

## 2.0 Development Plan

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### JSA McGill LCI Plan

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## 2.1 Community Vision

A significant portion of the work done on the JSA-McGill LCI study involved public participation, and this took 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 ([www.atlantadowntown.com](http://www.atlantadowntown.com)). E-mail comments were welcomed and encouraged. Several questions in the online 'Imagine Survey' were directed toward development in the JSA-McGill corridor. 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.

### 2.1.1 Public Workshop 1

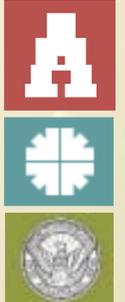
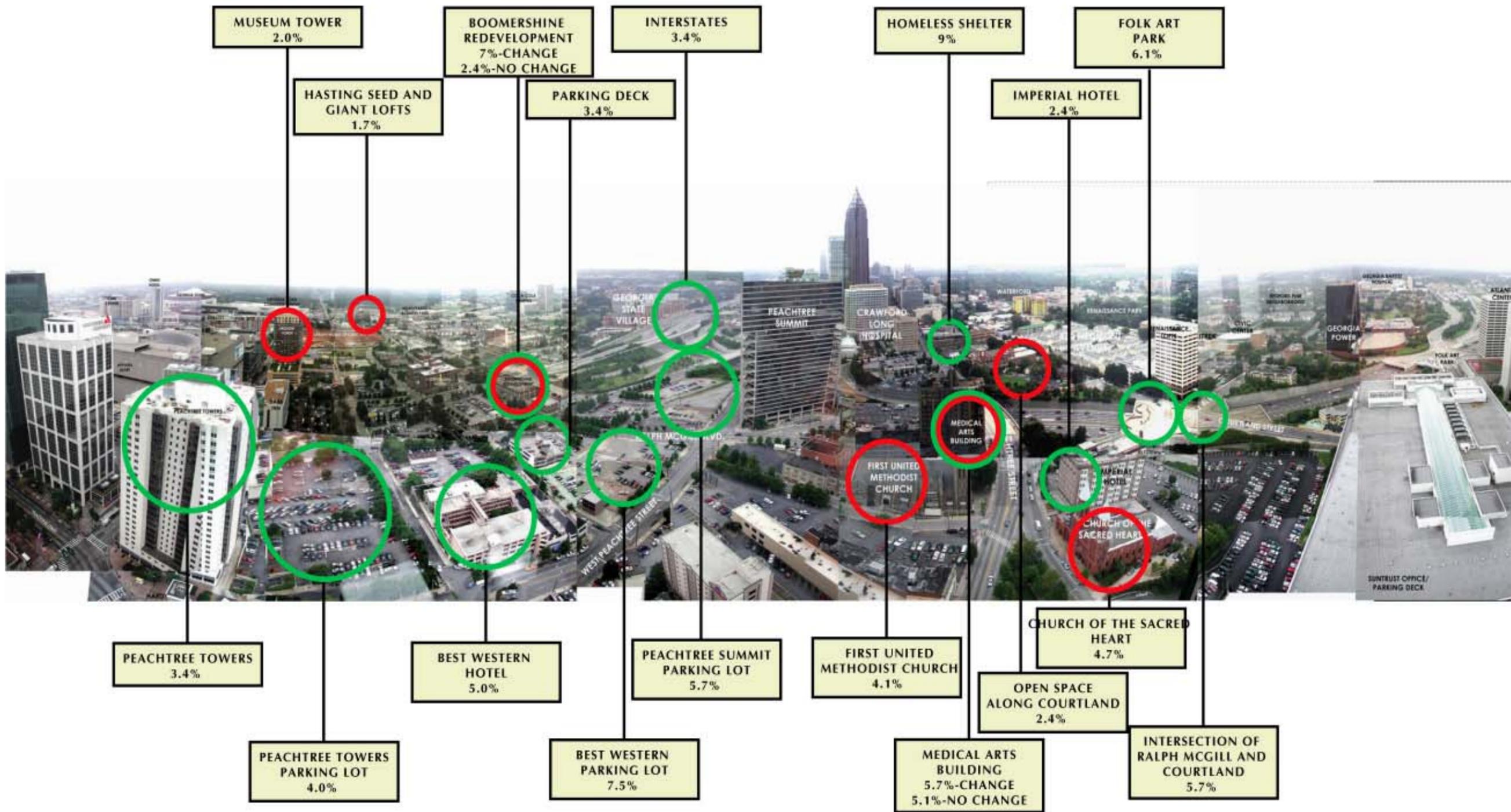
The first public workshop was held on August 19, 2003 on the 27<sup>th</sup> floor of SunTrust Tower; over 200 persons attended. The purpose was to kick off the JSA-McGill LCI process by introducing the project and the team, and to conduct interactive exercises to gauge the initial level of consensus on issues and priorities. The workshop opened with a welcome and introduction by representatives of Central Atlanta Progress, and continued with words and graphics describing the developing programs and potential impact of both the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola. The presentation session ended with an overview of the planning team and a description of process, schedule, and key questions framing the participatory exercises.

After some general questions were addressed, participants were encouraged to go to each of three stations to take part in both an 'issues' exercise and a 'community mapping' exercise. At each of the two community mapping stations, printed maps reproducing views from the meeting space were mounted adjacent to their respective windows. Each participant was given one red and three green dots with which they could 'vote' for priority action areas, i.e. things that they wanted to see changed or not changed; a green dot meant 'go' or a priority vote for change, while a red dot meant 'no go' or a priority vote for preservation. Participants were not limited to where they could place dots, or how many they could apply to an area. The maps were then compiled into one drawing illustrating priority action areas (Figure 2.1). Of the 'go' votes these areas ranked highest:

- Best Western building and parking lot on West Peachtree Street (12.5% of total green dots) – assumed issues with shoddiness, lack of maintenance, prominence of parking
- The Peachtree–Pine homeless shelter (9% of total) – issues with aggressive panhandling, drug distribution/ use
- The Peachtree Towers residential building and parking lot (7.4% of total) – assumed issues with appearance of building and amount and prominence of surface parking
- Boomershine building (7% of total; also gathered 2.4% of 'no go' votes) – assumed reaction to appearance of lack of maintenance, vacancy

Similarly, among the 'no go' votes, these areas ranked the highest:

- Sacred Heart Catholic Church (4.7% of total) – assumed interest in preservation of historic structure / religious institution
- First United Methodist Church (4.1% of total) – assumed interest in preservation of historic structure / religious institution
- St. Luke's park space along Peachtree and Courtland Streets (2.4% of total) – assumed affirmation of presence of green space, positive response to regular maintenance



The Medical Arts Building also received a substantial number of votes, both green (5.7%) and red (5.1%). Because of the roughly equal percentage and the historic significance of the building, it was assumed that all 'no go' votes and at least some 'go' votes were interested in preservation, the 'go' votes indicating that it could not remain in its current depressed state.

The second exercise tested community feelings regarding opportunities and challenges for the corridor. At this 'issues' station each participant was given two index cards to write a response to each of two strategic questions (Figure 2.2). The responses varied from social issues to circulation infrastructure to marketing. A sample of the perceived opportunities and challenges showed the crossover between the two categories:

- **Parking / Site Underutilization:** The prevalence of unsightly surface parking lots was a big issue for many people, but respondents also saw this as an opportunity in that the lots provide a ready vehicle for new development
- **Pedestrian Activity / Open Space / Walkability:** The generally poor or absent pedestrian environment elicited comments from several respondents as clear challenges for the corridor; yet some saw opportunities for creating new open space and better streetscapes as part of new development
- **Transportation / Traffic / Transit:** The harsh pedestrian environments are partly conditioned by the vehicular bias of the corridor resulting from one-way pairs and the interchange with I-75/85 - many respondents felt that taming traffic was of paramount importance and a challenge. Similarly, some saw the good interstate access and MARTA coverage as definite advantages for the corridor.
- **The Homeless Issue:** The negative perceptions associated with the Peachtree-Pine and other social service facilities in the corridor, as well as the homeless encampments at Renaissance Park, are challenges identified by a significant number of people; a few also saw the problem as an opportunity, presumably because it forces attention and action.

At the conclusion of workshop 1, the results were summarized and presented to the Core Team for validation as well as posted on the Central Atlanta Progress website.

### **2.1.2 Public Workshop 2 – Charette Week**

The second public workshop was held over the course of three days between September 16 and September 18, 2003 at AmericasMart (Building Three - the Apparel Mart). 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.

Day one of the workshop opened with a welcome, introduction of the planning team and presentation of a short video orienting attendees to the existing conditions in the corridor and the strategic questions affecting the participatory exercises. The four-hour event was broken into four individual sessions – land use, circulation, open space and identity – each had a warm-up exercise involving choosing images that represented group consensus on the desired appearance of the elements under discussion in each session. There were a total of ten tables with ten to twelve participants at each, guided by two facilitators at each table.

Session one, land use, consisted of two interactive exercises in addition to the image selection. Over a large printed map of the study area boundaries each group was asked to color in the

**What do you perceive to be the biggest challenge in the JSA-McGill Corridor?**

**Transportation, Traffic and Transit (16 Responses)**

*Many comments on vehicular and pedestrian conflicts, the impact of the interstate, the underutilization of MARTA*

**The Homeless Issue (16 Responses)**

*Comments ranged from the negative impression of the area compounded by the homeless, to aggressive behavior of panhandlers, to theft and drug use*

**Lack of Retail and Local Services (6 Responses)**

*Most responses focused on increasing the stock of retail, although some were specific about retail tailored to neighborhood residents*

**Public Improvements (6 Responses)**

*The big issue was overcoming the impact of the Downtown Connector at Peachtree Street*

**Lack of Pedestrian Activity / Walkability (5 Responses)**

*Some of the concerns over pedestrian activity were linked to the poor appearance of the area, noting that streetscapes are fragmented or disconnected*

**Perception Issues / General Blight (5 Responses)**

*This issue overlaps with others in that several causes mentioned as contributing to the corridor's derelict appearance are vacant lots, streets empty of pedestrians, and the presence of the homeless*

**Lack of Housing / Lack of Residents / Affordability (5 Responses)**

*Cost of living and housing affordability were mentioned as disincentives to prospective residents*

**Parking (3 Responses)**

*One response identified the challenge of overcoming too much parking, while the other two were unclear whether parking is an immediate or future problem*

**Destination / Theming (3 Responses)**

*Two individuals mentioned the idea of a welcome center, while one felt that the area should be marketed as a destination because of the several attractions*

**Design / Human Scale (2 Responses)**

*The scale of 'Big Projects' (Georgia Aquarium, World of Coca-Cola, Connector) was seen as an issue*

**Other (1 Response Each)**

*Incentives, difficulty of building consensus with property owners, relocating the Georgia Power substation*

**What is the greatest opportunity in the JSA-McGill Corridor?**

**Potential for Open Space Creation / Walkability (15 Responses)**

*Many comments on public space and the pedestrian environment; implicitly tied to the presence of vacant land and unimproved streets*

**Clean Slate for Development (12 Responses)**

*Clearly the area's greatest opportunity, considering the underlying assumptions of the interest in more open space; conversion of surface parking reduces development costs, avoids preservation / environmental conflicts*

**Potential for New Housing / More Residents (10 Responses)**

*Similar interpretation as open space / walkability advocacy - tied to stock of development opportunities*

**Good MARTA Coverage / Good Interstate Access (9 Responses)**

*Several responses about proximity to Civic Center station, also MARTA bus routing; good vehicular access also seen as a plus*

**Potential for New Retail / Services (6 Responses)**

*Similar interpretation as open space / walkability advocacy - tied to stock of development opportunities; also some indication of underserved / captive audience in existing residents*

**Location / Visibility / Urban Form (5 Responses)**

*Central location facilitates good connections to other areas, three universities; interstate visibility enhances development opportunities, image of Downtown; small blocks an asset to walkability*

