

# East Metro DeKalb CID

## Wesley Chapel-Panola Corridor Revitalization



**Urban Land  
Institute**

**Atlanta**

An Urban Land Institute  
Technical Assistance Panel  
November 15 – 16, 2016

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ULI Atlanta TAP's panelists discussing East Metro DeKalb CID



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## Introduction: The Panel's Assignment

In November 2016, East Metro DeKalb Community Improvement District (EMDCID) hosted an Urban Land Institute - Atlanta District Council (ULI Atlanta) Technical Assistance Panel to assess corridor development strategies aimed at growing the economic vitality within EMDCID. Formed in 2013, EMDCID is at an important stage in its growth. Following the recent hire of its first Executive Director, this report identifies short-term and long-term recommendations to expand the organization's efficacy and impact.

Though EMDCID has made significant strides, it still faces major organizational challenges to utilize the tools needed to replicate successes of other community improvement districts in the state of Georgia. As such, this report draws on two days of Panel interviews and dialogue, best practices from other local Community Improvement Districts (CIDs), and national case studies from the Urban Land Institute's Building Healthy Corridors work to understand how EMDCID can enact its mission of economic revitalization in East DeKalb County.

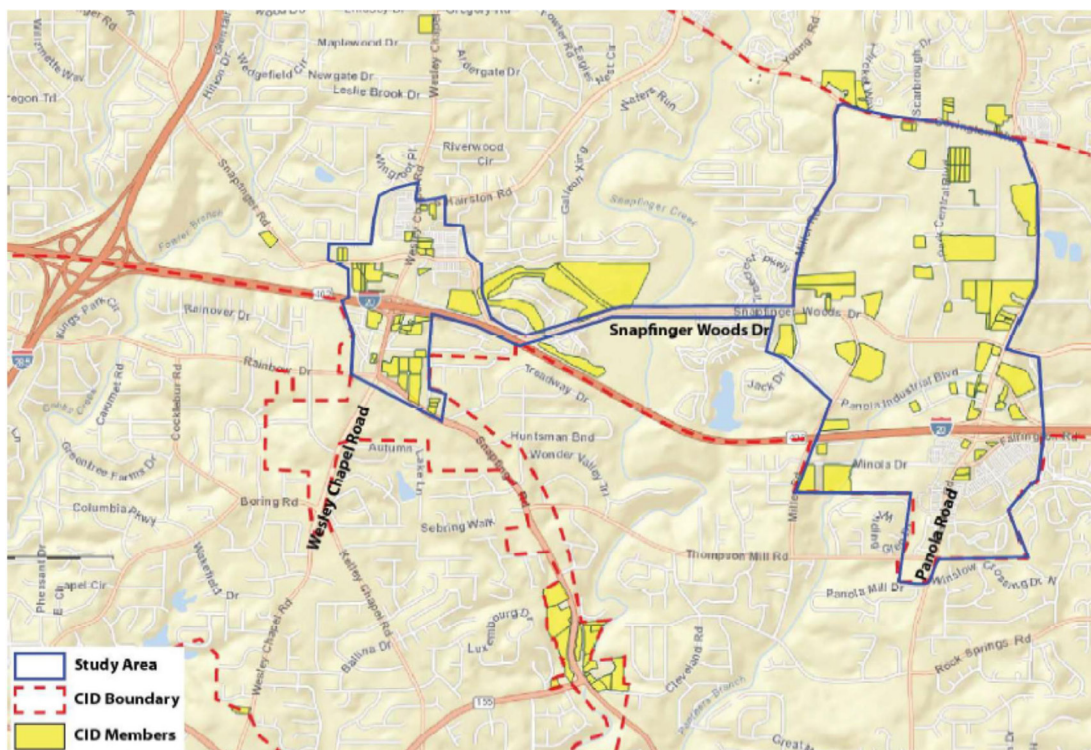
The considerable geographic scale of EMDCID (30 square miles and up to 1,600 eligible members) compared to other CIDs prompted panelists to focus efforts around five key questions which anchored this assignment:

- Why are Class-A businesses not choosing to locate within southeastern DeKalb County? For instance, are there any unseen obstacles preventing

businesses from choosing the area? How can EMDCID better leverage the community to make it more competitive both regionally and nationally?

- What strategies can be used to enable existing local businesses to attain and maintain profitability given the competitiveness of the greater metropolitan Atlanta region?
- What types of strategies are appropriate for EMDCID leaders to consider to encourage and enable new business investments in the Wesley Chapel-Panola Corridor?
- How should EMDCID best partner with other community stakeholders (e.g. Georgia Piedmont Technical College, churches, schools) to better position the community to attract residents, businesses, and patrons?
- What strategies and/or initiatives can be considered to encourage the redevelopment of underutilized properties and the development of undeveloped land?

The following report summarizes the Panel's response to these questions and outlines actionable steps towards implementing a comprehensive revitalization plan, ultimately aimed towards EMDCID's long-term economic health and sustainability.



