

**Hudson Bridge-Jonesboro Roads Connector Activity Center  
LIVABLE CENTERS INITIATIVE**

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September 1, 2009

## **MEETING MINUTES**

Meeting: Kick-off Meeting  
Time: 6:30 – 8:30 PM  
Date: August 11, 2009  
Location: Henry County Administration Building, Community Room  
Attendance: 52 members of the public, approximately 10 staff or consultants

### Sign-In Exercise

Before the meeting started the public were given an opportunity to place dots on a map of the study area where positive and negative things were happening today. Red dots were intended to show where something negative was happening, and green dots where something positive was happening.

Please see Exhibit A for the results of this exercise.

### Introduction

An introduction to the planning process was provided by Chairman “BJ” Mathis of the Henry County Board of Commissioners. Mrs. Mathis stressed the opportunities presented by the plan to use the current recession to encourage sustainable economic growth in the County. She also stressed the importance of public engagement.

Following Mrs. Mathis’ introduction, Caleb Racicot of Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates introduced the consultant team and their role in the master planning process.

### Presentation: Introduction to the Planning Process

Mr. Racicot provided an overview of the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program, the proposed planning process, and opportunities for public input, including:

- o Community Charrette 1: Existing Conditions/Visioning
- o Community Charrette 2: Vision Refinement

He explained that locations were still being finalized, but encouraged attendees to sign-in to the meeting so that they would be notified.

### Presentation: Introduction to Planning Principles

Mr. Racicot then made a presentation on the approaches to community planning, including a “Traditional” model, also known as “smart growth” or “new urbanism,” and a “Conventional” model, also known as “sprawl.” He discussed the differences between them and reminded that the former model was a goal of the LCI program.

Key elements of the “Traditional” model were then explained. These included: land use and mix, transportation design and network, parks and open space, housing, and sustainability, to name a few. The societal and health impacts of this model were also stressed.

Mr. Racicot concluded his remarks by noting that these principles were merely starting points for the discussion on the future of the study area. He stressed that there was no “one size fits all” approach to planning, and that it would be up to the stakeholders of Henry County to determine how the study area should grow.

### Success Stories

A review of how principles of “Traditional” design have been applied in other communities was then provided using three case studies:

- Suwanee: A 63 acre town center in Gwinnett County that has transformed the city into one of America’s top 100 best places to live, according to Money magazine. It features a 10 acre green, mixed-use buildings, townhouses, and single-family houses.
- Woodstock: A 30 acre expansion of an existing downtown in Cherokee County featuring mixed-use buildings, parks, townhouses, single-family houses, and a new street grid.
- Edgewood Retail District:: A 40 acre mixed-use site in Atlanta featuring 500,000 sf of retail, 200 housing units, and open space. The plan also includes parking lot drive lanes that are designed to one day convert to streets if/when the big boxes that use the parking lots close.

### Questions and Answer Session

The public was then given an opportunity to ask questions to the consultant team or County staff, as follow:

**Q1. How will you deal with traffic particularly on Chambers Road and how will you deal with the tree issue?**

**A.** *Simply put, we had not come up with any specific recommendations yet. We do have our traffic and transportation experts URS Corporation, who will be looking at just that. They will be assessing traffic impacts of various development scenarios on particular roadways. We are going to be looking at what we can do to get as much new traffic on that Woodstock connector that parallels I-75 to keep it off the existing roadways. But then we are also going to look at where are the short features, things that can not be impeded. We will be developing a series of recommendations and because this is a public outreach effort, we will very strongly ask for your comment and your feedback.*

**Q2. I want to know some of the plans we have in place for the recreation area (1300 acres) - are there going to be any parks, walking trails and bike trails...things like that?**

**A1.** *We have not done the plan yet. If you ask me what I think, I think there is a tremendous opportunity there – you have several flood plains, creeks and corridors that make interesting connection opportunities. What we are going to do is envision and come up with alternatives for you to review. We have been interviewing stakeholders, we have the online visual preference interviews and I can assure you those will be accommodated, but again because we are just getting started and haven’t done the plan yet, we don’t know where we are going to go. If you or any of you have particular ideas about specific recommendations and you would like us to look at, we do have comments sheets at the front table. Be sure to fill them out and tell me - I’d like to see a bike path from here to here. I’d like to see you look at the intersection of B&C – we’ll certainly make sure that we do that.*

**A2.** *I just want to make sure it is clear that we haven't planned anything in this area as of yet. That is why we are having these series of meetings to get the community's input to find out how we would like to plan. I want to make sure we stress that, nothing has been planned so far to date that's why we are going through these series of kick-off meetings and future charrettes, to make sure we get everyone's input concerning traffic, concerning recreational areas. What would the citizen and what would the community like to see in this area and together us as a county and you as citizens and business organizations, developers together come up with a plan that everyone is happy and pleased with. We want to make sure that gets stressed throughout the course of the evening that we are in the process of putting together the plan now, so everyone's input is welcomed, in fact we need everyone's input to make sure the plan is truly a success.*

