

NORCROSS COUNCIL RETREAT

SUMMARY REPORT



PREPARED BY THE GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION
FEBRUARY 2025



Overview

The City of Norcross held a “Mini-Retreat” on Friday, January 31st at the City of Suwanee’s City Hall. Prior to the retreat, the Mayor and City Manager gathered input from Council for agenda items and developed narratives to set the stage for the discussion in six areas of focus: Economic Development, Transportation & Mobility, Natural Environment & Greenspace, Quality of Life (summarized), High-Performance Government, and Regional Leadership & Influence. Each discussion area had 2 to 4 discussion points taken from conversations between Mayor, Council, and staff.

Purpose of Retreats

Public officials operate in a demanding and rapidly changing work environment, exacerbated by shifts in the workforce, development trends, rising costs, technological advancements, and evolving service delivery expectations. Given these challenges, structured retreats offer decision-makers and administrators an opportunity to step away from their usual routines and engage in focused discussions and idea-sharing in a more relaxed setting.

Beyond merely enhancing governmental efficiency and effectiveness, retreats, as highlighted by the International City-County Managers Association (ICCMA), offer many advantages. They serve as a platform for resolving conflicts that may impede group dynamics and foster stronger working relationships. Retreats can facilitate the cohesion of a new governing board, aiding in their understanding of roles and responsibilities, building trust and collaboration, establishing effective communication channels, and exchanging expectations. Key components often include introduction and familiarization, clarification of roles, trust-building exercises, communication strategies, and setting expectations. However, participants must be willing to undergo self-examination through thoughtful, honest dialogue and try to change individual and group problem areas in order to realize progress.

Participants

Elected Officials: Mayor Craig Newton, Mayor Pro Tempore Marshall Cheek, Councilmember Josh Bare, Councilmember Bruce Gaynor, Councilmember Andrew Hixson, Councilmember Matt Myers

City Staff: City Manager Eric Johnson, Assistant City Manager Tracy Rye, City Clerk Monique Philip, Interim Economic Development Director Jim Trupiano

Speakers: City of Suwanee Mayor Jimmy Burnette, City of Suwanee Councilmember Linnea Miller, City of Suwanee City Manager Marty Allen, and Assistant City Manager Denise Brinson

GMA Facilitator: Michael McPherson, Member Services Consultant

Welcome & Introduction

Mayor Newton began the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for taking time to be present. Mayor Jimmy Burnette welcomed everyone to the City of Suwanee and expressed his

delight that the Norcross Council should meet in Suwanee. Mayor Newton turned the meeting over to Michael McPherson to facilitate.

Roles of Facilitator & Ground Rules

McPherson thanked everyone for their candid conversations during the confidential interviews in the days leading up to the retreat. He introduced himself, his experience, and his motivations. He covered the role of the facilitator as:

- Keeping the conversation focused
- Being the gatekeeper
- To make sure everyone is heard
- To protect the participants during the meeting
- To keep a written record
- To help the group reach a consensus
- To answer questions where possible

McPherson asked to trust him to rearrange the order of the agenda items to streamline the day's discussion and covered the ground rules:

- Each member present will check their title at the door, including staff, would operate as equals during the meeting keeping the best interests of Norcross at the front
- Everyone will focus on the future leaving the past in the past
- Think community-wide and focus on broad strategies
- Trust each other enough to speak
- Respect each other enough to listen
- Respect each other's differences and perspectives
- Leave personal interest behind
- Don't beat a dead horse

McPherson asked for agreement on the ground rules and to forgive him in advance if he should seem rude at any point because his job is to keep the discussion moving forward to give ample time to the agenda items. McPherson acknowledged that in previous years, some members expressed a disdain for teambuilding exercises. He asked the group to humor him briefly by examining a few images that highlight the fact that people sitting in the same room can be looking at the same image and see it very differently. After some discussion, he asked each member of the Council to think about their ideal city—a city that comes to mind as a great place—but to save their answers for a little later as they were about to tackle an item that has been discussed at every retreat since 2020: Parking.