*The Study Area*



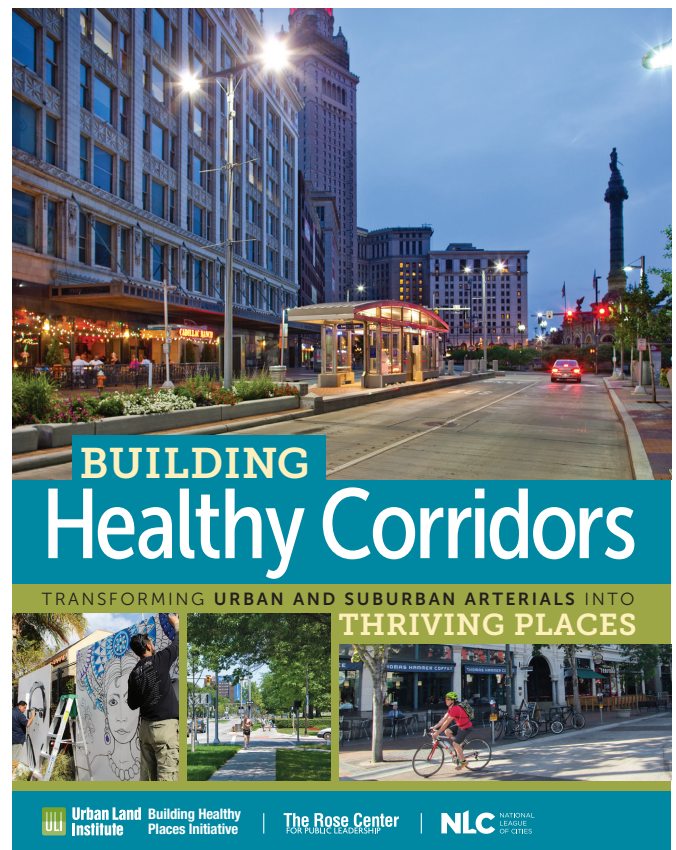
## Executive Summary

After two days of focused discussion, engagement with EMDCID leadership, and stakeholder interviews, the Panel devised five major areas of focus for EMDCID. Considering how the organization can evolve its approach to economic development, Panelists unanimously championed the opportunities offered by the existing industrial facilities within EMDCID, and tailored its recommendations to capitalize on this major asset. With a focus on offering better jobs and opportunities for residents, the Panel recommends that EMDCID focus its efforts on the following five major objectives:

1. **Structure and organize for success.** EMDCID can easily expand its capacity through several simple organization modifications. Improved and innovative governance structures will enable more effective board leadership and significantly improve EMDCID's interface with its members and the general public.
2. **Job creation:** Leading with strategies that promote business development, EMDCID can create a climate for commercial viability and promote a more equitable version of economic development. Additional job investments will help drive amenities that the community wants and needs.
3. **Double-down on partnerships.** Additional internal and external partners will amplify EMDCID's impact. To grow EMDCID's impact beyond its existing resources, leveraging and sustaining partnerships is critical.
4. **Geographic concentration:** EMDCID's size diminishes the visibility of its progress. To demonstrate EMDCID's impact, the Panel recommends focusing efforts on a specific node and then applying those lessons to future nodes. Demonstrating EMDCID's success in these projects will build momentum for future projects across the district.
5. **Focus on efforts that create long-term value.** Short-term gains show that EMDCID is capable, but sustainable economic development is centered on good jobs and workforce development.

CIDs are formed by commercial property owners and can collect an additional property tax on members. However, CIDs cannot pass legally binding laws on members, like a local government can.

– Source, Georgia Community Improvement Districts, The Center for State and Local Finance, 2016.



*Resource for corridor revitalization strategies.*

## Description of Technical Assistance Panel

On November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of 2016, ULI Atlanta assembled members representing diverse areas of real estate expertise to consider how EMDCID's activities can improve the economic vitality within its boundaries. After congregating at an EMDCID member's office park, offering introductions, and hearing a brief introduction from EMDCID director Christopher Sanders, Panel members were led on a tour of the study area by Nicole Hall, its former administrator. Board members also joined this tour and offered historical insight about tracts and parcels within EMDCID. This tour familiarized the Panelists with the major arteries and nodes of the districts, highlighting some recent retail development and properties that represent major opportunities for development.

This tour identified EMDCID's early accomplishments, such as a demonstration median beautification project, and highlighted major challenges with real estate development in particular parcels. Hall also exposed panelists to several of the transportation infrastructure challenges that limit access to many of the study area's retail centers.

Upon completing the tour, Panelists conducted a series of stakeholder interviews with EMDCID members, partners, local government staff, and business owners. Stakeholder groups focused on public safety and economic development, infrastructure, and local business and property owner needs. The groups included representatives from DeKalb County, MARTA, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Decide DeKalb, Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Sanford Realty, Omega World Headquarters, Orkin & Associates, DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce, and Golden Eagle Partners. Panelists had the opportunity to hear comments from and ask questions of these invited stakeholders to better understand EMDCID's context and current challenges.



*ULI Atlanta TAP participant working session.*

Following these interviews, Panelists were able to ask questions from EMDCID leadership at a working dinner, discuss early impressions, and begin to clarify the next day's work. The focal point of dinner was remarks by Ray Gilley, President of Decide DeKalb Development Authority, who addressed the future of economic development in the county. While previous impressions held that the County government could direct all activities in this realm, Gilley explained that future success in the County is dependent upon the unique strengths and tools of the major players in economic development. Treating EMDCID as an important factor in this landscape, Gilley stressed the importance of coordination between the County, Decide DeKalb, and EMDCID to improve quality of life for residents.

Gilley outlined how Decide DeKalb's 2014 establishment has facilitated economic development momentum, specifically recent relocations totaling investment of \$100.6MM and 1,610 jobs. These include HomeChef (\$3.5MM investment, 1,200 jobs – distribution of uncooked packaged meals), Acuity Brands (2014 - \$34.6MM investment, 250 jobs lighting solutions company - Office / Research and Development), and Sempertans (2016 - \$62.5MM, 160 jobs – advanced manufacturing). Gilley described these successes within the context of national trends, such as recruiting around research and development operations and working towards developing an innovation cluster which harnesses this collective knowledge. The conversation also highlighted the importance of local education investments and working to continue improving county schools.



*ULI Atlanta TAP participants on tour of the study area.*

The candor of these conversations underscored the Panel's commitment to a productive second day, where an early breakfast hosted members of EMDCID's Board of Directors. After hearing perspectives from the current Board, the panelists used their assessment and experiences to begin devising where to focus their recommendations.

Three working sessions throughout the day reframed the Panel's assignment, focusing on long-term economic development strategies. To better assess the major challenges and opportunities, Panelists undertook a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to inform an afternoons discussion devoted to organizing and refining its recommendations.

The items identified in this SWOT analysis are summarized below, as competitive advantages, and conversely, challenges for investment.



*Large tracts available for development*

## Competitive Advantages for Investment

### Physical:

- Available land and property: The study area has large tracts available for development at competitive prices plus underdeveloped retail centers and industrial buildings. The scarcity of undeveloped land in the region coupled with rising land values in Atlanta make these available parcels and underdeveloped retail centers and industrial buildings increasingly desirable.
- Industrial zoning, which is becoming regionally more scarce. Few regional competitors (South Fulton, Coweta County) match the quantity and quality of EMDCID's close-in (i.e., convenient) industrial stock and zoning.

### Location and Infrastructure:

- Interstate access: The Wesley-Chapel Panola Road Corridor's proximity to I-20 and I-285 make it an ideal location for business; per GDOT, 41,700 cars travel through the Wesley Chapel Road and I-20 intersection each day. This proximity also makes the area idea for "last mile" distribution hubs and light manufacturing that wants to be close to customers.
- Well located in region: Proximate to major employment centers such as Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and downtown.
- Technical college and associated job training: Georgia Piedmont Technical College can provide important workforce development support.
- MARTA bus service and planned future expansion: I-20 is identified as a priority for MARTA's system expansion planning.