**Existing Neighborhood Resources (3 Responses)**

*Vested, committed residents already living Downtown perceived as an asset*

**Prominence of the Homeless Issue (2 Responses)**

*Unsure of logic - assumed respondents felt that the magnitude of the homeless issue forces awareness and attention to solutions*

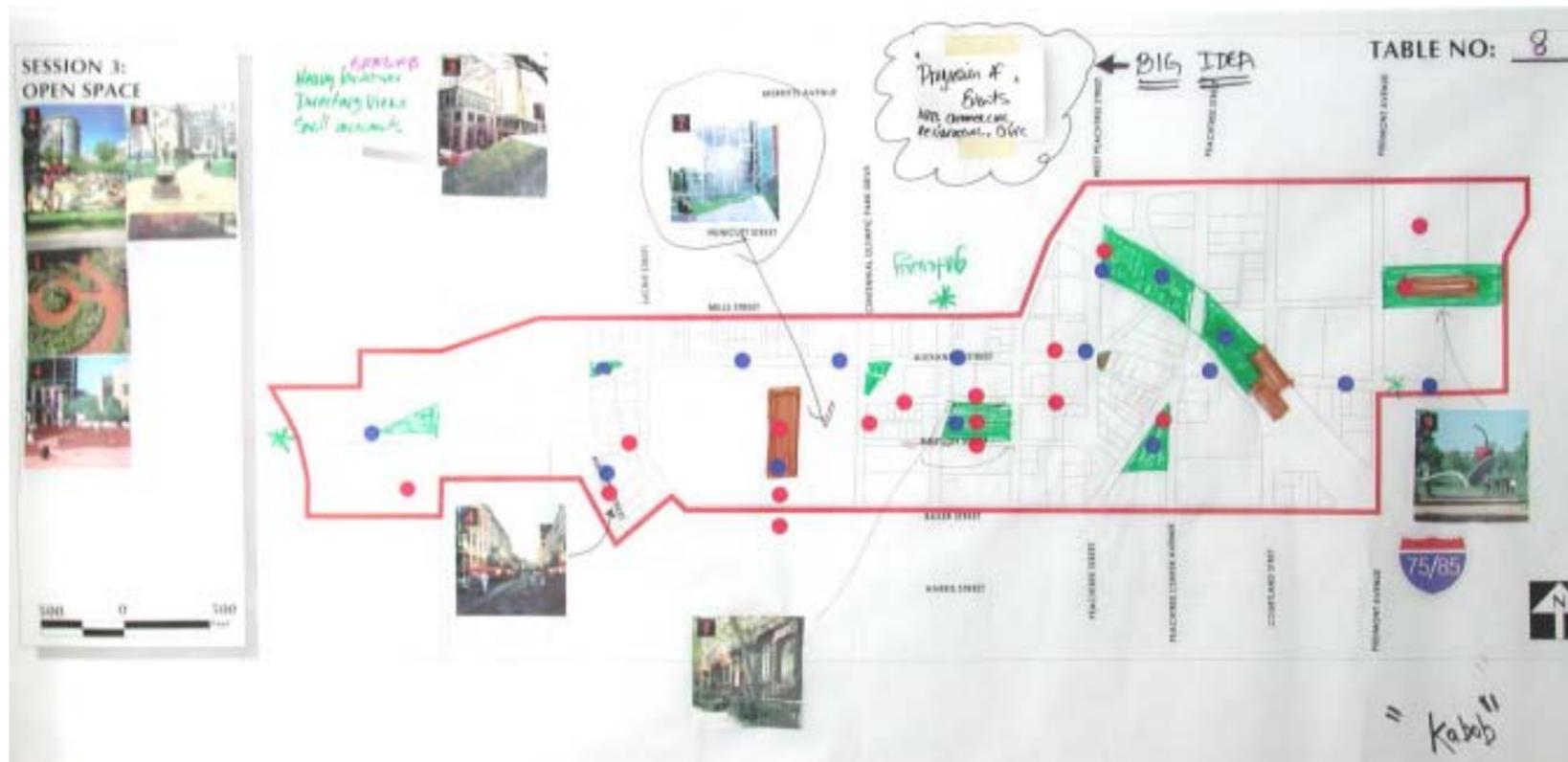
**Welcome Center (2 Responses)**

*Unsure of intention - assumed reference to area as gateway to east and west sides*

**Other (1 Response Each)**

*Opportunity for innovative parking solutions; opportunity for historic preservation; opportunity for business start-ups; opportunity to merge business and civic interests; opportunity to provide additional entertainment venues; opportunity to increase property values; proximity to other successful areas an opportunity*

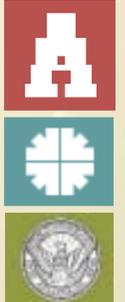




Open Space



Land Use



JSA McGill LCI Plan

desired future land use of all parcels subject to change. Seven land-use categories – low-density residential, high-density residential, residential mixed-use, commercial mixed-use, office, institutional, and open space – constituted the range of options available to each group. Once consensus was reached on future land use, groups were charged with prioritizing retail locations by sticking a prescribed amount of red adhesive-backed strips down on the colored future land use maps. Though no two tables were alike, several areas of consensus emerged among all ten:

- The Marietta Street corridor biased toward commercial mixed-use, with residential interspersed;
- Centennial Hill as both a residential and commercial mixed-use district;
- Increasing commercial uses toward West Peachtree Street in Centennial Hill;
- Simpson and JSA as the primary retail streets in Centennial Hill;
- The redevelopment of the Civic Center surface parking as either residential mixed-use or institutional, presumably a expansion of the Civic Center; and
- A major new open space bridging the interstate.

In addition, the following images were overwhelmingly popular among all groups as being appropriate representations of the character of development desired in the corridor:

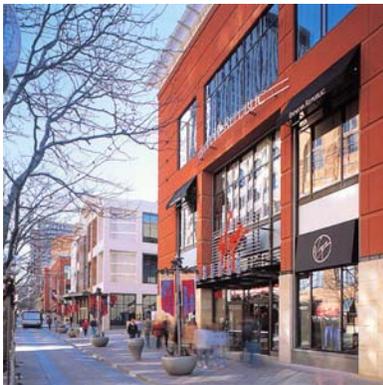
**Residential**



**Office**



**Retail**



Session two, circulation, opened with five categories of images: boulevards, thoroughfares, avenues, neighborhood streets, and pedestrian streets or 'mews'. The idea was not only to get a sense of the street character people desire, but also to get the participants thinking about hierarchies of streets in environmental instead of vehicular terms. Part two of session two charged the groups with classifying each street in the study area as having either light, medium or heavy pedestrian use; heavy pedestrian streets were colored red, medium were colored

orange, and light were colored yellow. By having to consider both the ways streets currently serve pedestrians and how each might change in the future, the groups were forced to relate street design to the future land use choices they made in session one and consider key linkages.

The final exercise of session two asked each group to mark locations of on-street parking as dashed black lines on the base map overlay, and indicate where they would like to see structured parking facilities. The planning team hoped that by the process of layering character images, pedestrian volumes and parking over land use, a clear picture of each group's priorities for the study area circulation system might emerge; for example, intersections of heavy pedestrian streets might suggest locations for bus transit stops.

From all the groups' individual exercises in session two, these ideas represented areas of consensus:

- West Peachtree Street was identified as a heavy pedestrian street by all groups;
- JSA-McGill varied in pedestrian use, with Centennial Olympic Park Drive dividing a heavy eastern from a light western half;
- Streets such as Spring and Courtland currently carrying heavy traffic volumes remaining as such, with low pedestrian activity (with the exception of Piedmont); and
- On-street parking placed throughout Centennial Hill.

In addition, the following images showed some consensus about appropriate street character:

**Boulevard**



**Thoroughfare**



**Avenue**



**Neighborhood Street**



Session three, open space, tested feelings about the character of open space with images in five categories: parks, gardens, plazas, sidewalks and squares. Although open space was a category in the future land use exercise of session one, it was intended to allow groups the

flexibility to suggest large parks, typically the size of an entire city block. In the second exercise of session three, groups were asked to be more discriminating about open space by locating parks and plazas with cut-out pieces of green construction paper. Each group was also given a vellum circle that was sized to represent a quarter-mile radius at the scale of the land use base map, 1" to 50'. Groups were encouraged to provide open space amenities throughout the study area, but in no case more than a quarter-mile walk from each other.

Exercise three returned to the idea of pedestrian uses; groups were given sheets of red dots and asked to stick them on the base map to represent concentrations of pedestrians. There was no limitation on where the dots could be applied – groups could choose to animate their open spaces of exercise two, or reinforce particular portions of streets marked in session two. Once the groups had placed their red dots, they were given a limited amount of blue dots to represent pedestrian enhancements such as fountains, public art or outdoor dining. Groups again used the base map to show locations of enhancements by affixing the blue dots.

Areas of consensus on open space included the following:

- A new park flanking Peachtree Street, built over the interstate;
- A park at the intersection of the Spring Street connector and Centennial Olympic Park Drive;
- A park or plaza in the vicinity of JSA and Marietta Street;
- An expansion or enhancement of the Civic Center plaza; and
- Pedestrian concentration in Centennial Hill, especially at the intersections along Simpson.

These images showed the type of open space character the participants tended to agree on:

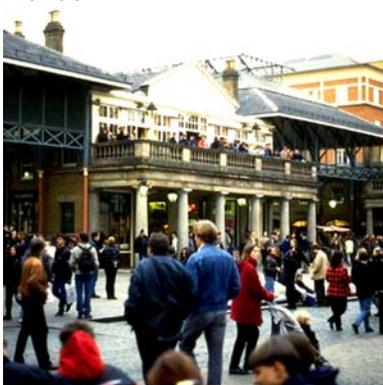
**Gardens**



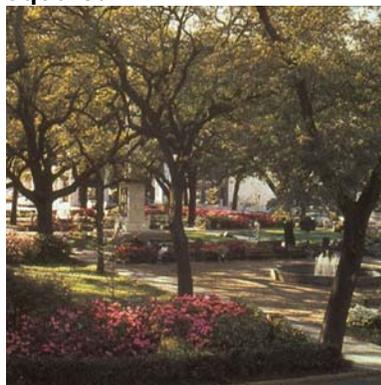
**Parks**



**Plazas**



**Squares**



Session four, identity, opened with four categories of images: street edges, gateways, landmarks, and neighborhood character. Once all groups had chosen their images and applied them to their base maps, a key question was posed regarding whether the study area required a singular, homogeneous identity or whether it was a sequence of districts, each with its own distinct character. Participants were challenged to reflect on all the previous exercises before answering the question. Each group discussed this amongst themselves before writing the answer on their sheets; along with the decision of homogeneity or plurality groups were asked to write down some of the identity themes that might apply.