Parking

In discussion of the parking situation, its history, studies, and ideas for solutions the following SWOT analysis was started by the group and specific action items were developed:

Parking

Strengths

Added 40 paces recently
2 New Restaurants Opening +
Parking Study
Acquiring Property for New Spaces

Opportunities

Impact Fee
Signage
More spaces
District
Standards
Parking Deck / More Spaces
Permeable Parking on Greenspace
Pick-up Spots
Lions Club Park

Weakness

Perception
Underutilized Spaces
Biz Employees Taking Spaces
Signage
Policy
No Consensus on Study Data
Space for New Parking
Mandates / Regs (Federal)

Threats

Status Quo / Perpetuating
Public Backlash
Decreased Utilization of Downtown Biz
Too Much Parking / Waste of \$

Action Items:

- 1) Develop plan for signage upgrade (immediate)
Assigned to: Staff
- 2) Communication w/ Biz Association RE: Employee Parking (Enforce Employee Permit Requirement?) (immediate)
Assigned to: Staff
- 3) Consider revised parking ordinance (minimum parking standards)
Assigned to: Council and staff
- 4) Plan for RR property parking & benchmark other cities
Assigned to: Staff and Legal

Natural Environment & Greenspace

The discussion started broadly, and it was pointed out that Council has updated the comp plan regarding greenspaces, parks, and trails. Council voted to take first step in implementing the first item in Master Plan—RFQ Engineering/Design for Phases. In discussion of the recycling program, it was determined that Council should understand the difference in cost if residential recycling was left to the resident to decide rather than subsidize a program that is not performing due to trash contamination. Council will consider roll-offs at Lively for a recycling location. Should Lively turn into a recycling center, community service workers could sort/prep streams as there is an ample number of people seeking community service hours. Keep Gwinnett Beautiful should be a great

resource for recycling information for direct contact with glass, paper, and metal recycling interests.

A discussion regarding the Sustainability Commission ensued and it was determined that the commission had largely accomplished its goals. The point was made that Council had a goal of lowering the number of Boards, Councils, and Commissions where possible, especially when needs had been satisfied. Council saw that there are other opportunities to show movement on sustainability through analysis, department by department, to highlight what is already being done and taking note of items that may be accomplished in the future.

Action Items:

- 1) Staff will provide Council with figures in conversation with WM regarding change in contract
- 2) Staff will provide Council with figures for expanding recycling options at Lively
- 3) Sustainability Planner will help communicate the successes of each department in this area

Regional Leadership & Influence

Council had good discussion on the topic, and each member will keep in mind the ability to showcase the city by taking on leadership roles and participating in roundtable discussions with partners. Staff will partner with their counterparts in neighboring cities to stay informed of initiatives that might allow for regional projects and other collaboration.

Action Item:

Staff will start the initiative to propose regular (perhaps bi-annual or quarterly) meetings with peers in surrounding cities.

Great/Impressive Cities

The Council was asked to share the cities that came to mind and the things that make the cities special:

Portland, ME

Safe
Historic
Walkable
Downtown vibrant

Greensboro, NC

Big City w/ Feel of Small Town
Cost of Living
Lots to do
Great Feel

Savannah, GA

Historic Residential/Retail
Parks
Grid
Jobs

Fort Collins, CO

Walkable
Bikeable
Tree Canopy
Downtown not Dominated by Parking

Greenville, NC

Walkable
Safe

Greenville, NC

RR City
Leveraged Business Community

Pretty Downtown
Modern Amenities/Retail

Econ Redevelopment has driven wealth
Walkability

The group took a quick break to gather their lunch and prepare for an Economic Development presentation by Suwanee staff and Councilmember Linnea Miller. The presentation focused on the new park that Suwanee recently opened, including its features and the history of the project, which was delayed by COVID. Also covered in the discussion was the development of Suwanee City Hall and the surrounding residential and retail. The point was well made and taken by all that Suwanee was in a different position than Norcross in terms of development as Norcross opportunities are squarely in the redevelopment category, which poses unique challenges with each property considered. **In discussion, using the old library for filming opportunities had consensus among the group.**

Interim Economic Development Director Jim Trupiano gave a presentation on the Economic Development Outlook for Norcross. Lots of good discussion ensued regarding rising costs, incentive strategy, current and possible future Tax Allocation Districts (TAD), and the expansion of the DDA footprint or explore alternatives to the limited footprint.

Jim's Presentation is attached to this report.

Action Items:

- 1) Staff to determine from county how to access the TAD funds and explore its use on Skin Alley and stormwater retention
- 2) Staff/Council will explore the use/creation of another TAD around Beaver Ruin and Indian Trail
- 3) Staff will research expanding the DDA footprint and better communicate DDA finances
- 4) Host an Open House / Ideation at the Old Public Library Building for input on use; possibly incorporate a "Bring a Book, Take a Book" event alongside the Open House

