

# Livable Center Initiative 2015- 2<sup>nd</sup> Five Year Plan Update

Highway 78 Corridor Study - Previously updated: September 2010

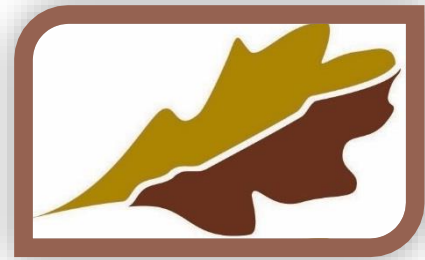


Evermore Community Improvement District  
5525 Bermuda Road  
Stone Mountain GA 30087  
June 2015  
[www.evermorecid.org](http://www.evermorecid.org)

## Board and Staff

The Evermore Community Improvement District (CID) is comprised of an 8 member Board of Directors. Each year property owners elect members to serve, and one appointment each is made by Gwinnett County and the City of Snellville.

Staff is comprised of the Executive Director and Executive Assistant.



## Staff

Jim Brooks, Executive Director

Amanda Soesbe, Executive Assistant

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chris Garner, Chairman

Ron Harrison, Vice Chairman

Thomas Carraway - Post 1

Brad Williams – Post 2

Dwight Harrison – Post 5

Warren Auld – Post 6

Stacy Patterson – Gwinnett County Appointee

Callie Andrews – City of Snellville Appointee

Bill Gower, Secretary / Treasurer

## Contents

Board and Staff.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Definition of the Study Area .....	4
Recommendations.....	5
Transportation.....	6
Transportation Accomplishments .....	7
Housing.....	10
Building and Design .....	11
Other Initiatives / Land Use.....	12
Economic Development .....	13
Maps & Photos .....	17

## Introduction

### Overview

In 2004, the Evermore Community Improvement District received funding from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Livable Center Initiative (LCI) Program to enhance livability and mobility along the Highway 78 corridor.

As a requirement of the program, agencies are required to revisit LCI plans every five years, and evaluate and update plans and progress made towards goals set forth in the original plan.

A five year update was completed in 2010, which illustrated previous actions and accomplishments, as well as, those actions which were not implemented or completed.

As required, this report and update will contain an Evaluation and Appraisals report, which will outline completed actions, infrastructure improvements, new development, and current initiatives.

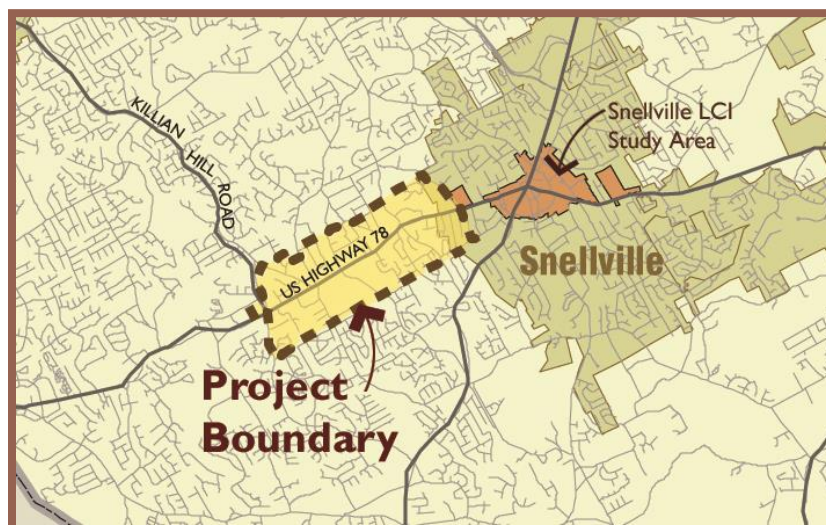


## Definition of the Study Area

The Study Area is located in the southern portion of Gwinnett County, Georgia on US Highway 78 (also called Stone Mountain Highway) between the cities of Snellville and Stone Mountain. The Study Area includes approximately 2.4 miles of the corridor, from just southwest of Killian Hill Road at Ross Road to McGee Road and extends approximately a quarter mile on either side of the Highway. The majority of the study area is located in unincorporated Gwinnett County, with a small portion on the northeast side of the corridor located within the city limits of Snellville.

