

Central  
Atlanta  
Progress



Atlanta  
Downtown  
Improvement  
District



City  
of  
Atlanta



# JSA-McGill Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Study

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Submitted:  
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## OVERVIEW

In 2003, the Atlanta Regional Commission granted Central Atlanta Progress a planning grant through its Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) to focus on developing a long-range plan for the Jones-Simpson-Alexander-McGill Corridor (JSA-McGill). The Livable Centers Initiative promotes the development of action plans to enhance livability, connectivity and mobility within existing town centers throughout the Atlanta region, while identifying development and redevelopment opportunities.

The JSA-McGill Study provides Downtown residents, property owners and business owners with an opportunity to reevaluate their neighborhood, envision improvements to strengthen the area and develop an action plan for achieving that vision. The JSA-McGill process included four phases: Inventory and Assessment, Visioning, Framework Plan and Action Plan.

## INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

The Inventory and Assessment included documentation of existing conditions within the JSA-McGill corridor in the summer of 2003. This included demographics, existing land uses, existing zoning, historic resources, character and building conditions, building occupancy, existing transportation and circulation, existing market conditions, susceptibility to change and Study Area issues and opportunities.

The JSA-McGill LCI Study Area focuses on an east-west corridor in north Downtown Atlanta comprised predominately of surface parking lots, but poised to capitalize and connect with developments surrounding its boundaries. The area is anchored on the east by the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center, SciTrek and Georgia Power complexes, on the south by Baker Street, on the west by the Northside Drive, and on the north by Mills Street through to Williams Street, and then Pine Street east to Courtland Street. The JSA-McGill study area includes the Georgia Aquarium (currently under construction) and World of Coca-Cola projects, newly built high-rise condominiums, the underutilized Civic Center MARTA station, and the pedestrian barrier defined by the I-75/85 Downtown Connector overpass.

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The JSA-McGill Study area has seen significant changes in its demographic profile since 1990. New residential developments around Centennial Olympic Park have resulted in an increase in population numbers. Based on Census data, the population has grown by 8.6%. There are currently 1,202 housing units in the study area (based on survey) and about 2,404 people (2.0 persons/household). 15,564 people are employed within the study area (based on a survey by ZHA, Inc.)

**KEY ISSUES** (as defined by the JSA-McGill Stakeholders)

### Land Use and Development

- There are significant development opportunities in the corridor
- Compatible development along Luckie street is important to the Aquarium
- Municipal parking might be used as a development incentive

### Economic Development

- There is little demand for Class A office space downtown at the present time
- There is demand for small-to-medium sized exhibition space at the Civic Center

### Housing

- There are ongoing development plans and strong support for new housing in the Centennial Hill area
- Condominium developments require secure, dedicated parking

### Historical and Natural Resources

- Marietta Street is a historic resource but will face development pressure

### Transportation and Circulation

- Baker Street should remain open to vehicles except for special events
- Parking on Baker Street is a potential problem due to poor pedestrian visibility
- School bus staging for the Aquarium/World of Coca-Cola requires multiple solutions
- Shuttle buses from the Georgia World Congress center to the hotel districts will use JSA as part of a loop route
- I-75/85 access and egress needs to be improved

### Community Facilities

- The Peachtree-Pine homeless shelter is a serious problem for the area
- Renaissance Park is being used by the homeless and vagrants as an encampment

### Urban Design

- The Centennial Olympic Park 'spine' is very important to the Aquarium
- The pedestrian environment on JSA faces challenges especially behind the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola Development
- An open space bridging I-75/85 at Peachtree Street has been proposed as a civic improvement and a development catalysts



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The JSA-McGill study area is made up of about 329 parcels covering approximately 145 acres of land. The land use categories derived for this study are a compilation of the City of Atlanta's land use classification system and Fulton County's land use categorization.

Commercial uses make up about 12% of the land use in terms of acreage. The character of commercial development ranges from the low-density historic to office towers. Institutional uses dominate the corridor with the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center and Georgia World Congress Center occupying about 29 acres of land. Historic churches and the Emory Crawford Long Hospital are additional institutions located within the study area. Private and public open spaces combined provide less than 2% of the total acreage. A wide variety of residential uses are scattered throughout the study area. Finally an astounding 64 acres, nearly 43% of the study area land is either vacant or occupied by surface parking lots.

