

Highway 20 Corridor Study

Introduction

Highway 20 (Hwy 20), also known as State Route 20, travels through the state of Georgia from the Alabama state line in Floyd County to its interchange with Lower Woolsey Road southwest of Henry County. Sugar Hill's portion of the Hwy 20 corridor spans from the Chattahoochee River to its intersection with Buford Highway and passes through Downtown Sugar Hill. This well-traveled corridor provides access to many important regional amenities and transportation networks. It connects Sugar Hill to other cities such as Buford, Lawrenceville and Cumming as well as Gwinnett County's airport Briscoe Field and regional retail shopping at the Mall of Georgia. In addition, Hwy 20 connects Sugar Hill to several other major regional commuter corridors such as State Route 316, I-85, I-985, Satellite Boulevard, Buford Highway, Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (PIB), Suwanee Dam Road and Georgia 400, acting as a major transportation spine for the City of Sugar Hill.

Hwy 20 accommodates the highest number of vehicle trips of all the city's major roadways. The recent capacity and streetscape improvements carried out by the State of Georgia and Gwinnett County, coupled with the city's strong population and household growth, has significantly improved the development potential of properties along the corridor. As such, we are seeing increased interest in area development.

The purpose of this study is to analyze existing conditions along or near the corridor as well as the dynamic issues influencing development patterns. The Highway 20 corridor is important to the city's community, economic and downtown development efforts. In addition to being the largest, by traffic counts, of any road in Sugar Hill, it will also serve as a spine to provide both pedestrian and bike connectivity to parks, neighborhoods and the planned Sugar Hill Greenway. Of utmost importance is protecting and enhancing the visual characteristics of the corridor.

Vision

- Create a parkway-like setting
- Enhance streetscape and landscaping
- Cultivate a safe and inviting pedestrian experience
- Promote an appropriate mix of land uses
- Capitalize on high traffic counts

First Public Meeting

Earlier this year we conducted an initial public meeting to involve nearby residents and landowners in the existing conditions analysis and visioning process. The meeting was led by our planning consultant TSW and was facilitated by assistance from city planning staff and Bleakly Advisory Group. Three exercises were conducted after an introduction presentation by TSW.

The first exercise asked participants to identify preferred locations for townhome, senior / multifamily, commercial and office land uses. The results from this exercise show that

townhome and senior/multifamily residential is most-desired within the downtown area with some residential desired near the river. Office was recommended to be interspersed between downtown and Suwanee Dam Road. Commercial was distributed in three loose clusters centered at Suwanee Dam Road, Bailey Avenue and Sycamore Road intersections.

The second exercise asked participants to provide input on their preferences for land use, parks and open space as well as connectivity. Although the land use objective was to determine a preference between auto-oriented and pedestrian-oriented development, some of the choices seem to indicate a greater concern over ‘character’ versus site configuration. This suggests that building design guidelines may deserve at least equal emphasis with the relationship of buildings and parking to the street. The results for parks and open space indicate a preference for less programmed, less intensively-developed park spaces and less structured more naturalized green space. The results for connectivity show more of an emphasis on walking and leisure (i.e. sidewalks) with less emphasis on bicycling, particularly on-street bike facilities.

The third exercise involved participants in small group discussions centered around four character nodes. Each group summarized their discussion for the collective group.

Node #1: Area between Chattahoochee River and Suwanee Dam Road.

This group considered the future path of the Sugar Hill Greenway tying into the regional trail along the river, discussed potential for institutional and commercial uses between the highway and the golf course and contemplated emphasis on greenspace and recreation in general. Other topics considered were the possible reconfiguration of part of the golf course and encouraging family-oriented natural recreation and associated retail opportunities.

Node #2: Area between Suwanee Dam Road and Future Park site.

This group preferred a parkway like design with future trail connections, large sidewalks and benches using Peachtree Parkway in Johns Creek as an example. Participants expressed a desire toward conservation where possible; more casual dining restaurants; shops connected to neighborhoods and additional senior oriented communities. Other land use preferences included: opportunities for medical (imaging) office, new residential or quiet uses across from Marketplace at Sugar Hill and new lake and recreation-oriented retail.

The group expressed dissatisfaction for existing congestion at Suwanee Dam Road, car dealerships, preponderance of fast food, rental housing and large garden-style apartment complexes.

Node #3: Area between Future Park site and Downtown Sugar Hill.

This group recommends better bike infrastructure, more trails, wider sidewalks, appropriate buffers, underground utilities, mixed use “park once” development between Sugar Ridge Drive and Arbor View Way. Other land use opportunities discussed: planetarium, children’s museum, bike shop, “mom & pop” retail, and additional medical uses. This group also discussed steep-slopes as a potential development constraint.