The study area is characterized primarily by retail development along Highway 78 surrounded by residential development, of mostly single family homes. Generally, the retail is located in small strip centers or “stand alone” buildings. The study area included a small number of non-retail commercial uses, primarily offices for local professional services and flex space for locally owned and operated businesses. The residential component of the area includes single family homes as well as apartment complexes, townhomes and a series of small groupings of attached homes that are primarily rental units. However, most of the residential is bordering the study area and not contained within it.

The map below illustrates the study area boundary.



## Recommendations

The study area is located along a well-traveled and increasingly congested route between two established nodes of activity: Snellville and Park Place, near Stone Mountain.

Initially, the Highway 78 Corridor Study suggested that the Evermore CID would be able focus on three trends on which to capitalize:

- An increasing demand for housing.
- The fact that the study area is located on a major transportation artery that is relatively close to economic centers, and is a desirable location in the metro area.
- The growth of the area which could in turn stimulate investment by playing off efforts to create a destination in the corridor that would create a sense of community and place.

Overall recommendations of the study to revitalize the area were divided into three primary categories from which subcategories were developed:

- Transportation
- Housing
- Other Initiatives / Land Use

## Transportation

Transportation recommendations included a range of projects that were designed to improve mobility and safety while accommodating redevelopment efforts along the LCI corridor. Among the most critical were the removal of the reversible lanes, widening and median projects.

Transportation projects within the five year plan and subsequent update reflected a variety of project types. Key initiatives included the following:

- Interparcel access
- Intersection Improvements & Roadway Construction
- Safety
- Public Transportation
- Pedestrian / Bicycle / Multi-Use Paths
- Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

## Transportation Accomplishments

The overall execution of the original Five Year Implementation Plan has proceeded as expected. Some delays were created during the economic downturn, however; those were primarily the result of a lack in federal and state funding, integral to the realization of CID's transportation goals.

Of the successes which have made the most significant impact is the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Highway 78 Median Project. With the removal of the reversible lanes, addition of medians and sidewalks, safety has greatly improved along the corridor which sees approximately 75,000 vehicles per day. With the implementation of the Intelligent Transportation Signalization (ITS) network, key intersections are experiencing a reduction in congestion and intersection wait times. The ITS installation is complete in both the East and West directions of Highway 78, to include the Park Place area. Additionally, ramp meters have been installed at the West Bound entrance ramp onto Highway 78, and have significantly impacted congestion entering the Highway during peak travel times.

Vertical realignments at key nodes have also played a major part in the successful implementation of transportation improvements along Highway 78. Highpoint Road, Walton Court and McGee Cambridge have all experienced significant improvements. An additional project resulting from these successes is Evermore North Boulevard. This new collector road, will be developed in conjunction with the improvements to Walton Court/Old US Highway 78.

The Walton Court realignment and intersection project was a concept born of the original 2005 LCI study. Once complete the project will create a properly aligned intersection to include new signalization, roadway, curb/gutter, and five foot sidewalks. Currently in the final stages of Right Of Way acquisition, this project is slated for completion in early 2016.

Immediately adjacent, Evermore North Boulevard will continue the 4.5 mile collector road system. Beginning at the terminus of Walton Court, and coming across Highpoint Road, the road will terminate at Britt Drive. This new roadway will feature a roundabout intersection on Highpoint Road, new roadbed, curb/gutter, and five foot sidewalks.

The McGee Cambridge realignment was critical to revitalizing a former big box vacancy. In 2011, just after the intersection was complete, Wal-Mart purchased the distressed southwest corner along Highway 78, and developed the first Wal-Mart Neighborhood Grocery. Without the improvement, that opportunity could have been lost to another community.

In fact, these transportation improvements have led to other successes in economic development. Deceleration lanes, curb cuts, median brakes and sidewalks all contribute to the connectivity and ease of travel along Highway 78. These and other improvements have resulted in a corridor with no big box vacancies, and very few undeveloped parcels.

Another key transportation project of the Evermore CID is the Hewatt Road to Britt Drive collector road. This project is designed to improve mobility, safety, and connectivity, while reducing traffic

on Highway 78. The proposed project would begin approximately 430 feet north of the intersection with SR 10/US 78 and Hewatt Road and would proceed east on new roadway alignment for approximately 0.91 miles to terminate at Britt Drive.