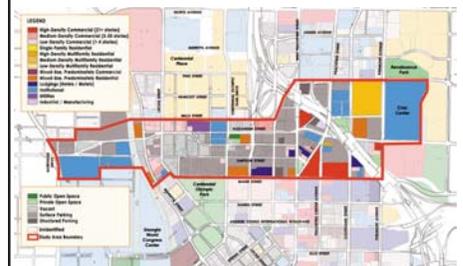
Over three-fourths of the buildings in the study area are found to be in **very good** condition. Buildings found to be in **good** condition are mostly smaller commercial establishments along Marietta Street, Baker Street and Peachtree Street. They require minor repairs. Very few buildings are found to be in **fair** condition and there are no **deteriorated** buildings.

A majority of the buildings in the study area are **occupied**. The **unoccupied** buildings include the Boomershine building (under renovation at the time of the survey) and the Medical Arts building. Some of the high-rise office towers were evaluated to be partially unoccupied based on office occupancy data in Downtown Atlanta (occupancy rate less than 90%).

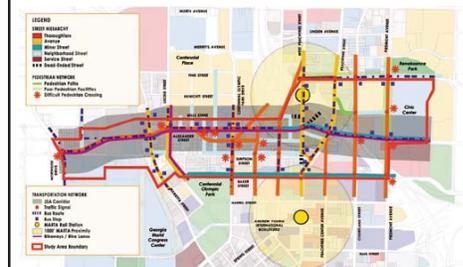
The City of Atlanta regulates the development of all real property through the use of zoning districts. Central Atlanta Progress and City of Atlanta is currently in the process of reviewing and updating the zoning code for Downtown Atlanta.

The vehicular grid in the corridor is reinforced by a network of transit options. About one-third of the study area is within walking distance of two MARTA rail stations. The City's 'Commuter On-street Bike Plan' identifies Luckie Street as a potential bike path connecting Georgia Tech to Downtown. The JSA corridor has also been identified for a proposed bike path connecting to the Freedom Parkway trail. Given Downtown's complex street grid, traffic signalization and timing are an important issue in the study area, a detailed traffic study will be required to maintain the vehicular flow while supporting the additional pedestrian activity within the corridor.

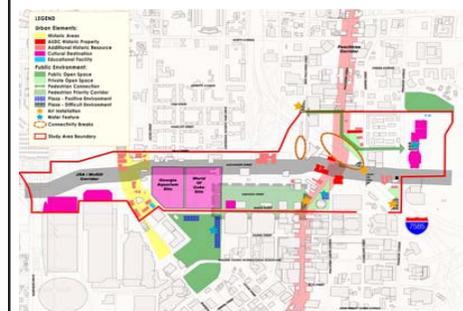
Land Use Type	No. of Parcels	Acreage
Commercial H.D.	5	7.63
Commercial L.D.	37	7.64
Commercial M.D.	6	2
Industrial	4	1.8
Institutional	34	37.42
Lodging	4	3.1
M.U-Residential	8	6.73
Multifamily H.D.	1	.25
Multifamily M.D.	1	8.47
Open Space	1	.45
Parking Deck	4	2.15
Parking Lot	135	50.29
Private Open Sp.	11	2.23
Utility	18	1.78
Vacant	60	13.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>145.68</b>



Existing Land Use



Existing Circulation



Urban Design Framework



**JSA-McGill LCI Plan**

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# MARKET CONDITIONS

## Housing Trends

Based on Zimmerman/Volk Associates' field investigation, analysis of migration and mobility data, and assessment of the assets and opportunities of Downtown Atlanta, new housing units within Downtown are likely to attract potential renters and buyers from elsewhere in the City of Atlanta as well as other states. The JSA-McGill LCI Study Area could support, and the market could absorb up to 1,500 new dwelling units within the next five years.

For the multifamily market, younger singles and couples (childless households) have been identified as the largest general market (about 70% of the market for housing units). Empty nesters and retirees are the next group most likely to locate in Downtown (just under 25%). The preferred building types includes; loft apartments, conventional apartments and mansion apartment buildings.

## Retail Trend:

The JSA-McGill Study Area's retail potential will be driven by proximate markets. These markets are employees, residents, and hotel guests within easy walking distance (one-quarter mile) to the Study Area and visitors to the new Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola projects.