Node #4: Downtown

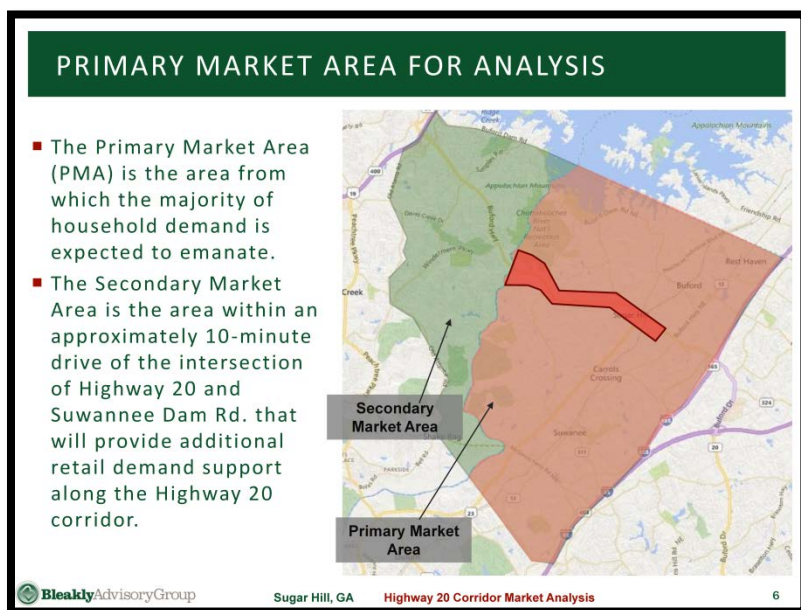
This group found that higher density is most appropriate in or near downtown. “The higher the density, the fresher the donuts” was a phrase used to describe this type development. Small lot residential, townhouses and apartments are most appropriate in this node. The group discussed: Avalon as a possible model for walkable development; demand for additional medical/office/restaurant locations; potential locations for a grocery store; upcoming senior living projects; upgraded pedestrian crossing or pedestrian bridge at Hillcrest or Temple.

Market Analysis – Bleakly Advisory Group (BAG)

Summary

This real estate market analysis assesses future development opportunities along the Hwy 20 corridor from the Chattahoochee River to Buford Highway (Hwy 23). The development market is poised to undergo significant growth due to population and household growth as well as the recent road improvements and significant “sea-changing” downtown city investments. Further development along the corridor can complement downtown development but this analysis excludes conclusions regarding feasibility of current and future downtown development. BAG recommends diversifying character by allowing for a mix of uses, including housing and a blend of housing types, pruning back retail zoned land, pulsing development in activity nodes, creating an experience of arrival...a unique sense of place.

Primary and Secondary Market Area



Future Real Estate Demand

FUTURE REAL ESTATE DEMAND

- The Hwy. 20 Corridor's future real estate demand potential by land use is shown below.
- These estimates are based on analyzing historic and future supply and demand conditions and do not take into account other factors that impact the likelihood of development such as zoning, development costs, local appetite for growth, unknowable national/international economic trends, etc.
- These future potential demand estimates do not include the potential demand for the immediate downtown Sugar Hill area along Broad Street.

| Demand Potential | Owner Residential (Units) | Owner Senior (Units) | Rental Residential (Units) | Rental Senior (Units) | Retail (Sq. Feet) | Office* (Sq. Feet) |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Annual | 176 | 42 | 200-210 | 70-75 | 20,000 |
| 5-Year | 880 | 210 | 600-650** | 350-375 | 100,000 | 125,000 |

| Potential Development Timeline | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| | Owner Single-family | 123 | 123 | 123 | 123 | 123 |
| Owner Townhome | 53 | 53 | 53 | 53 | 53 | 265 |
| Owner Senior Single-family | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 145 |
| Owner Senior Townhome | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 65 |
| Rental Residential** | 100 | 100 | 200 | 100 | 100 | 600 |
| Rental Senior | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 350 |
| Retail (Sq. Feet) | | | 50,000 | 50,000 | | 100,000 |
| Office (Sq. Feet) | | | | 62,500 | 62,500 | 125,000 |

The analysis used to derive these future demand estimates is detailed later in this report.

*Includes local-serving office and medical office/facilities.

**Assumes 100 units of market rate absorption annually, and an additional 100 affordable units absorbed over the 5-year period.

Source: Bleakly Advisory Group

Land Use Framework Plan

Our planning consultant TSW produced a framework plan of potential land use designations in consideration of a proper mix of uses relative to the market analysis performed by BAG. A summary of those land use categories follows:

Low Density Residential – Detached single family homes on relatively larger lots (15,000 square foot lots or larger).

Medium Density Residential – Detached single family homes on medium lots (10,000 square foot lots or larger).

High Density Residential – A mix of different smaller-scale housing types seen in historic in-town residential neighborhoods including detached single-family homes on 5,000 square foot lots, townhomes, duplexes, and cottage courts (small detached single family homes around a common court).