The Hewatt to Britt Collector, scheduled for completion in 2017, will combine the Wentz-Reeves access project (between Parkwood Road and Westside Court), the Interparcel Access from Country Walk to Hewatt Road and the Interparcel Access east of Westside Court.

As part of an overall communication strategy for the Hewatt to Britt Connector, PIOH were held on in 2008, 2011 and 2014 which resulted in further directives to remove the planned sidewalks from the residential side of the proposed connector street and replace the sidewalks with a screening buffer that will be landscaped by Evermore CID after the roadway construction is completed. The intersection of the connector street with Parkwood Road was moved approximately 200 feet to the south to provide adequate sight distance for turning vehicles onto Parkwood Road. This change has necessitated the lowering of the crest of Parkwood Road, which has lowered the roadway by 10ft., and has added \$800,000 to the project cost. The connector street from Parkwood to Britt was modified to utilize Westside Court so that the landscape buffer between the residential properties and commercial development can be maintained. An easement is needed within the landscape buffer to construct a wall along the roadway. The proposed connector street will not be in the landscape buffer and vegetation will be restored once construction of the wall is completed.

Throughout these transportation projects, the leadership within the Evermore CID has developed a very strong working relationship with the Georgia Department of Transportation, Gwinnett Department of Transportation, the State Road and Tollway Authority, and The Atlanta Regional Commission. In all instances of the transportation projects mentioned above, these agencies have been our key partners. We will continue to strengthen and foster these relationships as we move forward.

Another key partnership of the Evermore CID is with Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA). At the time of this LCI study, Gwinnett Transit did not have bus routes planned for Highway 78 due to a concern that there would not be sufficient population density to generate ridership demand. However, discussions between Evermore CID and GRTA led to the inclusion of Highway 78 as part of GRTA's Express Bus System. Currently, Express Bus sites are functioning at the intersection of Oakland Park Blvd Road and Hewatt Road, East Park Place and Highway 78, and a select stop in Snellville. Ridership of these three stop is approximately 144,000 boardings per year.

Another aid in mobility is the Yellow River Pedestrian Bridge. This pedestrian bridge would allow access to the proposed Yellow River Scenic Trail. We are currently in discussions with Gwinnett County Community Services and adjacent property owners with regards to continuing the development of the Yellow River Scenic Bridge and trail concept.

A project just to the east of the study boundary is the Displaced Left –Turn Interchange at Highway 78 & Highway 124 in Snellville.

A first of its kind in Georgia, this GDOT project consists of redesigning the intersection to improve traffic flow and to speed left turn activity onto Highway 124. A PIOH was held with community stakeholders, and received a favorable response. The project has cleared the NEPA process and preliminary Right of Way work has begun. Construction will likely occur in 2017 and is anticipated to be open to traffic in 2018.

The Scenic Drive multi-use trail has been removed from implementation plans due to funding.

## Housing

Housing related recommendations focused on protecting existing single-family neighborhoods and supporting new opportunities for mixed housing at higher densities at specific nodes along the corridor. These include detached single-family homes, apartments, townhomes and detached rental housing. It was recommended that the CID assist with housing-related initiatives by working with the private sector to encourage new mixed-use opportunities that provide a range of housing types and by supporting future land use and zoning designations that protect single-family neighborhoods.

Presently three new housing developments have recently been completed or are in final stages of completion. Approximately 30 new townhomes have been developed under a Phase II plan at Brookwood Village on Highpoint Road. Consistent with the 2030 Unified Plan, and Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) prepared by Gwinnett County, this node is primarily a Regional Mixed Use (MU-R) district. The CID continues to work with the private sector to encourage new mixed-use development at this node, and to promote a range of housing options to compliment this designation.

Directly across from this node along Highway 78, is the Highland Park neighborhood. While only 56 home sites have been created, this exclusive townhome community boasts excellent amenities and quality construction.

Further along the corridor, at the western most study boundary, is the Paxton Lane townhome community. Situated behind the Killian Hill Market place, this development will similarly feature approximately 100 units, in a mixed medium design. Findings from the 2010 update support that this was a formerly abandoned development during the economic downturn. Overall revitalization efforts in this area however, support new housing and improvements.

