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Market Street brings original insights and clarity to the evaluation and revitalization of the places where people live, work, and grow. Through honest and informed assessments, *Market Street* can equip you with the tools to create meaningful change. Our solutions successfully merge our experience and expertise with the economic and social realities of our clients. *Market Street's* community clients are successful at creating stronger programs, increasing operational budgets, and creating new quality jobs that improve the quality of life in their communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project Overview 2

Executive Summary: Competitive Snapshot..... 4

Strategic Recommendations 16

 Development Policy and Redevelopment.....17

 Partnership and Program Development..... 32

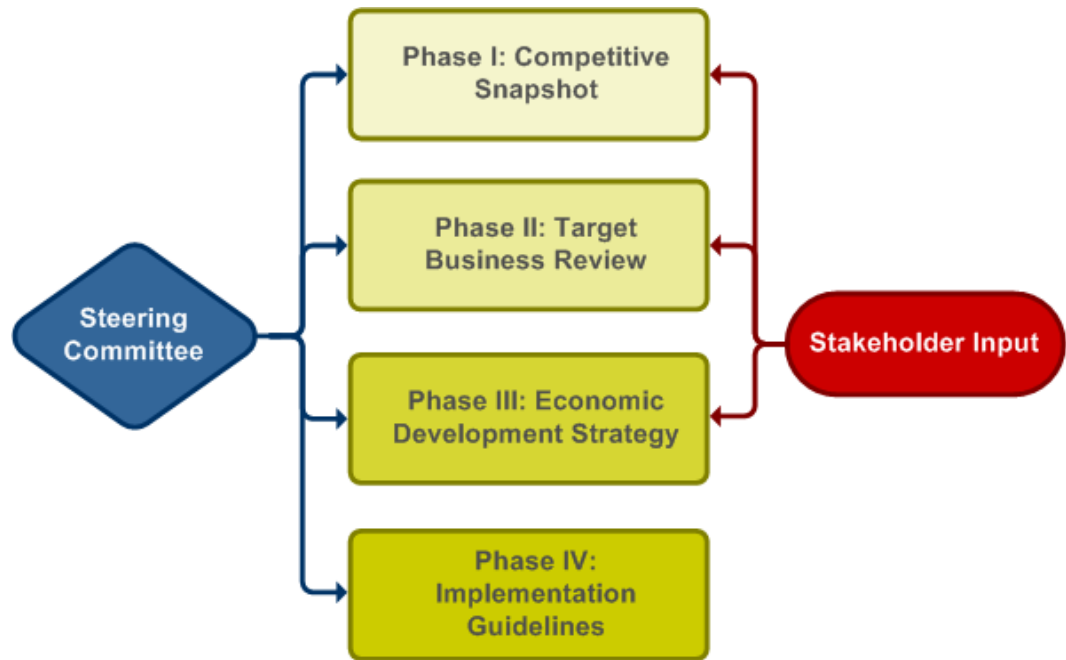
 Community Assets..... 45

Conclusion55

Appendix A: Best Practices 56

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Alpharetta contracted with *Market Street Services*, a national community and economic development consulting firm headquartered in Atlanta, to facilitate a six-month economic development planning process beginning in August, 2010. The planning process is comprised of four phases, as outlined below.



- ✓ **Competitive Snapshot:** The *Competitive Snapshot* provided a qualitative and quantitative analysis of Alpharetta’s competitiveness as a place to live for current and relocating residents and as a place to conduct business. The City’s performance was measured along three broad components of community – *People, Prosperity, and Place* – and benchmarked against three peer communities, the state, and the nation. The *Snapshot* incorporated findings from a Stakeholder input process that included interviews, focus groups, and an online survey.
- ✓ **Target Business Review:** The *Target Business Review* merged quantitative and qualitative research to produce a short list of clearly defined target business sectors and the opportunities and challenges involved in effectively growing them. Additionally, *Market Street’s* partner, *Buxton Company*, provided supplementary retail analyses that include trade area data, retail sales leakage and surplus assessments, and consumer propensity reports.

- ✓ **Economic Development Plan:** This *Plan* represents the culmination of all research completed and presents action items geared toward addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities for visionary growth. This *Economic Development Plan* is intended to serve as a tool to unify Alpharetta's leadership behind a blueprint for the community's future economic development activities.

- ✓ **Implementation Guidelines:** The *Economic Development Plan* represents "what" Alpharetta needs to do to achieve its preferred future, while the *Implementation Guidelines* determine "how" that will be done. This *Implementation Guidelines* will include action plans for years one through five, organizational and structural realignment recommendations, and benchmarks and performance measures for tracking progress during implementation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: COMPETITIVE SNAPSHOT

The *Competitive Snapshot* provides a review of a variety of trends in the city of Alpharetta as compared to the cities of Cary, NC; Round Rock, TX; and Sandy Springs, GA, as well the state of Georgia and the United States. It provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Alpharetta’s competitiveness as a place to live for current and relocating residents, and as a place to conduct business for existing, expanding, and prospective businesses. This *Snapshot* is organized into three sections according to the principal factors that together determine the competitiveness of Alpharetta as a setting to live and do business: **People, Prosperity, and Place**.

Throughout this executive summary, symbols are used to denote positive, negative, and neutral trends across the City of Alpharetta.



The green icon with a plus sign indicates positive trends



The orange icon with an equals sign indicates neutral trends



The red icon with a minus sign indicates negative trends

People

It is critical that all project stakeholders embark on Alpharetta’s ten-year strategic process with a shared understanding of community dynamics and recent trends that can influence policy decisions. Assessing how the city of Alpharetta’s population is growing and changing is the first step towards understanding its recent past and clarifying its future opportunities and challenges. This section analyzes the growth and well-being of the community in terms of demographics, socioeconomics, and education dynamics.

The city of Alpharetta experienced tremendous population growth in recent decades, booming from an exurban community that was largely residential and undeveloped in the 1970s to a city with more than 50,000 residents. Alpharetta has experienced rapid rates of growth and the city’s long-range plans still account for considerable additional population growth. The city’s relatively young and increasingly diverse population is a clear asset for the community moving forward.



Between 1990 and 2000, the city of Alpharetta added nearly 22,000 new residents, equivalent to 168 percent growth. This rate of growth outpaced the rates experienced in Cary (116 percent), Round Rock (98 percent) and Sandy Springs (26 percent), and far outpaced the national growth rate (13 percent). Since 2000, population growth in Alpharetta has been steady but more modest than in the 1990s. The city added 16,715 new residents between 2000 and 2009, equivalent to 48 percent population growth. Only Round Rock, Texas experienced a higher rate of growth in the 2000s, driven by the allure

of the Austin metropolitan area and the rapid expansion of employment opportunities within the metro.



Alpharetta diversified rapidly during the last decade, with minorities increasing their share of total population from 20.8 percent in 2000 to 34.5 percent in 2010. Many communities find that population diversity can provide good opportunities to enhance local cultural attractiveness and economic vitality. Similarly, employers often find that communities lacking population diversity can inhibit their ability to attract the best and brightest to their companies.



Alpharetta will benefit greatly from its relatively young population in the years ahead. As of this year, the city has a lower share of its population between the ages of 45 and 64 (25.3 percent) than the national average (25.9 percent) and its Metro Atlanta competitor, Sandy Springs (28.1 percent). This demographic will be approaching retirement age in the coming decade, and communities with a relatively small share of residents between the ages of 45 and 64 will be less susceptible to impending demographic shifts in the workforce as the Baby Boom generation retires.



Most importantly, Alpharetta's share of the total population between the ages of 25 and 44 is the largest among all three comparison communities, the state, and the nation. This strong pipeline of younger residents will help to reduce the susceptibility of the city's workforce to the aforementioned impending retirement of the Baby Boom generation.

The city of Alpharetta also benefits tremendously from an incredibly well-educated population. Educational attainment is an important indicator of socioeconomic well-being and earning potential. It also is one of the key determinants of a workforce's competitiveness and the ability of a community to develop and attract high-skilled, high-wage employment.




As of this year, 59.5 percent of the city's adult population (ages 25 and older) possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. By comparison, only 27.9 percent of the nation's population and 27.5 of the state's population possesses a bachelor's degree or higher. Two of the city's comparison communities, Sandy Springs and Cary, also possessed extremely well-educated populations with more than 60 percent of their adult populations possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. This indicates that both communities compete very strongly with Alpharetta from the standpoint of workforce preparedness in an increasingly knowledge-intensive economy.





Only 4.3 percent of Alpharetta's adult population did not possess a high school diploma, lower than all comparisons and more than ten


percentage points below the national average (14.8 percent). Alpharetta benefits from strong state workforce development resources, which are a best practice model in economic development, and provide support for workers trying to enhance their skill sets or advance their education.

With such a well-educated population and given the well-documented impact of education on lifetime earnings potential, it is no surprise that Alpharetta’s resident population earns considerably higher incomes than the national average.

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According to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey three-year estimates spanning 2006 to 2008, Alpharetta’s median household income was \$98,535. This was nearly double the national average (\$52,175) and more than \$9,000 higher than the next highest-earning median household out the three comparison communities (Cary, at \$89,053). The median household income in Alpharetta was nearly \$24,000 higher than its Metro Atlanta competitor, Sandy Springs (\$74,581).
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During the same three-year period, only 6.7 percent of Alpharetta’s households earned less than \$25,000 per year, a smaller percentage than all comparisons, and considerably lower than the national average (23.2 percent).
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This translates to an extremely low poverty rate in the city, with only 3.8 percent of the population falling below the poverty thresholds, lower than all comparison communities and 9.6 percentage points lower than the national poverty rate (13.2 percent).
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Additionally, median household incomes in Alpharetta grew faster between 2000 and the 2006-2008 period than any comparison community, the state, or the nation. This contributed to an unusual but very positive finding: poverty rates actually declined in Alpharetta between 2000 and the 2006-2008 period, whereas poverty increased in all comparison communities, the state, and the nation.

The city’s residents benefit greatly from strong public schools that consistently rate among some of the best schools in the state of Georgia. High quality public schools are attractive to both existing and potential residents, but, equally important, are also an important factor in the location decisions of firms that understand employees want to have access to the best public education possible for their children.

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Graduation rates at the city’s two largest high schools, Alpharetta and Milton High School, were 92.8 percent and 97.1 percent, respectively, during the 2008 academic year. This far exceeded the statewide graduation rate of 75.4 percent. Student performance on key end-of-course subject tests has historically been well above the statewide

average at Alpharetta High School, Milton High School, and Teach Charter High School.



Input participants in Alpharetta repeatedly cited the quality of the city’s public schools as one of the top strengths and selling points of the community, and emphasized that the quality of its schools must be preserved to ensure that it remains competitive for new employers and families, and continues to benefit future generations.

Prosperity

This section will present and explicate key trends in a variety of economic indicators, including those related to employment, business sector dynamics, tax environment, and business costs. Each of these indicators contributes to a broad understanding of the community’s ability to generate employment and wealth, or **Prosperity**. By examining Alpharetta’s competitive position against the selected benchmark communities, the city’s economic strengths will be highlighted and its challenges revealed. A breakdown of employment and relative concentration by sector will provide a first look at the city’s business sector composition, a topic that is further explored in *Target Business Review*.

Employment in Alpharetta can be understood in two dimensions: *resident employment* and *total jobs*. *Resident employment* refers to the employment status of the resident population, regardless of where the jobs are located. *Total jobs* refers to the number of jobs within city boundaries, regardless of employees’ place of residence. Alpharetta experienced modest growth in resident employment in the early half of the past decade but experienced much stronger growth from 2004 to 2007. The recent recession has hit Alpharetta hard, with relatively large declines in resident employment (the employment status of those residing within the city) as compared to the state, and the nation. However, while resident employment has been hit hard during the recession, there are still considerably more jobs than working-age residents in Alpharetta.



As of 2010, the number of jobs within Alpharetta’s city limits (50,874) is 55 percent higher than the size of its resident working-age population (32,838). This implies that the city is a large net importer of employees from other parts of Metro Atlanta. Sandy Springs is also a relatively large net importer of employees from outside the community with the number of jobs exceeding the working-age resident population by 38 percent. However, both Cary and Round Rock have working-age populations that exceed the number of jobs, indicating that they are more traditional suburban “bedroom communities” than true job centers like Alpharetta and Sandy Springs.



Resident employment grew by more than 6,000 in Alpharetta from 2000 until the onset of the most recent recession, with much of this

growth occurring in 2005 and 2006. This was equivalent to a 31.2 percent growth rate, far outpacing national and statewide growth, and exceeded only by the rapid growth of Round Rock.



Since the national recession began in December 2007, resident employment in Alpharetta has declined by 2,746, equivalent to a 10.3 percent decline. This rate of decline was exceeded slightly by Sandy Springs (11.2 percent decline) but was larger than the national and statewide rates of employment loss. Cary began to recover rapidly from the most recent recession beginning in January 2010, nearly recouping all employment losses experienced in the previous two years. The Round Rock economy has been extraordinarily resilient to recent recessions, actually exhibiting employment growth during the 2001 and most recent recession.