**Q3.** ***What is the relationship between the implementation of the final plan and the economy? Do you have any idea the period of time the final will be implemented? What I am fearful of is what I see a lot in the county is plans gone wrong...green space completely leveled...no construction...it's just destroyed.***

**A.** *This is a 25-year plan. However, there are certain projects that are going to be a lot higher priority. For example, the north-south parkway could happen much sooner than a lot of us realize. There is an upcoming transportation bill through Washington – maybe opportunities coming from that. The land use piece is going to be entirely dictated by the market. What this plan is going to look at is what could happen in a way that makes sense and is consistent with these principles, but at the same time has some flexibility built into it. We are going to come up with a framework for change that is consistent with the design principles but also market realities. There are going to be zoning code amendments made as part of this effort. Those are going to be extremely important in achieving the kind of vision that you want.*

*The zoning code changes are also important for developers because as we all embark on this process we are going to come together with a general idea and development that is consistent with that idea and will be very compatible and very easy in the rezoning.*

*What developers do not want is a very arduous process and unclear expectations. What we want to do with property owners, residents, business is to come up with a plan that is flexible that can respond to the market and that can put the public infrastructure investment in place in such a way that they are flexible and visionary. For the short-term something will happen in transportation, and for the long-term land use is market based and again these are 20 to 25 year visions.*

**Q4.** ***It looks like we are talking about 3 ½ to 4 miles point to point. What is the cost per mile to build two lanes and four lanes? Is infrastructure bringing additional business... is that part of the plan? How is this tied to economic development?***

**A1.** *This is a county-initiated effort and also the County is very interested in these opportunities here ... regarding the infrastructure cost, I am not qualified to answer that, I will let our transportation consultant or if anyone from the county has an idea of the particular prices.*

**A2.** *Transportation Representative: ARC's costing tool gives \$2.6 million per lane mile. So if you have a four lane road that would include \$10 million per mile and would include right of way, design, utility cost...that's a pretty steep number. That number is probably down considerably. We recently let Eagle's Landing Parkway where the GDOT built all the way past 42 Hwy. And that is an \$18 million corridor. I believe it was \$2.7 million per lane mile and I don't believe it would be that much today. That would be a very high estimate.*

**Q5. Would the County residents pay for this?**

- A1.** *The County residents may or may not pay any portion of that. If anything else, the county will be going after public/private partnership(s), federal dollars...currently we are going after additional money, so there might not be any money that comes out of our general fund. It just depends on how that happens. I know that's a vague answer, but we are going to try every way possible to get money without hitting the taxpayers.*
- A2.** *There is an 80/20 percent match. What the 80/20 percent match refers to is that the study, the process that we are in, 80% is paid for by the Atlanta Regional Commission. The Atlanta Regional Commission will also pay 80% of the cost assuming there's a competitive piece within the bidding process for two transportation projects that are between \$500K to \$5 Million. The county is incredibly engaged in this process and we will make sure that anything that is recommended is something that is fiduciary responsible.*
- A3.** *I also want to expand on regards to the infrastructure question; we are looking at bringing in telecommunication infrastructure into the area. We are talking to our telecommunications people here as well as we've reached out to the private side because we do anticipate that this is going to be a major corridor and to be able to attract the kind of businesses going forward. We recognize that's going to require infrastructure incorporated from the technology standpoint and is going to be another one of those focal points to see how and where to best place it within the corridor.*
- A4.** *You also heard some examples of how to use public/private funding sources like Tax Allocation Districts (TAD's) or Community Improvement Districts (CID's) are being used and are very successful. Those projects are not funded by a broad group, but by the landowners in specific areas, its only commercial landholders in this area and so that may have a very good fit for this type of development. This will require some legislation and some location and active legislation in terms of financing infrastructure. Typically that is what you see with TAD's and CID's. This land is fit toward transportation infrastructure, water/sewer infrastructure and telecommunications infrastructure. So you see that is the nature of public /private partnerships going forward with these types of projects.*

**Q6. My question is about the Summit. Is that in relationship to the Birmingham Summit? And are you the same corporation that will be building the Summit?**

- A.** *For clarification purposes we are not building anything as the consultant. What we have been retained to do is to prepare a master plan for a much larger area than that particular development. It is the same project as in Birmingham, and as I mentioned, there are a lot of different stakeholders that we are meeting with to understand what their current plans are. We are going to fold them into this planning effort to make sure the vision of this plan is compatible with the overall area vision. We are hired by the County to facilitate the process between county officials, the public, property owners and developers to come together and come up with a plan that makes sense for everyone.*