The final exercise in the workshop required each group to use wooden blocks to 'build out' the mass, height and density of the study area. Again, groups were asked to consider all they had done previously, and work over the land use base map to realize their plans in three dimensions. There were different results depending on group for this exercise, but some common ideas were strikingly apparent:

- JSA-McGill between Centennial Olympic Park and Peachtree was depicted as a very dense, urban street – almost like an urban 'canyon';
- A notion of 'gateways' to Centennial Hill and Downtown visible from the interstate;
- Low- to medium-density buildings along Marietta;
- Medium-density (eight- to ten-story) buildings in the center of Centennial Hill; and
- High-density towers framing the park over the interstate

Groups chose the following images to represent their ideas of identity for the study area:

**Street Edge**



**Gateway**



**Landmark**



**Landmark**



**Neighborhood Character**



**Neighborhood Character**



While no two tables were completely alike, there were many similarities both in large-scale strategies (mixing land uses) and specific improvement projects (the interstate park). After reviewing all the group 'collages' against each other, the planning team set out to refine the visions into a draft concept plan. As the team worked within the parameters of actual block dimensions and street alignments, these design themes materialized to order the plan:

- **Centennial Hill as an Urban Village:** The combination of mixed-use medium-density buildings at the core of Centennial Hill with the focus on Simpson Street as a significant pedestrian destination led to the idea of Centennial Hill as a unique district or an 'urban village'. Simpson becomes the main neighborhood street of Centennial Hill, with shops and restaurants clustered around its intersections with Spring Street, Williams Street and West Peachtree Street. The notion of Simpson as a kind of 'restaurant row' serving not only the neighborhood but visitors to the Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola is reinforced by its location at the midpoint of two MARTA stations, and park space anchoring each end. The team chose to recommend expanding the Children's Museum in the second phase of Museum Tower, supporting the critical mass of destinations at Simpson's western end.
- **A succession of open spaces along JSA:** The reconstruction of JSA in line with the completion of the Georgia Aquarium will transform what is now a derelict right-of-way into a major urban avenue. Visibility, access, market preference and projects on the verge of implementation will almost certainly guarantee that the portion crossing Centennial Hill will be the equivalent of what Park Avenue is to the Upper East Side. Every group saw the potential in JSA, and its connective ability between unique districts. To capitalize on this quality, the team used central points in each district to create parks and plazas that define the character of the street. Each park or plaza also acts as a gathering place for its neighborhood.
- **A reinforcement of the Civic Center MARTA station:** All groups recognized the underutilization of the Civic Center MARTA station and placed an emphasis on improving connections and encouraging development to optimize the station's potential. The design team responded by giving high-priority status to both West Peachtree Street streetscape improvements and physical linkages to the open space bridging the interstate and Peachtree Street. As a long-term possibility, the interstate cap might extend to and incorporate the MARTA station; the cost of this extension could be offset somewhat by private development of interstate air-rights.
- **Revitalization of the Civic Center and surrounding property:** The possibility of redeveloping the surface parking lot at the rear of the Civic Center has been around for many years. The slow pace of development in the area south of North Avenue ('SoNo') coupled with the unintended externalities from the social service centers has stalled serious redevelopment efforts; the effects have spilled over to the public spaces around the Civic Center so that what was once an open forecourt is now fenced and gated. Built during the era of monumental civic complexes, the Civic Center and plaza was inspired by the magnetism of Lincoln Center in New York. The design team recognized that rebuilding the plaza was a key step in moving the Civic Center closer to its redevelopment future.
- **Preservation of the small-scale context of Marietta Street:** Marietta is one of three historic railroad corridors leading into Downtown, and has over the years acquired a stock of small-scale former light industrial and warehouse buildings. Keeping some of this fabric intact is important to understanding the growth of the city as well as making it desirable

for the urban loft residential market. The design strategy for Marietta involves preservation and infill, as well as creation of a centralized open space.

- **Orienting future land use almost exclusively toward mixed-use:** The planning work associated with the updating of the SPI-1 zoning district opened discussions on the appropriateness and benefits of mixing uses on single development parcels. The JSA Charette Week validated the public interest in diversifying development away from single-use projects. Development opportunities in the JSA concept plan lean heavily toward mixed-use to bring goods and services into residential neighborhoods and equalize the jobs-housing balance.

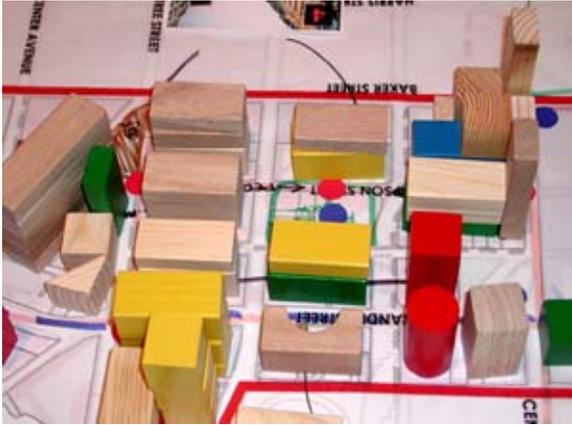
These ideas formed the basis for assembling the draft framework and illustrative plans, and translated into five vision statements:

- **A place of arrival...** Downtown gateways
- **A place to live...** Centennial Hill Urban Village
- **A place to relax...** a new park over the Interstate
- **A place to walk...** Marietta, McGill, Simpson, West Peachtree
- **A place to eat and shop...** Simpson, Luckie, Marietta and Alexander

As the details of the plans were discussed and refined, several specific transportation, public space and development projects emerged; these projects are discussed further in Section 2.2

The final event of Charette Week was the presentation of the workshop results and draft plans on the evening of Thursday, September 18 (see Appendix A for the hard-copy version of the presentation). About one hundred persons attended, roughly half of whom participated in the previous workshop. Questions from the audience were addressed, and as a parting exercise each attendee was given several \$5 million-dollar bills to prioritize by 'paying for' their preferred projects that had been identified as possible corridor investments. The projects in order of participants' responses include:

1. Simpson Street Improvement - 46 votes
2. Gateways into Downtown - 41 votes
3. Park Bridging Interstate - 31 votes
4. Interstate Ramp Improvements - 27 votes
5. Park at Marietta Street and Alexander Street - 20 votes
6. Municipal Parking Structures - 16 votes
7. Baker Street Streetscape – 14 votes
8. GWCC Phase V – Entry Park - 12 votes
9. Civic Center Plaza – 3 votes
10. Piedmont Avenue Streetscape Improvement - 3 votes
11. Baker Street-Harris Street Two Way – 2 votes



### **2.1.3 Public Workshop 3**

The third and final public workshop was held on the evening of Tuesday, November 18 at the Atlanta Civic Center. The workshop was structured as an open house, where all of the graphic products generated during the planning process were on display. A self-cycling PowerPoint presentation featured each project identified during Charette Week, with photographs of the existing context fading into illustrations of the future development. 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.

Approximately sixty persons attended the workshop over the course of two hours. Feedback was positive, as many of the attendees were participants in Charette Week and complimentary of that process. As a final exercise, note cards were distributed to those who wanted to comment in writing on the plans. A few cards were collected at the conclusion of the evening, with these points noted:

- The block bounded by West Peachtree, Baker, Spring and Simpson should be identified as mixed-use residential
- Development at the intersection of Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Alexander Street should feature ground-level storefront treatment with active uses to animate the pedestrian space
- All parking structures, including municipal parking, should have street-level and street-fronting active uses
- Parking should be located underground wherever possible, for example under new public open spaces
- On-street parking should be maximized on all streets on Centennial Hill
- On-street, off-peak parking should be considered for thoroughfares like Piedmont Avenue and Courtland Street.

## **2.2 LCI Study Area Concept Plan**

The JSA-McGill LCI Concept Plan is a direct outgrowth of the 'Charette Week' workshop process, and of the parameters defined by both extensive field analysis of existing conditions and the exhaustive series of stakeholder interviews underlying the Issues Matrix. In addition, the Concept Plan is supported by both transportation and market studies that, while specifically and carefully considering the needs of the corridor, also benefit from parallel work on the broader Downtown Atlanta context. The utility of an expanded context – in this case, the import of the Central Area Transportation Study (CATS) into the Jones-Simpson-Alexander transportation concept plan, and the market 'benchmarking' as part of Imagine Downtown – is registered in projects that are realistic in their assumptions and part of a web of improvements working together to benefit the entire extent of Downtown.

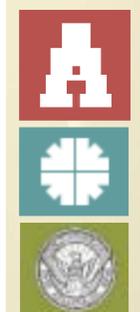
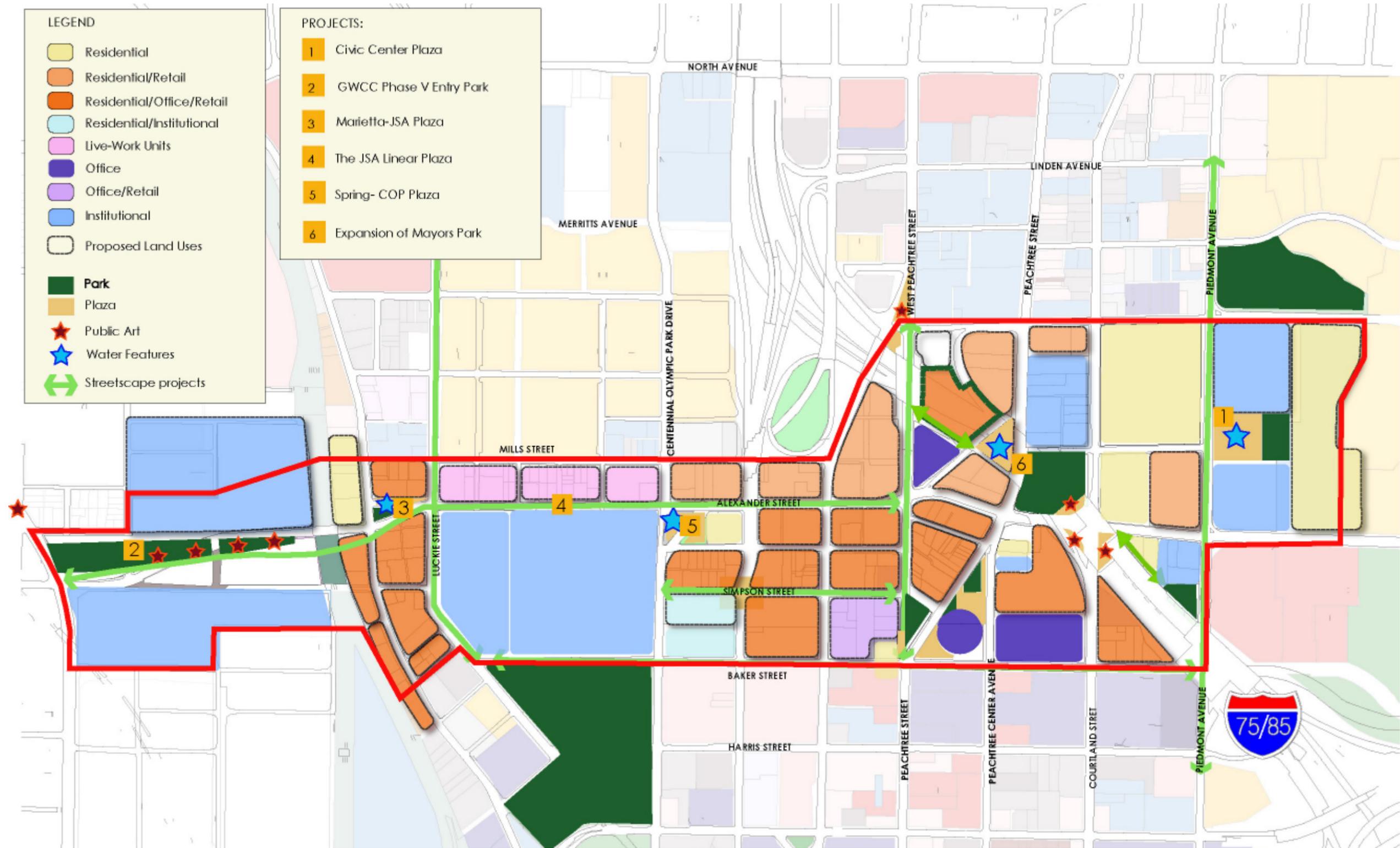
The Concept Plan is composed of two layers – a land use framework plan and a transportation framework plan. The land use framework plan deals specifically with the nature of future development and public spaces, while the transportation framework plan deals with improvements to mobility and connectivity.

### **2.2.1 The Land Use Framework Plan**

The land use framework plan (Figure 2.4) is essentially two different but interwoven elements – a future land use plan that prescribes the desired development on private land, and an open space plan that identifies new plazas, parks and connecting streetscapes which order future development. Section 1.0 categorized the corridor as bracketed by major institutional uses – the Georgia World Congress Center and the Atlanta Civic Center – with a scattering of high-density commercial and medium-density residential. With twenty acres of vacant land being utilized for two additional institutional 'destinations', the balance of developable land aggregates into five distinct districts: 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.

