor into a vibrant entryway to Athens.

This report outlines a number of actions both UGACC and commercial property owners can take to stimulate redevelopment of, and reinvestment in, the Corridor. Many of the Corridor improvements needed are relatively simple and low-cost. Others are more complex and will require more significant investment. But there is a strong political will to preserve and foster Athens's dynamic character, so there is potential for the more costly improvements to be realized.

The Panel proposes a number of methods for stimulating revitalization of the Corridor, but one of the most important (and perhaps the easiest) things UGACC can do to breathe

new life into the Corridor is to improve its appearance and functionality. The Panel recommends several approaches, including multi-use trails, tactical medians, a gateway feature and improved signage. It is also critical that UGACC work with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) on plans to improve the Lexington Road/Athens Loop interchange to address traffic congestion. GDOT's present plan is to begin construction on the interchange in 2021, which is a long time to wait on a critical component. If there is any way to accelerate this plan, that would be very beneficial.

UGACC needs to create an identity and "brand" for the Corridor to guide development efforts and attract new housing and retail. Leveraging existing Corridor assets, the Panel identified four areas which could function as development nodes, each with its own anchor and theme while still contributing to the larger Corridor brand. The Panel suggested entertainment and recreation-centric themes as areas of focus UGACC should consider.

The Corridor also has the potential to offer affordable housing options in a more peaceful environment while remaining close to downtown. The area would be ideally situated for a new type of development that is gaining popularity in the U.S. – the agri-community with housing that revolves around a farm or community garden. An agri-community or similar residential development would complement the more rural uses to the east of the Corridor while enhancing the customer base for the Corridor retail.

At present, Athens's west side is receiving the bulk of the attention of businesses and developments. It is unlikely that change will occur on its own for some time without UGACC taking more active steps to foster development in the Corridor. UGACC needs to drive change for the area, not just wait for individual property owners and potential developers to discover that Lexington Road is a diamond in the rough.

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

The Panel identified a number of strengths and weaknesses for the Corridor, which formed a basis for the Panel's recommendations.

Strengths and Opportunities

- **Location** - The Corridor is only two miles away from bustling downtown Athens and the prestigious University of Georgia (UGA), which foster a rich academic and cultural environment in Athens.
- **Retail Anchors** - Lowe's and Walmart are regional destinations and pull customers not just from the areas immediately around the Corridor but also from outlying counties. Ovation Cinema, one of only three movie theaters in Athens, is located in the Corridor and has recently gone through an extensive renovation. There is a vacant auxiliary building in front of the theater that could be utilized for an additional entertainment use in conjunction with the theater.
- **Political Will** - Local elected officials and community/civic leaders are passionate about the Athens community and willing to commit time and resources to stimulate transformation of the Corridor.
- **Reputation** - Athens is a dynamic, creative and cohesive community. Its charm, commitment to sustainability and tradition of fostering creativity make it a wonderful story to tell and sell.
- **Timing** - The vacant stores and aging student housing along the Corridor present something of a blank slate for creative development. The residential neighborhoods in this area are also reaching a 30-year turnover window.
- **Layout** - Lexington Road has more width than needed, which presents a wonderful op-

portunity to improve the vitality and walkability of this area.

- **Parks & Greenspace** - Satterfield Park and Southeast Clarke Park are great assets for the Corridor and help make the east side of Athens a quieter, more rural alternative to the bustling west side. Southeast Clarke Park is larger and offers many amenities to draw users, including a skate park, soccer fields and tennis courts. It recently received money from a special purpose local option sales tax (SPLOST) that funded the relocation and updating of the existing Wiggly Field dog park and World of Wonder playground. Regional tennis tournaments here provide an additional draw and generate income for the park.
- **Athens-Ben Epps Airport** - This regional airport covers 425 acres and averages 100 flights per day. It also includes a flight school.
- **Community** - UGA not only provides an identity for Athens but also a caliber of mind that can be utilized to help address the community's issues. Athens residents are invested, as evidenced by a pre-Panel community survey, which elicited 719 responses in a few days. The survey results can be found in [Appendix B](#).
- **Seniors** - The number of retirees moving to Athens is growing, and the Lexington Road Corridor could be redeveloped to entice them to this area.

Ovation Cinema & Athens-Clarke County Tennis Center are both strengths for the study area.



Weaknesses

- **Zoning Restrictions** - A significant portion of the Corridor falls under the airport's zoning overlay district. This overlay restricts many uses, such as restaurants, big retail, churches and schools. Zoning for residential housing is also restrictive, with only high or low density options. Current zoning further restricts parking in the front of retail buildings.
- **Changing Housing Trends** - Students are no longer living in the housing that was built for them in the 1970s-80s. As housing becomes vacant, retail real estate becomes vacant as well. Many residents and retailers have relocated to the more vibrant development at Barnett Shoals/College Station Road. Some housing along or near the Corridor has begun to be filled by lower-income residents. Current rental rates do not justify new construction in this Corridor.
- **Traffic Congestion** - The Athens Loop/Lexington Road interchange experiences massive traffic congestion and lowers desirability of the Corridor for residents and shoppers. Although GDOT has plans for a diverging diamond interchange improvement, there is no immediate funding for the project.
- **Parcel Size** - Most of the Corridor parcels are small, which makes redevelopment more complicated because multiple parcels would need to be acquired from different owners.
- **Appearance** - The vacant lots and lower-quality, small retail stores present a shabby appearance. Many of the Corridor buildings are beginning to show their age and are in need of rehabilitation or redevelopment.
- **UGACC Properties** - Southeast Clarke Park does not present a vibrant front to Lexington Road. The police station, jail and vehicle tag office located along the Corridor do not have a cohesive presence.
- **Lack of Cohesion/Economic Strategy** - This area lacks identity. Without a consensus between property owners and UGACC about where this area is headed, there is no movement forward. A clear vision is also necessary to utilize the proper economic development tools to bring funding to the area.
- **Insufficient Circulation and Walkability** - There are no minor connecting road systems to ease the flow of traffic from one area to another. This poor interconnectivity and flow has contributed to the retail shift to other areas of Athens. The Corridor is not pedestrian friendly. Southeast Clarke Park is not accessible by foot.
- **Retail Presence** – While there are several big box anchor stores, there are few smaller retail establishments, and many of these appear to deal in low-quality merchandise.
- **Airport** – The Athens-Ben Epps Airport does not have a strong Corridor presence. Signage to the airport is generally small and easy to miss. The airport also presents many developmental restrictions.



Lower-quality, small retail stores present a shabby appearance.

- **Perception of Crime** - Although crime in the area is relatively low, there is a perception that the housing area behind Willowood Square is dangerous. As housing and retail degenerate further, crime will likely increase.
- **"Sense of Place" Missing** - Although the Corridor has historical significance as the first road in Athens, Lexington Road currently does not feel historic. There is currently no "destination" here beyond the Corridor itself. There are insufficient signs and landscaping to announce the area as a gateway into Athens or to highlight attractive features of the Corridor.
- **Eastside Versus Westside Perception** - Residents seem to view the west side of Athens as more desirable because it has more vibrancy and is closer to Atlanta and its urban amenities, such as the airport.
- **Little Communication with Property Owners** - At this time, there is no property owner database and no open line of communication with owners to gauge their vision of the future of this area.
- **Lack of a Champion** - There is currently no single visible advocate to spearhead needed changes in the Corridor.
- **Lower Tax Base** - There are at least six churches located along Lexington Road, which contribute to a lower tax digest.



As housing and retail degenerate further, crime will likely increase. Many of the Corridor buildings are beginning to show their age and are in need of rehabilitation or redevelopment.



