

1. Background & Introduction



1.1 INTRODUCTION

This Downtown Master Plan is a major update to the Sugar Hill Town Center Master Plan completed in 2005. Although the old master plan was not funded through the LCI (Livable Centers Initiative) grant by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), it met the goals and objectives for both the ARC LCI guidelines and the City of Sugar Hill. When the LCI program was formalized, the old master plan was grandfathered and recognized as an official LCI area. In February 2017, the city was awarded an LCI study grant to update the 2005 master plan to establish updated goals for downtown growth and to ensure that the development regulations align with the updated LCI plan.

This plan is not only designed to comply with the intent of the LCI goals but also to respond to the evolution of downtown Sugar Hill over the last decade. The master plan process provides a unique opportunity to take stock, assess and connect the incredible successes the City has achieved in planning and building a vibrant downtown future. Since the completion of the new City Hall in 2014, the downtown landscape has significantly changed. In a short time period, the real estate dynamics and user experiences have fundamentally transformed the once suburban “downtown” into an urban place. The City has successfully created a downtown core with efforts like the iconic Bowl, the City Hall, West Broad streetscape, the Splash Pad and the E Center. The next generation of the core will further expand with transformative public-private development such as the Broadstone a residential-commercial mixed use project by Alliance Residential Company, and Dogwood Forest a senior residential assisted living and memory care facility by Solomon Development Services. The intent of the master plan update is to build on the spirit of “think BIG” and to create a vision for future growth opportunities beyond the core, improve



connectivity and enhance the quality of life throughout downtown in the next 10-15 years. The master plan focused on answering the following questions:

- How can we fully integrate and connect all the planning efforts in a cohesive master plan?
- While the Downtown Core is mostly planned, which area is ripe for the next wave of development?
- What are the future land use and density strategies for the expansion areas?
- What are the mobility options and strategies to connect the Downtown Core with the expansion areas?
- Are there housing types missing in the changing demographics?
- Is there potential to attract jobs and economic development?
- How can Downtown build on art, history, and cultural resources?

1.2 LCI AREA CONTEXT

The LCI area boundary is same as the old master plan with approximately 520 acres around the intersection of Highway 20 and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (PIB). The downtown study area includes a number of community assets: City Hall, The Bowl, Dawn P Community Plaza Splash Park, E Center, West Broad Street streetscape, Sugar Hill Church, Historic Sugar Hill Cemetery, older residential neighborhoods along Whitehead Road and Level Creek Road, and heavy tree canopy. Additionally, the downtown and the City as a whole have many strengths such as the City’s commitment and leadership, community support for progressive growth strategies, development character and vibrancy in the downtown core, events, youth program, small-town feel, sense of community, southern-style living, and high performing schools. Despite so many assets and strengths, downtown has several challenges that need to be addressed. With high visibility and accessibility from Highway 20 and PIB, the heavy traffic on both corridors comes with connectivity issues. Both corridors are physical barriers bisecting downtown into four quadrants. The quadrants are further divided by the railroad and a power easement on the east side. Collectively these barriers create perceived edges that inhibit growth and connectivity. This plan seeks to define strategies to help bridge those divides in the effort to create a larger, more connected downtown core.



FIG. 1: CONTEXT MAP

1.3 PLANNING PROCESS

The Downtown Master Plan planning process started in Fall 2017 and it was organized around three phases over a seven-month period.