### Market:

- Affordable real estate: Industrial and warehouse rents are materially lower than for competitive areas like South Fulton County. Hapeville/Forest Park and Kennesaw, while providing comparable or better highway access.
- Timing is good for investment in DeKalb overall: Decide DeKalb's advent as an independent entity and new executive-level county leadership greatly enhance DeKalb's capacity for economic growth.
- Macro trends of demand for last-mile distribution: East DeKalb's location within the region is perfect for short-range deliveries, and serves a unique radius compared to regional competitors (i.e., South Fulton and Coweta County).



## Challenges for Investment

### Market:

- Apartment vacancies high in areas: Per American Community Survey census data, the total number of households has decreased by 2% in the Wesley-Chapel Panola Corridor study area between 2010 and 2014.
- Lack of resident spending power: On average, median household incomes are below DeKalb County and Metro Atlanta averages by between \$20,000- \$40,000.
- Retail vacancies are difficult to fill, especially as buying power of residents within study area remains limited.
- Lack of mass transit, other than buses. The area would benefit from heavy rail or, failing that, high-speed buses to reduce commute times and improve the EMDCID's appeal as an employment destination.

### Existing conditions:

- Homeless, panhandling, and prostitution: vacancies, and especially local hotels are an incubator for criminal activity.
- Crime: Existing businesses often feel the need to hire private security patrols; in the last six months, 602 crimes were documented in the Wesley Chapel – Panola Corridor.
- Lack of public realm: The study area lacks significant open greenspace or parks where residents can congregate.
- Amenities and assets unknown: lack of studies on commercial activity or industrial inventory means EMDCID lacks the data to promote its growth potential.

### EMDCID Structure:

- Large size swallows EMDCID's visibility: An approach focusing on specific corridors, such as Wesley Chapel and Panola Road, will allow for more targeted approaches and a more visible return on investment for EMDCID members.
- Distrust: EMDCID activities and board meetings need more transparency to communicate the value of the organization to diverse group of members and potential members.
- Private Sector Involvement. Successful CIDs tend to have materially higher participation by private enterprise (i.e., stakeholders) than governmental actors. In EMDCID that relationship appears somewhat reversed leading to a (mistaken) perception that EMDCID is another government agency. That perception impairs the ability to recruit private enterprise's participation.
- Limited information on EMDCID: Expanded print materials and web media can expand EMDCID's bandwidth and marketing footprint.

Reviewing these two days of informed discussion, interviews, and materials from ULI's Building Healthy Places Toolkit, the Panel dedicated the remaining time to preparing and organizing their recommendations.

To conclude the Technical Assistance Panel, Panelists presented their summary recommendations to an audience of EMDCID board members, business owners, and public guests, followed by a question and answer session.



*Vacant retail is hard to fill*



*High security around local business*

## Recommendations

Over the course of the TAP, the Panel utilized ULI's Healthy Corridor Roadmap below to guide its recommendations. While EMDCID has already completed some of the steps, such as listening sessions with the public (Phase II), it needs to revisit other areas the Roadmap recommends as initial organizational steps.

The Panel recommends that EMDCID leadership continue to reference this timeline as it revises its workplan.

## Healthy Corridor Roadmap

<b>PHASE I:</b> Startup and Partnership Development (six to nine months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Identify a diverse leadership and stakeholder group</li> <li>» Pursue strategies for community empowerment, engagement, and coalition building, framed around health and community needs</li> <li>» Conduct initial-conditions audit</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE II:</b> Convenings and Issue Identification (three to four months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Hold a local public workshop to identify key corridor assets and challenges</li> <li>» Start setting priorities for needed changes</li> <li>» Hold study visits to obtain expert recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE III:</b> Priority Setting and Quick Wins (three to four months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» With stakeholders, set priorities with quick wins and short-, medium-, and long-term actions</li> <li>» Outline policy changes needed to achieve priorities</li> <li>» Determine appropriate funding sources and needed partnerships</li> <li>» Implement low-cost quick wins</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE IV:</b> Implementation and Working for Change (nine to 12 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Execute on plans and priorities developed in previous phases</li> <li>» Implement longer-term development, policy, planning, and programming interventions</li> <li>» Assemble a corridor oversight group to oversee implementation</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE V:</b> Sustaining Progress and Avoiding Problems (ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sustain progress through the creation of a formal leadership group or improvement district</li> <li>» Measure and track changes, and conduct conditions audits periodically</li> <li>» Plan for ongoing maintenance and redevelopment</li> <li>» Continue to address affordability and displacement issues</li> </ul>

### 1. Structure and Organize for Success

As the most actionable items, the following points address how improving EMDCID's structure and organization is a prerequisite for additional investments.

#### *Short-Term Recommendations (2017)*

##### **Strategic Board Selection**

EMDCID is still in its infancy. As a result, now is the time to make significant, strategic investments in its leadership and government structure. Hiring an Executive Director represents an important first step, and upcoming Board vacancies present an additional opportunity. The following recommendations, largely concerning the Board of Director's

organization and structure, are the most actionable, urgent steps for EMDCID to mature as a vehicle for economic development.

While the EMDCID Board does not have authority to select its own members (some Board members are elected from among the membership and others are appointed by various parties), the EMDCID Board can still influence its makeup by recruiting EMDCID members to run for open positions and lobbying those with appointment power to make particular appointments.

- ✓ EMDCID Leadership should reflect the different market sectors of markets within the CID, as well as EMDCID's long-term interests.
- ✓ Appropriate and strong Board composition and



organization is one of the most critical factors for EMDCID's growth.

- ✓ Geographic diversity is also important as a way to ensure localized knowledge of the different corridors and activities within EMDCID.

At present, vacancies and term expirations of current Board members present an opportunity to recruit qualified individuals to steer EMDCID's future. The Board should evaluate the skill set that each Board member brings to the table, and strive to recruit persons to fill upcoming vacancies who can bring diverse skills to the table. These vacancies additionally represent a chance to grow relationships with major new employers or anchor institutions within EMDCID, such as Acuity, DeKalb Medical, or Georgia Piedmont Technical College.