RECOMMENDATIONS

There was much discussion throughout the TAP about the best use of UGACC resources (human and financial) to stimulate redevelopment of the Lexington Road Corridor. The following recommendations should guide decision making in planning and implementing redevelopment efforts for the Corridor. The recommendations represent the big picture "road map" and action items for UGACC.

Define collective vision for the Corridor to guide community investments

UGACC has a shared desire for change and an improved image for this Corridor. What is lacking is a clear definition of the shape, form and identity the "new" Corridor should take. The community needs a collective vision to guide UGACC forward, built on consensus and shared opportunity. The option of doing nothing will lead to further decline; this area must grow or die. The vision should conceptualize an idea for developers, retailers, consumers, residents and the community at large for defining the Corridor over the next 5 to 10 years and beyond. In creating the vision, thought should be given to the needs of the today's residents as well as tomorrow's. Consideration should be given to the area's future demographics. What will make the Corridor a destination people will want to visit? What uses best suit the nature and character of Athens's east side? Goals for the Corridor should be clarified, including the target audience – adult consumers, students, seniors and/or the research/medical community.

The vision should be created in detail - tell a story in pictures and drawings to present a definite sense of what's possible. Athens has a great story to sell. Once the collective vision is defined, it should serve as a guide for community investment, policy development and projects.

Create an economic development strategy

Once a collective vision for the future of the Corridor is defined, UGACC can begin crafting a framework for economic development and begin to commit resources for implementing the vision. The funding tools most suited

to the Corridor will depend upon what the community sees as the future of the area. At the fundamental level, UGACC's Economic Development Department can begin building and leveraging relationships. The state and federal governments prefer dealing with one local UGACC contact. UGACC should enhance the Economic Development Department's resources and support. The Department should identify the top Corridor property owners and build relationships with them. Establishing a relationship with the owners of the large, thriving shopping centers is essential to the future of the Corridor because the existing businesses can serve as anchors for future development. Building a relationship with the newly formed East Athens Business group could also be important.

Funds are needed to improve the Athens Loop/Lexington Road interchange. Convincing developers and residents to invest in this area will be difficult until traffic congestion at this intersection is improved. UGACC should also consider the possibility of demolishing/redeveloping outdated housing and commercial structures to create key catalyst sites for new development. Current rental housing rates in the area do not justify new construction, so redeveloping existing structures and thinning older rental inventories might be a more feasible first step. Look to the private sector for new funding. UGACC must create short-term catalysts for a long-term plan. It would be worth investigating the following options:

- **Economic development funds** - Explore the types of grants that may be available to assist with planning, beautifying or redeveloping the Corridor.
- **Evaluate establishing a TAD** – Explore whether a Tax Allocation District (TAD) would be appropriate to catalyze investment by financing certain redevelopment activities. Redevelopment costs are financed through the pledge of future incremental increases in property taxes generated by the resulting new development. TAD bonds may be issued to monetize the projected future increases in property tax revenues so that funding is available to subsidize a portion of devel-

opment costs up front. UGACC is authorized under the Georgia Redevelopment Powers Law to use a TAD. The Willowood shopping center could be a potential location for the use of a TAD to attract redevelopment to the area. It could also be an effective financing technique for converting older apartment projects into new mixed-use development.

- **Explore the feasibility of a CID** - Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) are funded from commercial owners paying extra property taxes. If the tax base is high enough (valuation x 3), owners can pool funds, which they manage, to be used in the district. If 51% of the property owners elect to form a CID, other owners can be compelled to join. Funds raised by the CID are multiplied by federal matching funds. Large land owners must be included for the CID to work. The private sector can make visual changes quickly to keep momentum. A possible focus for a Lexington Road CID is the Athens Loop/Lexington Road interchange.
- **Tax Abatement Programs** - Local governments in Georgia have been increasingly using a form of tax abatement known as "leasehold bonds" or "bonds for lease transactions". Under this approach, a local development authority enters into a partnership with a private entity to jointly own a property. The portion of the property owned by the public entity often starts at 90% in the first year and is reduced by 5% or 10% per year until the property is entirely owned by the private entity at the end of the 10 to 15 years. The portion of the property owned by the development authority is tax exempt, since it is held by a government entity. As a result the property taxes owed on the property are reduced by the amount of the development authority ownership. The development authority also has the potential to issue debt on a tax-exempt basis to help finance the new development. In lieu of the property taxes they would pay, the private entity can repay the tax debt issued on its behalf. This approach can be used individually or in tandem.
- **Tax Credits** - Tax credits can be used to fund environmental cleanup. As an example, through a state program for brownfield redevelopment, a developer hires a company to clean the site and their liability thereafter becomes limited.
- **Joint ventures** - A public-private partnership might be appropriate for certain development, depending upon the vision established for the Corridor. Most complex projects today involve some sort of joint-venture partnership between the public and private sectors. If structured properly, it can be of benefit to both parties. In addition to potential involvement by UGACC, a developer has to feel comfortable that the government will follow through. This could help address the deteriorating housing along the Corridor. Depending on the vision UGACC sees for the Corridor, health service incubators, trade schools or food/beverage start-ups may be possibilities. Any public-private partnership should be championed by the mayor and a business leader.
- **Georgia Department of Economic Development** - Work with the Georgia Department of Economic Development to determine whether any of their sponsored programs might benefit the Corridor. For example, Entrepreneur Friendly is a community-based program that helps create an entrepreneurial environment and support system conducive to a community's overall economic development.
- **Opportunity Zone** - Portions of the Corridor are already within an Opportunity Zone. It may be beneficial to extend the Opportunity Zone further into the Corridor. An Opportunity Zone provides a job tax credit of \$3,500 per year for five years for each new job created in the area by employers. This has been the most successful job creation incentive provided by Georgia. This incentive could be used to create additional employment opportunities in the study area. The Opportunity Zone would need to be created by UGACC and approved by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to be operational.

- **New Markets Tax Credits** - This federal program is designed to attract private investment to revitalize neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and unemployment. It provides private sector investors (e.g., banks, insurance companies, corporations, and individuals) with federal income tax credits in return for new investments in eligible businesses, ranging from small business startups to real estate development. The program is designed to increase the amount of investment capital available to business and economic development programs in low-income communities that traditionally have had poor access to debt and equity capital. A low-income community generally is a census tract with a poverty rate of at least 20% or with median family income of up to 80% of the area median family income.
- **SPLOST** - Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds have been successfully used by UGACC to support transportation and other key infrastructure projects. They could provide key funding for the needed road improvements in the Corridor, but it would need to be coordinated with the next round of SPLOST funding in the County.
- **REBA grants** - Regional Economic Business Assistance (REBA) is a job creation incentive program run by the State of Georgia to encourage business relocation into Georgia. REBA helps "close the deal" when companies are considering Georgia and another state or country for their location or expansion. REBA funds may be used to finance various fixed-asset needs of a company, including infrastructure, real estate acquisition, construction, or machinery and equipment. A local development authority must be the applicant for a REBA grant, and the application must be supported by a recommendation letter from a state agency, typically the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Georgia has recently received more money for REBA grants.

For an area to qualify for an Opportunity Zone it must meet at least three of five criteria: (1) Pervasive poverty established using the most current United States decennial census prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Census; (2) Unemployment Rate (average for preceding year) at least 10% higher than the State or significant job dislocation; (3) Underdevelopment evidenced by lack of building permits, licenses, land disturbance permits, etc. that is lower than development activity within local body's jurisdiction; (4) General distress and adverse conditions (population decline, health and safety issues etc.); and (5) General Blight evidenced by the inclusion of any portion of the nominated area in an urban redevelopment area. Incentives include property tax exemption and abatement or reduction in occupation taxes, regulatory fees, building inspection fees, and other fees that would otherwise be imposed on qualifying business. O.C.G.A. Section 36-88-9(a).

