



Arc of Atlanta's Future

A renaissance is happening in the areas
covered by the South Fulton CIDs.

By Patty Rasmussen

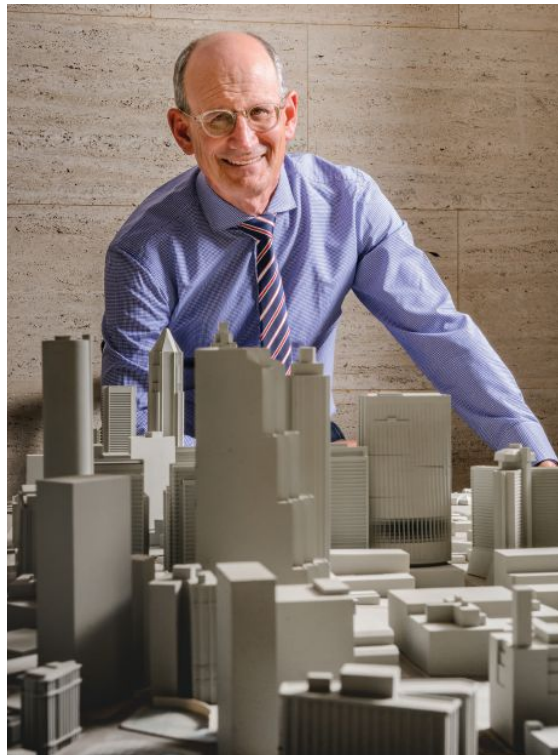
Photo by Woodie Williams

Enhancing a gateway to Atlanta. Developing a smart corridor in a commercial district. Reclaiming urban land over the highway. Forward-thinking projects are flourishing with support from South Fulton County's and Downtown Atlanta's community improvement districts (CIDs). These self-taxing commercial property districts that band together to tackle issues are poised to make some of the region's most exciting changes to business, transportation, infrastructure and place-making.

The Stitch - Just in Time

The Atlanta Downtown Improvement District (ADID) is the CID run by Central Atlanta Progress, a public-private civic organization that has been in existence since 1941. A.J. Robinson is the president of CAP and the ADID. Some of the projects they're working on, Robinson says, "are a little different than the normal capital projects."

The first involves a portion of downtown Atlanta being designated as a Federal Opportunity Zone (from around Grady Hospital, through the Georgia State University campus and almost to Centennial Olympic Park).



► **Urban Greenspace:** Clockwise from top left, Food Truck Fridays at Woodruff Park, Central Atlanta Progress and Atlanta Downtown Improvement District President A.J. Robinson and rendering of plans for The Stitch

"We're one of 26 [opportunity zones] in the city of Atlanta," he says. "This was part of the [federal] tax law that was passed in 2017. What that means is that there is a tax incentive to invest in these zones. We've been doing a lot of educating not only to our property owners but to the investment community about how the zone is an attractive place for investment."

The ADID partnered with the city on a prospectus of all the zones in the city and unveiled it at national funding conferences. "We're beginning to see funds flow into our area, and hopefully into others," says Robinson.

The ADID is also trying to seed development into the historic Auburn Avenue corridor, working with Invest Atlanta to help mostly nonprofit property owners with architectural work and looking for development opportunities. And they've created the Atlanta Arts and Entertainment District (AE), which has its roots in the restrictions on signage in place since before the 1996 Olympics. The new AE zone allows up to 25 "new but creative signs" in the downtown community, says Robinson. This isn't a traditional billboard - think digital projection or illumination. "There's a curation process. We want the signs to meet certain specifics. There's an art form to it. We're not turning our community into Times Square."

Finally, there's the urban reclamation plan known as The Stitch, which Robinson describes as an "ambitious plan to 'stitch' back the hole over the interstate" where the I-75/I-85 Connector runs through downtown. The project aims to create about 14 acres of urban greenspace on top of a new platform structure that would be built above the Connector from the Civic Center MARTA station at West Peachtree Street to Piedmont Avenue.