Each district's future land use and development strategy is reflective of themes either present in existing development or resulting from public consensus during Charette Week. Marietta Street, a historic railroad and industrial corridor with existing buildings redeveloping as mixed-use lofts, preserves its orientation with an even coverage of residential, office and retail mixed-use. The exception to this pattern is the northward expansion of the Hastings Seed and Giant lofts, identified as single-use residential. New developments are envisioned to maintain the spirit of the industrial vernacular. On the other side of the Georgia Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola complex, Centennial Hill reflects the mixed-use diversity of Marietta Street, but in a different development package. While on Marietta the loft typology allows for commercial, residential or retail in undifferentiated space, in Centennial Hill the mixture of uses are accommodated in 'zoned' buildings; that is, certain areas – such as office - with independent circulation and mechanical systems are functionally separated from residential areas. Retail typically occupies strategic locations like corners on the ground floor. This pattern shifts north of JSA-McGill where higher visibility encourages higher concentrations of retail, this time in high-density residential projects (including towers marking the northern entry to Downtown) with continuous and significant ground level retail.

The blocks north of JSA between Marietta Street and Centennial Hill are unusually shallow and underutilized. Across Mills Street, Centennial Place mixes townhouses and apartments in a very placid residential setting, while the south frontage of JSA will likely contain most if not all of the loading and service entrances to the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola. These 'transitional'



blocks require uses that adapt to the physical and contextual constraints of the site. A 'live-work' future land use classification is proposed in buildings that are double-fronted, with ground-floor commercial uses exposed to JSA and residential entries and garages along Mills Street; upper floors would be reserved for residential uses. Along with this specific development type 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 along Peachtree Street are targeted for residential and retail mixed-use of the kind proposed for the north end of Centennial Hill. Finally, the blocks straddling Courtland Street adjacent to the SunTrust offices are envisioned as a residential, office and retail mix, with high-density office on the Peachtree Center Avenue and Baker Street; high-density residential along McGill; and storefront retail at all street frontages.

Each future land use and development 'district' has an associated public space or open space improvement that serves to give the area an urban design focus and reassure private sector developers that there is a significant public commitment to create a world-class urban neighborhood. The proposed new public spaces are, from west to east:

- **Marietta – JSA Plaza** – a landscaped and hardscaped plaza created from the combination of a short redundant extension of Alexander Street to Marietta and the adjacent vacant triangular-shaped parcel; serves as a focus for the Marietta Street neighborhood and the Georgia Aquarium district
- **The JSA Linear Plaza** – the widening and enhancement of the north side of JSA between Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Luckie Street; serves to counteract the predominately service elevations of the Georgia Aquarium and World Of Coca-Cola, and incite development on difficult blocks
- **Spring – COP Plaza** – the regularization and improvement of the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) parcels at the termination of the Spring Street tunnel and the intersection of JSA and Centennial Olympic Park Drive; serves as the transition between Centennial Place and Centennial Hill as well as a gateway to Downtown
- **Expanded Mayor's Park** – new open space 'cap' over I-75/85 at Peachtree Street flanking both sides of street and extending to the McGill – Courtland intersection; serves to mitigate the impact of the interstate and reconnect the 'SoNo' (South of North) portion of Downtown with Centennial Hill and the Aquarium area

In addition, two public space projects on either end of the corridor respond to future institutional development which, collectively with existing components, are large enough to be considered urban 'districts' in their own right:

- **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 similar to those present in International Plaza; serves as a western gateway to the JSA corridor and as a ceremonial space for the future Phase V expansion of the Georgia World Congress Center
- **Civic Center Plaza** – an expanded and improved entry court to the Civic Center complex and adjoining development; serves to terminate the principal pedestrian approach down Currier Street, provides an exterior complement to lobby space similar to Lincoln Center in New York City, and acts as a transition to future development on the Civic Center parking lot.

Additional descriptions of development character and public space components are included in section 2.2.3

## **2.2.2 The Transportation Framework Plan**

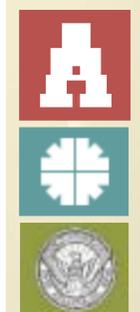
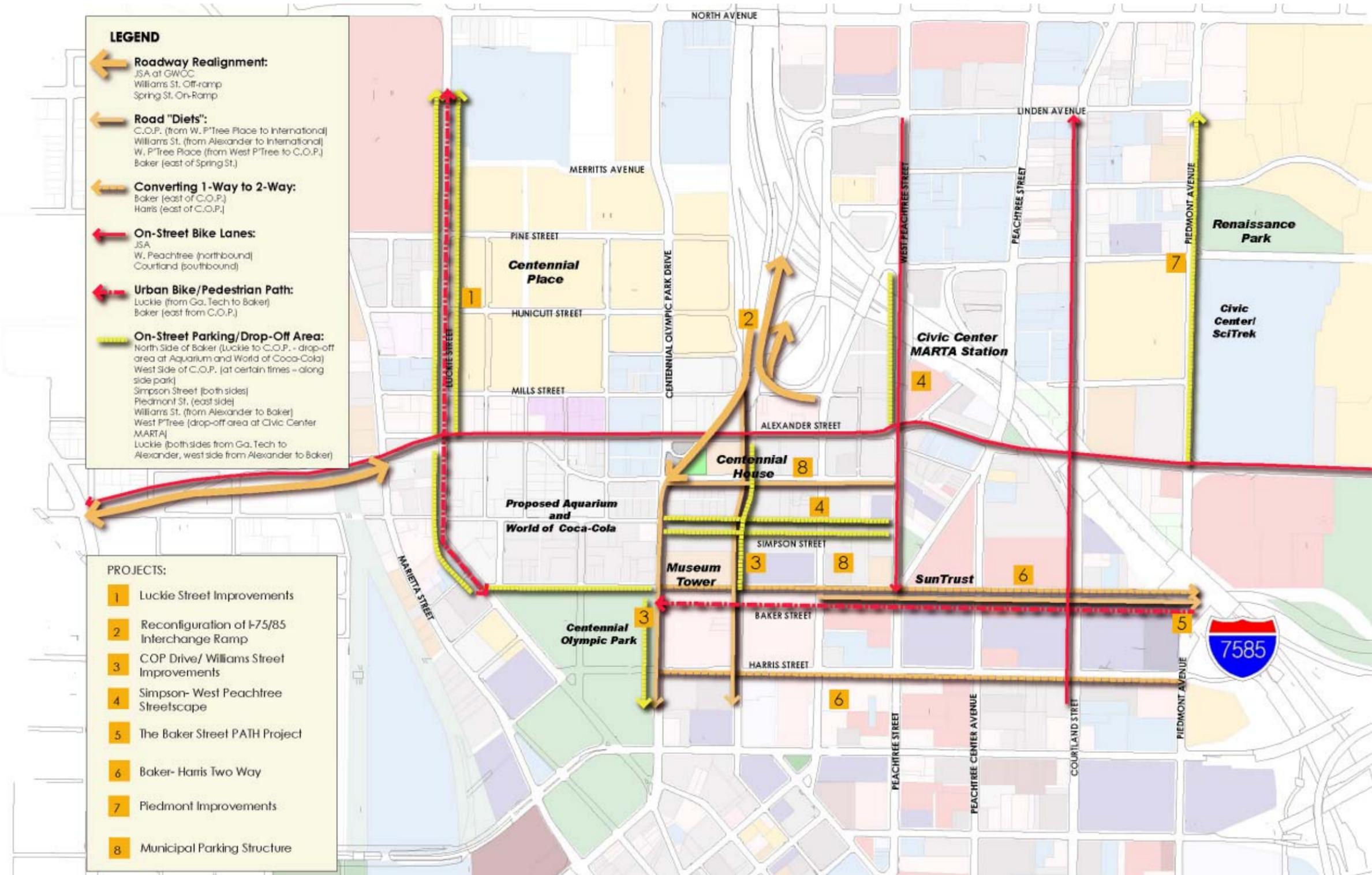
The most extensive transportation improvement in the corridor is the one that spurred the LCI project from the start – the new JSA-McGill. First proposed in 1999, the project has completed the conceptual design phase and been approved by the GDOT. The project will be constructed in phases to provide 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 (see appendix for alignment illustrations) 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.

Validating the concept design was an early priority in the LCI process given the schedules of the Georgia Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola projects. The concept plan was first tested for applicability and vehicle capacity based on the development programs and available site plans of the projects. With some minor changes, the concept plan was then presented as a given future condition for Charette Week.

The lively dialogue and exercises in Charette Week resulted in several additional transportation-related projects that enhance the JSA concept, improve corridor access for alternate modes, and adjust some streets for broader roles as urban spaces:

- **Luckie Street Improvements** – a multi-use path (an ongoing project of the PATH Foundation); provides a dedicated pedestrian and bicycle right-of-way from Atlantic Station and Georgia Tech to Centennial Olympic Park as well as parking and traffic calming for the Marietta / Centennial Place neighborhoods
- **Reconfiguration of the I-75/85 Interchange Ramps** – exit ramp realignment to penetrate the Spring Street 'tunnel' feeding to Centennial Olympic Park (COP) Drive, and entry ramp relocation to Spring Street north of JSA for single-occupancy vehicles; serves to reduce traffic volume and speed on Williams Street, reduce intersection congestion at Williams and JSA, and direct vehicles more efficiently to the Baker Street entrance / drop-off of the Aquarium
- **COP Drive / Williams Street Improvements** – 'road diets' (narrowing road width to become leaner, safer and more efficient) for COP Drive and Williams Street by the introduction of on-street parking; serves to reduce traffic speeds, provide visible parking to incite retail uses, provide better pedestrian environments, and offer a potential staging area (on COP Drive) for visitor buses feeding the Aquarium



- **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; serves to encourage transit ridership by connecting MARTA with the attractions of the Aquarium and World Of Coca-Cola, also to encourage mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development along Simpson Street as the center of Centennial Hill
- **The Baker Street PATH Project** – streetscape and sidewalk improvements to Baker featuring a dedicated, traffic-separated bicycle and pedestrian path along the south side from Jackson Street to Centennial Olympic Park; provides missing connection between Freedom Parkway trail to Centennial Olympic Park and serves to calm traffic speeds on Baker as well as improve the pedestrian environment
- **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
- **Piedmont Improvements** – streetscaping and on-street parking provision for Piedmont Avenue between Harris Street and North Avenue; exchanges excess vehicular capacity for better pedestrian environments and visible parking to assist fledgling businesses, while reducing notably high traffic speeds overall

One final project is tied to both land use and traffic but a distinct enough to be its own category:

- **Municipal Parking Structures**– parking decks built as stand-alone or part of larger projects, either as publicly funded or under a public-private partnership; serves to rationalize parking strategies and wayfinding throughout the corridor, and provides an incentive for redevelopment of surface parking lots through both reducing development hard costs for the private sector and introducing increased parking competition to reduce rates for better land utilization

### **2.2.3 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 (Figure 2.6). The Plan carries the hopes and dreams communicated through words and drawings at the public workshop, and physically translates them into a vision plan. This vision is then checked against economic reality from the independent market analyses performed by the consultant team. The three overriding goals and objectives throughout this process that are reflected in the plan include:

#### 1. Create an Identity:

The JSA-McGill corridor forms one of the prominent entry points into Downtown and currently has no gateways or landmarks celebrating this entry. The plan proposes landscape improvements at I-75/85 to establish an identifiable place of arrival along with building portals forming a physical and symbolic threshold that mark the entry point to the JSA-McGill corridor. This portal would be supported by a plaza with a fountain or public art.