Create an Identity for the Corridor

Currently, the Lexington Road Corridor is an area residents drive through to reach another destination. The eastern end of the Corridor does not engage many residents; daily car trips fall from 30,000 to 8,000 from the west end to the east end of the Corridor. Thoughtful redevelopment along the Corridor could inspire a sense of place and engage people, not only to come to the Corridor as a "place" but also to engage those passing through the Corridor in their daily commute.

UGACC needs to create a story for Lexington Road through branding to attract housing and retail development. Branding begins with identifying an area's attractive features (those that exist or those that will be built). The amenities in this area are relatively low, but there are two vibrant parks. Leveraging the existing green infrastructure and creating additional green infrastructure is a branding approach UGACC should consider.

Retail growth in the Corridor is limited, so UGACC must create a retail strategy and engage retailers by convincing them they will make sales, using current sales data. The Corridor must be attractive to residents and merchants, so an inviting look and feel is key.

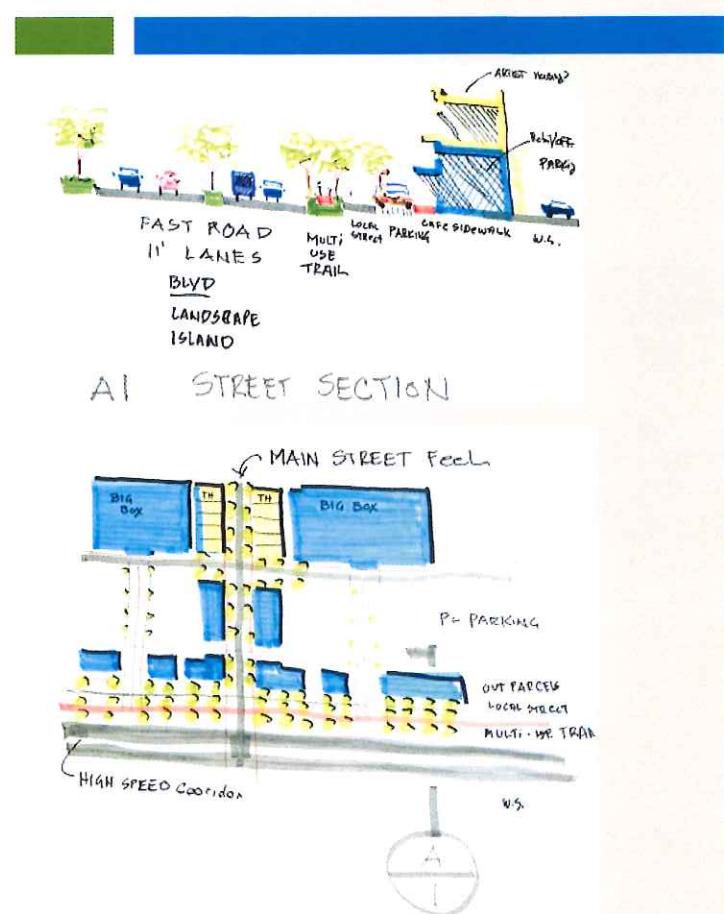
Image and Beautification Upgrades

The most important thing UGACC can do to stimulate development is to improve the appearance of the Corridor. The Panel recommends several approaches to beautification:

- **Tactical Medians** - Replacing the center turn lane with short (50-foot) medians interspersed along the Corridor would create a pedestrian refuge while still allowing commercial access. The medians also provide space for plantings.
- **Multimodal Trail** - At the top of the list for improving this area is making it more vibrant and connected. The Panel recommends installing a multimodal trail along Lexington Road. This would be accomplished through a "road diet." Lexington Road is currently wider than it needs to be. Removing the center turn lane, narrowing the lane widths and using the existing right-of-way

should provide sufficient land with which to create a multimodal trail incorporating pedestrian sidewalk, bike paths, benches and a tree-lined streetscape. In certain areas, an interparcel access road with street parking could be incorporated. The diagram below is a concept drawing illustrating a potential trail design.

Not only do reduced lane widths act as a traffic-calming device, but the trail would provide cyclists and pedestrians with a safe venue. This one improvement, by itself, would completely transform and breathe new life into the Corridor. It should also be fairly easy to accomplish since it would be located in existing right-of-way and the cost is relatively low.



Concept drawings illustrating the use of tactical medians and creating a multimodal trail along Lexington Road.

- **Greenway Trail** - In addition to the multimodal trail along Lexington Road, the Panel envisions creating a wooded greenway trail along the parcel boundaries on the north side of Lexington Road. This trail would increase the desirability of living on the eastside of Athens for the many residents who enjoy biking and walking. It would also serve as a recreational connection to downtown Athens, providing downtown residents with a reason to come out to the Corridor.

The trail would connect with the Firefly trail on the west end of the Corridor, run behind Lowe's and Walmart, come across Lexington Road and end at Southeast Clarke Park. There should also be a connector to Satterfield Park. Much of the land needed for the trail is already owned by UGACC, but additional land or easements across private property would need to be acquired. The commercial land owners should view the trail as a benefit since it would increase access to their property, so the additional access needed should not prove too difficult to accomplish.
- **Southeast Clarke Park** - This east side asset could be further leveraged with better landscaping and signage along Lexington Road. Connecting the park to pedestrian/bike traffic emanating from downtown would increase its vibrancy. If more seniors move into the area, there is an opportunity to create more active-adult programing at Southeast Clarke Park. Future improvement plans for the park should contemplate more active-adult amenities or programming, particularly since Satterfield Park seems to be primarily devoted to youth activities.
- **Quarry** - The quarry has the potential to become a greenway and water feature addition to the greenway trail once it reaches the end of its useful life. It may also be suitable for a water reservoir, allowing for recreational use, such as fishing. UGACC should work with the quarry owners to plan an exit strategy for when the quarry's operations cease.

There are various options for taking the trail across Lexington Road, ranging from a wide street crossing to a pedestrian bridge. A pedestrian bridge would be ideal to avoid the Lexington Road traffic. While a pedestrian bridge may prove too costly, the idea should not be dismissed without some serious thought because a bridge could also serve as a gateway feature with public art, helping to create a sense of place and identity for the Corridor.

- **Gateway** – UGACC needs to create a visual gateway into the city. An art installation, signage or a pedestrian bridge at the east end of the Corridor would convey the impression of arrival into Athens. The gateway feature also provides an opportunity to create an identity for the Corridor.
- **Public Art and Music** - The east side could capitalize on Athens's reputation for art and music by creating art installations along the Corridor. This would help address the empty feeling engendered by vacant buildings and a current lack of foot traffic.

Creating an east side music venue such as an outdoor amphitheater would have a similar effect.

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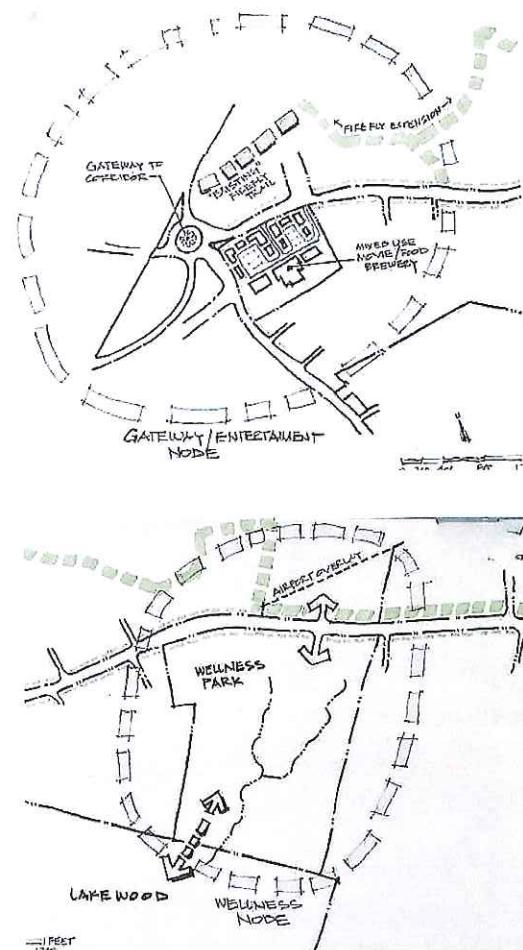
Art installation on Fulton Industrial Boulevard in Atlanta is a gateway and provides an identity for the corridor.