High Performance Government & Staffing

From the Economic Development discussion, the open position of Economic Development Director was discussed, and McPherson asked that the group move to the staffing agenda item. He asked everyone to think about the staffing reality that cities face—public service has not been seen as a popular career choice in some time, the city has a good pool of staff in the metro area, but it will be tough to compete for talent with its larger neighbors. Also, each member of Council needs to be very conscious of their interactions with staff. McPherson asked them to remember that they (the Council) must set the tone for leadership at the top and understand that morale is in their hands. Pay attention when staff is presenting and be conscious of your line of questioning, especially when cultivating great new employees. To keep staff—praise loudly, and reprimand quietly. However, the professional manner that is to be expected of staff interacting with elected officials should be instilled and understood before being put in a position to succeed or fail. An observation was made that employees need thick skin to operate in front of a Board of Directors in the private sphere, so too should the public employee. The difference should be pointed out that Council meetings are public, private BODs meetings are not. There is no need for a Councilmember

to berate, chastise, or “one-up” staff as employees are there to serve. If questions remain after a presentation or questions do not fully satisfy a Councilmember, simply get with the City Manager and ask for clarity.

Great/Impressive Cities

McPherson shared the population and demographics of the cities Councilmembers had mentioned and compared them with Norcross. As Norcross is a diverse city, there was some discussion on serving the populations that exist and how service might look in the future.

Micro Transit

The City Manager asked for clarity regarding the micro-transit program citing that several months of data has been collected. The point was made that the transit referendum failed, and due to the failure, several groups may no longer support micro-transit. It was noted that demand has been increasing, however, the cost per ride is more than it was initially thought to be and there was not much appetite for subsidizing further.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:00pm.

Closing

Team Norcross (Mayor, Council & Staff) consists of very capable individuals with great passion for their city, an incredible pool of experience, and a strong sense of professionalism. Team Norcross received a high compliment from Suwanee staff, which was expressed in their envy of Norcross’ historic downtown. Though there are some varying points of view on big issues like housing, the Mayor and Council work well together and reached a consensus on plenty of action items. It will be important to keep communication between Councilmembers steady with regular calls, meals, or coffee meetings, if only to touch base with each other between meetings. This will allow each member to gain and maintain the understanding between people that is necessary in a high-functioning group. Turnover among employees has apparently been an issue for the city—Councilmembers should be conscious of the need to cultivate talent and conscious of their tone in meetings. Allow the City Manager to handle coaching opportunities and discipline with staff but always remember to praise a job well done loudly. Encouraging staff to meet with their counterparts from the surrounding cities will reap benefits as they share good ideas, best practices, and brainstorm collaborations. In the past, the Mayor has spearheaded Legislative Delegation events that have brought many people together to network and hear from their legislators—this is a great way to bring good exposure to the city and get credit for a GMA Hometown Connection.

The Georgia Municipal Association was pleased to be a part of the Norcross Team Retreat. The retreat fostered a sense of unity and purpose, ensuring that the vision for a stronger, more vibrant Norcross will be actively pursued for long-term results.

Economic Development Market Outlook

- Economic headwinds will require cities to run more efficiently and create a sense of urgency to increase paths to revenue growth.
- Annual CPI growth is averaging 3% while asphalt and other manufacturing materials saw a 29% increase between 2021-2022 and continue to grow annually at an average of 5%.
- Rising materials and operational costs are outpacing revenues for many cities in the United States.
- Competition for economic growth between surrounding cities will tighten over the next few years making incentives a critical part of our strategy if Norcross wants to outperform in the economic development arena.
- Changing consumer preferences, rising prices, and the increased demand for convenience have led to new market demands for current and future businesses and residents.

Economic Development Scenario Matrix

○ Prioritization
○ Actionable
○ Measurable

Outcomes							
Revenue Streams							
Options	Description	Tax	Electricity Sales	Fees	Population Growth	Job Creation	Proposed Incentives
Scenario 1 Current State Comprehensive Plan 	☐ Business Recruitment ☐ Target Industries ▪ Advanced MFG ▪ Professional Services ▪ Wholesale Trade	☒ ☒	☒ ☒	☒ ☒		☒ ☒	☐ Waive Permit Fees ☐ Expediting ☐ Discounted Electric Rates for Customer Choice
Scenario 2 Retail & Residential	☐ Mixed Use ☐ Apartments ☐ Town Homes ☐ Missing Middle	☒	☒ ☒		☒ ☒		☐ 5-Year Tax Abatement ☐ Tax Allocation District ☐ Land Acquisition
Scenario 3 Redevelopment & Investment	☐ Buford Hwy ULI ☐ Examples ▪ Campus Drive ▪ Norcross Truck ▪ Pinnacle Park Properties	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐ Tax Allocation District ☐ Land Acquisition for Discounted Sale ▪ Example: Techie Homes