Although Alpharetta makes up only 9.6 percent of Fulton County's total employment, it was home to 27.8 percent of county job losses due to layoffs and closures in 2009. Job losses associated with layoffs and closures in Alpharetta comprised 10.2 percent of the ten-county metro region's total in 2009. Data covering January to September of 2010 show that there have been three significant layoffs or closures in Alpharetta resulting in a loss of 310 jobs. This represents 10.7 percent of the 10-county metro total year-to-date, and 17.7 percent of closure or significant layoff-related losses in Fulton County.


Although the recession has taken a toll locally as well as nationwide, the city has benefitted from a well-engaged workforce as exhibited by its high labor force participation rates and historically low unemployment rates.




In June 2000, only two percent of the city's labor force was reported to be unemployed, roughly two percentage points below the national (4.1 percent) and statewide (3.9 percent) rates. This was comparable to the unemployment rates experienced in Cary and Sandy Springs, but lower than the rate observed in Round Rock at the beginning of the decade.




Unemployment stood at 3.7 percent in Alpharetta in December 2007, at the onset of the most recent recession. Between December 2007 and June 2010, unemployment increased 4.4 percentage points in Alpharetta to 8.1 percent. This was slightly lower than the increase experienced in Sandy Springs (4.6 percentage points), but was larger than the increase experienced in Cary and Round Rock, both of which are contained within metropolitan areas with labor markets that were not as heavily affected by the national recession as Metro Atlanta. Although not faring as well as two its primary competitors, the city's unemployment rate remained below the national and state averages in June 2010.


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The labor force participation rate (LFPR) measures the percentage of the working age population (ages 18 – 69) that is either employed or unemployed. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, labor force participation rates increased steadily across the United States, driven in part by the influx of women and minorities entering the workforce. Female labor participation rates have stabilized in the 21st century, and the nation is currently facing a new trend: the beginning stages of the retirement of the Baby Boom generation, those 55 and older. Consistent with national trends, Alpharetta, Cary, Round Rock, and the state of Georgia experienced a decline in labor force participation over the course of the 2000s. However, the most recent recession has likely partially interrupted this downward trend as some individuals have chosen (and in many cases had little choice) to delay retirement.
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Despite recent declines, nearly 80 percent of Alpharetta’s working age population remained actively engaged in the labor force (LFPR = 79.9 percent) in early 2010. With such strong labor force participation Alpharetta is likely to continue to experience strong household wealth accumulation as compared to the nation (LFPR = 74.9 percent).

Alpharetta has benefited tremendously from major infrastructural investments made in previous decades, including the development of multiple business parks with strong telecommunications and fiber optic infrastructure. Coupled with the city’s comparatively well-educated population and the relative desirability of Metro Atlanta as a place to do business, these investments attracted multiple regional headquarters and other operations of high-technology and Fortune 500 companies to Alpharetta.

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Many of these firms are classified within the information sector, which encompasses information technology, telecommunications, data processing, and internet service providers, among other subsectors. Employment in the information sector has swelled to over 7,000 jobs in 2010, producing a location quotient of 6.92. This captures the employment contained within many of the city’s largest employers, including McKesson, Verizon, AT&T, LexisNexis, and Oracle, among others.
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Many of the city’s other major employers including ADP and certain business units of McKesson, Siemens, UPS Supply Chain Solution, and Ryder Shared Services are classified as professional and technical services. There are more than 4,400 individuals employed in this relatively high-wage sector in Alpharetta, representing 8.9 percent of all jobs in the city, as compared to 5.7 percent nationwide (LQ = 1.56).
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The city is also home to a vibrant retail environment, employing more than 10,000 individuals, representing just over 20 percent of all jobs in the city. North Point Mall and surrounding shopping areas, as well

as the Windward Parkway retail area are major draws for residents from surrounding North Fulton and Forsyth County communities. This influx of retail expenditures from surrounding areas provides a healthy boost to the city's tax base.

Although a number of factors related to a community's workforce are rising to the top of site considerations, overall tax climate consistently ranks high on companies' priority location concerns. Communities with non-competitive tax structures risk driving away prospective companies and those that are already located in the area. Georgia's tax climate is relatively low and quite competitive with the rest of the nation, with comparably low corporate income tax rates but slightly higher property tax rates than the national average. Local tax rates, including property taxes, and various fees, including development impact fees, are slightly higher than surrounding communities in North Fulton but much lower than major urban areas across the nation.

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The city of Alpharetta has the highest property tax millage rate (5.75 mills) out of all North Fulton communities, with the exception of Mountain Park (11.78 mills). Neighboring Roswell (5.455 mills), Johns Creek (4.614 mills) and Sandy Springs (4.731 mills) all have slightly lower millage rates.
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The city of Alpharetta also imposes three different types of development impact fees, collected for public safety, roads, and parks and recreation. Sandy Springs and Roswell also collect development impact fees for the same three categories. Fee schedules vary by size and type of development, and although rate schedules differ, they are generally comparable in size. Although development impact fees remain in place, Sandy Springs adopted a resolution in February 2010 to reduce all other fees collected by the Community Development department by 50 percent for a period of one year. This reduction is intended to help jump-start development in Sandy Springs, and may incentivize developers who are examining a variety of North Fulton locations to choose Sandy Springs over other North Fulton communities, including Alpharetta.
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Throughout the community input process, *Market Street* staff received many conflicting opinions about tangible and intangible business costs in Alpharetta. Most business owners felt that the city's taxes and impact fees were not prohibitive to development and were competitive with other North Fulton communities. However, many of the same aforementioned business owners felt that the permitting process in Alpharetta could be cumbersome and difficult to navigate. A full discussion with many other important observations from community input participants with regards to tangible and intangible business costs can be found in the full *Competitive Snapshot*.

Place

Alpharetta’s quality of place has been a key factor in the city’s residential and economic growth over the last two decades. Attractive housing options, quality schools, safe neighborhoods, and proximity to metro Atlanta amenities helped Alpharetta attract families and businesses. While the Great Recession put downward pressure on an otherwise mobile workforce and business community, the long-term implications of quality of place remain unchanged. As the nation slowly moves into full economic recovery, workers and businesses will continue to “vote with their feet” (as economist Charles Tiebout has said) by choosing to locate in communities with the most attractive bundle of amenities to suit their needs. As such, the continued development of Alpharetta’s community product is inextricably tied to its economic development success.

This section examines some of the concepts associated with Alpharetta’s quality of place – including cost of living, housing options, infrastructure and commuting, and public safety – and their implications for its competitiveness as a place to live, work, and grow.

Alpharetta’s strong community assets have helped to its reputation as a family-friendly community.



In July 2009, *Forbes.com* ranked Alpharetta #1 on the “Best Places to Move” list. All of the comparison communities examined in this report also landed on the list: Cary ranked 8th, Sandy Springs ranked 15th, and Round Rock came in at 24th place.




Community input participants were generally very pleased with the amenities available to individuals and families within the city. The Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre was frequently mentioned as a very welcome addition, and residents often cited the quality of the city’s parks and recreation facilities as a key strength of the community. Many also indicated that they would like to see these facilities maintained in the years ahead to ensure that future generations have the same access.








However, some participants lamented the absence of a more active nightlife in Alpharetta that would appeal to young professionals, and noted that there is no locus of entertainment activity. Some mentioned that restrictive alcohol policies contribute to the relative lack of bars and nightclubs in the city.

Overall cost of living in Metro Atlanta is below the national average and competitive with the cost of living observed in the Raleigh-Cary, North Carolina and Austin-Round Rock, Texas metropolitan areas.

-  The Council for Community and Economic Research's (C₂ER) Cost of Living Index scores the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta metropolitan area at 96.0, where a value of 100 represents the national average. This fell between the cost of living index values for the Raleigh-Cary and Austin-Rock metropolitan areas.

For a community to be economically competitive, it must have housing that is both affordable and attractive to its workforce. Because communities have workers of all pay scales, it is important to have housing options to suit the needs of all types of workers, families, and individuals.

-  Averaged over the three-year period spanning 2006-2008, Alpharetta boasted a higher rate of homeownership (69.3 percent) than Sandy Springs (54.8 percent), Round Rock (64.1 percent), the state (67.8 percent), and the nation (67.1 percent).
-  Across all four zip codes that are partially or wholly contained within Alpharetta, one in every 371 homes received a foreclosure filing in August 2010. Meanwhile, only one in every 1,807 units received a foreclosure filing in Cary in August 2010; yet, in Round Rock, one in every 297 units received a foreclosure filing (data was not available for Sandy Springs). To provide additional context within North Fulton County, one in every 393 units in Roswell received a foreclosure filing in August 2010, roughly equivalent to the rate observed in Alpharetta.
-  Alpharetta experienced strong appreciation in home values from 2000 to 2008, with the median home value rising 50 percent from \$226,300 to \$340,500, outpacing the rate of appreciation in all three comparison communities. Such strong appreciation provides elevated equity for homeowners, but also affects affordability for potential future homeowners. Compared to Metro Atlanta's median sale price in July 2010 (\$141,300), Alpharetta (\$295,000) is much less affordable for younger and lower-income populations.
-  The aforementioned median sale price for single-family homes in Alpharetta in July 2010 (\$295,000) was 13.1 percent lower than the median list price (\$339,900) during the same month. This rate of loss at the median (the percentage difference between the median sale price and the median list price) was higher than the rates of loss on July home sales in the Sandy Springs and Cary markets, where sellers experienced losses of only 2.6 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively.
-  In July 2010, 30.3 percent of all home sold in Alpharetta were sold for a loss. This level exceeded the percentage of homes sold for a loss in both the Cary and Sandy Springs markets (data was not available for Round Rock). The percentage of homes sold for a loss in Alpharetta has risen consistently since May 2007, when only 5.9 percent of

homes were sold for a loss. While it is a difficult blow for homeowners to absorb during difficult economic times, these are corrections in the market that will help bring housing prices better in line with current market demand.



According to the Census Bureau's three-year estimates spanning 2006-2008, nearly 31 percent of Alpharetta's housing stock is multi-family units. This is a relatively large share compared to the Cary and Round Rock markets, as well as the national average. This is a somewhat surprising finding given that community input participants indicated that many residents seem opposed to multi-family development in Alpharetta. Some participants noted that they would like to see more apartments and condos developed at price points that are affordable to young professionals and recent college graduates that may be employed in Alpharetta. However, others emphasized that they would like to see the community maintain the charm that they associate with the city's predominantly single-family residential areas.



According to the Census Bureau, the median rent in Alpharetta is \$893, a figure higher than all of the geographies examined. However, for local renters this is fairly affordable. Between 2006 and 2008, only 28 percent of renters paid more than 30 percent of household income on rent, representing a smaller proportion than all comparison communities, the state, and the nation.

One of the most important factors contributing to the attractiveness of a community for existing and potential residents is public safety. Community input participants felt that the city is a very safe place to live and many praised their local police and fire departments.



In 2009, Alpharetta had a higher incidence of property crime than Cary and Round Rock but lower than Sandy Springs and the statewide average. The city's rate of property crime was slightly higher than the national rate in 2009. This rate was driven by a relatively high incidence of larceny-theft.




Although the city possessed a slightly higher rate of property crime, it had no murders or cases of non-negligent manslaughter in 2009 and had rates of other forms of violent crime that were considerably lower than the national and state averages.





Thankfully, property crime is on the decline in Alpharetta, with the city experiencing a 12.9 percent reduction in the total number of reported incidents of property crime between 2007 and 2009. Further, the city experienced a 65.1 percent reduction in the number of reported violent crime during the same period, far exceeding the

reductions experienced in the comparison communities, the state, and the nation (Round Rock actually experienced an increase in violent crime during the period).

The quality and connectivity of a region’s road, rail, and air networks are critical to its ability to attract and retain residents and business. Metro Atlanta has strong interstate network connectivity and is home to the world’s busiest airport, significantly impacting the region’s attractiveness to businesses. However, many residents complained about congestion in and around Alpharetta, and traffic was cited by online survey participants as the single greatest challenge threatening Alpharetta’s future competitiveness.

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The city of Alpharetta has comparatively weak connections to metro transit providers, as measured against other communities in North Fulton that lie closer to MARTA rail connections. However, the city has worked well with MARTA to accommodate commuters by establishing three park and ride lots and three primary MARTA bus routes that run along primary corridors. Sandy Springs benefits from the presence of MARTA Red Line rail stop. Round Rock is currently planning for the development of commuter rail that will connect the city to nearby Austin. With traffic congestion cited as the biggest threat to future competitiveness by participants of the community input process, enhancing the city’s connections to and use of public transit will be critical.
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According to the Census Bureau, 62.4 percent of Alpharetta residents had a commute time of 30 minutes or less during the three-year period spanning 2006-2008, a smaller proportion than Round Rock (65 percent), Sand Springs (67.5 percent), and Cary (72.4 percent). Nearly one in five residents (19.6 percent) has a commute of at least 45 minutes, a larger share than all three comparison communities. This is likely just as indicative of Alpharetta’s desirability as a place of residence for individuals working in the urban core of Atlanta as it is indicative of congestion impacts on travel time.
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Input participants noted that Alpharetta has pressing traffic issues, but also highlighted some distinct advantages over other North Fulton communities. Traffic congestion is particularly onerous during the school year, but is present during the morning and evening commutes year-round. East-west connectivity was noted as being particularly problematic. Participants emphasized the importance of completing Westside Parkway, noting that it would be the single-most important transportation development in Alpharetta for many years to come. While traffic is a common complaint in Alpharetta, input participants were quick to point out the development and access benefits provided by having four GA-400 exits in Alpharetta.