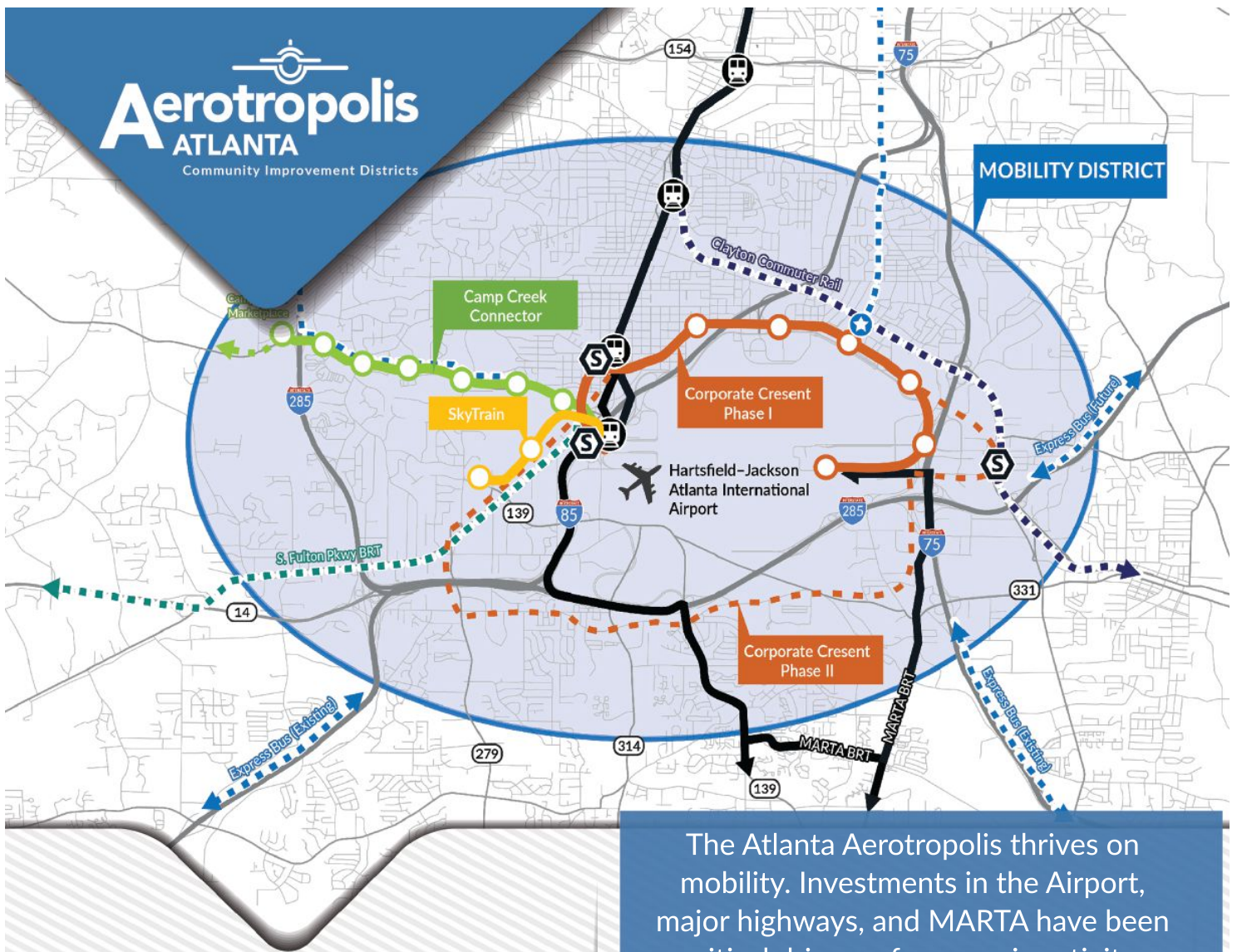
"We think that because of the separation of Midtown from Downtown by the connector, the areas on either side of the highway haven't developed as much," says Robinson. The ADID believes if they build a park on the reclaimed land, developers will build around it as has happened in similar projects around the U.S.

Robinson says The Stitch would cost between \$300 million and \$400 million if it were done all at once. They're at the end of a yearlong study, a master plan/road map of how to pull off the project. "Atlanta has done a lot of big things over the years. The airport, the Olympics, the BeltLine. We think this project - The Stitch - could be the next-generation project for us to tackle."

A Diamond Emerges

"I have said, and I firmly believe, that the future of Fulton County is the southern crescent, the south side," says Al Nash, CEO of the Development Authority of Fulton County. "We are seeing the locals take the challenge."

Kirsten Mote, program director for the Aerotropolis CIDs (Airport West and Airport South), would no doubt agree. Mote is responsible for capital and maintenance programs within the 15-square-mile Aerotropolis boundary, which includes parts of two counties (Fulton



AEROTROPOLIS ATLANTA CIDS TRANSIT FEASIBILITY STUDY



SCAN ME

The Atlanta Aerotropolis thrives on mobility. Investments in the Airport, major highways, and MARTA have been critical drivers of economic activity.