The Panel also recommends Board members explore additional development opportunities. To gain a sense of the dynamics and format of other established CID boards, EMDCID leadership should visit other CID Board meetings. Learning from these meetings can help EMDCID replicate successful practices developed by more established CIDs. This version of shadowing can demonstrate how these organizations successfully utilize the tools available to CIDs.

### **Make it Public**

Consistency and transparency are keys for establishing effective internal and external communications.

**Consistency.** Establishing a regular meeting schedule and posting minutes establishes important transparency for building trust with members and establishing legitimacy with potential members. Above all, the Panel stresses the importance of pairing a regular meeting schedule with clear expectations for board members, including attendance at a minimum number of meetings.

The Panel also encourages EMDCID to consider innovative meeting structures. These may include hosting quarterly public meetings dedicated to focusing on external communications and understanding member needs. EMDCID should also consider segmenting the Board into subcommittees, such as one for strategic planning and another focused on operations and programming.

**Transparency.** The EMDCID should improve its communication (through newsletters, an improved website and the above-noted meetings). In addition, EMDCID would benefit from disclosure of its annual budget so that stakeholders can understand its sources and uses of funds.

### **Rebrand for Unique Identity**

Improved branding will help establish EMDCID's identity among members and serve to recruit additional members. This identity should communicate something about the place and be unique from DeKalb County overall. Attractive logos and templates for content, whether online or in print, will improve CID communications greatly. Professional format and design conveys the organization's seriousness and efficacy. The Panel recommends that EMDCID contract with a branding agency whose portfolio includes other comparable mission-driven organizations.

This rebrand is also a way to communicate EMDCID's unique strengths as an economic development vehicle. At present, EMDCID is often confused as a branch of DeKalb County government and another layer of bureaucracy in a county where residents are often cynical towards local government. Instead, as a privately-funded, results-oriented organization, CIDs are designed to expedite and leverage investments. Improved branding and marketing should convey this distinction.

### **Create a Master Plan**

One specific short-range recommendation is to create a master plan utilizing significant public participation methods. At present, EMDCID has no guiding planning document to serve as a roadmap for EMDCID's activities. Such a document is critical to communicating EMDCID's strategies and priorities as it begins to leverage project funding. Additionally, public involvement among current and prospective EMDCID members should guide the creation of this plan. Hosting listening sessions, facilitating workshops, and conducting stakeholder focus groups will ensure that the resulting plan reflects the needs and priorities of CID members and also creates buy-in from property owners still undecided about membership.

A resulting plan that summarizes this input should create a priority list for projects and identify likely funding sources. This framework will underscore EMDCID's legitimacy as it begins liaising with regional, state, and private funding agencies, demonstrating that a particular project has been carefully identified as a priority among EMDCID members. As this project list solidifies, EMDCID Board members and leadership should become ambassadors for the organization around the identified goals. The Panel also recommends designating individual Board members as liaisons for specific agencies. This goal should specifically work towards priority projects that can be incorporated in the upcoming DeKalb County T-SPLOST list for infrastructure projects.

## 2. Job Creation: Economic Development Strategy

### Lead with Strategies that Increase the Economic Competitiveness of the District

The Panel recommends a focusing on economic development and stresses the differentiating between short-sighted approaches, focused on retail attraction, and a comprehensive strategy focused on driving a strong job base, particularly industrial development.

### Inventory Industrial Assets

In the short-term, EMDCID should begin inventorying its physical assets. One of the District's greatest opportunities rests in the quality and location of its industrial stock. A resource that documents specifications available for properties can inform site selection and communicate the value and extent of the District's land and physical assets. In addition to cataloging industrial parks and facilities, this inventory should focus on infrastructure, confirming the capacity of existing water and sewage.

### Showcase Your Successes

EMDCID should also focus on building its reputation by creating a narrative around its successes. For example, the story of recent business re-locations by Acuity, Sempertrans and HomeChef represents a cumulative \$100 million investment and over 1,600 jobs in and/or near the district. These victories should be widely known and generate growing interest in the area and showing EMDCID's capacity to build on this momentum. The Panel recommends publicizing successes through a newsletter, online updates, and press releases, diversifying media to ensure that this message reaches a wide-ranging audience. These dispatches will show EMDCID's progress and reveal the important role EMDCID serves as an ambassador for this part of the county.

Additional messaging should reiterate to existing members the return on their investment, particularly with EMDCID's public safety initiatives. Because EMDCID is so large, the number of weekly hours patrolled is not readily visible to property owners. Nonetheless, the relationship EMDCID has built with the DeKalb County Police Department, and improvements around patrolling based on current data collection efforts, should both be communicated with EMDCID members.

### Strategize Around Current Strengths and Future Aspirations

Final short-range recommendations focus on planning for EMDCID's business retention and expansion strategies. Based on the physical assets described above, as well as

workforce dynamics, EMDCID should identify the types of businesses it seeks to attract. This strategy should consider both feasibility (which industries are likely to re-locate to DeKalb), as well as long-range goal setting, in terms of which industries will provide the types of employment EMDCID hopes to sustain. This strategy should also consider ways to retain and scale existing businesses.

### Mid-Term (2018-2020)

Mid-term strategies center around leveraging assets for business attraction. Available land, interstate access, and facility-related amenities should build a case for the areas suitable for industrial development. This methodical approach prevents EMDCID from engaging in the type of footloose "smokestack chasing" often practiced within the economic development arena.

### Expand the Toolbox

This period should emphasize the development of incentive tools with Decide DeKalb. EMDCID needs to be a proactive partner in creating these funding frameworks so that applications include projects within EMDCID. No incentive programs or mechanisms should be off the table, but thoughtful consideration should look at where federal and state resources are currently allocated in the region. For example, though an Opportunity Zone may benefit the County, perceptions that Atlanta currently gobbles up existing versions of this funding might detract from its successful replication in DeKalb County. EMDCID should strongly lobby DeKalb County schools to create Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) serving strategic corridors within the EMDCID footprint. TADs have proven, documented success incentivizing investment, accelerating property tax growth, and fostering economic development.

To encourage redevelopment and repurposing of vacant/obsolete commercial space, DeKalb County should adopt zoning policies which foster increased density

In developing these incentives, EMDCID should refrain from reinventing the wheel and look towards existing models that would work locally. Establishing a new entity unique to DeKalb, would expedite the EMDCID's chance of securing new market tax credit allocations.