To capture a proportion of these sales will require that retail be clustered to create enough critical mass. Eating and drinking sales make up a vast majority of the retail sales potential and the most strategic location is Simpson Street. Additionally, stand alone retail will have potential on Alexander Street. The retail market consultant ZHA concludes that between 75,000 and 100,000 square feet of retail are likely supportable in the JSA-McGill Study Area through 2010.

## Office Trend:

The JSA-McGill Study Area is well positioned for office development. Recent trends suggest that Downtown office space is struggling, therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that office uses will rapidly absorb the available land in the JSA-McGill corridor between now and 2010. Conclusions regarding supportable office square feet are based on an assumption that the JSA-McGill corridor evolves into a mixed-use district with significant housing and retail and entertainment land uses.

The product could be moderately priced, new office space in a non-high-rise building. Loft office product would contribute to a neighborhood environment. This type of product would target the Class-B office user, priced out of Midtown and Buckhead. ZHA concludes that 350,000 to 500,000 square feet of this office product is likely supportable in the JSA-McGill Study Area between now and 2010.



Housing and Retail



Institutional



Office and Transit



Open Space



## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

A significant portion of the work done on the JSA-McGill LCI study involved public participation in many different forms. As part of the *Imagine Downtown* process, JSA was publicized as one of five focus areas requiring planning attention. Dates and times of all public events were posted on the Central Atlanta Progress website as well as the website dedicated to *Imagine Downtown*. Public participation and input opportunities included:

- One-on-one stakeholder interviews
- Project Management team meetings
- Public Workshops, Meetings and Presentations

### Stakeholder Interviews

In August, approximately 20 stakeholder interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted to promote an open forum for candid conversation between community members and the planning team before any planning concepts or alternatives were considered.

### Public Workshops

The centerpieces of the public involvement process were three public workshops, the second being a three-day long 'Charette Week' designed to build awareness and excitement through an intense set of collaborative exercises.

Over 200 persons attended the first public workshop. The purpose was to kick off the JSA-McGill LCI process by introducing the project and the team, and to conduct interactive exercises to gauge the initial level of consensus on issues and priorities. Participants were encouraged to visit each of three stations to take part in both an 'issues' exercise and a 'community mapping' exercise.

The second public workshop was held over the course of three days. This 'Charette Week' was intended to provide the public with an opportunity for a focused, structured dialogue on key planning issues for the corridor including land use, circulation and urban design, followed by a team working session culminating in a third-day public presentation of the consensus plan. Both the initial session and the public recap were well-attended with over 100 persons at each.

The third and final public workshop was structured as an open house, where all of the graphic products were on display, approximately 60 people attended. Members of the planning and project management teams were on hand to explain the plan and the choices made, as well as answer any questions that might arise. As a final exercise, note cards were distributed to those who wanted to comment in writing on the plans.



Proposed Residential Character



Proposed Avenue Character



Proposed Plaza Character



Workshop #2



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# LCI CONCEPT PLAN

## The Land Use Framework Plan

The land use framework plan is essentially two interwoven elements – a future land use plan, and an open space plan which order future development. The corridor is bracketed by major institutional uses with a scattering of high-density commercial and medium-density residential. Developable land aggregates into five distinct districts.

Each district's future land use and development strategy are reflective of themes either present in existing development or resulting from public consensus during Charette Week. Each future land use and development 'district' has an associated public/open space that serves to give the area an urban design focus and reassure private sector developers of significant public commitment. A 'live-work' future land use classification is proposed in buildings that are double-fronted along Mills Street. Additionally, a widened streetscape or 'linear plaza' on the north side of JSA provides a workable foreground to the commercial space. At the eastern extreme of the corridor, developable parcels around the Civic Center and Peachtree Street are targeted for residential and retail mixed use.



Land Use Framework Plan



Illustrative Plan

## The JSA-McGill Illustrative Plan

The JSA-McGill Illustrative Plan builds a vision of the future that is based upon input from many sources, both inside and outside the community. The overriding goals and objectives throughout this process seek to create an identity for JSA-McGill, restore and improve the public realm to create a place for the pedestrian, and to create new neighborhoods and strengthen connections.

The five districts are identified as: the Marietta Street corridor; the JSA-Centennial Place spine; the area known as Centennial Hill; the district around the Peachtree / McGill / I-75/ 85 intersection; and the Civic Center surroundings.



