

6 RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

This report concludes with recommended next steps for DeKalb County and others to consider to promote and incentivize TOD along I-20 East, and to access the widest array of funding and financing opportunities to assist in completing the envisioned build-out design presented in the Community Plan.

A limited number of funding and financing opportunities that can support TOD along the I-20 East corridor are truly dependent on transit approval. Most of the loan, grant, and tax credit sources presented in this report may be applied for by the County, MARTA, City of Stonecrest, or private developers at any time to begin to transform the character of the I-20 corridor through strategic development. While proximity to transit will make some projects more competitive for certain funding opportunities, the absence of a station does not preclude a development project from

receiving funds through several programs profiled in this report. However, these programs should be pursued strategically through a phased approach that maximizes the development potential along the corridor and best leverages a future I-20 East transit investment.

This section identifies several actions that DeKalb County and MARTA can take a) in the short term (one to three years) to best prepare the area for development; b) in the intermediate term (once the I-20 East transit project receives approval and funding) to tap into TOD specific funding sources, such as a TOD structured loan fund or a bond program; and c) development activities that will likely be undertaken by private developers that can be taken anytime – but likely close to or after implementation of high capacity transit in the I-20 East corridor - to design, finance, and construct projects similar to ones proposed in this Community Plan.

6.1.1 IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

Although approval and commitment of federal funding for a high capacity transit investment in the I-20 East corridor is not expected before 2024, it is never too early to begin implementing portions of this TOD Community Plan. Shifting the perception of the corridor early to cultivate an image of a developer-friendly County is paramount to achieving the desired full build-out envisioned by the Community Plan. To do this, there are several actions DeKalb County and MARTA can take right away and can continue to pursue in the short-term. An overview of the funding and financing opportunities that require short term actions is presented below.

1. **Include a “whereas” statement approved by ARC that will grandfather the Indian Creek, Covington Highway, Panola Road, and Lithonia Industrial Boulevard station locations as LCI Areas when DeKalb County adopts the I-20 East TOD Community Plan.** Achieving LCI status would allow DeKalb County and MARTA to immediately pursue federal funds available through ARC for bike and pedestrian projects associated with the I-20 East TOD vision at these four station locations not currently designated as LCI areas. The County should present this Community Plan to the LCI team at ARC to ensure all LCI study requirements are met and confirm the grandfathering language with ARC before Plan adoption.
2. **Confirm recommended priority bike, pedestrian, and complete streets projects presented in this Community Plan and start building the vision.** This Community Plan includes a proposed program of immediate improvements to the I-20 East corridor that the County can begin undertaking in the near-term to help change the perception of the area and entice future development. Once the County confirms these proposed priorities, it should:
 - a. Include these projects in the County’s 2019 Transportation Plan update;

- b. Prioritize these TOD supportive projects within the County’s CIP;
- c. Identify sources for the 20 percent local match required to pursue federal funding from ARC; and
- d. Apply for ARC funding for the selected bike, pedestrian, and complete streets projects.

3. **Work with Decide DeKalb to create one or more new TADs.** A recommended roadmap for TAD creation follows:
 - a. DeKalb County, City of Stonecrest and DecideDeKalb should consider the geographic boundaries for TADs in the six station areas envisioned for the I-20 East corridor. Those boundaries should consider the maximum amount of developable land available to developers, the existing zoning, underutilized or vacant parcels, and existing anchor institutions (employers, educational centers, etc).
 - b. The DeKalb County and/or City of Stonecrest should consider the driving goals for the acquisition of “catalytic” properties within proposed TAD boundaries. “Catalytic” properties are those that have the potential to increase affordable housing; serve the space and commuting needs for regional employers, such as logistics providers, or medical facilities; and to reactivate underutilized or vacant retail and industrial parcels. The goals of respective stakeholders will inform each TAD’s governance structure and the approach the stakeholders must take to justify the purpose and function of the taxing entities.
 - c. The DeKalb County, City of Stonecrest and DecideDeKalb should approach the DeKalb County School District to assess interest in the proposed TADs. Involving the school system will increase the amount of revenue the TADs are able to generate. Economic development in the corridor has a direct impact on student population and resources.

- d. To enact the TADs, a local act must be passed by a majority of qualified voters in a special election by the political subdivisions directly affected (DeKalb County, City of Stonecrest, school system).
- e. After pursuing the legislative changes necessary to implement the TADs, the entities should coordinate master planning efforts to enact cohesive change across the corridor and conduct outreach to developers interested in accessing the benefits of the established TADs. Since Georgia has several successful TADs in the I-20 East region, the TAD governing bodies should tap into this existing network and leverage lessons learned to develop a strategy that engages developers prior to the commencement of transit service.