Broadband infrastructure is critical to a community's overall competitiveness, especially for those that wish to retain existing and attract new high-technology companies.



According to Speed Matters, in 2009 the average download speed for the nation was 5,222 kilobytes (kbps) per second and the average upload speed was 1,126 kbps. Alpharetta's infrastructure facilitates download speeds of 8,436 kbps and upload speeds of 1,490 kbps, surpassing the Cary and Round Rock communities and just slightly trailing the speed observed in Sandy Springs.



A few community input participants mentioned the strength of the city's broadband and telecommunications infrastructure, with an emphasis on early investments that catalyzed the city's historical development and continued ability to attract high-technology and regional headquarters operations.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of creating this *Economic Development Plan* began with significant community input derived from focus groups, interviews, a web-based survey, and public meetings. This input was complemented by the findings of two research documents, the *Competitive Snapshot* and the *Target Business Review*. This qualitative and quantitative input has thoroughly informed the development of this *Plan* for the City of Alpharetta, and was supplemented by the guidance of the Alpharetta Development Authority.

This *Plan* represents a transition for the City of Alpharetta and its approach to economic development. It is a *Plan* that will require the development and maintenance of new partnerships, programmatic responsibilities, and strategic investments. However, it is also a *Plan* that seeks to leverage the numerous assets and successful initiatives that have helped make Alpharetta the highly-competitive community that it is today. The *Economic Development Plan* emphasizes “what” needs to be accomplished to elevate the City’s economic development efforts, while the *Implementation Plan* that follows will address “how” the *Plan* can be implemented. This includes the identification of key partners, recommendations on organizational structure, potential realignment of budgets, and the development of action timeliness to guide priorities for implementation.

This process has identified three priority goal areas for the City of Alpharetta to pursue in the years to come. These three goal areas are:

- 1) Development Policy and Redevelopment**
- 2) Partnership and Program Development**
- 3) Community Assets**

Each of the three goal areas possesses an associated goal statement. These goal statements can be thought of collectively as the mission of the City of Alpharetta’s Economic Development operations. Each goal area is of equal importance; one is no more critical than the others. Because they are interdependent, success depends on each one being advanced. Each goal area has several objectives, while each objective contains multiple potential actions to achieve the stated objective. At present, all action steps are labeled as “potential actions” to reflect the fact that this *Economic Development Plan* is currently in draft form.

In developing this *Plan*, *Market Street* has leveraged its extensive experience working in over 100 communities nationwide. This experience allows us to identify initiatives and investments that have proven successful in communities sharing similar challenges or possessing similar assets as the City of Alpharetta. When appropriate and relevant, best practices from around the country are referenced throughout the document with detailed descriptions of these model programs located in Appendix A.

DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND REDEVELOPMENT**Goal 1: Uphold development policies and invest in redevelopment projects that encourage economic progress.**

Throughout the stakeholder input process, business owners and developers frequently described the City's permitting and design review processes as cumbersome and burdensome. Many individuals made a wide variety of suggestions for improving these processes with references to specific ordinances. While it is important for the City to uphold its vision and maintain the character that has supported tremendous population growth, the City will need to balance this vision with the need to create an environment that is conducive to launching a successful business.

In addition, stakeholders frequently cited the City's historical reluctance to offer financial and non-financial incentives at the local level as a potential deterrent to economic growth in Alpharetta. While the City has been incredibly fortunate with its ability to continue to attract high-value employers that bring quality jobs, some communities that are unwilling to provide incentives at the local level may not be competitive for certain projects. In some cases, the availability, size, and form of the incentive is not of great value; however, the gesture is a sign that the City values the potential employer and is interested in creating an environment where it can be successful and profitable. In other cases, the availability, size, and form of the incentive are of great importance and can heavily influence the likelihood that a given community will be competitive for a specific project.

Much of the recent corporate development in the City of Alpharetta has occurred in areas of the City that are distant and detached from the historic central business district. The City set forth with an ambitious plan to redevelop its City Center in the last decade but a number of obstacles have prevented this vision from being realized. Further, the City's relatively large retail sector has been battered by the current economic recession, leaving many vacant store fronts and strip centers. Efforts to incentivize redevelopment, support occupancy of existing vacant space, and steer developments to targeted areas can help to bring new life to the historically strong retail sector in Alpharetta.

Objective 1: Support relocations and expansions that bring quality jobs to the City of Alpharetta by removing barriers to development and extending financial and non-financial incentives to qualifying establishments.

POTENTIAL ACTION 1.1: Develop and adopt a formal Incentive Policy for the City of Alpharetta.

**TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTION**

Economic development staff and City administration should work with the Alpharetta Development Authority to evaluate the viability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of a series of potential financial incentives that could be included a formal Incentive Policy. Once these evaluations have been completed, economic development staff and City administration should present a set of recommendations to the City Council for their review. These recommendations would supplement the City's recently-adopted permit fee reduction/waiver policy.

At a minimum the City should evaluate the following incentives that have proven successful in other communities nationwide:

1. Property tax abatements

Property tax abatements (phase-ins) are a relatively common form of local incentive, and one that could be used effectively in Alpharetta to incentivize redevelopment of currently vacant retail spaces in some the City's aging retail centers. Although this incentive could specifically target retail redevelopment in Alpharetta, all new or expanding commercial and industrial developments are typically eligible for property tax phase-ins in many other communities. Eligibility can also be tied to a number of factors such as investments in specific targeted business sectors or specific areas in need of redevelopment. The percentage of the property tax that is phased-in and the timing of the abatement are often tied to job creation or investment figures.

2. Impact fee reductions or waivers

Impact fee reductions or waivers can be granted in a variety of instances at the City's discretion. Multiple communities across the country have enacted temporary fee reductions or waivers to spur development in the midst of a national recession that battered the commercial and residential real estate and construction sectors. Fee waivers and reductions can help certain projects become viable with greater ease and speed. In addition to temporary reductions or waivers for all non-residential development, waivers and reductions could be targeted on specific locations to encourage development, including Downtown Alpharetta, beyond a period of temporary reduction or waiver across the entire City. Projects that provide a tremendous public benefit or invest private monies in infrastructure improvements could also be eligible for fee reductions or waivers in the long-term. It is important to note that state law requires that any revenues

lost as a result of impact fee waivers must be substituted with funds from another source to support the maintenance of standard service levels.

Other incentives to consider include:

- ✓ Flexibility in the permitting and development review process
 - the facilitation of “fast-track” permitting (see POTENTIAL ACTION 1.3)
 - the extension of density bonuses to encourage the incorporation of more affordable housing in targeted areas of the City (such as Downtown Alpharetta)
 - variances/waivers in design standards
- ✓ Alternative financing mechanisms
 - Alpharetta Acceleration Awards (see POTENTIAL ACTION 8.5)
 - Revolving Loan Fund (see POTENTIAL ACTION 8.6)
 - Partially subsidized leases/rent for firms occupying targeted vacant space (such as distressed retail centers)
- ✓ Provision of infrastructure or land
 - Subsidized extension of physical infrastructure to development sites (utilities, roads, etc.)
 - Acquisition and sale of land at below market rates
- ✓ Assistance with site planning
 - Financial/resource support for environmental planning and due diligence
 - Financial/ resource support for site surveying and infrastructure extension
- ✓ Support for capital improvements
 - Expansion of existing façade grant programs
 - Targeted tax credits for investments in building/energy efficiency

After assessing a variety of potential incentives, economic development staff and City administration should heavily weigh all options before recommending a specific Incentives Policy for adoption. It is important that any policy includes very specific eligibility requirements for each incentive as well as specific conditions that must be maintained to avoid repayment of any incentives received to date (also known as a “clawback provisions”). It is important that any policy also includes some flexibility allowing City Council to grant incentives for projects that may not meet the specific eligibility criteria for a given incentive.

Once a policy is developed, the extension of any and all incentives should be precluded by an economic impact analysis of the proposed project as well as a “but-for” assessment.¹

¹ A “but-for” assessment refers to the process of determining whether or the project would be economically viable without the offered incentive. That is to say, but for the economic incentive, the proposed project would not be economically viable in the proposed location.

City staff should evaluate the ability of the City's existing economic impact software - WebLOCI - to meet the economic and fiscal impact assessment needs associated with incentive and project evaluation. If additional functionality is determined to be necessary, staff should evaluate the cost-effectiveness of other economic impact software programs - including IMPLAN and REMI - and other means of estimating economic impacts (BEA RIMS II multipliers). The City should also invest in training for City staff to support such assessments.

BEST PRACTICE: CITY OF SAN MARCOS, TEXAS

POTENTIAL ACTION 1.2: Better promote the Alpharetta Development Authority (ADA) and its ability to support development through tax-exempt financing as a component of the Incentive Policy.

The ADA has engaged in conduit financing to support a few large-scale projects in recent years, most notably the Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre at Encore Park. With lower interest rates than more traditional financing mechanisms, the ADA can offer high-impact projects a valuable incentive that could help kick-start desirable developments. The ADA should work side-by-side with City staff to ensure that developers and prospective companies are well aware of all available assistance and incentives, including ADA financing when relevant. In order to maximize its visibility the ADA should consider:

- ✓ committing time and resources to support the development of the Incentives Policy
- ✓ developing a website that is co-branded with the City but accessible via a different URL
- ✓ becoming more actively involved in assisting with prospect response
- ✓ continuing to support professional education in economic development and development finance for ADA members

POTENTIAL ACTION 1.3: Develop a system to support expedited permitting for high-value projects.

In addition to financial incentives, fast-track permitting can also be a tremendously valuable incentive to developers and prospects that are seeking a location where they can start development quickly. The ability of a community to fast-track specific projects can help to kick-start development in an otherwise relatively sluggish market. The City should adopt a formal policy that allows for fast-track permitting of high-value and time-sensitive projects.

POTENTIAL ACTION 1.4: Streamline the City's permit review process such that applicants receive a single, coordinated document with comments from all inspectors and reviewers in various City departments.

Throughout the community input process, a number of current and former business owners indicated that the permit review process could often result in fragmented and occasionally contradictory comments from various departments reviewing the application. The City should consider revising its permit review and feedback process to incorporate comments from all reviewing departments into a single document in a coordinated process. This would be supported by multi-department meetings to resolve any conflicts prior to the delivery of comments to the applicant. Efforts should be made to ensure that all process improvements are integrated into the City's web-based permit-tracking tools.

POTENTIAL ACTION 1.5: Engage in a periodic review process of City ordinances, permitting, and design review processes, soliciting the feedback of developers and small business owners.

As previously mentioned, input participants mentioned a wide variety of specific ordinances that are often perceived to be excessively burdensome to certain small businesses. This process identified a number of items covering issues from tree removal to parking requirements and alcohol sales restrictions as potential barriers to profitable operation. Others simply requested greater flexibility in the design review process and permitting processes with individuals mentioning a greater willingness to grant easements and setback compromises and potential starting points. The City should continue to seek input from business owners to inform periodic ordinance reviews. Input should be solicited through various forms of outreach (site visits, phone surveys, web-based surveys, etc) included in the recommended BRE outreach program (see POTENTIAL ACTION 7.2). Economic development staff should be tasked with developing a list of concerns and recommendations for revising City code and policy to alleviate these concerns.

POTENTIAL ACTION 1.6: Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of city regulations that restrict the sale of alcohol as a percentage of revenues.

Chapter Three, Article Two of the City of Alpharetta Code of Ordinances currently restricts the sale of alcohol by eating establishments not located in hotels or motels to a maximum of 40 percent of total annual gross food and beverage sales. The ordinance also stipulates that bar seating cannot exceed ten percent of total seating capacity. Easing these restrictions would create new revenue streams for area restaurants and make certain new projects more financially viable. The vibrancy of downtowns and retail centers are heavily influenced by the availability of venues that support social gathering, from restaurants to bars and theaters to comedy clubs. Easing alcohol sales and bar seating restrictions could help encourage investment by new restaurants and open the door to establishments that derive the majority of their revenue from alcohol sales. New restrictions could be enacted if the City wishes to maintain control over the types of new establishments that may be incentivized by such a change in policy.