**Q7. You mentioned you had core representatives from the subdivisions that were involved in the planning. If that is so, do you have that from every adjacent subdivision? And as a property owner in one of those subdivisions, if you do, I'd like to know who it is in mine.**

- A1.** *We have made an effort, but if we haven't had a chance yet, please see me afterwards. Which subdivision are you?*
- A2.** *Morgan's Pond.*
- A3.** *Please check with us.*

**Q8. Where would the parkway go?**

**A.** *We don't know yet. The general vision is something that would run from Hudson Bridge all the way down to Jonesboro Road.*

**Q9. What about North and South of that? I mean you have a little piece of road for a couple of miles that still doesn't help anything bypass I-75.**

**A1.** *We are retained to look at the corridor from Hudson Bridge and Jonesboro Road. The county has embarked on a comprehensive transportation plan that was very recently completed.*

**A2.** *The Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) was done two years ago and it does look at adding a north/south connector throughout the county and enhancing the network. But as mentioned, we are looking at just this particular study area for the corridor. Now going beyond that going north, the CTP certainly does address areas both here and other parts of the County that create north/south connectors. Certainly much like the Patrick Henry Parkway has begun to alleviate a lot of traffic on the east side, we are sure to see the same paralleled on the west side have the same type of impact.*

**Q10. What is the current zoning and what is the zoning process?**

**A.** *The study area has a variety of different zoning designations quite a bit of it is zoned for commercial uses today, particularly along I-75. What we are going to do is determine if that needs to be changed and what needs to be incorporated into it. We don't have any recommendations yet mainly because we haven't moved forward with the plan. There will be some sort of zoning map amendment, better known as rezoning. It could be an overlay; it could be a redistrict just for the study area. We really don't know yet because we haven't moved forward. But again, there will be a zoning tool that comes out of it that incentivizes development and compatibility with the vision. And one other important point, zoning will have to go through the usual planning process. Anything that comes out of this LCI study still has to go through the Board of Commissioners, still has to go through the Planning Commission (Zoning Advisory Board), still has to go through the usual process and is dovetailed into the planning effort. It is not going to take away the ability of any existing organizations or agencies to review it.*

**Q11. Could you comment on how this is involved in the school's impact?**

**A1.** *We have asked school representatives to be a part of the Core team, I don't believe any agreed to do that yet, but we want to make sure that continues to happen. Typically in LCI communities, the development that tends to be created is more housing for seniors, empty nesters...those kinds of people. Henry County has a huge amount of housing that is geared towards families. So I don't foresee a lot of family geared development within this particular kind of community. You have huge lot subdivisions...this tends to be more empty nesters and singles, but we had asked the school to be a part of this effort.*

**A2.** *I do want to add that we do have two representatives from the School Board as part of the Core team. I believe they will be following us throughout this process to give input from the school board.*

Closing remarks

Closing remarks were given by Chairman Mathis so that Chanel 14 could complete their broadcast.

Mr. Racicot then thanked all present for attending. He encouraged them to attend the upcoming charrettes and take the on-line Image Preference Survey. He then notified the audience that stations would be available around the room for comments. The following is a summary of these:

*Station 1: What do you like best?*

- *The natural features in the area, such as the trees lakes, and streams. There should be no clear cutting.*
- *The area has many basic resources nearby, such as stores, hospital, I-75 access, etc.*
- *The rural character that exists today.*
- *The natural environment and existing trees.*
- *The natural landscape*

*What do you like least?*

- *Thinking only about short-term economic gain.*
- *We need more information on environmental impacts (of development).*
- *There has been poor planning.*
- *There has been uncontrolled growth.*
- *I don't like how long it will take for this effort to have a positive impact on traffic congestion.*
- *There are not enough public recreational/open space opportunities in the study area.*
- *The access management on west Hudson Bridge Road is poor, especially by Wal-Mart.*
- *There is difficulty accessing development from major roads due to lack of signals.*
- *I'm concerned about a misunderstanding of future traffic demands, which can result in undersized facilities.*
- *There is a conflict between traffic on I-75 and surface streets.*

*What would you change?*

- *I'd like more options for the study area.*
- *I'd keep the rural character, except closest to I-75, where density would be appropriate.*
- *We need a signal at Wal-Mart on Hudson Bridge Road.*
- *We need more turn lanes on the driveway within the Hudson Town Center shopping plaza.*
- *Add ramp capacity at two interchanges: Jodeco Road and Jonesboro Road*
- *I'd increase connectivity.*
- *I'd build a park and ride parking deck, not a parking lot. This would free up land for open space, art, amenities, etc.*
- *I'd like more bike paths, greenways, and open space.*
- *We need greenspace with quality developments*
- *I'd add more bike paths.*
- *We need connectivity improvements.*
- *I'd like to see more mixed-use development, such as building retail within apartment communities, rather than forcing people to drive to them.*

Meeting Adjourned

The meeting concluded at 8:45 PM when the last member of the public left.