4. Identify a program or projects that are consistent with policies of the existing East Metro DeKalb Community Improvement District (EMDCID)- The size of the EMDCID is both an advantage and a disadvantage; it encompasses the Mall at Stonecrest, Lithonia, Panola Road, and Wesley Chapel Road station areas, but this size also decreases the visibility of the CID's improvements, making it more difficult to engage with commercial property owners that do not directly benefit from EMDCID efforts. I-20 East stakeholders may help EMDCID focus interest on the four station areas. Focusing on specific station areas within the EMDCID allows for a targeted approach and more visible return on investment for EMDCID members most impacted by a transit investment in the I-20 East corridor. In turn, this will enable EMDCID to engage with more potential members around the station areas. The proposed vision for I-20 East offers opportunities to create vibrant, live-work-play areas that offer increase commercial activities. The County, MARTA, and City of Stonecrest, then, should educate EMDCID members about the benefits of the proposed transit improvements and coordinate with EMDCID to slate projects that attract developers and employers to the four station areas. DeKalb County and City of Stonecrest should engage with the EMDCID to:

- a. Identify existing and potential CID members in the four station areas;
- b. Calculate the potential revenues generated by existing (and

potential) commercial property owners closest to the four station areas;

- c. Work with EMDCID to identify beautification, infrastructure, and public safety improvement projects that would attract developers to the four station areas;
- d. Approach existing and potential members to gain their confidence that CID revenues would be applied to making improvements in the station areas that have the greatest impact on livability and transit access that result in a return on investment for members; and,
- e. Collaborate with EMDCID's board to update EMDCID's Master Plan to include those projects and coincide project execution with the construction timeframe for the I-20 East transit project.

5. Identify strategic and catalytic sites to be acquired through the regional land bank. Land banking is a powerful tool to safeguard pivotal sites proximate to the proposed station locations, allowing the County to have influence over the density, use, and even style of building erected by developers. Without the ability to land bank, key parcels near station areas may be acquired too early – before transit arrives – and be developed into an undesired use, such as single family homes or low density commercial. To do this, the County and City of Stonecrest must:

- a. Select priority sites both in the County and in the City of Stonecrest to acquire. Both parties will need to identify the owners of each site and current value.
- b. Reinstate the DeKalb County Regional Land Bank and identify the source of County funds to acquire land and operate the land bank. This may include reassigning County staff to manage the land bank full or part time.

6. Encourage TOD at the existing MARTA Indian Creek Station. Since the Indian Creek Station already exists, the County should coordinate with MARTA to prioritize TOD at the Indian Creek station. Pending the DeKalb County's Master Transit Plan approval, the project team will:

- a. Confirm station location and transit alignment.
 - i. Station Location. The current plan for the station area assumes that in the future the station will be relocated south of the current location. The plan locates the highest density mixed use development around the new station. If the transit plan keeps the station in the current station location, the plan should reconsider the location of the highest density development to leverage proximity to transit.
 - ii. Alignment. Development must respect the transit alignment. In the short-term development, can leverage existing transit access so long as the ROW is preserved for the future alignment of the transit extension.
- b. Prepare a site master plan for Indian Creek station area. Once the project team knows what the transit plan will call for at Indian Creek, the team will prepare an alternative site master plan for MARTA and DeKalb County to consider. Phasing of the project should allow for development to occur in the short term that accommodates the final alignment in the long-term. Specific elements that will be built out to set the stage for a master development should sequence construction to prioritize:
 - i. Central boulevard - Improve connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods
 - ii. Site infrastructure - street greening and utilities to begin to prep sites for development
 - iii. Residential neighborhood - begin construction of the residential neighborhood to create demand for future retail uses
 - iv. Community Green - construct open space to provide amenity for residents and to create a focus for development
 - v. Central structured parking - as the park and ride surface lots are built out the commuter parking will need to be replaced

with structured parking. Synergies for shared parking with on-site uses should be investigated to reduce parking demand.

- vi. Civic Plaza - once a critical mass of residents is established construct the civic plaza to create a focus for the mixed-use district. Before the mixed-use district is constructed the plaza can be programmed to attract visitors who otherwise would not visit the site and start to change perceptions of Indian Creek as a destination.
- vii. Mixed use district - it is envisioned that the last area to be developed would be the mixed-use district. This is the highest density of uses closest to transit and is where most of the retail uses are proposed in a 'Main Street' environment. The phasing this district is ultimately based on market demand, but it is assumed that it would occur in later phases once a critical mass of residents has been established and perceptions of Indian Creek Station area have been changed

7. Connect with Invest Atlanta to understand their process for creation of the new Atlanta TOD Structured Loan Fund. Using Atlanta as a case study may help DeKalb County replicate a similar fund. The County should also monitor the success of Invest Atlanta's fund, and work with it to benefit from any possible lessons learned. To create a structured loan fund, DeKalb County will need to:

- a. Identify investors; and
- b. Develop investing guidelines of the fund.