The City should conduct a cost-benefit analysis of existing regulations that restrict alcohol sales to determine if easing or eliminating these restrictions would increase social, economic, and fiscal benefits above and beyond any potential social costs incurred by the easement or elimination of such restrictions. An independent third-party should be retained to conduct this analysis. Changes in policy should be made if supported by the findings of the cost-benefit analysis.

Objective 2: Continually seek to develop a more vibrant Downtown Alpharetta.

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.1: Continue to pursue designation as a Georgia Main Street community and develop annual work plans to guide downtown development initiatives within the framework of the national Main Street approach to revitalization.

**TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTION**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has supported the advancement of the “Main Street” approach to downtown revitalization for numerous decades. This approach is grounded in a four-point, preservation-based program that is customized by the collaborative partners working to implement the program. These four points are:

- ✓ **Organization:** building a collaborative and inclusive framework to support implementation
- ✓ **Promotion:** creating and aggressively marketing an exciting downtown product
- ✓ **Design:** enhancing the aesthetic character of the downtown
- ✓ **Economic Restructuring:** supporting new business development in the downtown

While the Main Street approach is the brainchild of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, coordinating entities (typically state departments) are responsible for assisting communities with the implementation of Main Street programs. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is the coordinating entity for the state of Georgia. Main Street communities receive a variety of benefits from the state, including but not limited to:

- ✓ Resource Team (consultant) support with plan development
- ✓ Site visits by DCA representative and resource team members to evaluate progress and provide hands-on assistance
- ✓ Training for Main Street program managers
- ✓ Technical assistance including but not limited to grant writing assistance, marketing assistance, and volunteer leadership coordination, among many others
- ✓ Design assistance including but limited to assistance with façade rehabilitations, historic preservation, signage and wayfinding, ordinance review, landscape and public space planning, among many others

City staff should continue to work with key partners supporting downtown revitalization efforts, including but not limited to the Downtown Alpharetta Trade Association (DATA), the GNFC, DCA, and private property owners to evaluate the requirements and process of establishing a Main Street program and becoming a designated Main Street community. One of the first steps in this process should be the development of annual plans for collaborative initiatives that advance an Alpharetta Main Street program. A first year program of work should address

appropriate startup actions related to POTENTIAL ACTIONS referenced throughout Objective 2, as well as efforts to enhance existing initiatives that align with the Main Street approach.

The City will need to commit financial and resource support that is necessary and sufficient to support a Main Street program. If such commitments are not secured, City staff should pursue efforts that are consistent with the Main Street approach and evaluate the benefit of participating in the DCA's Affiliate program. Affiliates are communities that are unable or unwilling to commit to the full Main Street program requirements but would still like to demonstrate a commitment to downtown development and collaboration with DCA.

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.2: Maintain efforts to engage developers in continued pursuit of advancing the Alpharetta City Center proposal.

The Alpharetta City Center plan has met a number of obstacles in recent years including a challenge of the legality of re-allocating tax dollars from education to other uses in the implementation of a tax allocation district (TAD), as well as the inability of the City's private development partners to reach agreements to purchase specific properties central to project. At present, Alpharetta has put the City Center project on hold indefinitely with hopes that the project may be completed when credit conditions and the development environment improve. The City should develop a plan to engage potential private sector partners and explore various public/private funding options. Every effort should be made to tie in relevant incentives that could help expedite the redevelopment process.

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.3: Develop a comprehensive neighborhood engagement program to increase pride in Downtown Alpharetta and patronage of downtown merchants in neighboring residential areas.

The vibrancy of a downtown is also heavily influenced by the level of engagement and patronage that comes from residents living within or near the downtown area. Regardless of location, residents often invest considerable time and resources in the development and maintenance of their neighborhood as a reflection of the pride they have in their community. The City should partner with the Downtown Alpharetta Trade Association (DATA) and all downtown merchants to engage households in residential areas surrounding downtown in a pride and patronage development effort. The City and DATA should consider a wide variety of incentives to help elevate the connection between residents surrounding downtown and businesses within downtown. Options include:

- ✓ the development of specific "neighborhood appreciation" events hosted by downtown businesses
- ✓ the development of special promotions available to residents within a specified radius of downtown
- ✓ the extension of unofficial downtown boundaries to include more residential area, reflected by additional signage
- ✓ the development of volunteer opportunities that build community pride including but not limited to litter collection, tree and flower planting, and other beautification efforts (see POTENTIAL ACTIONS 11.4 and 11.5).

Ultimately, households in residential neighborhoods directly surrounding downtown should feel that they are in fact part of downtown. Programs should be designed to help instill a mentality that downtown businesses are a part of their neighborhood community, and that their neighborhood community is part of downtown.

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.4: Develop a buy local/frequent patron campaign –Alpharetta First – offering discounts to individuals that frequent downtown businesses.

Independently owned and operated downtown businesses can often struggle to compete with big box and discount retailers. This is especially true in communities such as Alpharetta that possess powerful retail centers outside of their downtowns that draw shoppers from surrounding communities. Downtown merchant associations and downtown development authorities in a number of communities have coordinated buy local/frequent patron programs that extend special discounts and promotions to individuals that frequent downtown businesses. The City should continue to work with DATA to develop a collaborative buy local program, Alpharetta First. Such a program could include the establishment of a “Downtown Patron” membership whereby members pay a small annual fee to receive a membership card granting an agreed upon discount at participating establishments (10 - 15 percent). The program could include the development a rewards system whereby patrons accumulate points that can be redeemed for gift certificates of other special offers from participating establishments.

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.5: Develop a regular, monthly series of events and promotions to attract residents to downtown on the First Saturday of each month.

Downtowns that lack a strong residential element thrive when individuals and families have reasons to spend extended periods of time in the downtown. The City should work with key partners including downtown merchants to develop a monthly series - “Get DownTown!” or “First Saturdays” - that encourages individuals and families to spend extended periods of time in Downtown Alpharetta. The series could be hosted on the first Saturday of each month. The event would coincide with the Alpharetta Farmers Market, and would encourage downtown vendors to open doors and create a more inviting atmosphere for shopping and dining. The series must identify sustainable, monthly events or occasional quarterly or annual events to complement the Farmer Market that can help keep visitors downtown for an extended period of time. Potential examples include:

- ✓ Outdoor film series whereby movies are shown on a large screen via projector in the early evening on Milton Ave. or Roswell St. during seasonable months
- ✓ Artists markets
- ✓ Antique markets
- ✓ Taste of Downtown - a smaller, monthly variant of the Taste of Alpharetta festival that features the culinary offerings of downtown restaurants
- ✓ 3K or 5K runs, bicycle races, children’s “fun runs”, and other athletic events

The monthly series should also encourage downtown merchants to offer significant discounts on First Saturdays. Segments of Milton Avenue should be closed to automobile traffic on these days,

with detours clearly marked. Efforts should be made to secure free parking arrangements at the old Milton High School site.

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.6: Host a “Developer’s Day in Downtown” on an annual basis.

The City of Alpharetta should partner with DATA to host an annual “Developer’s Day in Downtown” to showcase available properties, discuss opportunities for redevelopment, and keep developers informed of Downtown Alpharetta investment and revitalization efforts, including efforts tied to Main Street programming (see POTENTIAL ACTION 2.1). The event should be housed in a central location in Downtown Alpharetta with programming that includes discussion forums, a downtown site tour, and keynote speaker(s) that will help attract interest.

The expansion of this event to a City-wide exposition should be considered if interest by developers is insufficient to support a downtown-specific event.

BEST PRACTICE: DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT DAY, CENTRAL ATLANTA PROGRESS (ATLANTA, GEORGIA)

POTENTIAL ACTION 2.7: Develop a residential growth strategy that encourages higher-density residential development around Downtown Alpharetta.

Downtown Alpharetta’s long-term vibrancy will be greatly supported by additional residential density within walking distance of downtown. The City should develop a plan to identify high-value parcels for high-density residential development and redevelopment within a one-mile radius of downtown. This includes but is not limited to greyfield properties (distressed and unoccupied retail centers/establishments) as well as existing residentially-zoned properties with stalled developments (such as property along Canton St., between School Dr. and Trailer St.). This strategy should also consider compatible residential infill development consistent with pre-existing Downtown Development Plans and other relevant efforts. The City should work with developers to identify key barriers to higher-density residential infill around downtown Alpharetta and respond to these barriers accordingly by extending financial and non-financial incentives to encourage development and redevelopment consistent with the recommendations identified in POTENTIAL ACTIONS 1.1 - 1.3.

Objective 3: Reposition the former Prospect Park site for highest and best uses.**POTENTIAL ACTION 3.1: Work with the property owners and prospective developers to create a flexible development environment that will accommodate high-value uses at the former Prospect Park site.**

**TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTION**

Just a few years ago, the City of Alpharetta was optimistic about the potential impact of a new, large-scale, mixed-use development at the intersection of Old Milton Parkway and Georgia SR 400. This project, Prospect Park, was stalled and ultimately halted due to the financial troubles of the developer. The Prospect Park site has become an eyesore for the City and there is a slim likelihood that a viable development similar to Prospect Park emerges in the years ahead. Accordingly the City must pursue a new use for the site.

The former Prospect Park site is an extremely valuable asset. It is one of the few remaining large tracts of land that is available for commercial development in the City. Its existing, pre-development site preparations, proximity to major arteries, and location within the Alpharetta city limits are among the many attractive features of the site.

The City should continue to work with property owners to advance efforts to complete Westside Parkway (see POTENTIAL ACTION 10.1) while communicating that the City is willing to reconsider the original zoning and land use requirements for the site to accommodate alternative uses.

The City should be prepared to extend financial and non-financial incentives (see POTENTIAL ACTIONS 1.1 - 1.3) to projects that align with the City's vision for the site. The City should be flexible in considering alternative uses that do not conform to the site's previous development plans. The site could accommodate a variety of desirable uses including but not limited to a large scale corporate office park, mixed use with medium to high density residential, or a variety of recreation and entertainment uses. By no means should the City pursue a large-scale retail project that would compete directly with North Point Mall. The City should consider outside-the-box opportunities that may not fit with original intentions for site, with consideration given to the potentially catalytic effects that certain developments may have on the development potential and property value of surrounding commercial properties.

Objective 4: Maintain a healthy and attractive retail environment that continues to draw expenditures from households outside the City of Alpharetta.**POTENTIAL ACTION 4.1: Continue to work with representatives of North Point Mall and General Growth Properties to develop a long-term economic sustainability plan for the mall.**

When constructed in 1993, North Point Mall was the largest mall in Georgia and one of the largest in the country. Its success in the 1990s was fueled by the rapid growth in higher income residents in Alpharetta and surrounding North Fulton communities. The Mall began to struggle in the mid-2000s with the closure and subsequent vacancy of two anchor locations: the former Parisian location (a smaller anchor) and the former Lord and Taylor/Belk location. Von Maur has recently announced that it will redevelop the former Lord and Taylor/Belk anchor space that is currently vacant with a targeted store opening of November 2011. The attraction of Von Maur shows that North Point Mall is still considered to reach a strong market of higher-income individuals, and the addition of Von Maur will undoubtedly improve the near and long-term health of North Point Mall and its other tenants. However, the Mall continues to face tremendous competition from Lenox Square, Phipps Plaza, and Perimeter Mall in nearby communities. Any additional large-scale retail development in North Fulton County or Forsyth County could threaten North Point Mall's competitiveness.

The City should work with representatives of the Mall and General Growth Properties to develop a long-term sustainability plan that incorporates ways in which the City can assist the Mall and its tenants. Such a plan could be inclusive of:

- ✓ the identification of potential new tenants to target in the short-term
- ✓ the identification of priority capital improvement projects to the mall including but not limited to exterior façade improvements, streetscaping, and parking upgrades
- ✓ specific strategies to attract a major new entertainment option to complement the retail and restaurant offerings in and around the Mall
- ✓ the identification of priority community improvement and infrastructure projects impacting the mall
- ✓ the identification of compatible and appropriate uses for properties adjacent to the mall.

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.2: Work with representatives of North Point Mall and General Growth Properties to attract a major entertainment tenant to the mall in the near-term.

North Point Mall is currently lacking a major entertainment draw that will bring children, adults, and families to the Mall for a reason other than shopping. Multiple malls across the country have been successful at integrating movie theatres into their facilities, and North Point Mall could certainly entertain this option in the vacant former Parisian space. Potential exists to attract a new movie theater, an IMAX theater, or a multi-purpose entertainment facility such as Dave and Buster's or Brunswick Zone's U.S. Play concept. The addition of such an entertainment concept could entice a younger generation of shoppers to develop loyalties to North Point Mall.

BEST PRACTICE: NORTHPARK CENTER (DALLAS, TEXAS)

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.3: Work with representatives of North Point Mall and General Growth Properties to develop a plan that consolidates parking and opens up space for compatible uses adjacent to the mall.