#### 2. Create New Neighborhoods and Strengthen Connections:

New residential development within the corridor will create the 24-hour environment envisioned for the area. The plan proposes the redevelopment of land currently vacant or underutilized to

create these residential communities in the JSA-McGill Corridor. Prominent examples of such residential districts are described below:

*The Village at Simpson Street*

A new mixed-use urban neighborhood at Alexander Street and West Peachtree Street will redevelop existing surface parking lots. New residential, cultural, office and retail uses will build a 24-hour pedestrian oriented environment. Simpson Street forms the heart of the retail pedestrian core, and creates an inviting path from the Peachtree corridor to Centennial Olympic Park, the new World of Coca-Cola, and the Georgia Aquarium. A municipal parking deck is proposed to financially support new residential and neighborhood retail development in this area. SciTrek is relocated from its current location beside the Civic Center, to a new location adjacent to the Children's Museum. This creates a synergistic cluster of family oriented cultural venues that work with the Georgia Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola.

*SoNo*

The area south of North Avenue, commonly known as 'SoNo' (or South of North) is poised for new urban residential, retail, and office development. New development will support ridership for the underutilized Civic Center MARTA station. The development will also begin to strengthen and reknit the connections between Midtown and Downtown Atlanta.

*Civic Center*

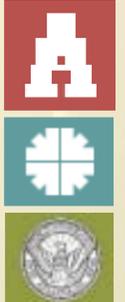
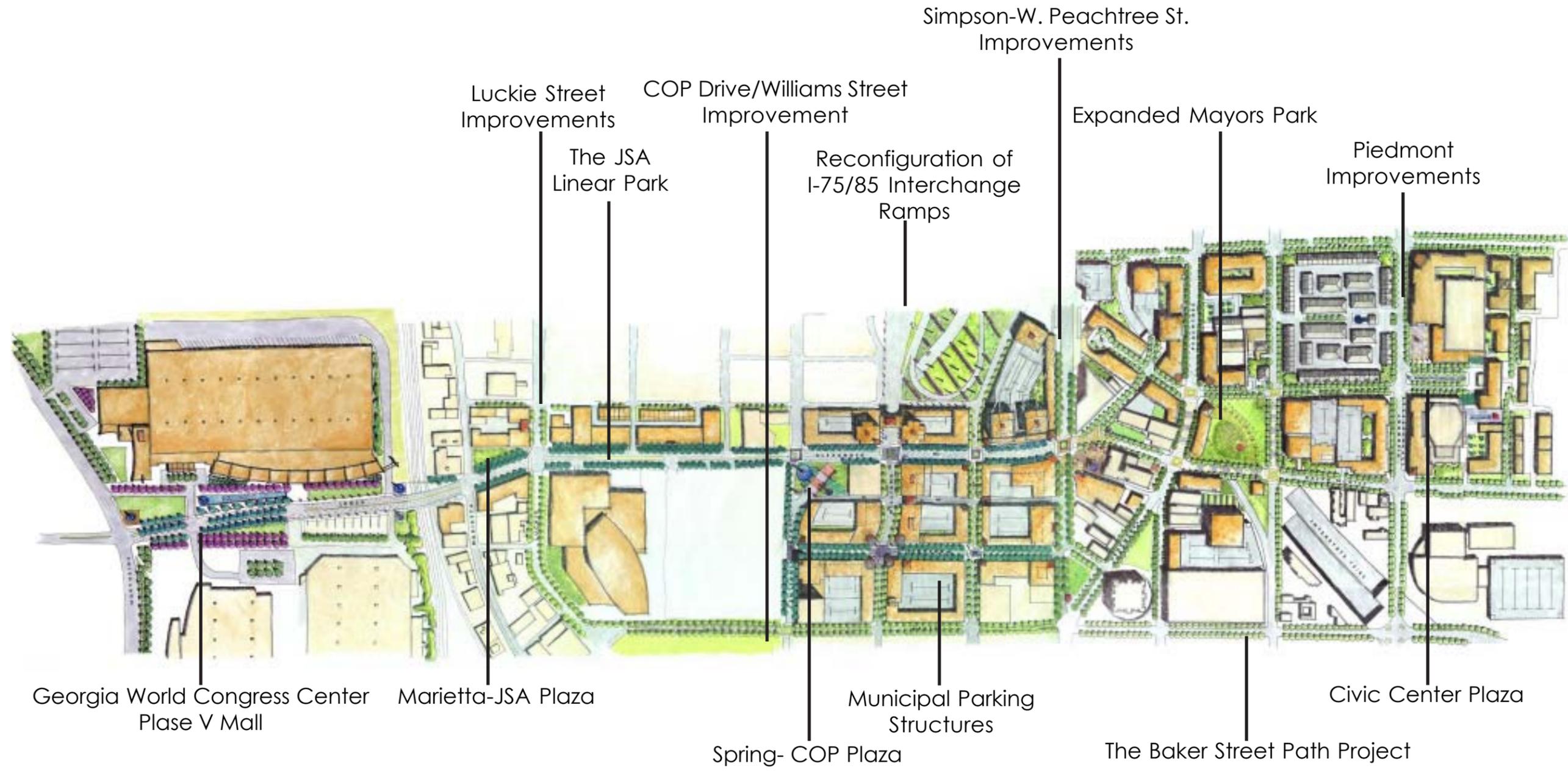
Underutilized surface parking lots that surround the Civic Center will be developed to build a new residential core on the east side of the JSA-McGill corridor. The existing SciTrek buildings transform into a new neighborhood school. The neighborhood school helps to attract new residents with families.

3. Restore and Improve the Public Realm

Along with new mixed-use developments and transportation linkages, an improved pedestrian environment is essential for attracting people to this area. Streetscape improvements, including wider sidewalks, street trees, and on-street parallel parking, to support and encourage pedestrian activity are planned along a majority of streets in the study area, described in detail in Section 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5. Focus will be on enhancing critical pedestrian paths to and from activity centers that support new land uses, such as retail and cultural venues. The pedestrian path from the Civic Center and Peachtree Center MARTA stations to Centennial Olympic Park should concentrate improvements on Simpson Street as a major pedestrian amenity street.

Parks form an integral part of the plan. Mayor's Park, located adjacent to the Interstate will be extended to bridge the Interstate and will reconnect the east and west sides of the JSA-McGill corridor, adding value by providing a new major public park amenity. A new linear park at JSA-McGill and Northside Drive will forge a new connection to the neighborhoods on the west side, and frame a gateway to the GWCC convention district. The linear park will extend east along the JSA-McGill right-of-way as development occurs over time. Smaller pocket parks, like a pocket plaza at Marietta Street will provide for the additional recreation needs of the residents in this area.

Hence the JSA-McGill Plan will successfully integrate existing and proposed development with open space improvements and transportation linkages, creating a pedestrian-friendly mixed use environment.



## 2.3 Short-Term Priorities (within 3 Years)

### Open Space and Parks

#### A. Marietta – JSA Plaza

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The Marietta Street artery has received new impetus to its development with the ongoing construction of the Aquarium and proposal for World of Coca-Cola. Already seen as an intown loft district, recent loft conversion projects like Giant Lofts and the Hastings Seed Lofts have contributed towards enhancing the railroad character prevalent in this district. In addition, some new developments like Uptown Lofts have been well received as infill projects. Though the historic nature of the buildings defines Marietta Street's character, the public environment does not contribute towards unifying the district.

The proposed plaza would also serve as a public gathering space for the new residents moving into this area. Centennial Olympic Park, located at a short distance from the Marietta Street, currently provides the necessary active recreation space. Hence a moderately sized plaza with features such as benches and public art would be adequate in providing for the passive recreation needs of these residents. This new pocket plaza located on Marietta would enhance the visual character of the area and create an entry gateway into the district. In addition to seating, this plaza would include some type of public art like a water fountain or sculpture.



**Figure 2.7: Marietta – JSA Plaza looking west**

Located at the junction of Marietta Street and Alexander Street, the plaza would be created on the 0.17 acre wedge-shaped property, currently used as surface parking. The traffic on Alexander Streets is diverted on to Jones Avenue before it dead-ends into Marietta Street. This short redundant length of Alexander Street would be included into the plaza or converted into a pedestrian walkway. Though presently a high-speed vehicular street, on-going plans for JSA corridor improvements include making the street a continuous two-way vehicular connection along with wider sidewalks, improved pedestrian access, enhanced transit mobility and bike lanes. The new plaza along with the streetscape improvements would increase pedestrian activity and help support the retail surrounding this area.

**Recommendations:**

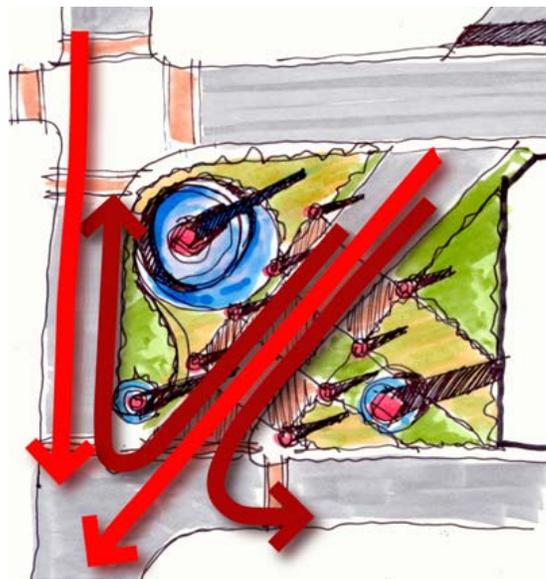
- Provide a new plaza on the property at the intersection of Marietta Street and Alexander Street
- Reconfigure the western part of Alexander Street (where it intersects Marietta Street) to be pedestrian only and divert the traffic along Jones Avenue.
- Provide passive recreation facilities like seating along with public art and water features.

**B. Spring – COP Plaza**

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Spring Street, as it proceeds southbound from Midtown, swings west to dip below Williams and Alexander Streets and merges into Centennial Olympic Park (COP) Drive at the point where COP Drive changes from two-way to one-way traffic. This arrangement, though efficient in moving vehicles, has resulted in major problems for the urban environment. Five traffic lanes are rarely filled beyond two cars deep, and crossing them is a dangerous proposition for pedestrians. The abrupt transition from two-way to one-way traffic is confounding to first-time visitors; and in concert with the one-way bias of West Peachtree Place frustrating for residents of Centennial House. The tunnel / bridge structure and the GDOT right-of-way on either side is an extension of the vernacular of the interstate, and not reflective of the urban space it should be. The tunnel often floods; and there is no indication once through that one has arrived in Downtown.

Some of these issues can be addressed by two moves: taking better advantage of the tunnel width and direct connection to COP by allowing some southbound exiting interstate traffic to drop down into the tunnel (see Project 4 below); and redesigning the intersection and bridge area to be an urban plaza and a gateway to Downtown. Currently, Spring Street Connector traffic looking to travel northbound on COP Drive can use a dedicated right-turn lane to arrive at the JSA / COP intersection. While this option is still necessary, especially with the realignment of the interstate exit ramping, the lane can be reconfigured to avoid bisecting the GDOT landscaped embankment. A more conventional 'T' intersection with a hard-right turning movement on to a single northbound lane would free up land area for plaza improvements. Likewise, the southbound merge onto COP would also require additional study to calm traffic and provide a better pedestrian crossing environment at West Peachtree Place.