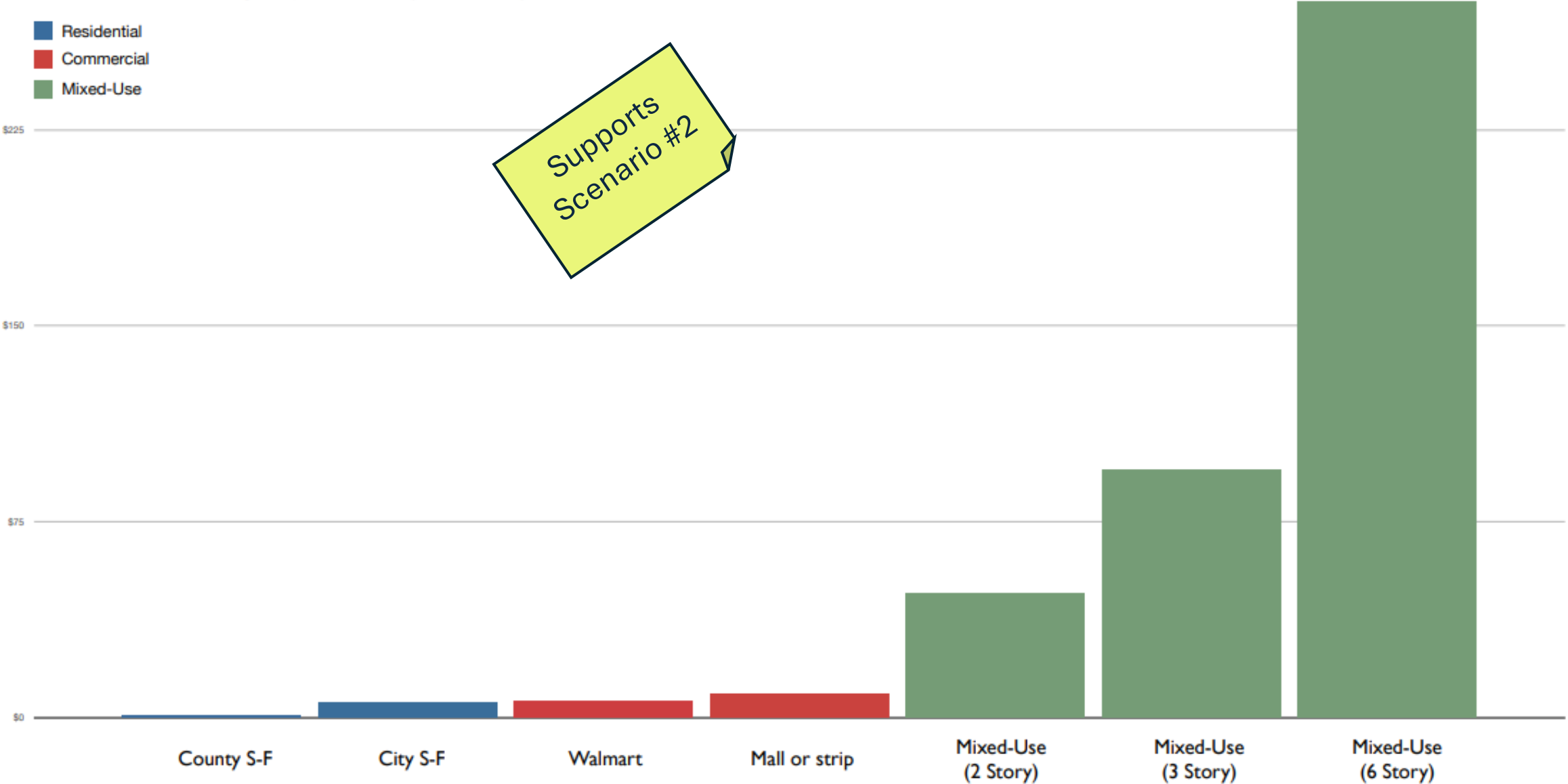


Existing State Incentives Include, Job Tax Credits, Port Tax Relief, Foreign Trade Zones and Data Center Tax Exemptions

County Property Taxes/Acre

Ratio Difference of 60 City Set, in 21 States (+ a Province)

- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed-Use



Surrounding Jurisdiction Incentives

Municipality	Business Focused Incentives	Development Focused Incentives	Tax Abatement
Gwinnett County	Yes		Yes
Forsyth County	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cobb County	Yes	Yes	
City of Roswell	Yes		
City of Peachtree Corners	Yes		Yes

- ***Norcross has been known to offer incentives on a case-by-case basis. However, the jurisdictions above have officially adopted and advertised these incentives.***