North Point Mall currently possesses a single parking deck on its property. However, there remains a vast amount of surface parking that could be consolidated into an additional above ground or below ground parking deck. The consolidation of this parking space into more vertical, higher-density parking would free up valuable property that is currently dedicated to parking but could be converted to alternative uses that support the mall's long-term vibrancy. Alternative uses include but are not limited to:

- ✓ additional free-standing restaurant space
- ✓ an additional hotel with additional space to accommodate meetings and conferences
- ✓ senior living and retirement residential
- ✓ entertainment facilities (see POTENTIAL ACTION 4.3)
- ✓ public greenspace offering recreational opportunities that complements and enhances existing efforts to increase walkability and connectivity between the Big Creek Greenway, North Point Parkway, and Westside Parkway along Encore Parkway

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.4: Inventory all vacant, underperforming, and distressed retail properties to inform the creation of targeted redevelopment strategies.

The City of Alpharetta should initiate a process of identifying all vacant, underperforming, and distressed retail properties inside the city limits, leveraging available information from city records and real estate databases. Details on the properties, owners, existing occupants, previous occupants, lease terms, infrastructure, and other critical attributes should be collected. City staff should use this database to work with property owners on site-specific improvement and marketing plans. These plans should leverage existing incentives (such as the façade grant program) and newly-created incentives such as the Retail Investment Grant (see POTENTIAL ACTION 4.7) and others (see POTENTIAL ACTION 1.1). Property owners should be encouraged to leverage available incentives and city staff should work with property owners to identify the ways in which the City can best support revitalization and re-occupancy. When appropriate, city officials should work with property owners to identify specific recruitment targets for vacant space consistent with the findings of the Buxton Company's retail matching services (see POTENTIAL ACTION 4.6).

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.5: Develop a research-informed effort to help retail property owners improve prospective tenant identification and help retailers improve marketing and product mix.

The City should utilize the information provided by the Buxton Company on retail leakages and surpluses to identify store types that may be strong fits for the community. Store types with a leakage factor represent areas where local demand is being met by stores outside the trade area. Therefore, these are store types that the City could attract to prevent expenditures (and tax dollars) from leaving the community. The City should consider leveraging the expertise of the Buxton Company in determining specific retailers that may be a strong profile fit (see POTENTIAL ACTION 4.6).

Retail Leakage and Surplus Assessment can be used by developers and property owners to identify specific prospective tenants that they can use in their own recruitment efforts. The City should

make this information available to retailers and property owners in Alpharetta to help enhance competitiveness of existing retailers and identify potential new retailers that fit consumer demands and preferences within the community. This information should be shared with property owners during the process of creating targeted redevelopment strategies for vacant, underperforming, or distressed properties (see POTENTIAL ACTION 4.4).

Consumer Propensity Reports can supplement retailers' proprietary information on store sales by providing them with access to information measuring the demand for specific products that they may not currently offer but should consider offering based on market demand within their trade area.

BACKGROUND: RETAIL ANALYTICS

The research phase of this strategic planning process included detailed analyses of various retail sites and consumer preferences in trade areas associated with these sites. Buxton Company generated two core pieces of research that can help inform retail development efforts.

Consumer Propensity Reports illustrate the likelihood that a consumer living within a given radius around three primary retail centers in Alpharetta (North Point, Windward, and Downtown) will purchase a certain product or service relative to the average U.S. consumer. These reports cover nearly 5,000 different products or services and can be used by retailers to better understand their customer base and potentially alter their product mix accordingly. The reports indicate which products are in high demand by customers within a retailer's trade area, and which products are not in high demand.

Retail Leakage and Surplus Assessments identified which examine actual and potential expenditures within 49 subsectors of 11 primary retail store types in the City of Alpharetta. The reports estimate the difference between "potential" and actual expenditures in each of the 49 store types across various trade areas in and around the City of Alpharetta. Potential expenditures are the level of expenditure in a given store type that would be expected if these stores were only supported by households in the trade area. Actual expenditures represent the actual level of expenditure in a given store type within the specified trade area. When actual expenditures exceed potential expenditures there is a surplus. When potential expenditures exceed actual expenditures there is a leakage.

A retail surplus implies that the community's trade area is capturing the local market plus attracting non-local shoppers. A retail surplus does not necessarily mean that the community cannot support additional business. Many communities have developed strong clusters of stores that have broad geographic appeal. A retail leakage means that residents are spending more for products than local businesses capture. Retail sales leakage suggests that there is unmet demand in the trade area and that the community can support additional store space for that type of business. However, retail leakage does not necessarily translate into opportunity. For example, there could be a strong competitor in a neighboring community that dominates the market for that type of product or store.

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.6: Consider working with the Buxton Company to identify specific targets for retail recruitment efforts.

The Buxton Company has decades of acquired expertise in analyzing the retail environment and serving as retail site selection consultants. This expertise can not only applied to assisting private sector clients, but it can also be leveraged to assist communities with the identification of specific retailers that may be a strong fit for a community or individual property based on the Company's proprietary psychographic profiles, retail leakage and surplus assessment, and Consumer Propensity Reports.

The City of Alpharetta should consider engaging the Buxton Company or another retail real estate specialist to help identify specific targets for individual properties. This engagement should be timed appropriately to be an important component of the creation of targeted redevelopment strategies for vacant, underperforming, or distressed properties (see POTENTIAL ACTION 4.4). The City should considering partnering with property owners that are interested in utilizing this information to share costs and maximize the impact of matching services.

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.7: Consider the development of a targeted Retail Investment Grant program.

Retail investment grants are a somewhat common incentive but they often take various forms and target widely varying activities. Generally speaking, retail investments grants (or funds) are programs that provide matching grants to eligible existing or new retail businesses. The intent of such grant programs is typically to encourage private sector investment that is consistent with the community's vision. Some grants target specific neighborhoods in need of reinvestment, while other grant programs focus on specific types of investments such as façade and other building improvements. As with other financial incentives, the City would need to establish specific criteria for eligibility, but the establishment of a Retail Investment Grant program could help steer smaller retail projects to areas that the City would like to see redeveloped.

POTENTIAL ACTION 4.8: Develop an aggressive proposal sufficient to incentivize Publix to relocate from its site at Haynes Bridge Road and Old Milton Parkway to the nearby, vacant anchor space at Alpharetta Crossing.

**TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTION**

The Alpharetta Crossing shopping center is situated in a prime location at the intersection of Old Milton Parkway and Haynes Bridge Road, within walking distance of Downtown Alpharetta. The anchor space at Alpharetta Crossing is currently vacant after losing its most recent tenant, a discount furniture and rug outlet. The absence of an anchor tenant eliminates spillover traffic to adjacent smaller retailers in the center, and represents avoid that threatens the long-term viability and competitiveness of the center. Meanwhile, the Publix grocery store that lies on property across Old Milton Parkway from Alpharetta Crossing is located on a prime area that could support a tremendous new mixed-use development, inclusive of higher-density residential that would greatly increase the attractiveness of and economic activity in Downtown Alpharetta.

Publix owns the property that it currently occupies, and the company is likely to be very reluctant to consider any proposal to relocate from its current site. However, the City could potentially create a proposal that is attractive enough to incentivize Publix to relocate to the vacant anchor space in Alpharetta Crossing. A full site analysis of the space at Alpharetta Crossing will be necessary to determine if the existing space can meet the spatial needs of Publix and its customers, or if redevelopment and retrofitting can bring the space up to Publix standards. The City should reach out to existing property owners of Alpharetta Crossing to gauge their interest in selling the property. The City should assemble an aggressive package that includes site ownership potential, city-financed façade improvements, other city-financed aesthetic investments in the center, necessary traffic flow and road infrastructure improvements, property tax abatements, waivers of all permit and impact fees, and potential to leverage tax-exempt bond-financing to support redevelopment.

The ultimate goal is two-fold:

1. Revitalize the Alpharetta Crossing Shopping Center which desperately needs a new, high-traffic anchor tenant
2. Assemble a large piece of property (existing Publix site) that can be used to create a catalytic new project that enhances Downtown Alpharetta

[[PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT]]

Goal 2: Build and maintain effective partnerships that support collaborative economic development programs.

The development and maintenance of collaborative relationships with key regional and state partners in the economic, workforce, and community development fields is critical to the delivery of effective and efficient programs at the local level. By the time a prospective firm has settled on a list of potential sites they have likely spoken with representatives from a variety of entities, including but not limited to representatives from the state government, the local or regional chamber of commerce, utilities, and local government. The maintenance of collaborative relationships between economic development practitioners is not only critical to presenting a unified front to prospects, but is also critical to the development and delivery of high-value programs and services that support existing businesses and entrepreneurs.

Objective 5: Enhance relationships between Economic Development staff at the City of Alpharetta and key partners that support economic development throughout the region and state.

POTENTIAL ACTION 5.1: Schedule regular meetings on a monthly or quarterly basis with economic development staff at the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce (GNFCC).

Chambers of commerce are often the first point of contact for prospects and site selectors at the sub-state level. Further, their intimate knowledge of the challenges and opportunities facing their private sector membership base makes them a critical partner in efforts to improve the local business climate. City staff should regularly communicate with economic development staff at the GNFCC to coordinate programs, prospect activity, and response to private sector concerns. City staff and GNFCC staff should develop a system for following up on specific issues identified in each meeting. This includes the identification of lead responsibilities for engaging additional partners at the regional and state level that are necessary to address identified issues that are broader in geographic scope than the City of Alpharetta (regional transportation, workforce development, etc.)

POTENTIAL ACTION 5.2: Regularly attend events relevant to economic development issues at the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce (GNFCC), the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce (MAC), and other regional events of interest.

Chambers of commerce frequently host a variety of events that provide networking and educational opportunities to their membership as well as larger audiences. These events are not only an opportunity to connect with private sector leadership in the community, but they are also an opportunity to engage on a regular basis with other community, economic, and workforce development practitioners from around the region. Regular attendance at such events goes a long in

exhibiting that City staff is committed to being a valuable partner, listening to the concerns of the business community, and strengthening professional relationships that improve trust and facilitate collaboration.

POTENTIAL ACTION 5.3: Effectively communicate the outcomes of this strategic planning process to regional representatives at the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) and maintain strategic relationships with state representatives over time.

In addition to relationships with other economic development practitioners in North Fulton County, City staff will need to maintain strong relationships with representatives from GDEcD. While the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) will review the City of Alpharetta's full ten-year Comprehensive Plan, City staff should make a concerted effort to inform regional representatives from GDEcD of the outcomes of this strategic planning process and the City's specific economic development priorities for the years ahead. City staff should also work with GDEcD to evaluate the benefit and cost-effectiveness of City staff attending or providing resource support for state-supported business development trips including but not limited to convention and trade show attendance as well as international trade missions.

POTENTIAL ACTION 5.4: Maintain frequent and effective communication between City staff and major utilities, providing regular updates on available properties, infrastructure projects, and other information pertinent to the business development efforts of the utilities.

Utilities such as Georgia Power and Sawnee EMC play a critical role in economic development. Their community, economic, and business development teams are involved in a number of activities to support existing and prospective new businesses. City staff should maintain frequent contact with regional representatives from the Georgia Power Economic Development team as well as business development representatives from Sawnee EMC to evaluate a number of collaborative opportunities:

- ✓ information-sharing from BRE outreach efforts
- ✓ incorporation of the Select Georgia GIS application into the City's website
- ✓ research support
- ✓ marketing collateral development

POTENTIAL ACTION 5.5: Develop a communications and outreach plan to ensure critical partnerships are developed and maintained with entities supporting community, economic, and workforce development.

In addition to the aforementioned actions, the City should develop a internal plan to ensure that effective relationships are developed and maintained with officials from numerous potential partners that can help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of community, economic, and workforce development efforts in the City of Alpharetta. This plan should include the identification of key services/needs fulfilled by each partner, identification of primary and appropriate contacts, identification of existing or planned investments where assistance could be gained, and a variety of other factors that will help determine the appropriate frequency and form of communication. These potential partners include but are not limited to: higher education institutions, state agencies, regional planning entities, offices of elected officials, and other relevant local, state, and federal agencies and organizations.

Objective 6: Build a comprehensive marketing effort to support the attraction of new companies and workers to Alpharetta.**POTENTIAL ACTION 6.1: Develop a data-rich and user-friendly economic development website that is informative, compelling, and targeted to specific external audiences.**

According to the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), up to 80 percent of initial screening for company relocations are now done via the Internet. The biggest need that corporate site selectors and consultants have is the ability to quickly and easily obtain current, reliable, and detailed information about a community. In order to maximize effectiveness, economic development websites must be highly informative, visually appealing, easy to navigate, and targeted at specific audiences. The Economic Development section of the City's current website lacks the comprehensive and detailed information that is expected by corporate site selectors and consultants. The City of Alpharetta needs an informative economic development website that is competitive with best practice websites from competing cities. This website should be consistent with the City's brand image but will need to present information in a flexible, user-friendly, and interactive manner. The City should coordinate economic development web development efforts with citywide website updates, utilizing developers familiar with the City's existing structure and image. The process of developing a best practice economic development website should utilize paid-search and search engine optimization (SEO) techniques to direct traffic to the website.