Civic Center Plaza



The Village



JSA Linear Park and Plaza



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# LCI CONCEPT PLAN

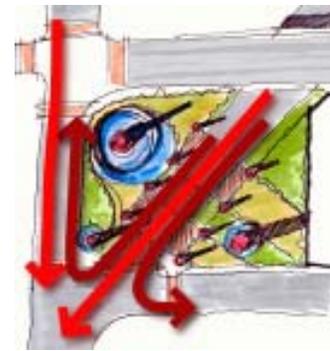
## The Transportation Framework Plan

The most extensive transportation improvement in the corridor is the one that spurred the LCI project from the start – the new JSA-McGill. First proposed in 1999, the project has completed the conceptual design phase and been approved by the Georgia Dept. Of Transportation. The project will be constructed in phases to provide critical transportation improvements prior to the opening of the Georgia Aquarium in 2005. Construction of the segment between Luckie Street and West Peachtree Street is scheduled in 2004.

The need for the project arises from several issues in the area including the ongoing development activity, the lack of sufficient connections across the railroad between the neighborhoods to the east and west sides of Downtown, and the importance of providing a direct route between the Georgia World Congress Center and the hotel district that is designed to accommodate bus and pedestrian traffic. The basic design features four 11' travel lanes, two in either direction, with a variable width median and single turn lanes at key intersections and includes bike lanes, planting strips and new sidewalks. While generally following the path of Alexander Street, the design breaks from the existing street grid west of Marietta Street to gently sweep southward to the Simpson Street – Northside Drive intersection. As part of the improvement the one-way sections of JSA and West Peachtree Place would be converted to two-way operation.



Transportation Framework Plan



COP Drive Entry Park Plan



Baker Street Improvements



Luckie Street Path Option 1



Luckie Street Path Option 2



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# LCI CONCEPT PLAN PRIORITY PROJECTS

## Short-Tem Projects within 3 Years

**Marietta – JSA Plaza** – a landscaped / hardscaped plaza that serves as a focus for the Marietta Street neighborhood and the Georgia Aquarium district

**Spring – COP Plaza** – the regularization of the Georgia Dept. Of Transportation parcels at the termination of the Spring Street tunnel and the intersection of JSA and COP Drive

**Luckie Street Improvements** – on-street parking and the incorporation of a multi-use path (an ongoing project of the PATH Foundation)

**Simpson – West Peachtree Streetscapes** – new streetscapes extending from the Civic Center MARTA station to the World Of Coca-Cola site along West Peachtree and Simpson Streets

**COP Drive / Williams Street Improvements** – ‘road diets’ for COP and Williams by the introduction of on-street parking; provide visible parking to incite retail uses, and provide better pedestrian environments

## Mid-Tem Projects 3-7 Years

**The JSA Linear Plaza** – the widening and enhancement of the north side of JSA between COP Drive and Luckie Street

**Civic Center Plaza** – an expanded and improved entry court to the Civic Center complex and adjoining development; serves to terminate the principal pedestrian approach

**Reconfiguration of the I-75/85 Interchange Ramps** – exit ramp realignment to penetrate the Spring Street ‘tunnel’ feeding to COP Drive, and entry ramp relocation to Spring Street north of JSA for single-occupancy vehicles

**Baker – Harris Two-Way** – conversion of one-way pairs to two-way movement by restriping; provides additional route flexibility between the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola and I-75/85 as well as additional routes for local traffic

**Municipal Parking Structures**– parking decks built as stand-alone or part of larger projects, either as publicly funded or under a public-private partnership

## Long-Tem Projects 7-25 Years

**Expanded Mayor’s Park** – new open space bridging I-75/85 at Peachtree flanking both sides of street and extending to the McGill – Courtland intersection

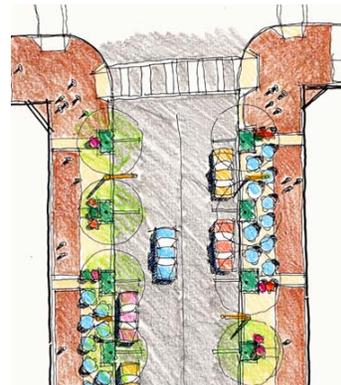
**Georgia World Congress Center Phase V Mall** – new landscaped promenade on northern flank of JSA from Northside Drive to the railroad viaduct, with widened median and tower elements; serves as a western gateway