Finally, EMDCID should work with the County to continue building its workforce development programs and align them with the types of industries it seeks to attract. Georgia Piedmont Technical College should become a strategic partner to continue building the skills of a qualified workforce in DeKalb County.

### *Long-Term (2021+)*

#### **Revisiting Retail**

While retail should not lead an economic development strategy, it can follow. As successful business recruitment and retention grows the number of jobs in DeKalb County, corresponding increases in real earnings will allow EMDCID to attract more quality versions of retail. This may entail upgrading current offerings, as well as diversifying these existing retail operations. Quality retail can attract residents and also provide higher wages than current stores and fast-food restaurants.

#### **Invest in Human Capital**

Long-term workforce development strategies should build on the programs and trainings described above and also focus on investments in education. More investment in schools develops the human capital needed for a well-trained, educated workforce. Additionally, coordinated partnerships between schools and employers could provide valuable versions of vocation education for students, as well as successful feeder training programs for businesses.

#### **Appearance Matters**

Finally, EMDCID should make specific aesthetic improvements to make the area more attractive to businesses. These include landscaping and beautification efforts, streetlights, improved pedestrian infrastructure, and placemaking initiatives. EMDCID's ability to leverage other municipal and state projects will be critical to these projects that improve the quality of life for current residents and future businesses.



*Revist Retail*

## **3. EMDCID as Platform: Amplify Impact through Partnerships**

### *Short-Term (2017)*

#### **Learn from Your Peers**

Due to the strength of CIDs in Georgia, the Atlanta region features several examples of successful peer organizations. EMDCID should tap into this "CID network" to learn about resources and best practices. While some CIDs such as Central Atlanta Progress and Midtown Alliance have long-standing track records, successful younger CIDs, such as Gwinnett Village CID and The Boulevard CID, would also provide valuable peer-to-peer mentoring at this stage of EMDCID's growth.

#### **Identify Quick Wins**

Partnerships with businesses and property owners can support beautification efforts in the District. "Adopt a Road" or "Adopt a Bus Stop" programs offer a volunteer-driven way to improve road conditions, while other small-scale efforts, such as community gardens or landscaping, also provide aesthetic improvements. Far from window dressing, these initiatives enhance the user's experience in a district and also encourage further investment by property owners in their own landscape. These efforts can include partners both within and outside of EMDCID.

#### **Build Regional-Level Relationships**

One of the most significant steps EMDCID can take is to connect with local and regional partners to develop a list of potential T-SPLOST projects and initiatives. With a defined menu of projects, and messaging about their importance to County-wide mobility planning, EMDCID can ensure that its priorities are included in the County's list. Developing this list and becoming an important stakeholder for the County represent two of the most impactful short-range recommendations in this report.

EMDCID should also liaise with MARTA to assess opportunities for improved bus service and transportation improvements, such as bus stops. If area residents express concerns about crowding, limited bus stop amenities at a highly trafficked stop, insufficient service, or poor access to particular activity hubs, EMDCID can become the vocal champion for transit riders in the district. Board members should proactively approach MARTA planners to understand whether any changes are on the immediate horizon during any of its upcoming tri-annual service changes. EMDCID should also work with employers to encourage transit incentive programs for employees.



### *Mid-Term (2018 -2020)*

#### **Invite Major Players to the Table**

To continue growing EMDCID's resources, leadership should recognize the important role large exempt employers such as hospitals can make via voluntary contributions. Though not members of EMDCID, the businesses still benefit from improvements in its boundaries and can easily understand how investing in a CID would benefit their business and operations. EMDCID members can instigate these conversations through existing overlapping networks, such as the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce and Decide DeKalb. In addition to monetary contributions, investment by such exempt employers can also take the form of building workforce development partnerships to improve training and job skills, funding bus stop or sidewalk improvements or simply hosting EMDCID meetings.

#### **Grow Partnerships to Leverage Funding**

Regional-scale partnerships should also play a key role in economic development. The Atlanta Regional Commission's Livable Centers Initiative program can provide key planning support around identified nodes in EMDCID's boundaries. The program requires that EMDCID offer a 20% match for the grant allocation and provides support for transportation and land use plans which aim to enhance the sustainability and livability of identified study areas. LCI planning will demonstrate EMDCID's capacity in conversations with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), County and other actors involved in the implementation of infrastructure plans. Leveraging Georgia Power's assistance also represents a powerful potential regional partnership for economic development, specifically through their marketing resources and reach.



*Emphasize the assets of existing industrial stock*

#### **Address Basic Needs and Housing Challenges**

Another key partnership should involve the Housing Authority of DeKalb County. Assistance programs offer stability for at-risk households, but concentrations of Section 8 housing are sometimes associated with areas with high levels of crime. These real and perceived problems with existing Section 8 tenants should instigate a coordinated public safety approach between EMDCID and the Housing Authority.

A final fruitful partnership will rest in coordination with Decide DeKalb and the county's code enforcement operations to identify abandoned and blighted property. Mapping where vacancies create space for criminal activities is the first step to minimizing these hot spots. Targeting an approach to code enforcement will allow EMDCID to address issues that keep property values low, or extremely low, in areas of the District.

### *Long-Term (2021+)*

Long-term partnerships emphasize the additional tools and resources needed to encourage investment, redevelopment and business retention and expansion. Again, working with Decide DeKalb will be central to establishing and enabling these programs. Specific tools that would benefit EMDCID include Opportunity Zones, Tax Allocation Districts, New Markets Tax Credits, and Enterprise Zones.

EMDCID should also continue cultivating its relations with GDOT to implement long-range infrastructure improvements identified through short-term planning documents, such as a Livable Centers Initiative.

## **4. Geographic Concentration**

#### **Identify Priority Corridors**

EMDCID's large footprint means that strategies that work for one corridor may be of limited impact to another. Acknowledging that different nodes have different objectives will allow for EMDCID to apply the right lens, attention, and resources to these respective challenges. Two major segments around which EMDCID should focus efforts are Wesley Chapel Road and Panola Road. Identifying ambassadors for particular areas or Board members for geographic areas would provide further attentive oversight of activities in these particular areas.

Wesley Chapel Road represents the best corridor for additional retail investment. Still, the Panel emphasizes that retail cannot be EMDCID's dominant focus. Although the EMDCID and local-residents desire the addition of attractive retail and dining options as local amenities, retail is generally the byproduct of employment, not the catalyst therefor. Consequently, the EMDCID's primary goal should

be job creation and retention. Residential growth tends to be driven by employment. Retail, in turn, follows residential growth. In other words retail attraction and retention fundamentally flow from the growth of employment opportunities and neighboring residential stability.