A compelling website will include the following features:

- ✓ Information in both digital (web-based) and downloadable (PDF) formats covering:
 - Economic trends
 - Demographic profiles
 - Workforce and higher education information
 - K-12 information and statistics
 - Key business costs
 - Tax profiles
 - Utility rate information
 - Available sites and properties
 - Available financial and non-financial incentives
 - Retail surplus and leakage information (Buxton retail analysis)
 - Physical and infrastructural assets
 - Quality of life features and assets
- ✓ Downloadable profiles of target clusters: Corporate and Regional Headquarters; Corporate Services; Information Services and Technology; Telecommunications; and Retail Trade
- ✓ Interactive tools such as searchable business directories, data-retrieval tools, and interactive site/property search portals (such as Select Georgia GIS)
- ✓ User-generated content such as blogs, videos, and testimonials

- ✓ Links to relevant partners in the community, economic, and workforce development fields
- ✓ Comprehensive information on starting a business in the City supported by a Virtual Business Assistance Center (see POTENTIAL ACTION 6.1).

BEST PRACTICE: CITY OF ARLINGTON, TEXAS

BEST PRACTICE: GREATER RICHMOND PARTNERSHIP, INC. (RICHMOND, VIRGINIA)

BEST PRACTICE: SIOUX FALLS DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION (SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA)

POTENTIAL ACTION 6.2: Serve as a regional leader in advancing the “Progress Partners” initiative by devoting the time and resources necessary to support its successful development and implementation.

The GNFC is currently undertaking a multi-year effort to establish a cohesive brand identity for the North Fulton region. This effort - “Progress Partners” - will leverage the collective assets of all North Fulton communities in the development of a brand and associated messaging for the betterment of the entire region. The City of Alpharetta has been actively engaged in initial planning and startup efforts for the initiative. City staff and elected officials should serve as a regional leader of municipal partners in advancing this initiative throughout North Fulton County. City staff should work with the GNFC and other municipal governments to advance the initiative by helping to define its scale and scope, identify specific strategic priorities, define appropriate support functions, and identify the necessary financial support required to implement the priority initiatives that will benefit all communities in North Fulton.

POTENTIAL ACTION 6.3: Develop new marketing collateral aligned with the City’s recommended target clusters.

In addition to an attractive and informative website, the City needs to develop targeted print collateral that used by the City and its various partners in responding to requests for information (RFIs) from prospects. This collateral should include a series of handouts specific to each of the City’s target clusters that detail the region’s key assets as they relate to each cluster. Collateral materials should also include a general community overview detailing workforce characteristics, educational assets, demographics, labor market conditions, major employers, and other relevant information.

BEST PRACTICE: MARTINSVILLE-HENRY COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (MARTINSVILLE, VIRGINIA)

BEST PRACTICE: RALEIGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA)

BEST PRACTICE: ST. LOUIS REGIONAL CHAMBER AND GROWTH ASSOCIATION (ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI)

POTENTIAL ACTION 6.4: Identify specific high-value print and web-based publications that present opportunities to market the City of Alpharetta to audiences that align with the City's target clusters and evaluate the cost effectiveness of targeted marketing through advertising.

Alpharetta is growing in name recognition throughout the country, but in many cases it only known as a suburb of Atlanta. Many outsiders are surprised to learn of the City's high quality of life and immense corporate presence. Efforts should be made to promote the corporate assets and community character of the City of Alpharetta to specific external audiences and key corporate decision makers. The City should evaluate the cost effectiveness of placing advertisements in web-based and select print publications that reach a specific audience that aligns with City's target clusters. For example, the City might consider an advertisement in *InformationWeek*, promoting the region's Information Services and Technology cluster. City staff should engage other partners - particularly the GN FCC - to determine if collaborative opportunities exist whereby costs for such advertising can be shared. Advertisements should be limited to outlets that are read by key decision-makers and potential investors in the City's target sectors as opposed to general economic development and site selection publications. Web-based advertisements may be deemed to be more cost effective.

POTENTIAL ACTION 6.5: Work with the GN FCC to develop the "Ambassadors of Alpharetta" volunteer council.

Ambassador councils are frequently developed by chambers of commerce and local economic development organizations to assist with a variety of retention and recruitment efforts. Ambassadors are typically highly-networked and influential private sector leaders in a community. These individuals serve as volunteer ambassadors for the community, occasionally working with prospects to educate them about the community. This often includes meeting with prospects and attending hosted events. The City of Alpharetta is unquestionably home to strong corporate leadership that could be tapped to serve as volunteer ambassadors. Further, the City is also home to a number of athletes and entertainers that could potentially serve as community ambassadors in a variety of different roles.

POTENTIAL ACTION 6.6: Retain a respected public relations consultant to implement a targeted public relations campaign.

The City of Alpharetta should retain a public relations individual or firm with experience in the community and economic development fields to help the City implement an aggressive public relations campaign seeding stories of Alpharetta in national and international media outlets. The campaign should spread awareness of the City's various assets and success stories, including but not limited to its fiber optic infrastructure; high quality public schools; concentration of high-technology and Fortune 500 companies; emergence as a job center as opposed to being a "bedroom community"; and positive recent developments including new relocation and expansion announcements.

POTENTIAL ACTION 6.7: Work with relevant state and regional partners to identify and attend high-value trade shows, conventions, and other external marketing opportunities that align with the city's target clusters.

The City of Alpharetta should work with key economic development partners - primarily GDECD and GNFC - to identify high-value trade shows, conventions, association meetings, and other events that provide the City and North Fulton with opportunities to market Alpharetta and its various assets to targeted audiences that align with the community's targeted clusters. Preference should be given to events that are currently attended by these partners in order to share costs and maximize impact. The City should also consider partnership opportunities with major employers exhibiting at relevant events. Potential examples include but are not limited to:

- ✓ Gartner Data Center Conference
- ✓ International Council of Shopping Centers Conventions
- ✓ CTIA Wireless
- ✓ DEMO Conference

Objective 7: Develop relationships with existing businesses that support business retention, facilitate expansions, and foster cluster development by formalizing a business retention and expansion (BRE) outreach effort.

POTENTIAL ACTION 7.1: Evaluate the extent of existing BRE outreach efforts in the City of Alpharetta and North Fulton County.

Economic development staff at the City of Alpharetta is not currently engaged in a comprehensive and proactive business retention and expansion (BRE) outreach effort. The degree to which staff at municipal economic development departments engages with existing businesses varies tremendously. Some governments simply do not have the financial resources to support such efforts while others find that chambers of commerce are more effective and efficient at BRE outreach. Still, many municipal governments are actively engaged in BRE outreach to better understand the needs, challenges, and risk factors facing employers in their community. In North Fulton County, there is currently very limited staff capacity at the GNFC and various local governments to meet the needs of tens of thousands of employers throughout the region. Many communities with comparable levels of employment to North Fulton County have multiple individuals staffed at chambers of commerce and municipal governments that are devoted to BRE outreach full-time.

The City should partner with representatives from the GNFC, GDECD, Georgia Power and other relevant partners throughout the region to evaluate the extent of existing BRE efforts. This assessment should examine a number of items including:

- ✓ Specific businesses engaged in outreach efforts
- ✓ The frequency of contact with existing businesses
- ✓ The type of outreach employed (phone, survey, on-site visits, etc.)
- ✓ Types of software used for tracking
- ✓ Status of pre-existing databases

BACKGROUND: BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BRE)

Business retention and expansion (often referred to simply as “BRE”) is a collection of programs and services that economic development entities implement in their communities to help elevate the competitiveness of existing businesses, support expansion plans, alleviate burdens and barriers to competitiveness, and prevent them from relocating elsewhere. Numerous studies over the years have shown that existing businesses within a community are responsible for between 60 and 80 percent of all new job creation. While ribbon-cutting ceremonies and corporate relocations often make headlines, existing businesses are typically fueling economic growth at a much higher pace than relocations. BRE programs attempt to identify ways in which the public, private, and non-profit sectors can help support business expansions and mitigate closures or reductions in employment. Communities that lack comprehensive and effective BRE programs are often too late; they will find that they could have helped an employer stay in business or remain competitive at its current location after the business has already decided to close or relocate.

BRE programs typically include a series of outreach efforts including but limited to site visits and interviews with executive leadership, telephone interviews, web-based surveys, and mail surveys. These visits and surveys are typically carried out by economic development practitioners. The method of outreach is typically tied to various attributes of a firm such as total revenues, number of employees, business sector classification, years in business, and other factors.

Site visits, interviews, and survey questionnaires typically seek to identify business and tax climate concerns; labor or training needs; regulatory concerns; financial needs; issues with permits, licenses, and local ordinances; physical infrastructure concerns and needs; satisfaction with elected and appointed officials; and other points of concern. The feedback received from firms often helps to inform necessary changes to local regulations, legislative priorities, future infrastructure investments, and other strategic actions. Site visits, interviews, and survey questionnaires also seek to track a number of key attributes of firms in the community in order to develop and inform an “early warning system.” Such a system is used to identify firms that may be at at-risk of contraction or closure.

POTENTIAL ACTION 7.2: Establish a comprehensive and collaborative BRE outreach program with representatives from the GNFC and other partners.

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

Once existing efforts have been evaluated, City staff should work with economic development staff at the GNFC to develop a collaborative BRE program that includes various outreach methods, including but not limited to site visits, telephone interviews, and web-based surveys. This is yet another opportunity for the City of Alpharetta to demonstrate that it is a regional leader in its approach to economic development, service delivery, and the creation of a business-friendly environment. This is a major initiative that serves to:

- ✓ Mitigate reductions in force or business closures before they happen

- ✓ Increase understanding of barriers to expansion facing existing businesses and adjust government policies and procedures as necessary
- ✓ Proactively address the needs of existing businesses
- ✓ Improve private sector trust in and communication with local government
- ✓ Facilitate “growth from within”

City staff should work with key partners including the GNFC to **outline specific protocols** pertaining to outreach and visitation priorities and frequencies; response and follow-up timelines; software acquisition; information-sharing; and coordination with other partners such as utilities.

Before commencing BRE outreach efforts, the City will need to **develop a comprehensive database of existing firms** with as much relevant information as possible. This database should begin with available information from the City’s tax records and should leverage any pre-existing information derived from outreach efforts conducted by partners, including but not limited to GNFC, GDEC, and others.

In concert with the development a business database, the City should **acquire customer relationship management (CRM) software** that is designed specifically for BRE programs. There are multiple CRM solutions that allow economic development practitioners to manage a database that tracks interactions with employers in the region. These software programs provide practitioners with a solution that is customized to their needs, and are critical to maintaining and understanding the wealth of information that is gathered through BRE outreach efforts. The City should consider acquiring a license to an industry-standard CRM software solution such as ExecutivePulse or Synchronist, with preference given to programs that are already being used by partners. This software would be used to manage the interactions with firms visited, interviewed, or surveyed. The City should schedule demonstrations and evaluate the aforementioned software solutions to gain a better understanding of the ways in which this software can be leveraged to manage a BRE outreach program.

City staff should leverage the CRM software to **develop a BRE questionnaire for surveying the City’s businesses** and **identify preferred methods to deploy surveys** (web-based, mail, email, phone, on-site). Certain BRE software programs are pre-equipped with BRE questionnaires that can be customized by individual communities. Questionnaires/surveys should cover company specific information as well as questions about the business climate, including but not limited to: current and historical employment; sales volume and history; hiring plans; workforce needs; financial needs; regulatory concerns; site-specific concerns; and others. Questionnaires/surveys should be designed such that they inform an early warning system that is sufficient to identify firms at-risk of contraction or closure and ways in which community, economic, and workforce development partners in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors can help employers increase their competitive positions and reduce barriers to competitiveness.

Ultimately, the City and the GNFC will need to **develop a communications plan to support the initiation of the program**. Some local businesses may be skeptical of the

intentions of City staff to collect information on their business and their needs. The City and the GNFC should prepare marketing and public relations materials including handouts, web-based content, and press releases to educate the business community on the intent and details of the new program. Emphasis must be placed on the desire to provide an enhanced level of service to existing businesses as well as the collaborative nature of the program between the City and the Chamber.

Objective 8: Create an environment that facilitates innovation, entrepreneurship, and small business growth.

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.1: Develop a Virtual Business Assistance Center.

The City should establish a Virtual Business Assistance Center as a component of the new economic development website (see ACTION 6.1). This virtual center should include:

- ✓ a comprehensive directory of all forms and documents relevant to business licensing and permitting
- ✓ frequently asked questions about business startup procedures in the City
- ✓ forms to request or schedule an appointment with various City staff
- ✓ forms to request or schedule an appointment with mentors from the Alpharetta office of the Atlanta SCORE chapter
- ✓ an inventory of all relevant federal, state, and regional support services and assistance programs for small businesses
- ✓ calendar of events related to small business networking opportunities supported by various partners including GNFC and the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG)
- ✓ forms to request or schedule an appointment on Business Assistance Fridays (see POTENTIAL ACTION 8.2).