As also reported in 2010, economic conditions had stalled developments in most all instances along the corridor also providing for very little demand for new housing. In the years since, this pattern has shifted as financial institutions have begun to lend to the residential markets, and efforts to create more housing opportunities have presented themselves in the current climate.

Moving forward we will continue to support and champion housing related recommendations and new opportunities for mixed use development. We will also continue our support of future land use and zoning designations which protect single family neighborhoods.

## Building & Design

In 2003 the CID championed to become one of six districts within the County to receive an Overlay District Designation, intended to enhance the viability and livability of the corridor through a series of guidelines on aesthetics, transportation, infrastructure, landscaping, architecture, parking, height and setback.

In recent years, Gwinnett County has put forth its comprehensive 2040 Unified Plan, as well as, the revision of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). This work has eliminated the need for the CID to be in an Overlay District, and in April 2015 the Gwinnett Board of Commissioners voted to set aside the designation for the CID.

## Other Initiatives / Land Use

In the 2010 update the CID reported on several other initiatives and land use. The following list updates the progress of those items.

- Support Revitalization Task Force Recommendation to Further Goals of the LCI Study.
  - Now called the Redevelopment Task Force – we continue to work closely with Partnership Gwinnett staff on redevelopment plans for the area.
  
- Allow a broader List of Building Materials in Design Standards
  
- Support Mixed Use Overlay for review on a case-by-case basis to allow for flexibility in building height
  
- Nodes should permit moderate density
  - The above efforts have been incorporated into the Gwinnett County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) and 2040 Gwinnett Unified Plan.
  
- Establish a communications program
  - We utilize a number of methods to distribute correspondence and information to the members of the CID and the community. Quarterly newsletters, constant contact emails, website and social media, regularly held board meetings and our annual report. The CID has also been featured in the **Atlanta Business Chronicle** and **Georgia Trend Magazine**.
  
- Investigate additional routine building maintenance code provisions on commercial properties
  
- Support Code Enforcement initiatives such as Operation “Broken Window”
  - Gwinnett County Codes Enforcement has continued to have a strong presence in the CID, and remains the best resource for eliminating blight, and providing enforcement of the County standards and guidelines. We enjoy a very strong and positive relationship with our local GCPD precinct.
  
- Encourage acquisition of DOT property for inclusion in Killian Hill Node Development.
  - A portion of this node improvement was formerly DOT property. Additionally, other DOT property across Highway 78 from this node has recently been put on the market.

- Implement a Banner Program
  - This item was implemented a number of years ago, and each node sees banners rotated seasonally.
  
- Create Destinations
  - We continue to partner with Gwinnett County and property owners to develop the Yellow River Greenway Plan.
  - We work closely with Stone Mountain Park to promote and support their efforts to maintain the park as a premiere Georgia destination.
  
- Concentrate Growth in Nodes
  - Each node in the Corridor has experienced some amount of growth and improvement in the last five years.

## Economic Development

Recognizing Highway 78 as a major transportation artery for those traveling to and from Atlanta, the Evermore has been successful in revitalizing itself as a major retail and commercial corridor. The CID recognized that during the period of economic instability in the US, property owners took the opportunity to rebrand or remodel, rather than relocate. To that end, the corridor is now reshaping itself again, to include removal of older, existing facilities.

### **In the last five years, successful revitalization efforts have included:**

An additional GRTA Xpress stop at East Park Place Blvd.

New one-of-a-kind Waffle House, located in a repurposed, former fast food restaurant

Tear down of an old Toyota dealership, which resulted in a two pronged improvement. A new Quick Trip Kitchen style operation has been erected on the old site. Additionally, this same parcel was subdivided, and a new Avis Rental car facility was added. The former Toyota dealer who had previously occupied the parcel, has relocated along the corridor to another empty dealership. That relocation saw a \$2.8M improvement to the existing facility, and a direct reinvestment in the corridor.

Sherwin Williams has completed work on a new 15,000s.f. building, conforming to all building and design standards included in the Gwinnett County UDO, and 2040 Unified Plan.

A former car dealership, which sat vacant for many years, has been upgraded and is currently home to a successful Hyundai dealership.

Two parcels which formerly housed a large scale motorcycle dealer and its riding school, were subdivided to good use. The largest of the two parcel has become home to a national Auto Body repair facility. The smaller of the two, and its open parking, facilitate a national RV dealer.