Development Nodes

The Panel recommends establishing four key development nodes along the Lexington Road Corridor as a development strategy. These nodes will create destinations, breathe life into aging housing, and spur redevelopment.

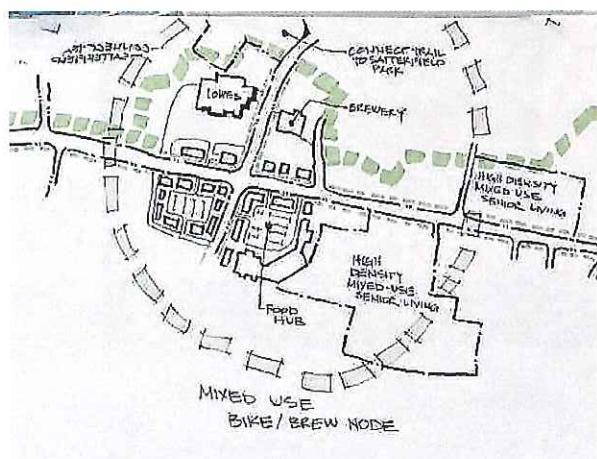
Consumers now want to feel they are arriving somewhere, so the focus needs to be on creating a sense of place in each node. A cohesive vision is key. Developing concept drawings is a good approach to funneling the thought process. To encourage and facilitate development of the nodes, UGACC should consider acquiring groups of small parcels to form larger tracts available for development. The Panel identified the following nodes for development:

- **Gateway/Entertainment Node** - The Panel envisions leveraging the existing Ovation Cinema (which has undergone substantial renovation and upgrade) as an anchor for an entertainment node at the intersection of Lexington Road and Barnett Shoals Road. A restaurant in the vacant space in front of the theater would give moviegoers and local residents an additional dining choice in this area. Other dining and entertainment options could be clustered around the theater. This node also serves as the gateway or entry-point into the Corridor, so improvements planned for Lexington Road to address traffic congestion at the Loop should also contemplate a focal point to serve as a welcoming entry feature to the Corridor.
- **Wellness Center Node** - This node utilizes some vacant parcels on the south side of Lexington Road situated between Barnett Shoals Road and Gaines School Road. The property is currently wooded and contains a lake, but it is zoned for residential development. This property could be attractive for developers because there are large tracts of undeveloped land. A developer does not have to spend the time and effort it takes to assemble multiple smaller parcels, and demolition of existing buildings is not required. While none of the property has been reserved as designated community greenspace, UGACC could rezone this property for commercial development and/or higher density residential development in certain areas while still incorporating "green" principles to preserve a pastoral feel. Portions of the property could remain wooded or be greenspace, and walking trails could be incorporated throughout. A parkway-like, tree-lined street providing access to the interior of the node could be configured into the design.



New development in this node could go a long way to breathing fresh life into the area and spur redevelopment of other vacant and abandoned lots. The Panel envisions this node being developed as a "wellness park." Development could focus on senior facilities and services to entice retirees to this area. Senior housing could be incorporated into this node or nearby.

Alternatively, the Wellness node could center around biotech or similar commercial/office development. One example is office space devoted to biotech research or vaccines. UGACC could consider partnering with Kaiser Permanente or incorporate a link to UGA's veterinary science campus. UGACC would need to bring fiber optic infrastructure to this area to attract technology companies. This could create a live/work environment for employees.



- **Mixed-Use Bike & Brew Node** - The Corridor needs to become known as a destination for something to combat its lack of an identity. The kind of "something" is a topic UGACC should explore through the visioning process. Leveraging the existing commercial uses and the trails proposed, the Panel sees the potential for more entertainment options in the Corridor, which could be the basis for a new identity. The Panel proposes craft breweries and a "brew trail" as a branding option to consider.

A craft brewery is a possible option for the abandoned Piggly Wiggly store site at the corner of Lexington Road and Cherokee Road. Athens is becoming increasingly known for craft brewing, adding to its reputation for artistic culture. The Terrapin Beer Company

is well established, and the new Creature Comforts Brewing Company and Southern Brewing Company microbreweries are putting Athens on the map as a brewery destination. A new Georgia law, effective July 1st (Senate Bill 63), will allow craft breweries to charge admission for tours and conduct retail sales at their facilities. Breweries can be a tourist hot spot and local showpiece for residents. According to a report in [The Atlanta-Journal Constitution](#), Atlanta's SweetWater Brewery attracts 150,000 visitors each year and is a job and income generator. Adding more breweries could create a tourism synergy effect, as exhibited in the cluster of wineries located in Napa Valley, California. Making this node accessible by bike and more easily connected to downtown (by bike or express bus) is essential. The parking lot of the grocery store could be utilized as an outdoor venue for music after the brewery closes.

In conjunction with the craft beer theme or as an alternative to beer, a focus of this node could be a culinary hub. With its many abandoned storefronts, Willowood Square is an area primed for a fresh start. The Panel reimagines this portion of the node as a culinary destination, building on the idea of using the parking lot as a farmers market. Establishing the farmer's market creates a destination, while small units in the shopping



center could serve as permanent locations for processing food, such as a creamery. The shopping center could serve as a site for a restaurant start-up school. This node's proximity to the agricultural area to the east is an added bonus.

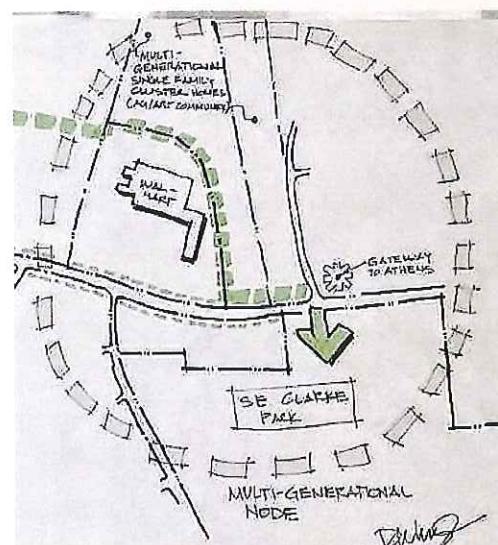
Establishing any new business here will increase the tax base and provide more revenue for a CID or improvements. Regardless of the direction UGACC adopts, the current zoning needs revision to encourage and facilitate development.

- **Multi-Generational Node** - For the last development node along the Corridor, the Panel proposes leveraging the proximity of the Walmart and Southeast Clarke Park to create new housing options, perhaps townhouses, cluster homes or cottages. Additional market analysis needs to be conducted to determine the target market for this housing. It could be targeted to young families or retirees, or it could simply be a multi-generational community.

This hamlet should have its own niche identity. It could be an artist colony with public art pieces throughout the residential area. Alternatively, this node could highlight the rural atmosphere to the east and become an agricultural community with community gardens and edible landscaping. Agri-communities are a growing niche - residential developments that include a working farm, community gardens and/or activities that promote health as well as farm-to-table eateries. An estimated 200 of these "Agrihoods" exist around the U.S., and homes in such communities can sell quickly. Residents love the sense of community that revolves around a farm or community garden. A local farm inspires emotion, is beautiful to look at and is fun for every member of the community. The east side of Athens is a good fit for this type of development. Appendix A contains an article providing more information about this type of development.