Multi-Family –A mix of different housing types that include townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, multiplexes up to eight units, courtyard apartments, cottage courts, live-work units, and multi-family buildings of nine or more units. These are most suited for areas adjacent to commercial nodes where multiple transportation options are present or possible.

Low-density mixed use - A mix of residential, retail, and office uses that is only two-stories in height. It does not allow single-family detached or multi-family buildings but townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, cottage court, and live-work units are permitted. This is the beginning state of a walkable node.

Medium Density Mixed-use – A slightly more intense mix of residential, retail, and office uses that can reach up to three stories in height. This includes most residential types, with the exception of single-family detached homes and multi-family buildings with nine or more units (with the exception of senior multi-family buildings). These areas are incrementally more vibrant than the ‘starter’ low-density mixed-use node and should have more visitors and business as a result.

High Density Mixed-use - A robust mix of residential, retail, and office uses reaching a height of three stories, but permitting a special exception for taller construction. The special exception could be granted for context-sensitive mixed-use designs that would require additional stories to be economically viable. This is the most intense land use category proposed and includes all housing types except single-family detached. These areas will become the most intensive and vibrant nodes in the community.

[Link to full resolution land use framework plan.](#)

TSW Design Framework Plan

The SR20 corridor is envisioned as a parkway equally inviting to pedestrians and cyclists as to motorists. The parkway will be characterized by high quality landscapes and public/semi-public spaces located strategically along its length, in addition to integrated mixed-use nodes of activity that are supported by the surrounding residential development.

One key element of the study is a recommendation to incorporate a comprehensive trail system. This includes a proposed north-south trail to connect to the proposed perimeter loop trail, as well as a possible enhanced trail route along the edge of the SR20 corridor. The new north-south trail system would intersect with the corridor at the proposed park and signalized street crossing at Sugar Ridge

Drive. The study does not give specific recommendations for a path. Rather, it only identifies potential connecting points within the study area.

Another significant recommendation proposed by TSW is a 100 foot landscape enhancement zone to establish the desired parkway character and create a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape environment. This zone will also provide other enhancements such as street lighting and furniture as well as some of the right-of-way for a connected trail network. The trail and other improvements should be installed incrementally, to city standards, as parcels are developed. Where possible, this trail would be achieved by widening the existing GDOT sidewalk; however, the city may consider policies for dedication and in-lieu fees. The trail would follow the path of SR 20 to the extent feasible, meandering away from the highway as necessary with redevelopment to provide a continuous multi-use route between individual nodes along the highway as well as to any larger residential developments along the way.

There are four main nodes along the corridor (see [node map](#)), each having a slightly different character.

Node 1 is an area just east of the Chattahoochee River. The area closest to the river is predominantly undeveloped, and should remain largely as is with some limited development at the first median crossing to leverage the cultural, ecological and market value there. Suitability analysis should precede any development as a limited area will be useable for institutional, hospitality, residential, office, or outdoor recreation in a clustered conservation or low impact development configuration. This carefully regulated development will preserve relatively undisturbed areas, but still allow for context-sensitive development that respects the natural character of the area.

Node 2 occurs at the intersection with Suwannee Dam Road and represents the most commercial-intensive aspect of the corridor. A mix of uses, including higher-density housing options, are proposed around the existing shopping centers, to improve support for retail and allow for a transition from surrounding lower-density housing to a more walkable environment. In response to concerns expressed by residents that traffic is an issue, the proposed infill housing focuses more on senior oriented facilities.

Node 3 is near the intersection of Sugar Ridge Drive and the potential north-south trail connector. Sugar Ridge Drive is one of the few street connections to downtown Sugar Hill, and has the potential to evolve over time to have a more compact, walkable development pattern. The trail connection and park are potential drivers of growth and development interest in this area. Proposed development at this node is small scale and responsive to the park and potential trails, with a limited amount of mixed-use nearby to cater to visitors as well as residents.

Node 4 is the gateway area around downtown, which should feature an emphasis on higher density and walkability in order to support downtown's viability and to create more vibrant uses along its edges. Downtown is the main feature, but the corridor plan proposes to extend the mixed-use, livable fabric of downtown to the surrounding areas where it makes sense, which includes portions of SR20.

To extend the walkable zone around downtown, along both sides of the corridor, improved pedestrian crossings are suggested at several points along its length as noted on the Framework Plan. These

crossings occur at the logical centers of nodes or at intersections of important roads. The Urban Design Map indicates where the previous trail master plan called for pedestrian bridges across the highway. We have included the notation “or Upgraded Crossing”, recognizing that pedestrian bridges are quite costly, and that a satisfactory crossing may be achievable with upgraded pedestrian signalization and road design at a much lower cost.

[Link to full resolution urban design framework plan.](#)