The Panola Road corridor's existing industrial facilities are the best opportunity for near-term and long-term employment in the corridor. To retain and attract new employers, EMDCID should emphasize the assets of existing industrial stock, while telling the story of recent relocations and growth in the area. Industrial development in this area should be EMDCID's primary focus for job.

### Capitalize on Same-Day Shipping Demand

EMDCID's location is well-positioned to take advantage of "last mile" logistics. According to ULI's Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2017, "E-commerce, long viewed as a 'disrupter' for real estate, is gradually emerging with a symbiotic relationship beyond the first clicks-and-bricks rapprochement. Nearby large-scale industrial and distribution facilities are clustered in Newnan and Coweta Counties. These facilities are not designed, however, to provide the type of prompt, small-small logistic services and convenience demanded by B2B and B2C commerce. The scale and existing infrastructure on Panola Road, its proximity to I-20 and I-285, its existing nexus of light manufacturing and distribution facilities, moderately priced developable land and favorable zoning make a compelling case for this area's ability to become an important last-mile logistics hub for the Atlanta region.

## 5. Livability Drives Value Creation

Improving livability in the district would benefit residents, employers, and retailers – fundamentally positioning the corridor for long-term value creation. Healthy corridor planning will support the development of land uses and services making healthy lifestyle choices easier for residents. In addition to improving the choices available for residents, walkable and connected communities consistently demonstrate higher property values. Communities that are designed around active, healthy lifestyles are more likely to thrive in the long run. This culture shift will require physical and social investments, yet are critical for the long-term vitality of corridors. Aging, dormant retail centers designed around quick boom-and-bust cycles showcase the negative consequences of shortsighted planning.

In short, a healthy corridor is a livable corridor — promoting social cohesion, facilitating healthy eating and active transportation, and connecting residents to a range of education opportunities and housing and transportation options.

Customers care about cost, transparency, speed and frictionless transactions. If you are committed to delivery within a few hours, you need to have inventory in places with high densities. Fortunately, that is the very description of the most profitable markets for e-commerce, so there is a real alignment of interests within a ten-to 3-minute drive of city centers. But that also indicates multistory facilities with between 20,000 and 70,000 square feet. Fortunately that is what the "old" configuration was like. For many years, such buildings were considered irretrievably obsolete. Now they have found new life."

– *Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2017*

### Short-Term (2017)

#### Establish Health Targets

Short-term goals should focus on completing a Health Impact Assessment to better understand the specific health challenges faced in District. Without a baseline understanding of current conditions, EMDCID cannot have reasonable targets for measuring the growth of the community's health. Fortunately, DeKalb Medical and Kaiser Permanente are proximate potential partners, and Georgia Tech could also add expertise to these efforts. The panel recommends using ULI's Healthy Corridor Audit Tool, as a health-oriented assessment tool developed to measure conditions along and adjacent to a corridor (such as land use and property conditions, amenities and services, institutions, demographics, transportation and road conditions).

#### Put Walkability on Your Wish List

Pedestrian improvements are also an important short-term goal. The first step in this realm is inventorying the existing sidewalk network and prioritizing which gaps are most important to address. Panelists noted the lack of sidewalks and safe access to bus stops in an area where residents are dependent on public transportation. MARTA can help EMDCID access the area's need for such transportation-related improvements. Once identified, these projects can become a part of EMDCID's "wish list" for T-SPLIST projects. Additionally, Safe Routes to School represents a potential partnership for completing this inventory, as their goals emphasize pedestrian safety through a connected sidewalk network.

### Harness Local Grassroots Energy

EMDCID should also identify “lighter, quicker, cheaper” solutions that it can implement in the short-term. This entails enlisting existing organizations, such as neighborhood groups and grassroots organizations, to partner with on shared goals. One example is MARTA Army’s current crowdsourcing efforts for trash cans and “Adopt a Bus Station” programs. Fostering such activities in the District can make great swift strides around more short-range projects. Even when cosmetic, these improvements work towards improving the corridor’s perception as a potential site for investment.

### Mid-Term (2018 – 2020)

#### Access and Mobility Enable Investment

Mid-term improvements should focus on transportation. Overall, EMDCID enjoys strong East-West connectivity, unique to Atlanta. Capitalizing on this mobility will again be key to efforts to attract additional development in the Panola Road industrial corridor. Additional transportation improvements, ideally identified through Livable Centers Initiative studies, will continue to build on these strengths.

Interparcel connectivity is key to access in EMDCID’s commercial corridors. Currently, navigating between particular commercial nodes is a handicap for the success of current retail and attraction new businesses as well. Eliminating the need to enter and re-enter shopping centers will enable easier movement through the corridor.

Pedestrian improvements are also key for mid-term investments. Sidewalks, street lights, medians and crosswalks

will all improve the safety and vitality of EMDCID. These infrastructure pieces also enhance interparcel connectivity, allowing shoppers to park in one lot and walk safely to an adjacent store. In particular, crossing signals will greatly improve pedestrian safety by offering safe alternatives to jaywalking.

### Long-Term (2021+)

#### Focus on Transit

Long-term planning should focus on transit’s ability to catalyze development in the District. Auto-oriented development will become increasingly irrelevant and inaccessible as Atlanta continues to grow around its transit investments. MARTA’s designation of I-20 for high-capacity transit, whether bus rapid transit or rail, will spur significant activity within the corridor.

EMDCID should work with County planning to ensure that zoning surrounding these proposed transit investments are amenable to higher-density development. Preparing for transit-oriented development, EMDCID should become a stakeholder in MARTA’s ongoing planning associated with this expansion, such that EMDCID is considered a leading voice for residents in this area. These proposed transit hubs at Panola and Wesley Chapel Roads both offer opportunities to create vibrant, live-work-play areas, that offer residents increased job access through transit, and a broader range of commercial opportunities near housing.



### Help Bring Trash Cans at Your East Point Bus Stops

Over the last few months, we have raised \$16,000 from 150 individual donations. This funding will enable the City of East Point to purchase and install trash cans at 80 bus stops. Although the program has ended, you can still [contribute to the general fund](#) to help partially funded stops get to the \$200 threshold.