In either case, this node has the potential to offer affordable housing options in a more peaceful environment while remaining close to downtown Athens. An outdoor amphitheater or auditorium would further anchor the east side of town and increase flow through

the entire Corridor. A catalyst art project could serve as a gateway highlight in this area.



A local farm inspires emotion, is beautiful to look at and is fun for every member of the community.

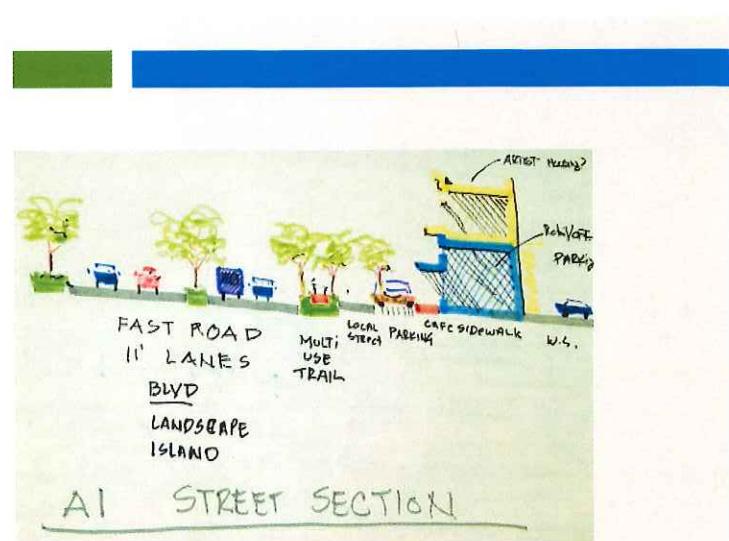
Zoning and Transportation Issues

One of the major obstacles holding back redevelopment in the Corridor is restrictive zoning - the different airport overlay districts, the commercial parking restrictions and the lack of medium-density residential zoning. Another major issue is traffic flow - congestion at certain intersections and the lack of connectivity between parcels and roads. Relaxing zoning restrictions will facilitate development on Lexington Road. Creating access roads and a trail system will make it easier to travel from store to store and attract more customers and residents.

- **Zoning changes and streamlining** - The Corridor would benefit from tailoring zoning for a more suburban environment rather than the less-flexible downtown zoning.
 - Allow a minimum of one lane of parking in front of storefronts. If motorists see parking in front of a building, they believe they can get a space and will pull in, even if they have to then park around back.
 - Create a new residential zoning classification. The current residential zoning allows either a very low 24 bedrooms per acre or 200 bedrooms per acre in the downtown core. Adding an intermediate classification, such as 50 to 80 rooms per acre, would further redevelopment of outdated housing. For example, create a highway commercial zone. Even relaxing zoning just at development nodes would be an improvement; infill development would happen over time.
 - Allow some special use permitting in the restrictive airport overlay zones.
- **Improve traffic congestion at the Athens Loop/Lexington Road Interchange** - The poor flow of this area is a major concern expressed by many residents. Traffic can back up over a mile during peak hours. GDOT has planned a "diverging diamond" type upgrade to this intersection. The Panel suggests evaluating whether the alternative cloverleaf-style intersection would be more appropriate.

UGACC needs to leverage its relationship with GDOT to make this improvement a priority.

- **Connectivity** - Another way to improve traffic flow is to create a system of access roads to keep more cars out of major intersections.
- **Dedicated Rapid Service Bus** - Making trips to the Corridor faster with an express bus service that serves the development nodes would encourage riders to shop in this area. Creating or improving bus shelters would also improve the look of Lexington Road.



Allow a minimum of one lane of parking in front of store fronts.

Housing

The outdated and vacant student housing needs to be addressed because taking no action will result in further deterioration. Single-story dwellings could be redeveloped for the growing number of seniors relocating to Athens. By creating senior-targeted and senior-friendly amenities surrounding the housing, more seniors may be lured to the area, especially if they are not required to drive. The added bonus is that branding for seniors sidesteps the perceived inadequacy of Athens-Clarke County's east side school system. Other outdated housing could be torn down and redeveloped if current rents justify it. Existing housing could also be refurbished for residents attracted to the Wellness and Multi-Generational nodes. Making Lexington Road more walkable/bikeable will also increase its residential attractiveness. UGACC may need to incentivize housing development for it to occur. The last senior facility was built in neighboring Oconee County rather than Athens-Clarke County.

Reassess Strengths of Airport

The Panel recommends reassessing the airport's strengths and improving what the airport has to offer, but courting a commercial carrier might not be the best use of UGACC's resources for the Corridor. If UGACC has not already done so, it may want to consider whether a fixed-base operator (FBO) would better meet the needs of the airport's customers. Catering to corporate users, who appreciate private vendor services, could increase corporate traffic. Close by warehouse space could also bring more business to the airport (e.g., building and medical supplies).

The Panel also recommends improving airport signage. The current signage is small, easily missed and not distinct. Although the current runway expansion is positive growth, there seems little need to move the runway or use the entirety of the recent airport SPLOST. UGACC should investigate whether any of the remaining SPLOST funds could be used to improve airport signage and/or implement any portion of the multimodal trail along Lexington Road.



Other outdated housing could be torn down....



... and redeveloped if current rents justify it.

Workforce Development

Another possible way to revitalize this area is to increase visibility and create identity through job training programs. The Panel suggests investigating the feasibility of the following:

- Internship Programs - bring academics to the area
- Apprenticeships - trade school training
- Mentorship - beginning at high school level. This could help raise the profile of nearby high schools
- Hospitality training - possibly in conjunction with a culinary hub in one of the development nodes

Research/Tech Facilities

The Panel also considered the possibility of creating biotech space in this Corridor. The new UGA Veterinary Teaching Hospital campus near the Corridor could be a key building block for attracting bioscience industries on adjacent parcels. Companies interested in vaccines, animal reproduction and veterinary pharmaceuticals and research may want to cluster around this new, state-of-the-art facility. UGA is one of only a few major universities which does not have an affiliated business and research park campus. The study area may provide a possible location for this type of facility. It will require an effective public-private partnership between UGA, a major developer and UGACC to achieve this vision. The areas around the airport could provide a site for this major investment. The presence of the Health Sciences University, the expansion of the Engineering and Computer Sciences offerings at UGA and the new Veterinary Teaching Hospital are all important new building blocks in creating potential demand for a business and research park in Athens affiliated with UGA.

Although there are great opportunities here, it could take many years to see results. For example, Tech Square in downtown Atlanta centered around Georgia Tech took decades. There is a need in Athens for additional lab space. Buildings with a traditional office look would be suitable, but high bandwidth is a necessity. UGACC would have to create fiber infrastructure along the Corridor to recruit such industry. The distance from UGA makes the Corridor less desirable for technology companies. However, a critical mass of companies could overcome that. To launch a technology hub along the Corridor, a large industry-anchored tenant would probably need to be recruited.

Crime

Although crime along the Corridor is relatively low, residents have expressed concern regarding crime in the area behind Willowood Square. To address this issue, the Panel recommends stronger code enforcement to make property owners more involved in their assets. UGACC could target inattentive landlords through code enforcement by sending police/fire/health department officials to do sweeps on dilapidated buildings. In addition, UGACC needs to deal with the perception of crime throughout the Corridor. While the public perception may not be supported by the crime data, the Corridor will continue to suffer as long as the neg-

ative perception remains. Creating a Corridor identity, implementing branding efforts, and beautifying the Corridor will go a long way in overcoming the poor perception.