**The Baker Street PATH Project** – streetscape and sidewalk improvements to Baker Street featuring a dedicated, traffic-separated bicycle path along the south side from Piedmont Avenue to Centennial Olympic Park

**Piedmont Improvements** – streetscaping and on-street parking provision for Piedmont Avenue between Harris Street and North Avenue



Simpson Street



Simpson Streetscape



I-75/85 Reconfiguration



Expanded Mayor's Park



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# IMPLEMENTATION

## Strategic Recommendations

As described earlier, the JSA-McGill LCI Study forms a critical piece of an overall planning and development strategy being created for all of Downtown Atlanta as part of the *Imagine Downtown* process. This process seeks to build upon past plans for Downtown and its districts and build on the inherent physical and economic strengths of major development "Focus Areas." In the next few years, efforts will be strategically directed towards the construction of the Aquarium, World of Coca-Cola and the support infrastructure needed to support employees, visitors, and residents of the area. Consciously, the JSA-McGill LCI study includes a mix of several thousand new residential units, several million square feet of new office development, and a major new retail corridor along Simpson Street. The public improvements plan provides the opportunity to balance improvements for vehicular access, by both automobiles, shuttles and buses with pedestrians and bicyclists.

How will this be accomplished? The LCI Study and *Imagine Downtown* have brought together all of the key participants in a successful implementation plan: residents, property owners, the City of Atlanta, the Atlanta Development Authority and major institutions. The existing Westside and Eastside Tax Allocation District (TAD) and proposed Eastside TAD provide an opportunity for public sector leverage of planned improvements. Much of the property in the JSA-McGill corridor is in the hands of developers with active plans for new development consistent with the objectives of the LCI plan. It will take public investment in infrastructure, particularly public improvements to area streets and financial assistance in the construction of structured parking, to make these projects feasible. Over time, public investment should, by design, decline as the private sector accelerates its activities. This trend has occurred recently just north of the study area in Midtown and the time is right strategically to instigate comprehensive revitalization in the JSA-McGill corridor.

## Regulatory Enhancements

The JSA-McGill study area has a conducive regulatory framework already in place in the form of Special Public Interest (SPI) Zoning Districts 1 and 13. These existing regulations allow and encourage mixed use, pedestrian orientation and good urban design principles of building buildings up to the street, articulating blank facades and hiding service. As part of a comprehensive update to these SPI districts, Central Atlanta Progress and the City of Atlanta have created the Downtown Livability Code (DLC). The DLC offers more definitive standards for streets and streetscapes, allowable uses, and support of transit and alternative transportation. It represents one of the most progressive "smart growth" codes in the Atlanta region and can be a model for other higher-density, mixed use districts.

## LIVABLE CENTERS INITIATIVE (LCI) DELIVERABLES:

### 1. Efficiency/ Feasibility of Land Uses:

- Promotes a mix of retail, residential, office, institutional and open space
- Strategic placement of retail and residential to encourage connectivity
- New live/work land use classification

### 2. Transportation Demand Reduction Measures:

- Concentration of uses and parking facilities
- Conversion of one-way streets to two-way
- Proposed shuttle/connector to connect major venues

### 3. Internal Mobility Requirements:

- Implementation of sidewalks, lighting, crosswalks, bike lanes and on-street parking

### 4. Mixed Income Housing, Jobs-Housing Match:

- Districts with high density housing mix
- Proposed zoning update to encourage mixed-income housing

### 5. Continuity of Local Streets:

- Reconfiguration of the minor street network will enhance public realm
- Redesign Baker and Harris as two-way vehicular corridor

### 6. Need/ID of Future Transit Systems

- Routing bus lines to service new development
- New developments around MARTA will promote connectivity

### 7. Connectivity to Transportation System to Other Centers:

- Linear park increases pedestrian mobility to transit
- Roadway improvements

### 8. Center Development Organizations and Management:

- Facilitated by CAP
- CAP experience is an asset to the collaboration of entities

### 9. Stakeholder Participation/Support:

- Stakeholder interviews
- Project management meetings
- Three public workshops

### 10. Public/Private Investment Policy:

- CAP connection with private and public entities
- New partnerships with parking authority and developers