Phase 1: Inventory and Assessment

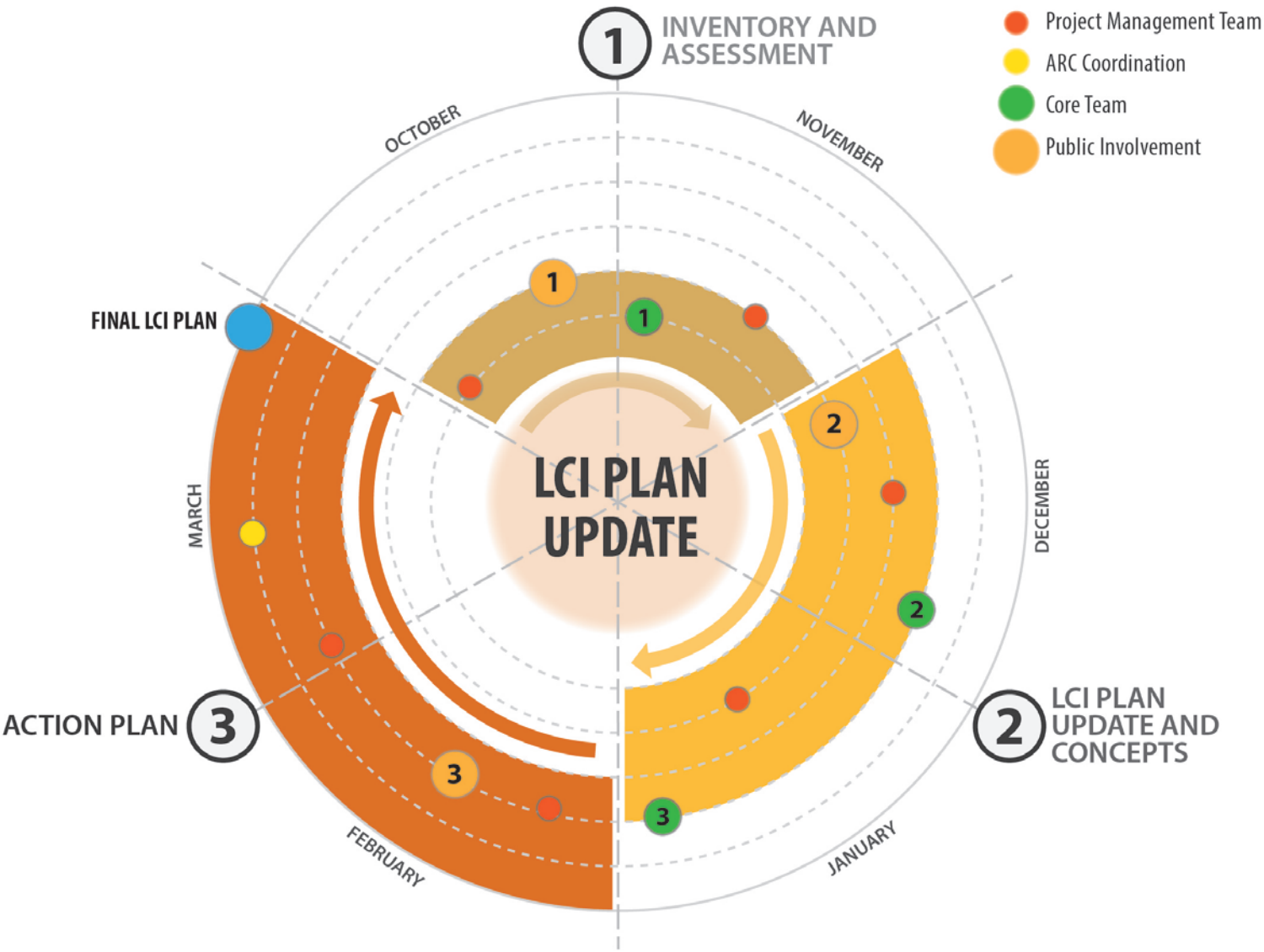
Considering this LCI plan is a major update to the previous downtown master plan and the city has completed several planning efforts, the first phase focused on gathering data and recommendations from the completed studies and validating the information from the city staff and stakeholders. In addition to preparing a thorough assessment of existing conditions, the planning team engaged the community to collect preliminary input on the future vision for downtown. The consolidated summary of stakeholder input through interviews, focus group meetings, an online survey, and public workshops led to preparing a comprehensive list of issues, needs, and opportunities for downtown. This phase also required taking a closer look at the changing demographics and market trends based on the large development projects planned in the downtown core (E Center, Broadstone, and Dogwood Forest).

Phase 2: LCI Plan Update and Concepts

Using the baseline assessment of the existing downtown and initial community engagement from the first phase, the planning team focused on developing framework plans and concepts for the future growth of downtown. Based on the community needs identified in the survey, stakeholder input, and market analysis, a series of urban design concepts were prepared for mobility improvements, development scenarios, and open space enhancements. The concepts were validated and refined through interactive planning exercises at community workshops. The results of the activities led to creating future growth strategies based on the common theme of “dream big and think long-term.” The LCI Plan Update specifically focused on expanding the existing core within the 5-min, 10-min, and 15-min walking areas with a variety development type, density, and characteristics. In terms of mobility improvements, traffic calming, intersection improvements, and pedestrian & bike infrastructure are key to transforming the once car-oriented suburban community into a walkable downtown. The planning team used 3D models, photo-realistic renderings, illustrative sketches, and street sections to help demonstrate the community vision for the future growth and evolution of downtown.

Phase 3: Action Plan

After receiving final comments from the core team, city staff, and the community on the framework plans, design concepts, and planning strategies, the final phase focused on compiling a list of projects as part of the Action Plan. Building on the other planning efforts, the LCI Plan Update provides recommendations for specific transportation projects for pedestrian and bike infrastructure, new streets, and intersection improvements. The future land use plan of the LCI area lists development strategies and potential policy and regulatory changes needed to further the future vision. The projects are organized into short-term (5-year) and long-term (10-20 year) initiatives. The project list was reviewed by the planning team, city staff, and the Atlanta Regional Commission to ensure project feasibility, build partnerships, and identify short-term funding opportunities. The planning process concluded with final input from the project core team, city staff, and community stakeholders. The final plan will be adopted by City Council and will serve as part of their future growth policy for downtown Sugar Hill.



PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SCHEDULE

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| 1 Public Kick-Off Meeting
October 21, 2017, 11 am - 5 pm
<i>Issues, Opportunities and Vision</i> | 1 Core Team Meeting #1
November 1, 2017, 6 pm - 7:30 pm
<i>Preliminary Vision and Stakeholder Input Summary</i> |
| 2 Public Workshop
December 6, 2017, 6 pm - 7:30 pm
<i>Development and Mobility Concepts</i> | 2 Core Team Meeting #2
December 21, 2017, 6 pm - 7:30 pm
<i>Draft Framework Plans</i> |
| 3 Public Open House
February 15, 2018, 4:30 pm - 7:30 pm
<i>Framework Plans, Strategies, and Priorities</i> | 3 Core Team Meeting #3
January 24, 2018, 6 pm - 7:30 pm
<i>Refined Framework Plans and Design Concepts</i> |