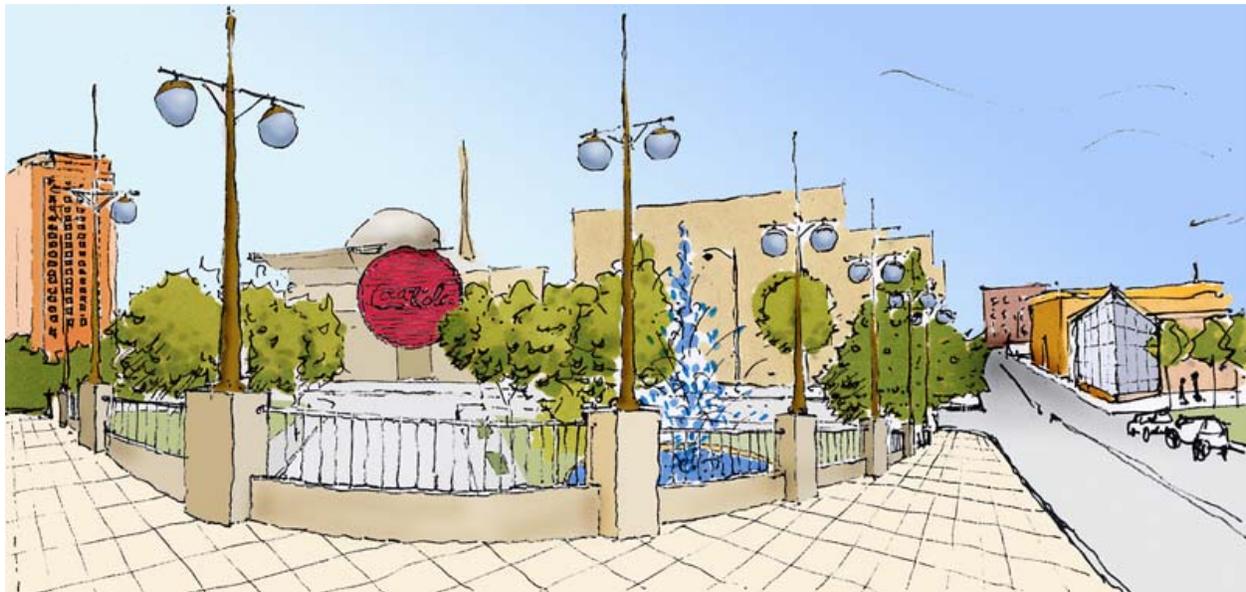


**Figure 2.8: Spring – COP Plaza showing conceptual traffic movements**

The Spring Street – COP Plaza is particularly important given the development that will occur on the World of Coca-Cola site, and for two additional reasons. First, pedestrian movement from the Civic Center MARTA station along JSA heading for the Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola will be forced to navigate this intersection. The plaza will mark the point where pedestrians either turn north for the Centennial Place neighborhood and Georgia Tech, south for Baker and the Aquarium, or continue west for the historic Marietta district. As a point of reference for wayfinding and as a visible symbol of the surrounding neighborhood, the Spring Street – COP Plaza is second only to the extension of Mayor’s Park over the interstate. The plaza also serves

the important function of anchoring the eastern end of the proposed JSA linear plaza (see Item C below), which attempts to mitigate the presence of the Georgia Power substation and the service entries of the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola. Second, the plaza will be the first point of contact with Downtown for vehicles destined for the attractions around Centennial Olympic Park or the Georgia World Congress Center. Just as signature development is critical for sites on the north side of JSA as markers for Downtown, so is the Spring – COP Plaza and its surrounding development key to signaling arrival and establishing an identity for COP and the emerging museum district.

The plaza is envisioned as a formally landscaped space centering on a water feature that links it to other fountains in the JSA open space sequence. Portions of the JSA bridge would be reconstructed to eliminate unusable space, extend and widen the JSA sidewalk to link to West Peachtree Place, and give Centennial House a fourth frontage and an incentive for storefront retail to wrap the southwest corner of the building.



**Figure 2.9: Spring – COP Plaza looking southwest from the JSA bridge**

**Recommendations:**

- Study the potential traffic impacts of reworking the Spring Street Connector – COP intersection and the dedicated northbound deceleration lane
- Redesign the JSA bridge to eliminate unused spaces and provide a pedestrian connection to West Peachtree Place
- Acquire right-of-way from GDOT or arrange a lease agreement to construct a water feature and paving in the section of embankment between the Spring Street Connector and COP Drive
- Investigate the possibility of design regulations for new development around the plaza to ensure active pedestrian uses and architectural compatibility

## Transportation/Circulation Improvements

### 1. Luckie Street Improvements

The City of Atlanta completed The Atlanta Commuter On-Street Bike Plan in 1995, with recommendations for on-street and off-street bikeway connections throughout the City. Luckie Street was identified as a part of this plan for the Downtown Loop project which would create a multi-use bicycle-pedestrian path connecting Georgia Tech, Midtown, Downtown, the Freedom Trail and the Westside Trail. Central Atlanta Progress conducted a supplementary study, 'The Central Atlanta Bicycle Facility Transportation Study' to identify priority transportation projects in 2000. This study also identified Luckie Street for a Multi-use Urban Bike-Pedestrian Path.

Along with being an important north-south street, Luckie Street is also one the shortest routes connecting Georgia Tech with Centennial Olympic Park and Downtown. In addition to the Coca-Cola Complex, recent developments like Centennial Place apartments, Centennial Place Elementary School, the YMCA and the Aquarium have increased pedestrian activity in the area, requiring better facilities. Currently a four-lane street (with one additional on-street parking lane), Luckie Street is underutilized except during peak office hours, when vehicular traffic entering the Coca-Cola Complex creates some congestion at the intersection of Pine Street and Luckie Street.

The streetscape improvements suggested for Luckie Street are focused on an urban multi-use bike-pedestrian path running through the center of the street. This 'Coca-Cola Parkway' concept considers two options for the location of this multi-use path. The first option incorporates a central bikeway with landscaped buffers on both sides while the second option recommends widening existing sidewalks into urban trails with enhancements such as landscape and way-finding signage. Both options have their advantages – Luckie Street is currently under consideration for a transit connection between northwest Atlanta and Downtown. A dedicated lane for an urban-trail could be converted into a transit lane. However this would require removing the on-street parking lane or reducing one vehicular lane going north. The second option may be more financially feasible as it requires using existing sidewalks. In addition, the on-street parking lane could be preserved and continued up to the new Aquarium to support new retail that is proposed at the Alexander – Luckie node. Additional pedestrian intersection improvements are recommended at the corner of Alexander and Luckie Streets and at the corner of Mills and Luckie Streets.



**Figure 2.10: Luckie Street looking north**



**Figure 2.11: Luckie Street looking north**

The PATH foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to developing a metrowide trail system for Atlanta, has shown keen interest in providing funds for the multi-use trail on Luckie Street. Additional support from the City and other governmental organization can expedite the process of creating this important link into Downtown.

**Recommendations:**

- Create an urban bike-pedestrian trail along Luckie Street.
- Providing streetscape improvements along Luckie Street
- Pedestrian Intersection improvements at the corner of Alexander and Luckie and at the corner of Mills and Luckie
- Studying the option for creating an additional parking lane on Luckie Street

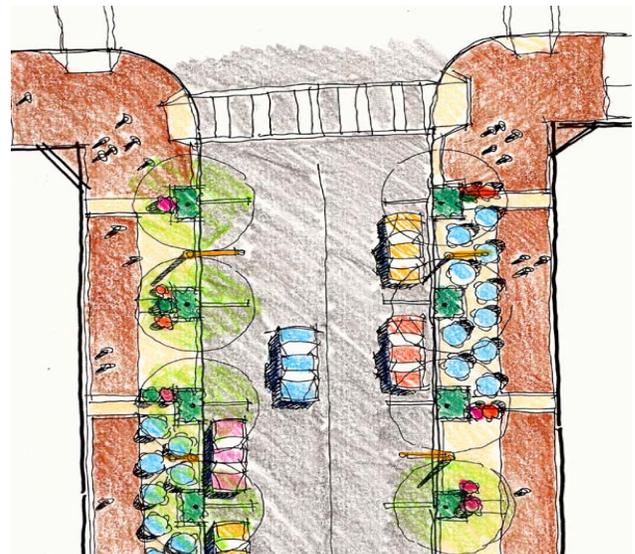
**2. Simpson – West Peachtree Streetscapes**

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Since the Olympic Games and the construction of Centennial Olympic Park in 1995, the area bounded by Alexander Street, West Peachtree Street, Baker Street and Centennial Olympic Park Drive has been discussed and positioned as a medium- to high-density residential neighborhood called Centennial Hill, its primary champion being COPA (Centennial Olympic Park Area – an affiliate of Central Atlanta Progress). Its abundance of vacant land make it a prime development target; but the expensive land and development costs for residential uses in Downtown and the stagnation of activity on the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola property dampened plans for new residential projects. Only two mixed-use developments – Museum Tower and Centennial House, both built by public-private partnerships – moved forward to give the area its first stock of major new housing since the construction of Peachtree Towers in 1962.

COPA has been retired, but the development interest still exists. With both the construction of the Aquarium and the improvements to JSA, developers are taking new notice of Centennial Hill; one mixed-use project is in design scheduled for a 2004 groundbreaking at this writing. Indeed, Centennial Hill and the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola complex are dependent on each other – Centennial Hill for the visitors the attractions will bring to new retail, and the Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola for a renewed and dynamic neighbor that can offer added value and entertainment for patrons.

As demonstrated in other places in Atlanta, investing in public improvements is one way to jump-start development by giving the private sector confidence in the city's commitment to the area. Public improvements – if sensitively located and carefully designed – can also give an area an urban focus and an identity. As it became apparent that pedestrian traffic from MARTA to the Aquarium would most likely pass through Centennial Hill, Simpson Street began to emerge as the target corridor for urgently-needed pedestrian improvements. Not only is Simpson at the mid-point of the distance between the Civic Center and Peachtree

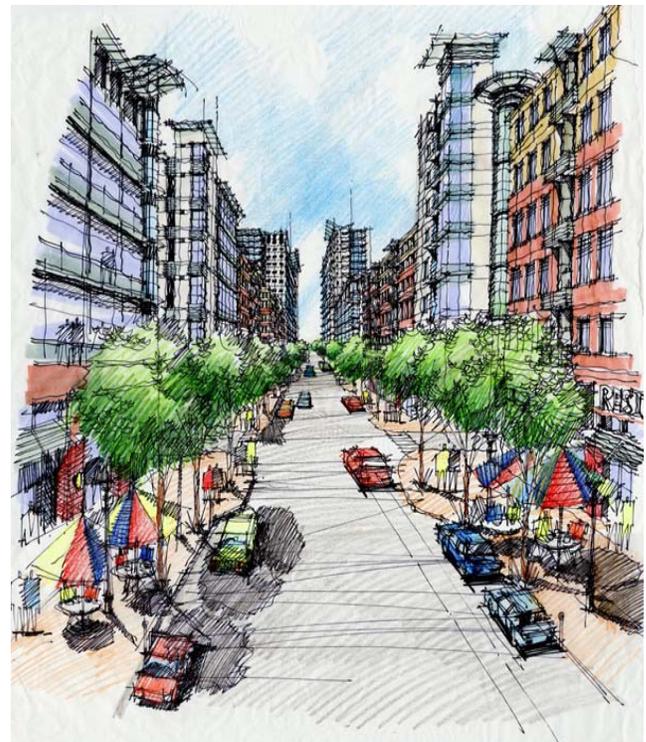


**Figure 2.12: Plan of proposed Simpson Street improvements showing possible pavement treatment and dining areas**

Center MARTA stations, it is the approximate north-south center of Centennial Hill.

The improvements suggested for Simpson Street include on-street parking (9' each side) with two 11' lanes of traffic, one in either direction. A minimum 30' wide sidewalk is recommended, with 5' street furniture, 15' clear zone and 10' supplemental zone. Street trees should be consistently spaced at 30' on center to form an even canopy for outdoor dining, which could take place in the furniture zone. 'Bulb-outs' at intersections would allow more space for outdoor dining, and all crosswalks would be constructed or accented with unit pavers to match the treatment of the clear zone.