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.2: Develop a “Business Assistance Fridays” program.

The City should develop a “Business Assistance Fridays” program to provide hands-on assistance to small business on the first Friday of every month. The program would be a collaborative inter-departmental initiative within the City and between the City and partners such as the GNFC and the Alpharetta chapter of SCORE. The program would be designed to provide business owners with the opportunity to meet with specific individuals during a regularly-scheduled and dedicated period of time to discuss needs, concerns, or simply ask questions. Requests for appointments would be submitted by existing or prospective business owners. City staff would coordinate requests, schedule appointments, and ensure that representatives from relevant entities able to provide assistance. Such representatives include but are not limited to economic development staff at the City, economic development staff at the GNFC, business permitting staff from the City, business mentors from the Alpharetta SCORE chapter, and other officials that support small business development in Alpharetta and North Fulton County.

Ultimately, the City should not attempt to “reinvent the wheel” in terms of small business assistance. Rather, it should make every effort to direct entrepreneurs to existing services, support efforts to enhance existing services, and provide complementary services to those already in place.

Long-term opportunities potentially include the development a physical Business Assistance Center that could provide existing and prospective small business owners with a wide variety of services depending on the level of commitment from the City of Alpharetta:

- ✓ a business resource center inclusive of computers and informational resources
- ✓ space to meet one-on-one with representatives from various City departments to discuss permitting and development review processes, including “pre-submittal meetings”
- ✓ space to meet one-on-one with an advisor from the Atlanta SCORE chapter
- ✓ space to host SCORE training seminars
- ✓ assistance locating ideal and available properties for occupancy or sites for developments
- ✓ access to statistics and market research maintained by City staff

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.3: Work with TAG and GN FCC to expand the programming and networking opportunities available to technology entrepreneurs via the “TAG North Metro” series.

The Technology Association of Georgia (TAG) has expanded its networking opportunities and educational programs in recent years, including the establishment of TAG North Metro in collaboration with the GN FCC and the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce. The City should work with representatives from TAG to identify ways in which the City can assist TAG in expanding its membership from Alpharetta while increasing the City’s exposure by hosting TAG events. Opportunities may exist to:

- ✓ host networking events at restaurants in the City
- ✓ host educational forums and speaker series at various locations
- ✓ conduct facility tours of major technology employers in Alpharetta

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.4: Work with Georgia State University (GSU) to secure staff and resource commitments sufficient to support Small Business Development Center (SBDC) programming at the GSU-Alpharetta Center.

The state-supported Small Business Development Center (SBDC) network includes 17 locations at public institutions of higher education across the state. Georgia State University operates an SBDC office in downtown Atlanta. SBDC offices provide a wide variety of free services to small business owners and entrepreneurs, including but not limited to:

- ✓ business/management consulting
- ✓ business plan review and assistance
- ✓ marketing plan review and development
- ✓ assistance with loans, financing, and capital access

The City should engage administrators at the Robinson Mack School of Business and the SBDC at Georgia State University to gauge their interest in developing a flexible SBDC program for North Fulton County at the GSU Alpharetta Center. This program would give North Fulton entrepreneurs and small business owners the opportunity to meet with SBDC staff for consulting and technical assistance on location at the GSU Alpharetta Center on a few regularly scheduled days each month. The City should develop a case statements in collaboration with partners supporting small business development such as the GN FCC, TAG, and others to illustrate ways in which SBDC programming

would complement the mission of and curriculum offered at the GSU Alpharetta Center while also expanding the SBDC network to a rapidly-growing portion of the state.

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.5: **Develop a competitive grant program – Alpharetta Acceleration Awards – to support the attraction of innovative early-stage companies to Alpharetta.**

**TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTION**

The City of Alpharetta has been successful in attracting many medium to large employers in the information technology and telecommunications fields. However, it has rarely offered financial incentives in the pursuit of key prospects. While this Plan also recommends the creation of a formal but flexible Incentive Policy to support larger-scale relocation and expansion projects (see POTENTIAL ACTION 1.1), the City should consider developing other non-traditional incentives to help attract early-stage companies in the City’s targeted business sectors. The Alpharetta Acceleration Awards (AAAs) are envisioned as annual grants awarded to eligible companies that meet numerous eligibility and selection criteria. Recipients of the awards must relocate their business to Alpharetta city limits prior to receipt of the full award. A refundable relocation allowance can help expedite the relocation process. Awards can range in size from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

The City should evaluate the viability of creating corporate-sponsored acceleration awards, which would provide the sponsoring company with an ownership stake in the companies receiving awards. These awards could include the establishment of strategic alliances with the sponsoring firms, including but not limited to subsidized office and laboratory space, and access to technology and infrastructure provided by the sponsoring firm.

The City should evaluate options for initial capitalization of the fund that will support AAAs, including 100 percent public funds, or a combination of public and private, or public and non-profit/philanthropic funds. The City should define eligibility criteria and assemble a strong public/private committee to evaluate applicants.

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.6: Develop a revolving loan fund (RLF) to support the expansion of existing small business in Alpharetta.

Revolving loan funds (RLFs) have been in operation across the country for many decades. They are an effective means of supporting business expansion and job creation by serving as a complement to traditional financing mechanisms. Many small businesses often do not receive sufficient capital to make initial startup investments from traditional lending sources. RLFs can help fill this gap and maximize the impact of traditional financing. RLFs are a simple concept: new loans are granted to new applicants with proceeds from repayments on outstanding loans. The loans typically offer businesses a few advantages over traditional financing, including below-market interest rates and extended terms.

A revolving loan fund in Alpharetta would complement the more traditional tax incentives and fee reductions referenced in POTENTIAL ACTION 1.1. The City should evaluate options for initial capitalization of the RLF, including 100 percent public funds, or a combination of public and private, or public and non-profit/philanthropic funds. The City should define eligibility criteria, define acceptable uses of RLF monies, and establish a loan review committee.

POTENTIAL ACTION 8.7: Pursue the attraction of a Verizon Wireless Innovation Center to Alpharetta.

**TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTION**

Verizon Wireless recently established a collaborative venture fund - the 4G Venture Forum - to support the development of companies and services that run on its broadband 4G wireless network. The initiative is a collaboration between Verizon Wireless, two of its largest vendors (Ericsson and Alcatel-Lucent) and multiple venture funds.

The LTE Innovation Center, currently located in Waltham, Massachusetts, is a collaborative facility that supports key Verizon partners and vendors in the development of new technologies, as well as venture-supported firms developing new products and services that leverage Verizon's 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology. There are multiple laboratories within the Innovation Center, offering a variety of services to participating companies. Companies have access to the latest Verizon infrastructure and technology to leverage in research and development efforts, while also having access to comprehensive support services that help companies better position themselves within the marketplace.

Alpharetta would be a natural location for a second Innovation Center, given the existing location of a Verizon Wireless regional headquarters, as well as strategic locations for key LTE technology and 4G Venture Forum partners such as Alcatel-Lucent. The City's strong wired telecommunications infrastructure, existing agglomeration of high technology and wireless telecommunications companies, and close proximity to the talent and research assets located at the Georgia

Institute of Technology add to the City's attractiveness. City officials should develop an outreach and recruitment plan that is aligned with efforts referenced in POTENTIAL ACTION 3.1.

Goal 3: Invest in community assets that increase the appeal of Alpharetta as a place to live, learn, work, and play.

The City of Alpharetta has grown into a community that residents are proud to call home. Businesses and families frequently praise the community's public schools, and emphasize the importance of continued investments in this asset. The quality of a community's public schools is often a key factor in the relocation decisions of families and businesses. Employers know that they will have difficulty attracting the best and brightest employees if educational systems are not high quality. Maintaining the competitive edge that Alpharetta currently possesses in this regard will require flexibility in adopting innovative programs.

Likewise, the City will need to continue to invest in infrastructure to accommodate and incentivize future growth. The City has thrived as a hub of high-tech activity due in large part to its early investments in fiber optics, as well as its transportation advantages afforded by strong road networks including four access points along Georgia SR 400.

Finally, the community has successfully developed new amenities and invested in programs that increase the attractiveness of the community to existing residents and visitors. This includes but is not limited to the development of the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater, the continued development and maintenance of the Big Creek Greenway, and continued support for cultural arts programs through the Alpharetta Arts Center. Continued investments in quality of life assets and the aesthetic character of the community will be necessary to maintain the appeal of the City to families and increase the attractiveness of the community to young professionals.

Objective 9: Invest in education initiatives that elevate Alpharetta's competitive advantage.

POTENTIAL ACTION 9.1: Evaluate the viability of developing a formal Business Education Partnership (BEP) to increase private sector involvement in K-12 and higher education throughout North Fulton County.

While the Partners in Education program and the Education Committee at the GNFC support collaborative relationships between businesses and educators in North Fulton County, the region could benefit from the establishment of a formal partnership in the form of a 501(c)(3) organization to provide consistent leadership in the advancement of critical education and workforce development initiatives in North Fulton County. The partnership would include representation from the region's pre-Kindergarten and child development centers, various public and private K-12

schools, and public and private higher education institutions. It would also include key private-sector leadership from major employers throughout the region.

The Partnership would be tasked with developing new ways in which the private sector can help advance key education and workforce development initiatives in the region. The Partnership would also be tasked with the development and implementation of annual action plans that identify innovative new partnerships between the business community and the education community. This may include but is not limited to the development or establishment of:

- ✓ internship programs
- ✓ “immersion projects” that give high school juniors and seniors exposure to career paths
- ✓ entrepreneurship education
- ✓ mentorship opportunities
- ✓ scholarship opportunities
- ✓ field trips
- ✓ mock interviews
- ✓ special needs education
- ✓ financial aid and college counseling assistance
- ✓ dropout prevention and reenrollment assistance
- ✓ career/technical education partnerships

The Partnership could develop “action teams” focused on specific areas such as early and elementary education, middle and high school education, career and technical education, higher education, and continuing education. These action teams would be comprised of volunteers with a passion for supporting initiatives in each area.

In addition, the Partnership should spearhead an effort to effectively integrate Alpharetta and North Fulton’s commitment to education into all external marketing efforts. Key messaging should be developed around the region’s primary and unique assets, including but not limited to best-in-state public schools and alternative education models such as the Fulton Science Academy and the Lionheart School.

BEST PRACTICE: BUSINESS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP (PADUCAH, KENTUCKY)

POTENTIAL ACTION 9.2: Encourage greater business participation in the Partners in Education program supported by the GNFC by developing a Principal for a Day program.

Partners in Education is a program operated by numerous Chambers of Commerce across the country that encourages private companies to provide resource (financial and other) to support specific curricular and extracurricular activities at public schools. The City can encourage participation by partnering with public school administrators to develop a “Principal for a Day” program based on national models. This program invites key business (and community) leadership to participate in a “principal for a day” experience in which participants shadow a school’s principal, meet with teachers and students, talk with parents, present to classes, and participate in a variety of other activities. The goal is to provide the participant with greater exposure to facilities, day-to-day operations, key needs, and key strengths of a given facility. This experience can help connect key

business leadership to a particular school/facility and create lasting relationships that can manifest themselves in the form of Partners in Education investments.

BEST PRACTICE: PRINCIPAL FOR A DAY (ATLANTA, GEORGIA)

POTENTIAL ACTION 9.3: Work with key partners to develop a series of cluster-based education and workforce development action plans.

The City of Alpharetta should work with key partners including the newly-formed Business Education Partnership (see POTENTIAL ACTION 9.1) and its various supporting entities to develop a series of action plans to better align secondary and post-secondary education and training programs with the region's targeted clusters of economic activity. Initial efforts should focus on target clusters in the City of Alpharetta that most closely align with targeted opportunities in other North Fulton communities.

Cluster-based action plans should identify near-term investments that can meet the immediate needs of existing businesses as well as long-term investments that align with the anticipated needs of prospective employers. Action plans should focus on:

- ✓ Increasing public and private high school student exposure to career and technical education
 - This can be obtained through the establishment of career academies, career-focused "schools within a school," and the development of early college programs, among other opportunities.

- ✓ Improving four-year and post-graduate degree availability
 - This can be obtained by working with existing public and private higher education institutions to customize existing programs based on employer feedback; identify new programs in high demand by existing employers but in short supply; and facilitate discussions to support the attraction of new institutions that stand to benefit from strategic alliances with corporations in Alpharetta and North Fulton County.

- ✓ Improving coordination between state workforce development entities (Department of Labor, Workforce Investment Boards, One-Stop Career Centers, etc.) and regional employers
 - This can be obtained by collecting information on workforce and training needs during BRE outreach efforts (see POTENTIAL ACTION 7.2) and communicating these needs to state representatives in regular outreach efforts (see POTENTIAL ACTION 5.5).

POTENTIAL ACTION 9.4: Attract new two-year and four-year branch campuses that complement the region’s existing higher education opportunities and align with the training needs of firms in target clusters throughout the City of Alpharetta and North Fulton County.