Major corporations such as Delta, Chick-fil-A, Porsche, and others already see the merit of proximity to the Airport and connectivity. There is a significant opportunity for Atlantans to benefit from additional development near the Airport, such as jobs, housing, shopping and restaurants. This is a part of the vision of the AACIDs. Additional transit serving the Aerotropolis area will bring about this vision, keep the economy growing and take us to the next level.

404-349-2211
www.aerocids.com



► **Enhancing Corridors:** Clockwise from top left, a rendering of Aerotropolis Atlanta CIDs' planned Camp Creek multi-use trail, Aerotropolis Atlanta CIDs Program Director Kirsten Mote and renderings of the Virginia Avenue Smart Corridor and a planned Hapeville trail

and Clayton along with Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport – the world's busiest.)

The district includes important freight corridors – trucking and rail – and major interstates. It's also home to transit facilities, and increasing pedestrian and bike traffic. Needless to say, transportation and transit are top-of-mind concerns.

Helping to increase safety and flow of traffic, a diverging diamond interchange at Camp Creek Parkway and I-285, years in development, should be completed by the end of this year.

"In addition to the transportation improvements, the CIDs partnered with East Point, College Park and Fulton County to do some additional enhancements," says Mote. "We've got upgraded fencing, a lot of landscaping going in, upgraded light fixtures. We added enhancements to make it a gateway and identify this [area] as a place people want to be."

Diverging diamond interchanges are also pedestrian-friendly, with the walkway inside the interchange rather than running along the outside of traffic. To heighten pedestrian awareness, the CIDs are using inlaid crosswalks to make them even more prominent. "We have a ton of pedestrians, and the bridge that was out there didn't have any sidewalks," Mote says. "The pedestrian accommodations with the diverging diamond will be a huge improvement."

Next up, Mote hopes to enhance the entire Camp Creek corridor to create connectivity and continuity for all modes of transportation – pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. "There are a number of MARTA bus stops along Camp Creek where riders are dumped on the side of the road," she says. "That is, in my opinion, not acceptable for a community. That is what we want to focus on."

The CIDs will engage in Camp Creek Parkway corridor planning in 2020. "Camp Creek has always been a priority for this CID and these cities," Mote says. "We're going to look closely at the corridor, at how these different modes interact with one another." It's more than putting in a sidewalk or a multi-use path; it's about understanding how the intersections work with vehicles, buses, trucks and pedestrians and what kinds of improvements make it a safer corridor for everyone, she says. The next step is enhancing the corridor so it's attractive when people are driving down Camp Creek when they arrive in Atlanta from the airport. "This is people's first impression of Atlanta," she says. "I think it's critical for not only the city, but the state of Georgia to make sure that that first impression is the best impression."

Using grant funds from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the Aerotropo-

lis CIDs are creating another innovative project – a two-mile smart corridor on Virginia Avenue between U.S. 29/Main Street and S. Central Avenue. The corridor will incorporate technology to improve mobility, walkability and safety. Mote says Virginia Avenue makes the most sense for the smart corridor development because it's already commercialized with headquarters, office and business, as well as hotel, restaurant and retail.

"It's going to be the most commercialized corridor and probably the most urbanized of any of our corridors," she adds. "It's going to feel more like being in the city than anywhere in the district."

The CIDs looked at all types of technology that would enhance mobility and safety, everything from traffic signal technology and digital wayfinding kiosks to solar-paneled benches where citizens can charge their devices, and presented their findings to the public at a meeting in August. They'll seek more funding to advance the corridor project to the next step, streetscaping with smart technology.

"We really want to think this through," Mote says. "We want it to be attractive and smart. We believe it will have the ability to attract more headquarters and office development to the area."

Design and Conquer

As Gil Prado, executive director of Boulevard CID, says, “things move a little slowly in the transportation world.” To help speed the process, the CID that focuses on the area around Fulton Industrial Boulevard in Southwest Fulton County combined two projects into one, hiring design firm Kimley-Horn to handle the project engineering.

“One project is operational improvements at the intersection of Cascade Road and Fulton Industrial Boulevard,” says Prado. “We are trying to relieve some of the traffic that exists at that intersection. But there’s less than one-half-mile distance between the two intersections [Cascade-Fulton Industrial and Camp Creek-Fulton Industrial], so, in addition to the operational improvements, we’re doing the streetscape improvements.

“The streetscape improvement is a much larger project,” he adds. “It includes the Cascade-Fulton Industrial intersection, the Camp Creek-Fulton Industrial intersection, and then goes all the way to Bakers Ferry Road and Lakeview Court to the south, Fulton Camp Way to the east and West Park Drive to the north.” The CID has \$1 million in Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (T-SPLOST) funds to help pay for the improvements and will apply for more funding from the ARC.