8. Continue the outreach and education process with developers on the potential of the corridor and TOD vision – Throughout the development of this Strategic Plan, the project team has worked alongside DeKalb County and MARTA to educate a broad range of stakeholders such as the City of Stonecrest, community groups, and private developers on the breadth of development possibilities along the I-20 East corridor. DeKalb County and MARTA should continue these efforts, including to:

- a. Facilitate developer coordination surrounding strategic land parcels. This will include working with Decide DeKalb and the Regional Land Bank to reach reasonable sale or lease prices with possible use restrictions to support the Community Plan's vision.
- b. Host periodic community meetings to present the progress of development interest and activity around the stations.

9. Continue the equity work surrounding the I-20 East TOD efforts by creating a TOD advisory committee – Equitable TOD is a priority of DeKalb County and MARTA and this Community Plan reflects that. The desired mix of development uses and affordability levels are designed to create a vibrant and diverse corridor where existing residents can remain and thrive, while attracting new residents to the increased access to transit, amenities, and jobs along the I-20 East corridor. This goal of equitable TOD should remain in the forefront of future planning discussions, and should be championed by a range of stakeholders. To do this, the County and MARTA should create a TOD Equity Committee comprised of community members, local governmental officials, developers, and MARTA representatives. Identifying project champions is an integral part of fueling the momentum for a development effort of this magnitude. An official advisory committee can:

- a. Serve as a unified voice to keep the public informed of progress, consider development proposals, and actively pursue new residents, employers, and developments.
- b. Change perceptions of the corridor by proposing and promoting new marketing efforts for the County and by implementing the initial phases of bike and pedestrian improvements discussed earlier in this section. The full build-out of TOD surrounding these stations is proposed to occur in phases, and the Advisory Committee should keep other developers, investors, and the public apprised of continued progress.
- c. Educate developers to inform them of the availability of incentive programs, grants, loans, and tax credit opportunities available in the area as provided in this Plan. This report can serve as a helpful resource - and roadmap - for the Advisory Committee to reference when meeting with potential developers and investors.

6.1.2 I-20 EAST TRANSIT APPROVAL

The following action items should take place soon after the I-20 East transit project is approved and funding is secured. While discussions surrounding these items can certainly occur in the short term, opportunities will be dependent on the financial commitment to implement high capacity transit in the corridor. These opportunities are described in greater detail below.

FUTURE ACTIONS

1. Work to confirm available public land near station areas. MARTA and DeKalb County should work together to identify possible opportunities for air rights or ground lease joint development opportunities with developers. It is more probable that the I-20 East TOD will occur on MARTA or County owned land using ground leases rather than air rights, due to the lower density nature of the corridor and the high construction cost associated with vertical development atop stations.
 - a. Once sites are identified, the property owner (MARTA or DeKalb County) should develop an RFP for joint development partners that may include some use restrictions such as density and income targets as a part of the deal.
2. Create a new bond program to specifically fund a portion of the infrastructure improvements associated with new TOD around the station areas. This will occur after the I-20 East transit project is confirmed, as the use of bond proceeds will be restricted to projects specifically tied to elements of the I-20 East project. Depending on the bond program, it may need voter approval, which will require community outreach and marketing.
3. Court tourism-generating development projects along the I-20 East corridor. DeKalb County should work with developers of possible major convention and expo centers, as well as other major tourism draws such as entertainment uses to locate near one of the new stations, such as the proposed entertainment center at Stonecrest Mall. These types of projects will be eligible to receive a state sales tax rebate, allowing the developers and operators to maximize profits without affecting DeKalb County's property tax revenues.
4. Implement TOD-specific sources that have been identified and researched in the short-term. Once the County and MARTA undertake the immediate next steps presented earlier (i.e. identifying new TAD locations, understanding CID opportunities, and evaluating a structured TOD Fund), they can begin to utilize these sources for proposed TOD.

6.1.3 DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Most of the specific “long-term” funding and financing options presented in this report will be pursued by individual developers of TOD surrounding the I-20 East stations. While these opportunities are immediately available for developers to begin densifying and diversifying land uses surrounding the proposed station areas, it is expected that the influx of major real estate investment will occur once the I-20 East transit project has secured funding, putting the “T” in TOD. At that time, these sources should be reevaluated to identify current funding levels, requirements, and program priorities before applying for any source.

Each of the incentives and funding and financing sources listed below relies on having an individual development project proposed with a strong level of certainty. In Section 2 Funding and Financing TOD of this report, each source opportunity profile identifies the administering agency, how to apply, typical funding levels, and eligibility information.

Since it is anticipated that the largest portion of the development presented in this Community Plan won’t be catalyzed until the I-20 East transit project’s approval in 2024, the information presented in this report will likely need to be refreshed at that time. Developers can find links to all program websites in this report’s references, and should monitor future funding levels and opportunities once ready to apply.

- Developer Impact Fees
- Developer Bonuses (Zoning)
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- Section 108 Loans
- New Market Tax Credits (NMTC)
- Historic Tax Credits
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) 9%

I-20 EAST TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD) COMMUNITY PLAN

SECTION 2

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