Source: MARTA Army



## Conclusion

EMDCID offers a vehicle for advancing economic development in a disinvested portion of DeKalb County. With the beginnings of an effective organization in place, this report summarizes Panel recommendations for how EMDCID can continue to deepen its reach. Immediate priorities should focus on internal organization, while long-term solutions for East DeKalb focus on job creation associated with the district's strong industrial assets. Opportunities for logistics and last-mile e-commerce business represent a particular promising niche for EMDCID.

With the right tools and partnerships in place, EMDCID can mature into an effective, savvy entity. As EMDCID becomes a vocal stakeholder and advocate for members, its achievements will continue to grow in membership as well as impact. Beginning with these strategies, EMDCID can continue to work towards a version of economic development that advances the economic health and vitality of businesses and residents in East DeKalb County.

**Next Steps** The Panelists recommend that EMDCID board and staff organize around the following workplan:

### *Short-Term (2017)*

- ☐ Create and market a unique brand
- ☐ Diversify and develop Board membership and structure
- ☐ Engage with peer CIDs for mentoring
- ☐ Commit to consistent meetings
- ☐ Identify priority project lists (i.e., T-SPLOST) and funding partners
- ☐ Create a Master Plan
- ☐ Become ambassadors for area
- ☐ Create an inventory of assets
- ☐ Publicize successes (i.e., safety patrols and business re-locations)
- ☐ Execute quick beautification partnership projects
- ☐ Liaise with MARTA around current service and long-range planning
- ☐ Identify priority corridors
- ☐ Pursue partnerships for Health Impact Assessment
- ☐ Focus on priority pedestrian improvements
- ☐ Work with existing grassroots groups

### *Mid-Term (2018 – 2020)*

- ☐ Develop incentives for business attraction
- ☐ Identify avenues for exempt employer involvement
- ☐ Look to regional planning partnerships
- ☐ Partner with the Housing Authority of DeKalb County
- ☐ Collaborate with Decide DeKalb and Code Enforcement to address blighted and abandoned properties
- ☐ Focus on transportation improvements
- ☐ Improve interparcel connectivity

### *Long-Term (2021+)*

- ☐ Upgrade and diversify retail offerings
- ☐ Implement workforce development strategies
- ☐ Improve aesthetics of infrastructure
- ☐ Partner with Decide DeKalb to create additional tools and incentives for economic development
- ☐ Partner with GDOT to improve transportation investments
- ☐ Plan development with MARTA high-capacity transit expansion

## About ULI

ULI, the Urban Land Institute, is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, we now have almost 40,000 members worldwide and over 1,200 members in the Atlanta district, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service.

A multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates an open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

## TAPs Mission

ULI's Technical Advisory Panels program provides local municipalities, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations with objective, multi-disciplinary guidance and advice on land use, real estate development and urban design-related issues.

Ellen Ray (Technical Writer) Georgia Tech MCRP Student

### Project Volunteer Leadership:

Derrick Holland (Program Manager) Trinity Development Group

Sarah Butler (TAPs Committee Member) Praxis3 Architecture

### ULI Atlanta Staff:

Sarah Kirsch, Executive Director

Barbra Bowers, Director



*ULI Atlanta TAP participants*

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## Panelist Biographies



**Janet Bozeman (moderator)**  
**Hyatt & Stubblefield, P.C.**

Jan Bozeman is a principal of Hyatt & Stubblefield, P.C. She is a 1989 graduate of Auburn University and received her law degree from Georgia State University in 2000.

She assists developers throughout the country in creating the governance structure for their planned communities, condominiums, and destination resorts and in establishing club membership programs for project amenities. Her experience includes small and large scale residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects, as well as age-qualified communities. She also counsels clients on club and community association governance and operations.

Before joining Hyatt & Stubblefield in 2005, Jan's practice involved the representation of condominium and homeowners associations on a wide range of issues, including construction defect and development issues, covenant enforcement, corporate governance, easement disputes, sexual harassment, and fair housing claims.

Jan is a member of the Urban Land Institute, Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW), the Greater Atlanta Homebuilders Association, the National Homebuilders Association, the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers, and the State Bar of Georgia. Jan was the recipient of the Best Service to the Bar for Exemplary Service to the Bar and the Young Lawyers Division Award in 2003.

Jan is a frequent speaker at continuing education programs on issues relating to community associations, real estate development and 55+ housing.



**Alan Ferguson**  
**Invest Atlanta**

Alan Ferguson currently serves as Vice President and Deputy Director of Invest Atlanta's Community Development Division managing Invest Atlanta's housing, redevelopment, and place-based

initiatives and programs. Prior to joining Invest Atlanta, Alan served as Senior Business Manager for Fannie Mae's Lender Channel, responsible for customer relationships with lenders headquartered in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast regions. Immediately prior to joining Fannie Mae, Alan created the investment and lending production platform, as well as the business strategy, for a national specialized lender in support of its Community Reinvestment Act compliance strategy, guiding that organization to "Outstanding" ratings by its regulator. Alan's career in finance, real estate, and

community development spans over 23 years with significant experience in multifamily lending, affordable housing (including low-income housing tax credits), venture capital, real estate equity, new markets tax credits, and historic tax credits. Alan has completed transactions valued at over \$4 Billion.

Alan holds a Bachelor of Arts in Banking & Finance from Morehouse College, an MBA from The Goizueta Business School at Emory University, a Master of Science in Real Estate from the J. Mack Robinson School of Business at Georgia State University, and is pursuing doctoral studies at Georgia State University.



**Robert Fransen**  
**Coro Realty Advisors, LLC**

Mr. Fransen is responsible for CORO's acquisition, disposition and financing activities. He also oversees asset management for a variety of CORO's value-add investments. Prior to joining CORO,

Mr. Fransen was President, North American Operations of the Slokker Group, headquartered in Washington, DC. There he oversaw commercial, residential and specialty properties in eleven US and Canadian markets. Mr. Fransen previously served as legal counsel for real estate, securities and private equity transactions at Baker Botts LLP and Battle Fowler LLP. Mr. Fransen is a member of ICSC, ULI and serves on several advisory boards. He received a B.A. from the University of Virginia, a J.D. from the Fordham University School of Law and an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago.



**Chris Hall**  
**Haddow & Co.**

Chris joined Haddow & Company in May 2002. He has worked on a wide variety of real estate assignments, ranging from feasibility and highest and best use studies to the marketing and disposition of land and

investment properties. Prior to Haddow & Company, he worked as an urban planner for an architectural firm and the City of Nashville, Tennessee.