Prado says a recent economic impact analysis of the district

found that there are 28,000 jobs in the Boulevard CID, and they pay well – \$81,000 annually, on average. There is a robust food manufacturing cluster, with strong presence of transportation, warehouse and distribution companies. UPS opened a 1.2-million-square-foot sorting and distribution center in 2018 that processes more than 100,000 packages per hour. “Once they’re fully operational, they’ll employ about 5,000 people,” says Prado. “They’re at 3,500 now.”

While UPS partnered with MARTA to put a bus stop on its property to provide transit for its employees, that’s not an option for smaller companies in areas of the CID that aren’t serviced by transit. “There are new warehouses coming in especially in the southern portion of the district, Campbellton Road at Fulton Industrial. That area isn’t serviced by MARTA,” Prado says. “That’s the number one thing companies and real estate developers are requesting, because it’s critical to bring those employees to the area.”

A commitment from Fulton County should help with getting employees into the region.

“Fulton County recently announced a \$150-million investment into the district, including \$90 million toward improvements to Charlie Brown Airport over the next 15 years,” Prado says. The funds will also go toward a new public safety training center, animal shelter, blight remediation, road infrastructure improvement and emergency operations, he says.

And Prado says the CID is growing. “We recently expanded

Check out our GeorgiaTrend BLOG

Latest Trends

Learn more about what's
happening around the state.











georgiatrendblog.com

FULTON
INDUSTRIAL

▶

BOULEVARD
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT

Fast Moving. Forward Thinking.

28,000 Jobs

1,000 Businesses

52 Million sf
industrial space in over
550 industrial buildings



Boulevard CID is proud to help preserve and grow the largest industrial corridor in the eastern United States and keep Georgia's economy growing.

BoulevardCID.org

to include the Donald Lee Hollowell and I-285 interchange,” he says. “We’re also in the process of expanding to Fulton Industrial and Campbellton Road as well. Once we’re fully expanded from the southern portion [Campbellton] to Donald Lee Hollowell, that will be 10 miles.”

Small But Mighty

Metro South CID, which up until March of this year was known as the Greater Conley Industrial CID, is relatively small in area. Formed in 2016, the CID features some mighty assets, including proximity to downtown Atlanta, I-75 and Hartsfield-Jackson, the I-675 and I-285 interchange, and a large swath of Moreland Avenue.

“We are basically turning around the entire area around Moreland Avenue and Bouldercrest Road around I-285,” says Emory Morsberger, president of Metro South CID. “We’re upgrading the appearance of the entire area, working on curb appeal, road paving, intersection improvements, security improvements and landscaping.”

Distribution and warehouses play a significant role in the economic health of the CID. Recently it was approved for a \$200,000 grant to do a plan for improving freight movement in the area. The CID will pay a \$50,000 match.

But the biggest news is coming out of Blackhall Studios, the largest business owner in the CID. “They are in the process of [tripling] their size,” Mors-



Bringing in Employees: Plans for Charlie Brown Airport, above, and Gil Prado, executive director of the Fulton Industrial Boulevard CID, right

berger says. “This is going to create a huge amount of momentum that will cause us to move even faster.”

A Union City movie studio could be a major change agent for the South Fulton CID further to the west as well. “We’re so excited that Atlanta Metro Studios has already signed on to be part of the CID,” says Joddie Gray, administrator for South Fulton CID. “They’re going to be a wonderful employer to add to our mix.”

South Fulton CID is still waiting for the interchange at State Road 74 and I-85 to be built, but in the meantime have convinced GDOT that pedestrian access is essential. “They’re putting in a multiuse trail, basically a protected walk and bike lane, for folks going over 74/85,” says Gray. “They’re doing right-of-way acquisition for construction in 2022.”

But under construction now is a 200-space Park and Ride lot just off State Road 74 that will serve commuters who can meet up to car-



pool or vanpool. “It could make a huge difference, especially for people going to the airport,” Gray says.

How important are CIDs? By way of example, Development Authority of Fulton County’s Nash talks about the beautiful interchanges along the interstates. “People don’t realize that it was the CID that either paid for it or put up the seed money or had the project teed up and shovel ready when money came available, and was able to take advantage of it,” he says. “Without the vehicle of the CIDs, a lot of projects that people see out there wouldn’t get done.” ■



▲ **Area Turnaround:** Left to right, Emory Morsberger, president of Metro South CID, and median improvement and tire cleanup around Moreland Avenue