Government Buildings

UGACC could begin creating a more cohesive presence in the Corridor through its own property. UGACC owns a substantial amount of property along the Corridor. A strategy for improving the look of the buildings and signage should be considered as part of the overall beautification campaign.



The new UGA Veterinary Teaching Hospital campus near the Corridor could be a key building block for attracting bioscience industries on adjacent parcels.



Tech Square, Atlanta, GA

IMPLEMENTATION

During the TAP, the commitment of the UGACC staff, business and community leaders, and residents to the long-term health and economic success of Lexington Road was evident. To help prioritize next steps, below is an action plan to guide implementation of the TAP recommendations.

Short Term: 3 to 12 months

- ✓ **Inventory all assets in the Corridor** - Create a housing, retail and industry database. UGACC should become familiar with all property owners in the Lexington Road Corridor. Beginning a dialogue between property owners and a department, such as the Economic Development Department, is essential to crafting a vision for the Corridor's future. The owners of Lowe's and Walmart are especially vital to any redevelopment scheme since these two thriving business could serve as anchors for surrounding development. Identifying property owners is also the first step in creating a CID and obtaining any right-of-way need for a trail system.
- ✓ **Identify a champion** - Find one person to be the catalyst for change and dialogue. A champion will help to keep momentum and focus.
- ✓ **Create a clear, shared vision for the Corridor** - Once property owners are engaged, the next step is to create a vision of the future that property owners, residents and the government feel inspired about. Engaging a focus group could help to crystallize goals. Major components of this vision must be what value the Corridor holds for the next generation and how to create a healthy sense of place that will draw people to the area. A lack of vision will result in further deterioration.
- ✓ **East Athens Business Group** - Leverage this newly-formed entity to further goals for the Corridor.
- ✓ **Begin zoning changes** - This step is necessary to engage developers.
- ✓ **Study CID/TAD** - Conduct a real property assessment through property tax valuation and overall feasibility study.
- ✓ **Create tax abatement program for 5- or 10-year reductions to incentivize development.**
- ✓ **Code enforcement coordination** - UGACC should decide which code monitoring will be most effective and which departments to include.
- ✓ **Study feasibility of an airport FBO** - Many other college towns have successful privately-run airports. Athens should make sure it is keeping up with the competition.
- ✓ **Begin a right-of-way acquisition plan** - UGACC will need additional property to implement the Greenway Trail and perhaps the Multimodal Trail. UGACC should develop a strategy for acquiring the needed right-of-way from property owners.
- ✓ **Engage developers** - Engaging developers is key to the survival and transformation of this Corridor. Also, keep in mind that crafting an identity of the Corridor will promote a solid retail future - "retailers follow rooftops."
- ✓ **Make assets more visible** - Create sidewalks and medians. Encourage signage for the airport and Lexington Road.
- ✓ **Engage GDOT** - Although GDOT has created an improvement plan for the Athens Loop Interchange, the project will not be funded for a number of years. UGACC needs to work to elevate this project on the GDOT construction list and investigate ways to raise additional funding, if necessary. If a cloverleaf improvement seems more beneficial to this interchange, UGACC needs to develop the plans and implementation strategy, then present to it to GDOT. CID funds could be applied to the interchange.
- ✓ **Beautifying greenspace** - Landscaping and improved signage would highlight both Satterfield and Southeast Clarke parks.
- ✓ **Form an eastern gateway entrance to Athens** - Make drivers feel they have arrived somewhere special at the entrance to Athens. For example, adding an art installation as a gateway feature could change the perception of this area. Develop plans to improve pedestrian access across Lexington Road at Southeast Clarke Park, whether it is a pedestrian overpass or a wide pedestrian crossing.
- ✓ **Technology opportunities** - Explore the possibility of fostering technology incubator/startup programs. This

will require bringing fiber optic infrastructure to the Corridor. Possibilities include biotech, wet lab space, vaccine research, intellectual property and a tie-in with UGA's vet school.

- ✓ **Leverage UGA/Schools** - UGA could become involved in incubating new businesses and internships. High schools could create mentorship programs.
- ✓ **Give school systems an identity** - UGACC could work with schools to develop trade school apprenticeships.
- ✓ **Senior Amenities** - Research features and amenities seniors are looking for in and around housing. This could help shape not only the approach to developing senior housing in the Corridor, but it could also contribute to greenspace plans and plans for Southeast Clarke Park.

- Design charrettes - This allows citizens to develop a concrete vision.
- Land use/zoning recommendations.
- Financing strategy/implementation matrix - Include a project flowsheet.

- ✓ Overlay district - Create a new intermediate residential zoning and incentive district for development nodes.
- ✓ Multimodal Trail - Complete the design and right-of-way acquisition and implement phase 1 construction.
- ✓ Redevelop real estate as opportunities arise - UGACC must capture demand. What types of places capture new residents and retail demand? Vibrant, healthy places.

Mid-Term: 1 to 3 years

- ✓ Create a detailed comprehensive corridor master plan and develop brand - The plan should contain many of the elements mentioned above. In addition, the following should be included in the new plan to create a more vibrant identity for Lexington Road:
 - Public participation strategy - How does UGACC get stakeholders involved?
 - Market analysis - Gather data for developers and retailers.
 - Transportation analysis and recommendations - Traffic flow study data could be helpful here.
 - Beautification strategy - Landscaping and trails.
 - Develop district brand and implementation strategy - A good example is "wayfinding" - creating a comprehensive city-wide (or at least Corridor-wide) signage system. This promotes a cohesive city image while promoting walking/bicycling and reducing visual clutter.
- Monopolize on good timing by staying alert for the right time to make changes. For example, attain right-of-way when property changes hands.
- Provide incentives to pool small parcels together.
- Initially, keeping new housing units around the \$150,000 - \$200,000 price point attracts buyers. Nearby properties at that price point have sold quickly. Higher price points may be eased in when appropriate.

Long Term Implementation: 3+ years

- ✓ Multimodal Trail - Complete construction
- ✓ Corridor master plan - Begin to implement transportation, retail and residential redevelopment
- ✓ Quarry exit strategy - Work with the quarry owner to create a plan for converting the quarry into another use once the quarry's useful life is complete.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Panel Overview

The Panel is designed to be a very condensed, information-filled period within which to provide feedback with next action steps. The Panel met for two days on May 11 – 12, 2015. In preparation for the Panel, each Panelist was provided with background materials, data and statistics on the Corridor compiled by UGACC representatives. The Panel kicked off the first day with a tour of the Lexington Road Corridor and surrounding area. This was followed by the Panelists interviewing invited community leaders and key stakeholders to gain local perspective on the status and potential of the Corridor. Learning the history and conditions of the area through the interviews helped the Panel formulate the direction the community should pursue.

The following persons participated in the stakeholder interviews: **David Clarke** (Athens-Clarke County Transportation and Public Works Director); **Patrick Allen** (UGA Director of Community Relations); **Blaine Williams** (Assistant County Manager); **Sean McMillian** (UGA Economic Development Office Director); **Derek Eberhart** (Director of Innovation Gateway); **Steve West** (Halpern Enterprises, Inc.); **Kevan Williams** (Department of Leisure Services Park Planner); and **Sheriff Ira Edwards**.

In an effort to capture additional community insight and stakeholder input, an online survey of area residents was conducted in advance of the TAP. This survey generated a tremendous response with 719 people participating in the survey. The survey results were provided to the Panel and are included in this report as [Appendix B](#).