New streetscaping should be provided along West Peachtree Street as well, extending from the Civic Center MARTA station to Hardy Ivy Park. The West Peachtree roadway section would be kept as currently designed, except for the addition of on-street bike lines in the zone normally occupied by parking. Sidewalks would be repaired or reconstructed as needed; and a 5' clear zone added with street trees spaced 30' to 40' on center. The intersection of West Peachtree and Simpson should be given special emphasis as the entrance to the symbolic center of Centennial Hill; intersection treatment should at a minimum match the standard used elsewhere along Simpson. Intersection improvements are also recommended at Simpson and Centennial Olympic Park Drive.



**Figure 2.13: The view down Simpson Street toward the World of Coca-Cola showing the proposed streetscape and development character**

Development along Simpson Street is envisioned to have six to ten stories with ground-floor storefront retail and restaurant space, if not continuous then concentrated in the vicinity of the intersections. Buildings should adhere to a consistent right-of-way line and should be designed to maximize the base-shaft-top expression stipulated in the proposed SPI-1 zoning district. Towers or tower-like elements, when present, should be located at corners facing intersections.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide new streetscaping including pavement repairs, street trees and lighting on both sides of West Peachtree Street between the Civic Center MARTA station and Hardy Ivy Park
- Provide pedestrian intersection improvements at the West Peachtree Street and Alexander Street, West Peachtree Street and West Peachtree Place and West Peachtree Street and Simpson intersections
- Reconfigure the Simpson Street cross-section to conform to the dimensions discussed above

- Provide new streetscaping including pavement repairs, street trees and lighting on both sides of Simpson Street between West Peachtree Street and Centennial Olympic Park Drive
- Provide pedestrian intersection improvements at the Simpson / Spring, Simpson / Williams and Simpson / COP intersections

### **3. COP Drive – Williams Street Improvements**

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As Centennial Hill evolves into its future as an 'urban village', it becomes increasingly important to transition streets from simple traffic conduits to public spaces. Williams Street was identified by a majority of stakeholder as requiring both traffic calming and an enhanced pedestrian environment. Because Williams is the major north-south 'avenue' through Centennial Hill, and because a great deal of southbound traffic would be redirected in the future on to Centennial Olympic Park Drive with the reconfiguration of the I-75/85 ramps, Williams is a prime candidate for a 'road diet'. This project would convert existing travel lanes – at a minimum one lane on the east side of the street - to on-street parallel parking. The change would improve the pedestrian environment by reducing vehicle speeds, increase the available sidewalk area for streetscaping and outdoor dining, and allow shorter crossing distances at the Simpson and JSA intersections. It would also stimulate retail by providing convenient parking for existing and future land uses in the corridor.

Centennial Olympic Park Drive is also quite wide between Baker Street and Andrew Young International Boulevard. The spacing of intersections, the timing of signals and the frequency of southbound movements from Baker and International often result in pedestrian confusion as to crossing privileges; and traffic accelerating to make signals is intimidating to those trying to cross. Several stakeholders felt that a reduction in size of COP would benefit visitor traffic attempting to reach Centennial Olympic Park and would also improve the physical appearance of the parks' eastern edge. The similarities between Williams and COP suggest another road diet; here the concept is to convert the western curbside lane on COP to parking from the Spring Street tunnel to Andrew Young International Boulevard. On-street parking would be limited to off-peak periods due to heavy vehicle traffic demands associated with events at Downtown venues, such as Phillips Arena. Some portion of the parking lane would be considered as a bus staging area for the Georgia Aquarium. The road diet would not have a negative impact on traffic flow, because the existing and future levels of off peak traffic are not anticipated to fully utilize the existing roadway capacity.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Convert the eastern (northbound) lane of Williams Street to on-street parking
- Convert the western (southbound) lane of Williams Street to on-street parking as permitted by roadway capacity
- Widen sidewalks on both sides of Williams Street and improve with street trees, landscaping and pedestrian lighting
- Improve the Williams-Simpson and Williams-JSA intersections with improved markings, signals and paving at crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety
- Specify storefront retail and restaurant future land uses at the intersections of Williams, Simpson and JSA, and stipulate that future development recognize these corners with architectural features such as towers or bays
- Convert the western lane of Centennial Olympic Park Drive to on-street parking between Baker Street and Andrew Young International Boulevard, utilized during off-peak hours

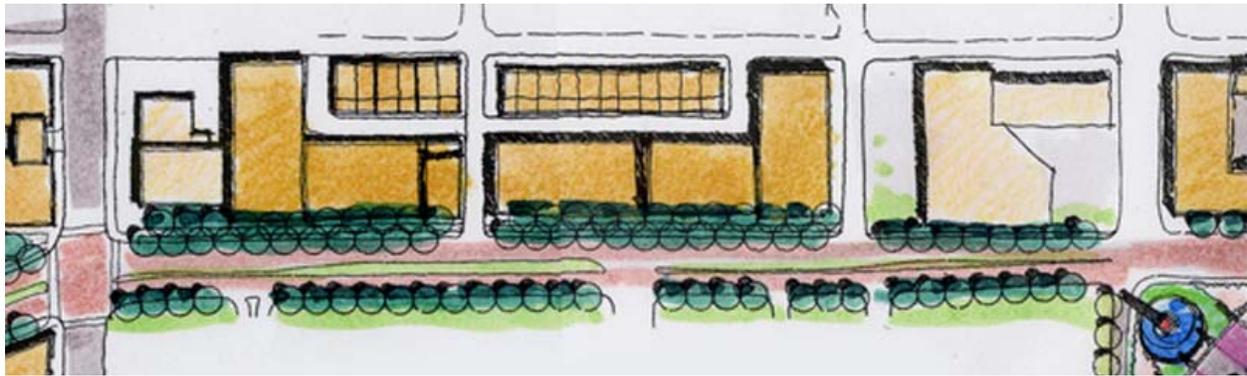
## 2.4 Mid-Term Priorities (3-7 Years)

### Open Space and Parks

#### C. The JSA Linear Plaza

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Alexander Street abuts an existing residential neighborhood to the north between Williams to Marietta Street. The new World of Coca-Cola and Georgia Aquarium visitor attractions both place their back door parking and service facilities along this stretch of Alexander. These developments will generate heavy truck and visitor traffic, adding to the traffic loads already in place on this important east/west connection. A proposed linear park, or greenway, through this corridor will help to improve the pedestrian walkability along JSA-McGill. The park will also help to soften the impact of increased traffic on the adjoining residential district.



**Figure 2.14: The JSA Linear Park / Plaza**

A wide lawn with specimen trees and a generous sidewalk will provide needed greenspace and help to beautify JSA-McGill. It will also link to the Luckie Street PATH bikeway, improving the network of east/west pedestrian and bicycle connections, and to the Civic Center MARTA station. As the corridor redevelops over time, additional right-of-way purchases can implement the linear park system.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Establish a linear park and/or plaza with a pedestrian and bicycle path along the north edge of Alexander where sufficient right-of-way exists
- Incorporate consistent landscape details and streetscape elements with the JSA corridor construction and future redevelopment sites along JSA to the east to West Peachtree Street.

#### D. Civic Center Plaza

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The current Civic Center plaza is seldom used and features an inhospitable design. The proposed Civic Center Plaza is the terminus of a larger pedestrian corridor running from MARTA's Civic Center Station, past Peachtree Street and the proposed park over the Interstate, and

down Currier Street to the Civic Center. This pedestrian-friendly corridor will establish the necessary level of synergy between each of these elements.

Specifically, the proposed plaza is envisioned as a public forecourt for a redeveloped Civic Center block. This plaza would be surrounded by new and revitalized uses: a new school in the current SciTrek building, a renovated Civic Center, and a new hotel, residential buildings and structured parking on the current parking lots. The plaza would feature a mix of hardscape and softscape elements arranged to provide an inviting entrance to the buildings as well as a pleasant passive-use space. It will be designed to accommodate the heavy but intermittent traffic of a school and the Civic Center.

**Recommendations:**

- Redevelop the Civic Center Plaza as the terminus of the Currier Street connection to MARTA and the forecourt to a redeveloped Civic Center block
- The City owns the land and thus maintains some degree of control over the site. The redevelopment of the plaza becomes a priority during the redevelopment of all or part of the block
- Design the plaza as both an inviting entrance to the buildings and a pleasant passive-use space. Design it to accommodate the heavy but intermittent traffic of a school and the Civic Center

**Transportation/Circulation Improvements**

**4. Reconfiguration of the I-75/85 Interchange Ramps**

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I-75/85 (the Downtown Connector) is a major asset for the JSA-McGill corridor, but also a major detriment. Besides the fact that it breaks the street grid and severs connectivity between blocks, it imposes a high volume of traffic – both entering and exiting the interstate – on the JSA and Williams Street intersection. To mitigate this problem and to improve access to and from the study area, the proposed project would reconfigure the Williams Street ramps to provide new connections between the study area roadway network and the interstate.

The existing ramp configuration focuses all traffic entering and exiting the freeway system into a single intersection - Williams Street and Alexander Street (JSA). This results in traffic congestion and high travel speeds along Williams Street from traffic exiting and entering the freeway. The proposal would reconfigure the ramps through several major improvements. First, the existing Williams Street interstate exit would be reconfigured so that two lanes would drop down into the Spring Street Connector tunnel redirecting traffic to COP Drive. One lane would peel off to the left to maintain access to Williams Street southbound. Second, a new single-occupancy vehicle entry ramp would be built to the north of JSA on northbound Spring Street for access to both northbound and southbound interstate lanes. Finally, the existing Williams Street on-ramp would be converted to HOV-



**Figure 2.15: Reconfiguration of the interstate access ramps**

access only, effectively redistributing current on-ramp traffic to two access points. Spring Street northbound through Downtown – one-half of a one-way pair with COP Drive – would more logically feed directly to an interstate access point.

This reconfiguration would reduce traffic volume and speed on Williams Street, reduce intersection congestion at Williams and JSA, and direct vehicles more efficiently to the Baker Street entrance and drop-off of the Aquarium. As an associated improvement, the ramp approaches and embankments could be landscaped in formal manner to indicate the northern approach into Downtown.

**Recommendations:**

- Realign two lanes of the single occupant vehicle (SOV) exit ramp from Downtown Connector southbound to penetrate the Spring Street tunnel feeding to COP Drive (the third existing exit lane would continue to connect directly to Williams Street); and
- Relocate the single-occupancy vehicle entry ramp to the northbound Downtown Connector to Spring Street north of JSA (behind the existing Boomershine Building)
- Reconfigure the interstate landscaping to respond to the new ramping arrangement and mark the entry to Downtown

**5. Baker – Harris Two-Way Conversion**

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The future traffic load imposed on local streets by the opening of the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola will function best if distributed over as many streets as possible in the study area. Just as an additional interstate ramp will relieve traffic congestion on the Williams and Alexander intersection, additional flexibility in routes out of the area will reduce congestion on any one street. Key to utilizing the local street network is the notion of converting Baker and Harris to allow two-way travel from COP Drive to Piedmont Avenue.



**Figure 2.16: Baker Street Improvements**

Currently, these streets function as a one-way pair with Baker providing four travel lanes westbound and Harris providing four travel lanes eastbound. Under the proposal, both streets would be restriped to provide two travel lanes in each direction. This improvement would allow for additional routes connecting Centennial Olympic Park and the surrounding attractions to the Downtown Connector and the hotel district to the east, as well as improve the pedestrian environment by reducing travel speeds. Depending on level of service, on-street parking could be figured into portions of the restriping. Since Baker is identified as the candidate for a multiuse-path connection to Freedom Park, this would likely leave little space for parking. Harris, however, could incorporate on-street parking with one lane of traffic in either direction, at least at the western end where vehicular volumes are less than those feeding Piedmont and Courtland.