In 2010 we reported the status of an existing retail facility, located within the study area, and the loss of its anchor grocery store. Today that center has been backfilled by Burlington (formerly Burlington Coat Factory). With that addition the center also experienced an uptick in leasing, and is currently 85% full.

Also within the LCI study area, a former restaurant has been demolished and a state of the art medical facility will take its place. The new 20,000s.f. building will include an immediate care center, therapy services, and a diagnostic imaging center provided by Eastside Medical Center. The hospital will also make improvements to its existing facilities located in Snellville.

Bojangles also did a tear down of a former distressed restaurant, and has replaced it with a new building.

Wal-Mart has completed improvements to both of its stores along the corridor. The Wal-Mart Supercenter in the Park Place area has recently undergone a second series of improvements to include a new pharmacy and improved grocer section. The Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, a first of its kind in Georgia, has found much success at the redesigned intersection of McGee and Cambridge Roads in Snellville.

Neighborhood Cinema Group (NCG) purchased and upgraded a local movie theatre, which had struggled under previous ownership. In 2010, we reported the reopening of the once popular theatre. Just after our report, the owners shuttered the site, and it was left empty until 2014. NCG's strategy is to provide new ownership to local small theatres, and offer discount prices on first run movies, stadium seating and unlimited refills on concessions. This model appears to be a success in the Evermore Community.

The Park Place area contains 5 of the corridor's 9 hotels. Within the last five years each of these properties has been upgraded, remodeled and are seeing regular "sell-out" nights and weekends.

Two of the corridor's biggest transformations have taken place in the last year. A former retail plaza and home to the local Kroger, was demolished and a 65,000s.f. LA Fitness was constructed as the anchor tenant, which has revitalized the property. In addition to the new construction, the entire plaza was remodeled and upgraded to compliment the improvements. Spacemax Storage took a 176,000s.f. former retail store and has created a specialty indoor storage facility. In 2003, the former retail tenant had opted out of participation in the CID. Spacemax however, asked specifically to be included and reinforced its commitment to community participation. Both properties have included new construction which feature the design elements and standards set forth by Gwinnett County.

Also shaping the economic opportunity within the corridor, is the Georgia Department of Transportation's Athens to Atlanta Connectivity & Mobility study. The intent of the study is to improve travel between these two important metro areas, to plan for needed transportation infrastructure for new and existing employment centers, education facilities, and other activity centers within the study area, and to enhance safety for the traveling public.

As illustrated by the study, the Highway 78 corridor is within the highest concentration of use and activity. The study concludes that by 2040 daily VMT will increase by 56% resulting in significant delays to the traveling public. The location of future congestion indicates some key transportation improvements will be needed to accommodate future growth.

Evermore has participated in the stakeholder meetings and provided input on transportation improvements both planned and underway which contribute to the overall study efforts.

Current collector road projects aide in relieving congestion and choke points along Highway 78, and serve as an alternative to local traffic.

Lastly, in 2009, Evermore CID was awarded two of five Gwinnett County Tax Allocation Districts. In 2013 the County reset the values, and left in place, a most important economic development tool for the corridor.

The reset of the values was intended to realign property values with the current market to strengthen the potential for redevelopment under this designation.

Located in the Lake Lucerne and Park Place nodes, and given the right project, TADs could transform the respective areas. We continue to work closely with Gwinnett Planning and Development, as well as, Partnership Gwinnett to identify opportunities to utilize these incentives.