The first day was capped off with a working dinner with members of UGACC's Lexington Road Corridor Study Group, including District 8 Commissioner **Andy Herod**, District 1 Commissioner **Sharyn Dickerson**, Planning Commissioner **Maxine Easom**, developer **Carl Nichols**, and **David Spooner** with UGA's School of Environmental Design. Discussion during dinner was moderated to provide further insight and perspective for the Panelists.

The second day included a series of moderated working sessions for the Panel to address the questions posed.



Pictures from the TAP panel. The dinner after the tour and stakeholder interviews. The panelists start the discussion at dinner with the group to get additional insight about the subject site and possible issues. Day 2 - the panel starts the TAPs process.

The Panel was asked to offer advice and recommendations on actions ACC might take to stimulate further development and/or redevelopment of the Lexington Road Corridor, including helping to answer the following questions:

- 1) **What is the highest and best use of the Corridor?**
 - a. Are technology-oriented businesses a viable use for the Corridor, such as bio-technology, high-tech industry, "clean" businesses and life sciences?
 - b. Is there a particular niche market that would make sense for the Corridor? Would developing a particular identity or brand help from a marketing perspective?
 - c. Are residential uses appropriate for the Corridor? If so, what kind of residential uses? Is senior housing a viable option?
- 2) **What opportunities exist within the Corridor to attract businesses to employ the existing workforce in the near term (3 to 5 years) with a long-term objective of providing training opportunities to develop and employ a higher-skilled workforce?**
- 3) **What actions can UGACC take to ease or facilitate development in the Corridor?**
 - a. Are there development standards that should be relaxed or waived for the Corridor?
 - b. Would a regional stormwater facility aid in attracting development?
 - c. What interim redevelopment strategies might be employed?
- 4) **How can the Corridor be developed and promoted to maintain its economic vitality while protecting the rural character to the east of the Corridor?**
 - a. What opportunities exist to capitalize on the investments UGA has made in nearby areas?
 - a. Are there business opportunities within the Corridor to support the neighboring agricultural uses, such as a farmers market or other agricultural options?
- 5) **Is there a better design for Lexington Road, taking into consideration the major intersections at Gaines School Road, Whit Davis Road, and Barnett Shoals Road? (Note that GDOT is planning intersection improvements at Barnett Shoals Road, Lexington Road and the Athens Loop).**
 - a. Are there opportunities to promote or require inter-parcel access?
 - b. Are there better routes or other transportation infrastructure UGACC should consider?
- 6) **How might the airport be leveraged to support the goals described above?**
 - a. Are there other actions related to the airport UGACC could take to support or stimulate development, such as rebranding, access or signage?
 - b. Should UGACC consider a regional commercial airport alternative?

Athens-Clarke County Overview

Athens-Clarke County (ACC) is a stable and vibrant city of over 120,000 residents. It is the smallest county in Georgia, consisting of about 122 square miles. The median age is 26. Athens is home to the prestigious University of Georgia, which fosters a rich academic and cultural environment. UGA students, numbering around 33,000, make up 27.5% of ACC's population. UGA is also the largest employer in the area. Hospitals are also vital to the Athens economy, representing two of the five largest area employers. A new health sciences campus is expanding Athens's reputation as a hub for medical expertise.

Athens is largely defined by a walkable, small-town development pattern of residential neighborhoods and clusters of businesses within its downtown area and civic institutions and park space along its main corridors. The mix of places to live, work, socialize and learn means that ACC can meet many, if not most, of the needs of its residents within its current boundaries.

Athens's rich history has built, over time, a multi-layered community. ACC set in motion a trend for sustainability and asset preservation in 1980 when it became one of the first cities in Georgia to become a Main Street City, embracing a program for downtown revitalization through the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The entire downtown area is listed as a historic district. ACC also encourages sustainable multi-modal transit with a bus system and by hosting the Twilight Criterium, one of the country's largest cycling events.

Athens also has a long history of fostering the arts. Known both nationally and internationally as a musicians' mecca, the bands R.E.M., B-52's and many others originated in Athens. Long famous for its arts and music, Athens is currently expanding its reputation as a destination for culinary arts and beer. Local gem Five & Ten has become something of a tourist attraction due to the culinary awards won by, and celebrity chef status of, its owner, Hugh Acheson. Athens is home to one major brewery, and two new microbreweries are launching soon.

With each of these milestones, ACC has grown in significance within Georgia. Today, Athens is a center for commerce and trade, health services, and cultural arts for northeast Georgia.

Due to the high quality of life in Athens, many retirees are migrating to the area. Athens has proven to be a desirable community in which to live. The walkability, access to parks and cultural events, beautiful downtown and cohesive political community have created a real sense of place for Athens.



Corridor Overview

The Lexington Road Corridor is one of the oldest roads in Athens and serves as the main entry point into Athens from Lexington, Washington, Winterville, Crawford and Augusta to the east. The study area extends for 3 ½ miles from the Athens Loop to Southeast Clarke Park. Lexington Road is built on top of an old Native American trail that follows a ridge line, which means the Corridor has few drainage/stormwater issues. Lexington Road/ Highway 78 is a state highway; therefore, GDOT has final approval over any road improvements.

This Corridor built its identity around student housing in the 1970s and 1980s. It was also a good alternative for families who wanted a more rural atmosphere but wanted to be close to downtown. There are many mature trees in the family neighborhoods, and the area becomes decidedly rural immediately after leaving the study area at the eastern end of the Corridor. Beginning in the 1990s, students began leaving this area to be closer to UGA and downtown. As Athens has grown, so has traffic at the intersection of the Athens Loop and Lexington Road. While the traffic congestion is localized to this one intersection, a reputation for congestion has spread across the Corridor generally.

The Lexington Road Corridor lacks vibrancy. The Corridor is presently defined by its many empty storefronts. There are no minor connecting road systems to ease the flow of traffic from one area to another. There is a lack of sidewalks and attractive features. There are several big box anchor stores (Lowe's, Walmart) but few smaller commercial stores. Many of the retail stores appear to deal in low-quality merchandise. Many of the Corridor buildings are beginning to show their age and are in need of rehabilitation or redevelopment. There is no signage to define this as a gateway into the city.

There are two parks in the Corridor - Satterfield Park and Southeast Clarke Park. Southeast Clarke Park is larger and offers many amenities, but it does not present a vibrant front to Lexington Road. Southeast Clarke has a skate park, soccer fields and tennis courts. It also recently received SPLOST money that funded a dog park and a playground. The movie theater is currently undergoing renovation and the auxiliary building in front of the theater is vacant. UGACC has a police station, jail and vehicle tag office here, but they do not have a cohesive presence. There are a half a dozen churches along Lexington Road. Many of the lot sizes are small.

Many residents and retailers have relocated to the more vibrant development node at Barnett Shoals/College Station Road. Vacant housing along or near the Corridor has begun to be filled in by lower-income residents. Crime has increased in very localized spots along the Corridor, but this creates a safety concern in many people's minds.

Athens-Ben Epps airport has been located along the Corridor since 1917, but it does not have a strong Corridor presence. Signage to the airport is generally small and easy to miss. The airport presents many zoning developmental restrictions. Residential zoning categories are restrictive, requiring either high or low density.

The corridor area has great potential for improvement due to its proximity and connectivity to downtown Athens and the larger region. However, the traffic congestion, interconnectivity of parcels and the attractiveness of buildings and streets need to be improved in order to attract new investment to the Corridor.



PANELISTS BIOS



WILLIAM DE ST. AUBIN
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Bill de St. Aubin brings many years of leading successful civic designs involving complex urban environments. His process is to collaborate in an open manner with multi-disciplinary teams, user groups and communities, to assure projects and studies are completed within constraints of the market, while directing solutions to achieve the highest aspirations of the client and community. The results are environments, which provide a sense of heritage, civic pride and community.