**Recommendations:**

- Restripe Baker Street from one-way to two-way traffic east of COP Drive, taking into account a future multiuse path connection to Freedom Park on the south side of the street
- Restripe Harris Street from one-way to two-way east of COP Drive
- Investigate the possibility of providing on-street parking on all or portions of Harris Street

## **6. Municipal Parking Structures**

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A key determinant of the success of proposed new development, particularly within the Centennial Hill mixed-use village, will be the financial feasibility to provide structured parking. The physical dimensions of many of the blocks within the JSA-McGill LCI study area provide challenges on the ability to sensitively fit new structured parking decks within proposed projects. More importantly, the scale and financial returns of proposed projects, particularly housing, need a more comprehensive approach to provide needed parking within an economical framework. The idea behind the proposed project is that public/private joint use structured parking would be built as part of new development at strategic locations within 2 blocks of major new developments. Ideally, residential projects in particular could share structured parking outside of their development footprint.

It is suggested that a strategy of creating municipal parking, perhaps with financial assistance from the Tax Allocation Districts, be pursued. Given the implications of the amount of parking needed for all of Downtown, it is suggested that the creation of a Municipal Parking Authority that could construct and operate public parking decks throughout Downtown, including JSA-McGill, should be studied. A less involved strategy could be the provision of banks of public parking within new developments that are utilizing structured parking in exchange for financial assistance for the parking decks.

### **Recommendations:**

- Study of Municipal Parking Authority
- Use of Tax Allocation Bonds for financing of public/private joint use structured parking decks

## 2.5 Long-Term Priorities (7-25 Years)

### Open Space and Parks

#### E. Expanded Mayor's Park

The most significant and far-reaching proposal to emerge from the stakeholder interviews and the public workshops during the JSA-McGill LCI process was the idea of bridging the interstate on both sides of Peachtree Street with a new city park. Several factors suggest that this is the logical conclusion to public improvements in the area. First, although the Civic Center MARTA station was, in part, identified and built to serve the Civic Center, the street connection between the two was disadvantaged by a lack of wayfinding clarity, a forlorn built environment and the presence of aggressive panhandlers. CODA improvements before the Olympics sought to rectify this by creating a better, more gracious route across a new park at St. Luke's Episcopal Church and down an intimate tree-lined Currier Street. Despite this, few Civic Center patrons use MARTA; the negative perceptions have lingered.

CODA also attempted to lessen the impact (or at least celebrate) the presence of the interstate by creating two 'folk art parks' at the intersections of Ralph McGill and Courtland and Baker and Piedmont. The parks feature whimsical kinetic folk sculpture but suffer from the hard environment and a lack of shade. A similar attempt at softening the interstate edge is the tiny Mayor's Park on the northeast corner of McGill and Peachtree. Hardly one-fifth of an acre in size, the park is little more than a landscaped shoulder patronized only by the homeless. On the other side of Peachtree Street, the old alignment of Alexander – which turned north to intersect with Peachtree – abruptly ends in a chain-link barrier with the interstate beyond.

The idea of uniting these disparate parts with a new park has been around for several years, gaining some momentum after the Olympics between its sponsors and some members of the philanthropic community. The idea – and the \$20 million price tag - was floated to GDOT, with mixed reaction; GDOT supported the idea in concept but not in funding. Since then, the project has been put aside, waiting for public circumspection of the surrounding area to catch up.

The looming improvements to JSA-McGill cast the interstate cap project in a new light. The emerging importance of JSA-McGill as the principal east-west connector at the north end of Downtown flares at its most symbolically important intersection, Peachtree Street. The open swath cut by the interstate has created – unwittingly – a marked entry point into Downtown from the north; the vistas unimpeded by development have given the intersection the feeling of a natural center or a place of departure similar to the infrastructural radiance of Five Points. Yet, approaching Downtown from the north, the severed Alexander Street tempts with a view of Centennial Hill; the Medical Arts building suggests the beginnings of an urban edge.



Figure 2.17: the expanded Mayor's Park

The proposal for the expanded Mayor's Park is essentially a great lawn filling in the void between St. Luke's, McGill and Peachtree. The existing folk art plazas would remain at the McGill and Courtland intersection but would be improved with shade structures and raised plantings. The park's northern edge is formed by an extension of Currier Street, paved in brick to match the entry to St. Luke's, and defined by future development on the St. Luke's property. The 1878 Gay House, occupying pride of place in the northeast corner, could return to the type of program it had as the former home of the Atlanta Shakespeare Company.

Across Peachtree to the west, Alexander is proposed to be extended over the interstate in the same small profile as Currier, either as a limited-access or a pedestrian-only street. The triangular plaza bounded by Peachtree and Alexander is envisioned to contain a significant monument or fountain, foregrounding a restored Medical Arts Building. This plaza marks the entry to Downtown, and could contain a low-rise signature building housing an ACVB welcome center. The plaza might be paved with the same brick as Currier Street, forming the design linkage to the Civic Center.

The western edge of Alexander overlooking the interstate is treated as a broad promenade and might contain reproductions of the original Hamburg Friendship Light on display at the Civic Center. A portion of the promenade would continue into Centennial Hill, while the balance would turn and hug the southern flank of the interstate, framing the void and leading to the MARTA station. A long-term option would be the continuation of the cap to the station leveraged by private air-rights development. The south side of McGill, currently occupied by surface parking, is intended to develop as high-density residential completing the urban enclosure of the park.



**Figure 2.18:** *Looking south on Peachtree at Mayor's Park, with Centennial Hill and the Alexander promenade and plaza at the left*

**Recommendations:**

- Construct a new park over I-75/85 between Peachtree, McGill and Courtland
- Extend Currier Street to the west to form the northern boundary of the park
- Extend Alexander Street north over I-75/85 to intersect with Peachtree and Currier

- Construct a new plaza between Peachtree and the extended Alexander Street that contains elements of other parks and plazas along JSA-McGill
- Renovate the Medical Arts Building and investigate the possibility of a visitor's or welcome center in the plaza
- Encourage future high-density residential development on the surface parking frontage south of McGill

## **F. Georgia World Congress Center Phase V Mall**

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GWCC's strategic expansion north along Northside Drive presents the opportunity to create a gateway into the convention district and the JSA-McGill corridor on the west side. The new bridge and road alignment open up a central foreground space that visually links Phase IV with the Phase V expansion. The new open space introduces a park amenity that complements both the convention district and the residential neighborhoods to the west.

Plantings and civic monuments along the new mall work to knit a strand of park into the length of the JSA-McGill corridor. Ultimately, the mall helps to build a sense of arrival into the JSA-McGill corridor, the convention district, and the Centennial Olympic Park area's many attractions.



**Figure 2.19: GWCC Phase V Mall**



**Figure 2.20: Intersection of Northside Drive and JSA corridor looking northeast with the proposed GWCC Phase V expansion**



**Figure 2.21: Intersection of Northside Drive and JSA corridor looking northeast with the proposed GWCC Phase V expansion**

**Recommendations:**

- Utilize the abandoned right-of-way between the previous and new alignment of JSA-McGill at Northside Drive for a public mall.
- Build the mall as monumental green space and locate civic fountains and sculptures sequentially along its length.

**Transportation/Circulation Improvements**

**7. The Baker Street PATH Project**

As mentioned above, the PATH foundation is actively involved in creating a network of bike and pedestrian trails around Atlanta. As a part of their Downtown project, Baker Street has been identified for a trail connecting Centennial Olympic Park with the Freedom Parkway trail. The proposal recommends widening the sidewalk on the south side of Baker Street and providing a landscaped buffer between the street and sidewalk along with street-trees and pedestrian scaled lighting to improve pedestrian safety. This wide sidewalk will also include a striped bike-lane to separate bicycles from pedestrians. Creating this new trail in addition to converting Baker into a two-way street will completely change the character of this street from a vehicular avenue to a pedestrian supportive street.

New developments like the Aquarium and proposed World of Coca-Cola fronting Baker Street are expected to attract a large number of tourists every year. In addition to these proposed facilities, Centennial Olympic Park and large commercial establishments such as the Inforum and AmericasMart complex located along Baker Street already have considerable pedestrian activity. Investment in this path project will increase this pedestrian activity and encourage transit usage.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide streetscape improvements including a bike-ped path and new sidewalks to the south side of Baker Street.

## **8. Piedmont Improvements**

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Piedmont Avenue was identified through the public participation process as a street that requires immediate attention. Currently a five lane one-way street, it functions as the northbound route of a one-way pair with Courtland Street. Carrying heavy volumes of vehicular traffic at high speeds, Piedmont Avenue creates a difficult and unsafe pedestrian environment as it moves through the study area. With growing residential, retail and institutional uses along this street, improving the pedestrian environment is of utmost importance. In particular, residents at 450 Piedmont and other housing developments around Renaissance Park will benefit from this pedestrian environment. Georgia State University is proposing a 1000-bed student housing project just south of the study area, which would add to the pedestrian activity in the Piedmont corridor.

The plan proposes streetscape improvements along Piedmont Avenue including additional pedestrian street lighting, utility relocation, new sidewalks, bike lanes and enhanced transit stops. Bulb-outs at intersections decrease crossing distance for pedestrians. Transportation studies have shown that Piedmont Avenue has excess vehicular capacity making it an ideal candidate for a “road diet” (narrowing road width to become leaner, safer and more efficient). Converting one lane into an on-street parking lane would provide traffic calming and increase the perception of pedestrian safety. In addition, on-street parking will help support existing retail at Piedmont and Linden Avenue and encourage future retail establishments along the corridor. Intersection improvements with redesign for pedestrian crossings and signal efficiency would be required at Piedmont and Ralph McGill Boulevard.

### **Recommendations:**

- Provide streetscape improvements along Piedmont Avenue.
- Provide intersection improvements at Piedmont at Ralph McGill Boulevard.
- Create a lane for on-street parking along Piedmont.

## **2.6 Corridor Development Program**

The JSA-McGill LCI Corridor Development Program provides summary information regarding each land use initiative including:

- Approximate acres of development and redevelopment
- Approximate number of residential units
- Expected residential density
- Amount of retail and commercial square footage
- Amount of new office space
- Complementary transportation improvements
- Necessary regulatory changes

The information included in the corridor development program leads to the 25-year population and employment projections in Section 3.0 Action Plan

In total, the JSA-McGill LCI Plan includes:

- Approximately 4,710 proposed residential units
- Approximately 250,625 square feet of new retail / commercial establishments
- Approximately 2,223,725 square feet of new office space

Table 2.1: Corridor Development Program

CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM										
District	Proposed Residential Units	Proposed Retail Area (sq.ft.)	Proposed Office Space (sq.ft.)	Live/Work (sq.ft.)	Proposed # of Hotel Rooms	Proposed School (sq.ft.)	Proposed Number of Private Parking Spaces	Proposed Number of Public Parking Spaces	Convention Space*	Projects
<b>A. GWCC</b>			125,000		500		8,000		1,383,000	
Short-Term Projects										
Mid-Term Projects										
Long-Term Projects										Phase V Mall
<b>B. Aquarium/Marieita</b>	155	16,000		131			401			Marieita-JSA Plaza, Luckie St. Improvements JSA Linear Plaza
Short-Term Projects										
Mid-Term Projects										
Long-Term Projects										
<b>C. The Village</b>	3,214	117,000	1,992,500				6,556	3,004		Spring-COP Plaza, COP Drive/Williams St. Improvements, Simpson-W. P-tree Streetscape Reconfiguration of I-57/85, Baker/Harris two-way, Municipal Pkg. Expanded Mayor's Park, Baker PATH Project
Short-Term Projects										
Mid-Term Projects										
Long-Term Projects					200	167,000	3,277			
<b>D. SoNo</b>	1,314	117,625	106,225							
Short-Term Projects										
Mid-Term Projects										
Long-Term Projects										
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4,683</b>	<b>250,625</b>	<b>2,223,725</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>167,000</b>	<b>18,234</b>	<b>3,004</b>	<b>1,383,000</b>	<b>Civic Center Plaza Piedmont Improvements</b>

\* Includes Exhibit Space (500,000 sq.ft.), Meeting Rooms (90,000 sq.ft.), Ballroom (43,000 sq.ft.) and Business Center (up to 750,000 sq.ft.)