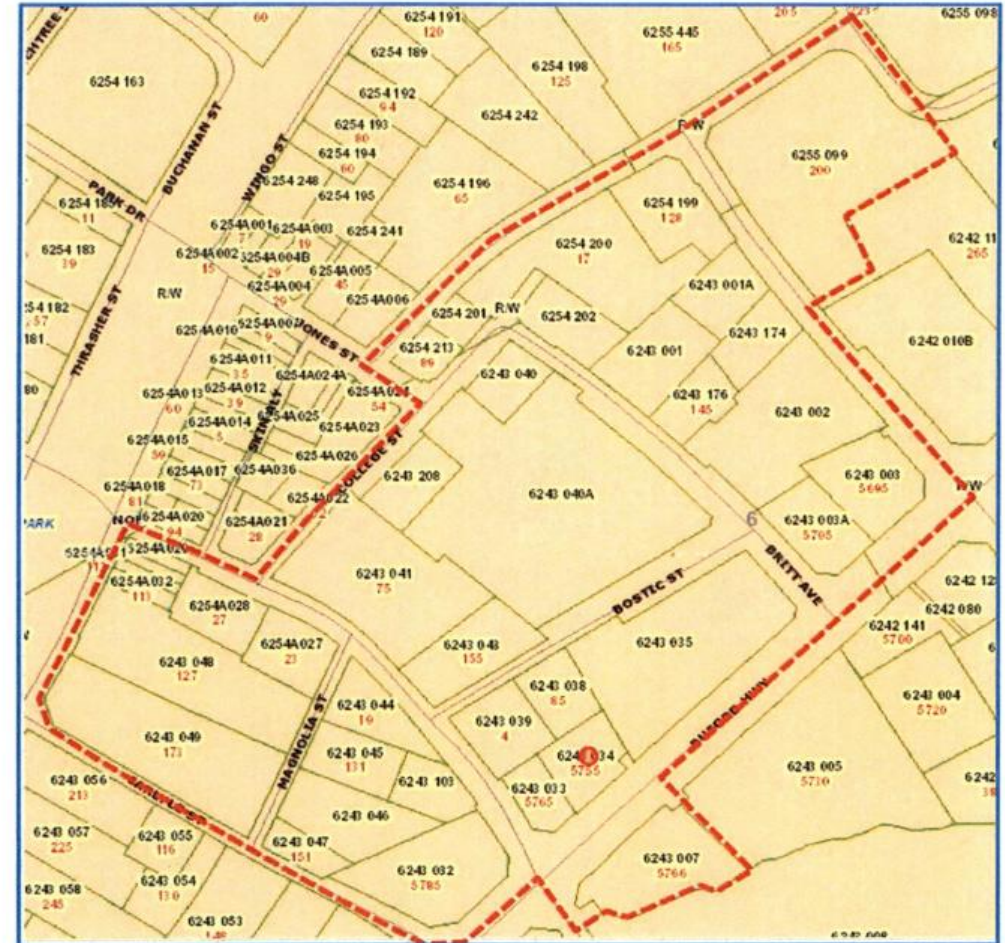
Norcross Tax Allocation District

GCID 2016-0321 - EXHIBIT A MAP

Downtown Norcross Redevelopment Plan and Tax Allocation District #1 - City Center East

APPENDIX A. DOWNTOWN NORCROSS TAD #1 BOUNDARY MAP (L)

- Existing TAD boundary is confined to a small geographic area and most of the property is non-tax paying entities:
 - ☐ Lillian Webb Park
 - ☐ Gwinnett County Library
 - ☐ DDA Parcels
 - ☐ USPS
 - ☐ Church
- ☐ Current TAD has limitations to the impact it can have on future development.



Utility Revenue Snapshot – The Brunswick



By the Numbers

- 186 Apartments Occupied
- 2024 Annual Electric Revenue \$242,000
- 2024 Annual Electric Margin \$39,000
- 25 Year Tax Abatement

- It is always a positive impact to add Residential customers because the incremental increase in cost is outweighed by the increase in revenue. Spreading high fixed costs over more customers is always better.

Alignment & Prioritization



Next Steps:

- ☐ Align as a Team – There is a clear correlation between alignment and effectiveness
- ☐ Once aligned... Prioritize, Incentivize & Measure
- ☐ Be “Lock Step” with the DDA
- ☐ Hire new Economic Development Director and Manager experience in aligned focus area
- ☐ Revisit TAD and Comprehensive Plan
- ☐ Note: Residential growth leads to more commercial growth

Measuring Outcomes

Outcome Metrics

[illegible]