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## **Southside Market Report**

# **CIDs raise funds to improve Southside traffic**

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Fond of that diverging diamond in the Perimeter area? Love the new landscaping around the Lawrenceville square? Those types of improvements, ranging from the dramatic to the aesthetic, are often the results of business owners banding together to form a Community Improvement District (CID) — a defined area where nonresidential property owners tax themselves to fund improvement projects in their district. By capitalizing on the power of many working together, a CID can give owners the clout to apply for grants and matching funds from a variety of sources.

CIDs have proved so successful in areas such as the Perimeter, Lawrenceville, north Fulton County and Buckhead that business and corporate executives around Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport have decided it was time they formed their own. To that end, they've recruited Emory Morsberger of Morsberger Revitalization to spearhead the formation of the Airport West Community Improvement District, charging him with replicating what he has already done with CIDs in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties: improve and leverage local assets.

And this CID has one spectacular asset.

"The airport is the goose laying the golden egg," Morsberger said. "We want to produce more golden eggs."

The presence of the world's busiest airport is a natural draw that brings travelers, visitors and economic impact into the zone that includes the city of College Park, the city of East Point, the city of Atlanta and unincorporated Fulton County. But so far, the efforts to leverage the airport's magnetism have been done on a one-by-one basis.

"In the past, it's just been different cities operating independently, on their own," Morsberger said. "But by working together, we can synergize all the different groups here."

When officially organized with a board in place — which Morsberger believes will happen by October — the Airport West CID will be one of the metro area's biggest, with a footprint of

about 15 square miles. It already has the support of about 300 businesses and 180 owners. It will also be the third CID in south Fulton County; the first was formed in 1999 and takes in portions of Fairburn, Union City, Palmetto and unincorporated Fulton.

"We have similarities [to other CIDs], but we're also very different," said Joddie Gray who has administered the South Fulton Community Improvement District since 2001. "We are an area of mostly warehousing and manufacturing, so our focus has always been on freight transportation and getting trucks to the highway."

South Fulton's biggest project is improving the intersection of Interstate 85 and Georgia 74, one of the Southside's busiest.

"It's a very congested interchange, with a lot of residential traffic coming from Fayette County interacting with trucks trying to access the interstate," Gray said. "Our goal is to upgrade and modify it."

South Fulton's second CID formed three years ago around the Fulton Industrial corridor close to Interstate 20 and Fulton Industrial Boulevard. Road and transportation improvements are part of a master plan being created, thanks to an \$80,000 grant from the **Atlanta Regional Commission**.

"That will be the blueprint for the next five years," said Boulevard CID Executive Director Gil Prado. "We're doing an analysis of road conditions and market conditions; traffic counts; a study of the kinds of businesses and industries we can attract to the area; street improvements; and landscaping plans. We also want to create a land use and zoning plan to increase the economic competitiveness of the area."

Many of those same issues are on the minds of the Airport West organizers who have studied the projects other CIDs in the metro area have tackled. Road improvements to ease congestion, increase safety and improve landscaping are high on the list, particularly at Welcome All Road and Camp Creek Parkway and the Interstate 285 and Camp Creek interchange, where a diverging diamond is being studied. The planners have already raised more than \$260,000 for those projects, with donations coming from College Park, Fulton County, Invest Atlanta, Woodward Academy, **Chick-fil-A Inc.** and Delta Air Lines Inc.

"Throughout this area there are seven interchanges that are overgrown like jungles," Morsberger said. "Just look at I-85 and Virginia Avenue. It's a mess. We also need signage for the hotels, and we plan to have security patrols running seven nights a week. Crime is not a big issue, but it is an issue, and we want to get as close to zero as possible."

The Airport CID venture will also be the first foray into Fulton for Morsberger, who sees his role as one of redeveloper, not just organizer and consultant.