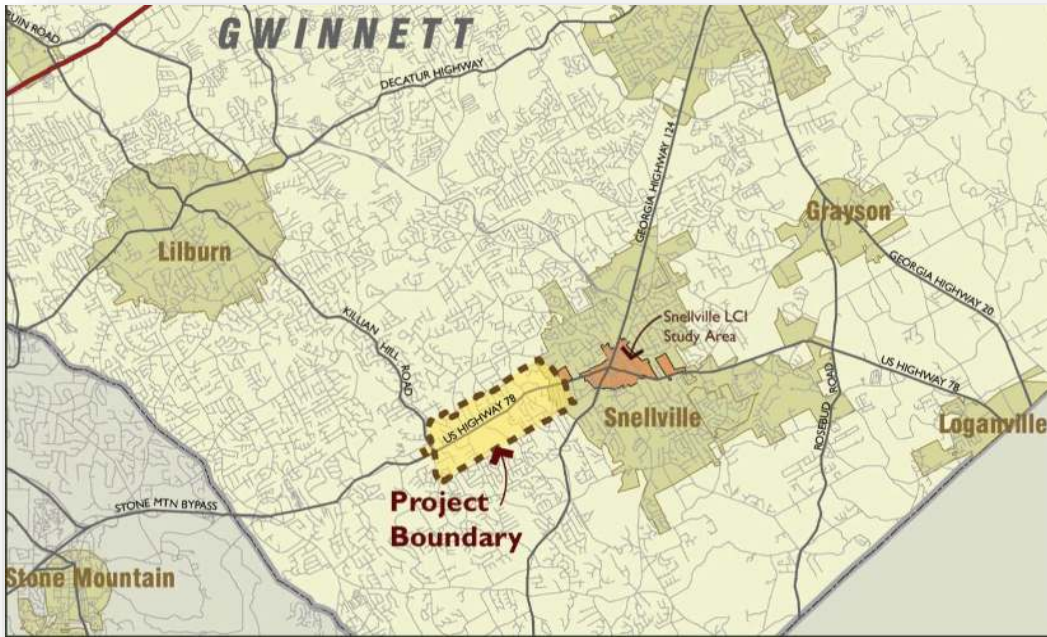
## Moving Forward

With our transportation projects advancing, and many economic improvements underway we will continue to seek opportunities to create meaningful and lasting change within the Evermore Corridor.

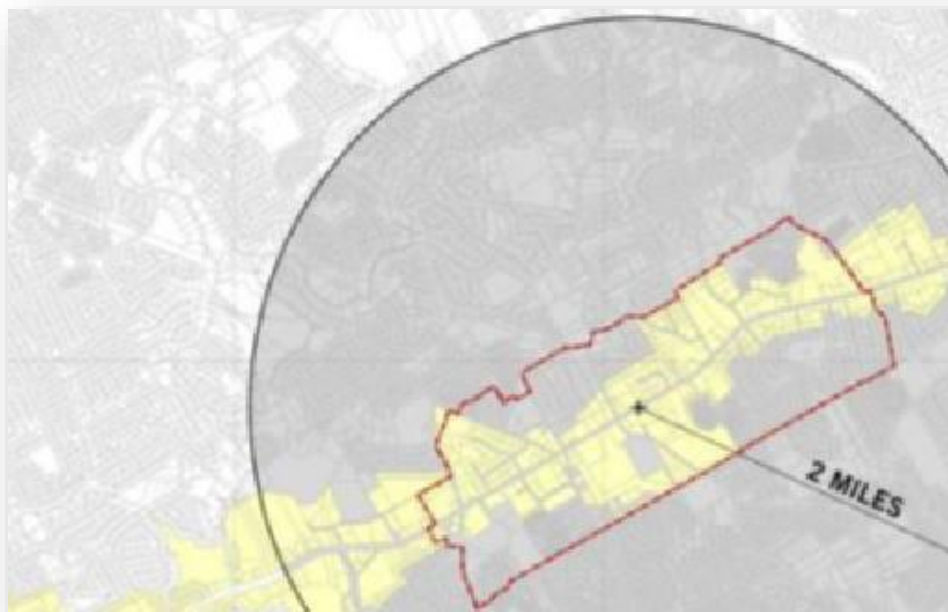
Our future plans include advancing additional goals of the 2005 LCI study while continuing to develop new initiatives to complement those already underway or complete.