Chris is a graduate of Kenyon College and earned master's degrees in city planning and real estate from the University of Texas at Austin and Georgia State University, respectively. Chris is a licensed real estate broker in Georgia, as well as a member of the Urban Land Institute and Counselors of Real Estate. He has published articles in the Atlanta Business Chronicle and served as a speaker and panelist at various real estate events.



**Beau Moultrie**  
**Crossman & Company**

Beau Moultrie is a Leasing Associate with Crossman & Company, one of the largest retail leasing, management, and investment sales firms in the Southeastern United States, with over 22 million

square feet of properties located in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee. Beau leases and sales commercial real estate assets for institutional and non-institutional investors.

Prior to joining Crossman & Company, Beau was a Property Agent for Roberts Commercial Real Estate. He joined the company in 2013 after graduating from FSU with a degree in Finance. While attending FSU he became president of the FSU Real Estate Society and member of the FSU College of Business Presidents Council.

Mr. Moultrie has always had an interest real estate. He began his real estate career as a licensed mortgage broker in Florida. As a mortgage broker, he built his book of business and became one of the top producers in his office. His hard work and product knowledge led to an advisory relationship with O&M steel (a residential home product firm) and Ragusa Developers.



**Gil Prado**  
**Boulevard CID**

Gil R. Prado is the Executive Director of The Boulevard CID (Community Improvement District) in Atlanta, GA where he leads the day-to-day management of the organization and the redevelopment of the Fulton

Industrial district, which is known as the largest industrial corridor in the Eastern USA.

Gil has outstanding track record of entrepreneurial success prior to joining the CID and extensive work experience in real estate, urban planning, historic preservation, sustainability, design, economic development, public infrastructure and business management in the private, non-profit and public sectors. Gil draws on this multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial experience to take a holistic approach to real estate and the built environment, bringing different groups together and building partnerships to yield successful projects that creates a sense of place, enrich people's lives, improve the economy, protect the environment and ultimately becomes an asset and amenity to the community.

Gil earned a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from UCLA (University of California Los Angeles), a Master of Arts in Historic Preservation from SCAD (Savannah College of Arts

and Design) and he is currently completing the Advanced Management Development Program (AMDP) in Real Estate from Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Gil holds the AICP (American Institute of Certified Planner) and the LEED Green Associate credentials. He is an active member of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), American Planning Association (APA), International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and he is an Alumni Advisory Board member at the Harvard University Real Estate Academic Initiative.



**Tyrone Rachal**  
**Red Rock Global**

Rachal is president of Urban Key Capital Partners where he manages all aspects of operations, applying more than 20 years of experience in community development finance, private equity funding and municipal finance.

He previously was founder and president of Atlanta Emerging Markets Inc. This organization is a four-time allocatee with the New Market Tax Credit Program, receiving \$148 million.

In addition, Rachal was managing director of redevelopment for Invest Atlanta, the city of Atlanta's development authority, where he handled tax increment finance and NMTC activity.

Before Invest Atlanta, Rachal co-founded Red Rock Global, a minority-owned real estate advisory services business, concentrating its activities in distressed Atlanta communities. Further, he served with Merrill Lynch, advising financial sponsors in the private placement of more than \$7 billion of limited partnership interests to institutional investors. He also provided advisory assistance in mergers and acquisitions, totaling more than \$5 billion of transactions.

Rachal is a Dartmouth College graduate with degrees in economics and government, as well as the University of Chicago Law School and Booth School of Business, receiving his law and master's degrees, respectively. A licensed attorney and real estate broker, Rachal serves on several nonprofit boards.



**Jetha Wagner**  
**Avila Development, LLC**

As Vice President of Avila, Jetha oversees daily development activities and establishes risk management policy and procedure. She is also responsible for managing lender and partner relations and reporting, monitoring development and construction budgets, cost management and procurement. Jetha has 25+ years in the real estate industry, with an emphasis on the multifamily market. She began her career with Avila as a paralegal and from there, moved into the development and management side of the business. During her tenure with Avila, Jetha has been intimately involved in the construction and development of numerous Atlanta area multifamily communities, as well as retail centers. She coordinates all refinancing, operations and disposition of assets, both commercial and residential, as well as the acquisition and repositioning of single asset purchases. Moreover, Jetha has overseen legal affairs for Avila since 1996. Jetha graduated from the National Center for Paralegal Training in Atlanta, Georgia and holds both the Certified Apartment Manager (CAM) and Certified Apartment Property Supervisor (CAPS) designations. Other professional associations include:

- Atlanta Beltline SSD Steering Committee
- ULI Member / ULI Taps Committee
- Board Member - Stonecrest Business Alliance, Inc.
- Stonecrest Overlay Task Force



**Jay Silverman**  
**Dwell Design Studio, LLC**

Jay Silverman has more than 20 years of experience working on a wide variety of project types including housing and mixed-use, retail, government, office, interiors, and single-family residential design in Atlanta and the southeastern United States. He is a Managing Principal with Dwell Design Studio.

Jay has a reputation for quality design of high-rise mixed-use towers and multi-building residential projects, as well as urban infill mixed-use developments, including new construction and the rehabilitation and adaptive use of older buildings. He takes pride in directing all phases of a project from master planning and schematic design through construction and completion, as well as finding creative solutions to complex design challenges associated with mixed-use and urban-infill development.

Jay currently serves as President of the Atlanta Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He is active in the Urban Land Institute, and as a graduate of the ULI Center Leadership, has served as co-chair of the Technical Assistance Program Committee and the ULI Atlanta Housing Council.

Jay holds licenses to practice architecture in Tennessee and Georgia. He lives in Dunwoody with his wife and two sons. In his spare time he enjoys running and coaching his sons' soccer teams.



**Ellen Ray**

Ellen is a Master's candidate at Georgia Tech in City and Regional Planning, where she specializes in transportation and economic development. Originally hailing from Tulsa, Oklahoma, Ellen graduated from Yale with a BA in American

Studies in 2011. Following graduation, she worked as an Americorps VISTA in the Mayor's office in Austin, Texas under a Bloomberg Philanthropies grant, and, most recently, coordinated public involvement and community outreach for the city's public transit agency. In her spare time she rides with the Georgia Tech cycling team and sings old time American religious music.





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