He is an active member of the Congress of New Urbanism (CNU), and founding member of CNU Atlanta chapter. He also co-chairs the Urban Land Institutes Sustainable Programs Subcommittee. Bill has published several papers and is a sought after speaker on urban architecture and business development.



GEORGE W. BAKER III
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George graduated from the University of Georgia with a BBA and a major in real estate in 1994. In 1995 he began his real estate career with John W. Rooker & Associates as an assistant to the superintendent for the construction of a 110,000 sf distribution facility in Conyers, GA. George moved from this job to NAI Brannen Goddard in 1996 where he began a career in commercial brokerage specializing in land sales across the State of Georgia. He has represented and consulted clients ranging from individuals to corporations and international investors, and in 2007 received the Phoenix award from the Atlanta Commercial Board of Realtors for 10 years of million dollar club production. Along the way George invested in land and in 2002 he developed his first single family subdivision. In 2011 he started Baker Real Estate Services Group, LLC with his partner and they focus on land brokerage and development. Presently Baker Group is marketing numerous land listings as well as developing a master planned community in Monroe called East Village.

George resides in Monroe, GA with his wife Suzanne and his two daughters Carsyn and Reese. He is a member the

Rotary Club, First Baptist Church of Monroe, an officer in the Walton Barrow Board of Realtors, a board member of the Monroe Downtown Development Authority, a graduate of Leadership Walton (2003), and a member of the Walton County Chamber of Commerce. In his leisure time George enjoys hunting, snow skiing, cooking, and traveling with his family.



KEN BLEAKLY
President, Bleakly Advisory Group

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Ken is the founder and president of Bleakly Advisory Group. He has been a practicing real estate consultant and advisor for over 30 years. Ken's areas of practice include: market and financial analysis, public/private partnerships, workforce housing, public finance and project implementation. He has assisted clients on a national basis with complex real estate issues. He has designed innovative economic development strategies and assisted with corporate relocation and incentive negotiations. Ken has been involved in the creation and implementation of more than 25 tax allocation districts for cities and counties in Georgia.

After more than 16 years in real estate consulting, in 1996 Ken had the opportunity to apply his skills directly to implementation. From 1996 to 2001 Ken served as president of COPA, Inc., a non-profit development entity formed by Central Atlanta Progress, Inc. to spearhead the redevelopment around Centennial Olympic Park. It was one of the most fulfilling periods of his career.

Ken's passion for the city building process was initially sparked by his reading of Robert Caro's biography of Robert Moses, "The Power Broker".



JOHN DEVINE, AICP
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As Senior Planner at the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) since 2007, John oversees long-range planning, leading projects in transportation, land use, natural resources, tourism, and other areas. Previously, John served as Greenway Coordinator and Associate Transpor-

tation Planner for Athens-Clarke County, Research Associate with the Center for Transportation Research, and Planner with the City of Austin, Texas. A native of Upstate New York, John earned a Master of Science in Community and Regional Planning from the University of Texas at Austin and a Bachelor of Arts (Environmental Studies in Geology) from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. John and his family live in Athens, where he serves on the board of directors of the Federation of Neighborhoods and is active in other organizations within the community.



DONNIE LONGENECKER
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Donnie Longenecker is a landscape architect, entrepreneur, and educator. His firm, DTC, provides a planning, program and project management services for a wide variety of clients and projects, with an emphasis on master planned resort communities. Donnie also serves as a Lecturer and Continuing Education Coordinator for the University of Georgia College of Environment and Design. He is a registered landscape architect in Georgia and has both undergraduate and graduate degrees in landscape architecture from the University of Georgia and the University of Illinois.



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Gil R. Prado is the Executive Director of The Boulevard CID (Community Improvement District) in Atlanta, GA where he leads the day-to-day management of the organization and the redevelopment of the Fulton Industrial district, which is known as the largest industrial corridor in the Eastern USA.

Gil has outstanding track record of entrepreneurial success prior to joining the CID and extensive work experience in real estate, urban planning, historic preservation, sustainability, design, economic development, public infrastructure and business management in the private, non-profit and public sectors. Gil draws on this multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial experience to take a holistic approach to real estate and the built environment, bringing different groups together and building partnerships to yield successful projects that creates a sense of place, enrich people's lives, improve the economy, protect the environment and ultimately becomes an asset and amenity to the community.

Gil earned a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from UCLA (University of California Los Angeles), a Master of Arts in Historic Preservation from SCAD (Savannah College of Arts and Design) and he is currently completing the Advanced Management Development Program (AMD) in Real Estate from Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Gil holds the AICP (American Institute of Certified Planner) and the LEED Green Associate credentials. He is an active member of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), American Planning Association (APA), International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and he is an Alumni Advisory Board member at the Harvard University Real Estate Academic Initiative.



J. WESLEY ROGERS
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As President and CEO of Landmark Properties, Wes has overseen the acquisition, financing, development, construction and operations of well over 10,000 beds of new construction student housing. In recent years, Wes and Landmark have largely focused on developing student cottage communities under the "Retreat" brand, and urban infill communities largely under the "Standard" brand. Wes is responsible for establishing and implementing Landmark's overall corporate strategy. He is very involved in the development and finance side of the Company's business, but his hands on leadership style keeps him engaged in all aspects of the business.

Wes, an Athens, GA native, obtained his B.B.A. in Finance from the University of Georgia in 1999 and his Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from UGA in 2004. While finishing up his MBA, Wes partnered with James Whitley to form Landmark Properties in May 2004.

Wes lives in Athens with his wife, Kimberly, and sons, James and Harrison.



JANET L. BOZEMAN
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Jan Bozeman is a principal of Hyatt & Stubblefield, P.C. She is a 1989 graduate of Auburn University and received her law degree from Georgia State University in 2000. She assists developers throughout the country in creating the governance structure for their planned communities, condominiums, and destination resorts and in establishing club membership programs for project amenities. Her experience includes small and large scale residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects, as well as age-qualified communities. She also counsels clients on club and community association governance and operations.

Before joining Hyatt & Stubblefield in 2005, Jan's practice involved the representation of condominium and homeowners associations on a wide range of issues, including construction defect and development issues, covenant enforcement, corporate governance, easement disputes, sexual harassment, and fair housing claims.

Jan is a member of the Urban Land Institute, Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW), the Greater Atlanta Home-builders Association, the National Homebuilders Association, the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers, and the State Bar of Georgia. Jan was the recipient of the Best Service to the Bar for Exemplary Service to the Bar and the Young Lawyers Division Award in 2003.

Jan is a frequent speaker at continuing education programs on issues relating to community associations, real estate development and 55+ housing.

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ULI Atlanta would like to thank the panelists and TAPs committee for their time, energy and passion for ULI.

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ABOUT ULI - URBAN LAND INSTITUTE

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 and has over 30,000 members from more than 90 countries. It is one of America's most respected resources of information and knowledge on urban planning, growth and development. ULI is a non-profit research and education organization. Its mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. To encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing experiences, ULI membership represents the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service. Among its members there are developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, planners, public officials, brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students and marketing and brand identity experts.

ULI ATLANTA

With over 1,000 members throughout Georgia, Alabama and Eastern Tennessee, ULI Atlanta is one of the largest District Councils of the Urban Land Institute. We bring together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs. We share knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. ULI Atlanta brought this same model of technical assistance to the Metropolitan Atlanta area. Local ULI members volunteer their time to serve on panels. In return, they are provided with a unique opportunity to share their skills and experience to improve their community.

Through Technical Assistance Program Panels, ULI Atlanta is able to enhance community leadership, clarify community needs and assets, and advance land use policies that expand economic opportunity and maximize market potential.



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