## Study Area Maps

### Definition of 2005 LCI Study Area



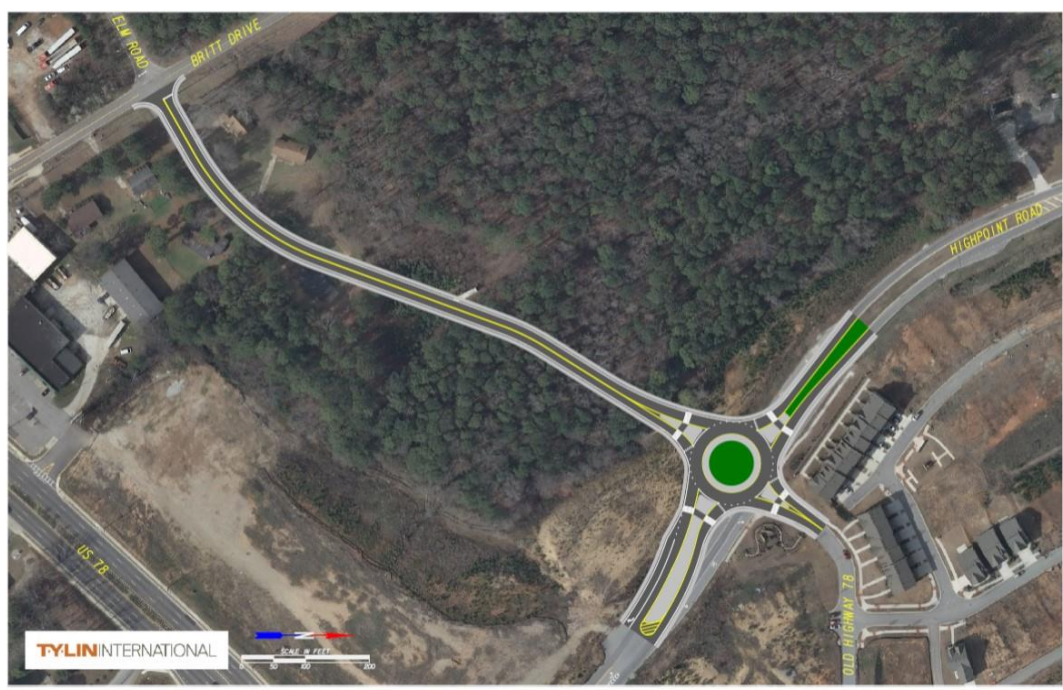
### 2005 LCI Study Area



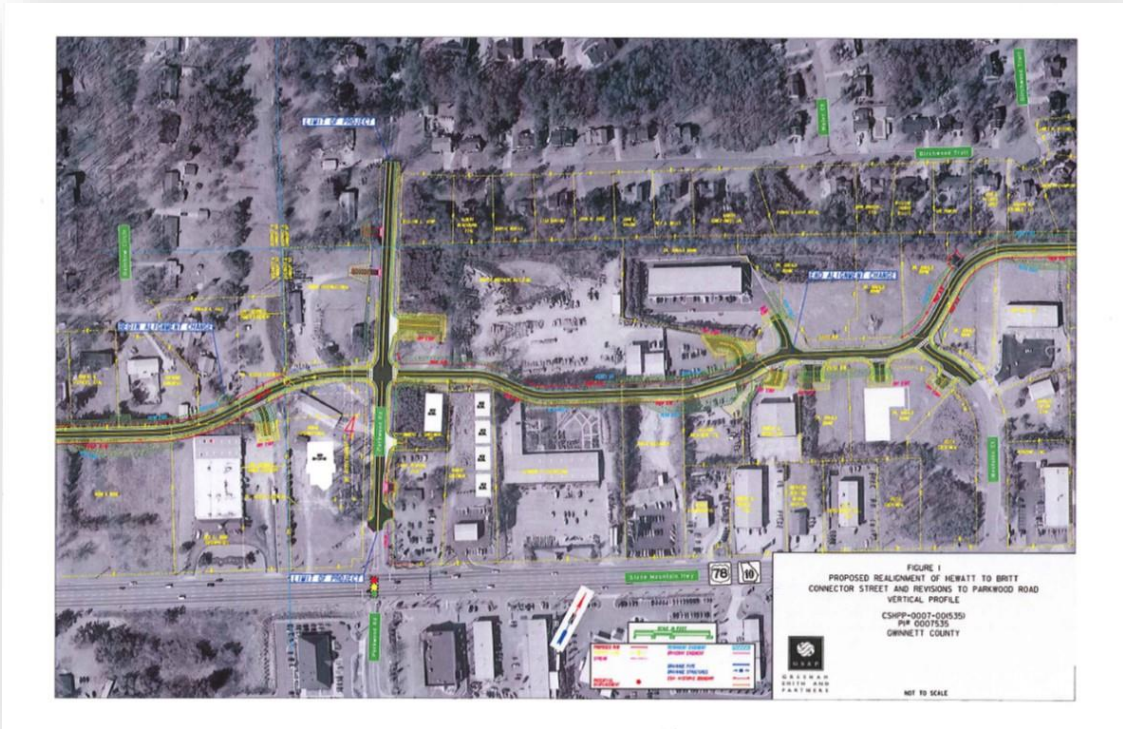
# Evermore Branding



### Evermore North Boulevard



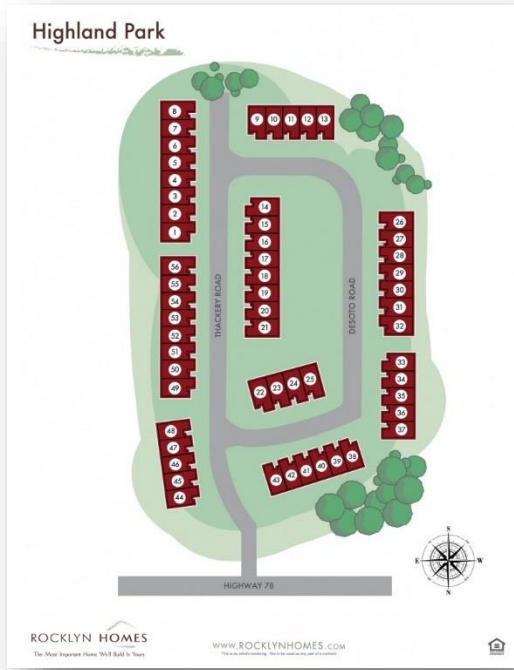
# Hewatt / Parkwood / Britt

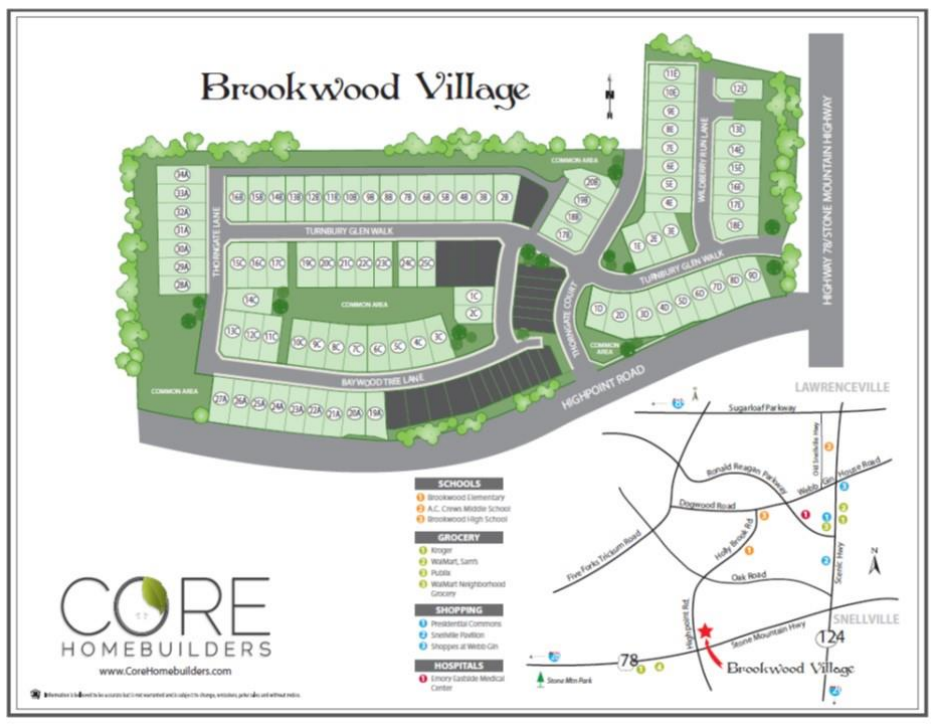


# Walton Court



# Housing







Redevelopment Progress

Stone Mountain Toyota – Before & After



**Former Kroger – Now LA Fitness - Before & After**



**Former Publix – Now New Concept Burlington**



**Former Empty Lot at McGee Cambridge Intersection –**  
**New Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market**



## Former Target – New SpaceMax Storage



## Former Toyota – Now QT Kitchen

## New Hyundai Dealership



Former Restaurant – Now Bojangles



Former Motorcycle Dealer – Now ABRA Body & Glass



**New Physicians Med Building Replacing former Restaurant**