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

The City of Alpharetta has recently submitted a collaborative bid with the City of Roswell to attract Gwinnett Technical College (Gwinnett Tech) to one of four potential sites that could accommodate a new North Fulton campus. The successful attraction of Gwinnett Tech to the community would be a major new economic engine and a valuable new addition to the long list of assets that attract employers to the City of Alpharetta. The old Milton High School site on Milton Ave. was one of the proposed sites for consideration. Should Gwinnett Tech choose to locate outside of Alpharetta and Roswell, the City should pursue other opportunities to advance technical education offerings at the old Milton High School site. And while Gwinnett Tech presents great opportunities, the City of Alpharetta should also pursue other opportunities for higher education expansion regardless of the success of its bid for the Gwinnett Technical College campus.

The City of Alpharetta should assemble a planning task force inclusive of individuals involved in the development of the Gwinnett Tech proposal to begin developing case statements to attract a new, four-year branch campus. The ideal campus would provide curriculum that does not compete with the strong programs supported by the GSU-Alpharetta Center, but rather, would complement existing programs and employers needs, especially in technology development and application. Ideal fits could potentially include:

- ✓ **Southern Polytechnic State University:** The School of Computing and Software Engineering offers numerous undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, and graduate certificates that closely align with the City’s targeted clusters of Information Technology, Telecommunications, and Corporate Services.
- ✓ **Kennesaw State University:** The College of Science and Mathematics offers numerous undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, and graduate certificates that closely align with the City’s targeted clusters of Information Technology, Telecommunications, and Corporate Services.
- ✓ **Georgia Institute of Technology:** The College of Computing offers undergraduate and graduate degrees that closely align with the City’s Information Technology target cluster.

POTENTIAL ACTION 9.5: Evaluate the viability of establishing a need-based scholarship for Alpharetta graduates – the Alpharetta Promise – that bridges the impending gap in HOPE scholarship funding.

Legislation is currently advancing through the Georgia legislature that will, among other aspects, reduce the HOPE scholarship amount for currently eligible students to 90 percent of tuition as compared to the previous 100 percent coverage. Future awards will be tied to state education lottery revenues. Student fees and the cost of textbooks will also no longer be covered.

The City of Alpharetta should work with the GNFC and the newly-established Business Education Partnership (POTENTIAL ACTION 9.1) to evaluate the viability of securing a large financial contribution from one or more private donors to support an “Alpharetta Promise” scholarship program that would cover the remaining in-state tuition that is not supported by the HOPE scholarship, as well as any student fees and a textbook allowance, for all HOPE-eligible students residing in Alpharetta.

The concept of creating an “Alpharetta Promise” is predicated on the popular effort initiated in Kalamazoo, Michigan - the Kalamazoo Promise - which has received national attention and has been emulated in multiple communities nationwide. The Kalamazoo Promise guarantees all of Kalamazoo public Schools a full scholarship to any state institution of higher education, subject to a variety of eligibility criteria including but not limited to grade point average, attendance record, and length of enrollment in Kalamazoo Public Schools. The program is supported by a few anonymous donors. In the case proposed for Alpharetta, the scholarship amount included in the “Alpharetta Promise” is not intended to be a full scholarship, but rather, it is a “promise” to families and children in Alpharetta that students counting on a full HOPE scholarship will still receive the same level of financial assistance that they have expected for years.

BEST PRACTICE: THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE (KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN)

POTENTIAL ACTION 9.6: [Develop a comprehensive entrepreneurship education initiative that includes a business plan competition and summer fellowship opportunities for high school students.](#)

Entrepreneurship education is increasingly becoming an integrated component of high school - even elementary and middle school - curriculum. Public school systems are constantly finding new ways to teach students about business concepts at an early age, while also supporting their desire to explore their individual interests in an applied setting. Entrepreneurship education is already relatively well-integrated into the culture throughout many Alpharetta public schools. For example, the Alpharetta High School chapter of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) was among the best performing chapters in the state across a variety of tests and events at the Georgia FBLA State Conference in 2010.

The City of Alpharetta should work with school administrators to develop a business plan competition for high school juniors and seniors. The competition would be open to all juniors and seniors, and would be supported by entrepreneurship curriculum integrated into classrooms as feasible. A volunteer-driven, after-school (or weekend) curriculum should be developed to teach participating students about key concepts relevant to entrepreneurs. These short workshops would cover basic concepts such as market research and marketing, accounting and finance, presentation skills, and writing a business plan. They would be taught by volunteers from the business community, higher education institutions, and mentors from the SBDC and Alpharetta SCORE chapter.

The City should work with these same partners, including SCORE, the SBDC, and the GNFC, to ensure that mentors are available to meet with students and provide hands-on, one-on-one assistance at a few specific times throughout the competition. A wide variety of potential outcomes and awards for the competition should be considered. Potential awards include but are not limited to:

- ✓ Summer internship/fellowship opportunities with area corporations
- ✓ Subsidized office space (provided in-kind by corporate sponsors or local government) to provide winners with an environment to further develop their ideas in the summer
- ✓ Cash awards to further explore business development
- ✓ Ongoing mentorship with area business leaders
- ✓ Higher education scholarships

Objective 10: Strengthen physical infrastructure to encourage and accommodate future growth.

POTENTIAL ACTION 10.1: Continue to acquire right of way necessary to complete Westside Parkway between Old Milton Parkway and Webb Bridge Road.

The completion of Westside Parkway is undoubtedly the most critical infrastructure project facing the City of Alpharetta. The Parkway has yet to realize its full potential as a major north-south artery capable of relieving traffic along Highway 9, Georgia 400, and North Point Parkway due to a small incomplete stretch between Old Milton Parkway and Webb Bridge Road that was originally planned for development as a component of Prospect Park. Today, the road remains incomplete as private development of Prospect Park was abandoned. The City should work to acquire the land necessary to complete Westside Parkway by whatever means necessary. The City should implore the current property owner to provide the City with the land so that the road can be completed. Ultimately, the completion of Westside Parkway will greatly increase the value of the remaining property. Should these efforts meet resistance, the City should consider moving forward with other legal approaches to acquire the land for a public purpose.

POTENTIAL ACTION 10.2: Develop a long-range plan for enhancing the City's fiber optic and wireless networks.

Strategic investments in the fiber optic infrastructure in the City of Alpharetta have paid dividends for many years and will continue to pay dividends in the years ahead. However, the City's advantage will not last forever, and Alpharetta needs a plan to remain ahead of the competition if it wishes to maintain its status as one of the most attractive locations for technology companies in the state and across the nation.

The City should begin the planning process by soliciting input from area businesses during the BRE outreach process (see POTENTIAL ACTION 7.2) regarding current and potential future fiber infrastructure needs. If deemed necessary, the City should solicit bids from interested firms to evaluate current fiber infrastructure and develop a plan for strategic investments that will not only maintain but also enhance the speed and redundancy of Alpharetta's network infrastructure.

The City should also consider a variety of alternative models to improve connectivity and download speeds to continually support the ever-expanding demands of existing and potential future businesses in Alpharetta. Such options span from the creation of a city-operated wireless network, to strategic partnerships with firms possessing expertise and interest in such investments in Alpharetta (such as Alcatel-Lucent).

POTENTIAL ACTION 10.3: Continue to implement the recommendations of the North Point Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) and actively support efforts by the North Fulton Community Improvement District (NFCID) to enhance retail corridors through investments in walkability, connectivity, and beautification.

The City of Alpharetta should continue to pursue the infrastructural improvements and recommendations detailed in the North Point LCI and incorporate these recommendations into the City's Comprehensive Plan. The City should work with the CID to engage in period review of progress towards the achievement of LCI objectives and identify priorities for each year to advance specific investments that support the transformation of the corridor into a more pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use "Village Center" consistent with the Initiative's vision.

POTENTIAL ACTION 10.4: Work with key regional partners to host an annual North Fulton Infrastructure Summit to develop annual agenda of short-term and long-term infrastructure priorities.

The City of Alpharetta should work with partners at the Atlanta Regional Commission, the GNFC, the NFCID, and the Georgia Department of Transportation to host an annual, collaborative North Fulton Infrastructure Summit to discuss local and regional infrastructure priorities, including but not limited to road infrastructure; water and wastewater; public transit; pedestrian and bicycle solutions; waste management; and energy infrastructure. The Summit would be a multi-day event convening key public, private, and non-profit leadership in roundtable formats around the aforementioned infrastructure categories. The Summit would help advance consensus on high priority projects requiring state and/or federal assistance that have a positive impact on multiple municipalities within North Fulton County.

A list of priority projects would be developed by infrastructure category, and grouped into critical, short-term priorities (potentially funded in the next two years or next two legislative sessions), and long-term priorities (beyond two years). Each community in North Fulton would also include three to five priority projects that primarily benefit their community, with relatively limited regional impact. The goal of the Summit is to develop and convey a unified front in advocating for and advancing legislation and infrastructure projects that benefit North Fulton County.

Objective 11: Continue to invest in the aesthetic, environmental, and cultural attractiveness of the City of Alpharetta.**POTENTIAL ACTION 11.1: Attract a new permanent resident to accompany the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra at the Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre at Encore Park.**

The City of Alpharetta should assist representatives from the Amphitheatre in identifying performing arts groups that could potentially complement the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's summer series. This could include but is not limited to the Atlanta Opera, Alliance Theater, and the Atlanta Ballet. Each of these groups could potentially utilize the Amphitheatre to broaden their exposure to audiences in North Fulton County. Potential exists to schedule performances during the daytime on the same day as the Symphony's evening performances. The Symphony and the other participating organization, such as Alliance Theater or the Atlanta Ballet, could sell promotional tickets to both events at a discount. By scheduling different matinee and evening performances, individuals and families that appreciate the arts could enjoy a full-day experience at the Amphitheatre and in the City of Alpharetta. Many attendees of events at the Amphitheatre likely drive in to Alpharetta for an event and then leave promptly once the performance has concluded. Dual-programming that provided patrons with a break between matinee and evening performances would afford them the opportunity to explore nearby parts of the City, potentially spending additional money at retail or dining establishments in the Downtown and North Point areas.

POTENTIAL ACTION 11.2: Develop a public art sponsorship program - Art for Adoption - that supports local artists, enhances aesthetic character, and elevates corporate stewardship in the City of Alpharetta.

The City of Alpharetta should advance existing efforts to initiate a new corporate-sponsored public art program. This program would solicit corporate donations to fund public art, including but not limited to sculptures, creative landscape architecture, downtown murals, and other forms of physical public art. The City should work with relevant partners to identify the appropriate locations for public art, with particular emphasis placed on entryways (e.g. exists from GA SR 400), gateways (e.g. Highway 9 in Downtown or Windward Parkway), and focal points (e.g. accents/landmarks in public space). Sponsoring corporations should be prominently honored alongside the artist.

POTENTIAL ACTION 11.3: Develop a Storefront Artists project that showcases local artists in vacant storefronts throughout the City.

The City of Alpharetta should develop a Storefront Artists project that encourages property owners and landlords of vacant retail space to allow local artists to showcase their work in vacant storefronts. The project serves two primary purposes. First and foremost, it provides a free opportunity for local artists to increase their exposure. Second, it increases the attractiveness of the vacant property and surrounding area.

City staff should identify one or two targeted areas (such as Downtown Alpharetta or specific retail centers) and hold an initial information session with property owners and landlords to gauge their interest and willingness to participate in a pilot program. The City should then hold a second information session with local artists to inform them of the program and all relevant guidelines for participation. Appropriate partner networks should be leveraged in outreach efforts, including but

not limited to the Alpharetta Arts Center and the Fulton Arts Council. Once participating property owners and artists are identified, the details and guidelines of the project should be refined and the pilot project should begin in targeted areas. The project should be extended to other areas of the City if appropriate and with sufficient interest.

BEST PRACTICE: STOREFRONT ARTISTS PROJECT (FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS)

POTENTIAL ACTION 11.4: Develop neighborhood- and corridor-specific beautification plans alongside a matching grant program to support their implementation.

The City of Alpharetta has invested heavily in efforts to make Alpharetta an aesthetically attractive place to live, work, and visit. This is exemplified by City policies that emphasize the preservation of trees and the maintenance of specific design standards as well as considerable public investments in landscaping and streetscaping. In addition to its own efforts, the City can facilitate volunteer-driven, collaborative approaches to community beautification that empower residents and businesses to make investments that elevate the attractiveness and value of their own property, as well as the entire community.

The City should work with homeowners associations, business associations, large businesses, large property owners, religious institutions, community non-profits, and other relevant partners to develop a neighborhood- and corridor-specific beautification plans. These plans should identify the specific needs of targeted areas, varying from tree-planting to weed removal and tree-pruning to litter removal. These plans should establish a vision for each area with an emphasis on low-cost solutions that can be implemented by volunteer teams. The City should develop a matching grant program that would help to fund beautification efforts undertaken by homeowners associations, private businesses, and non-profit entities throughout the community that are consistent with neighborhood and corridor beautification plans. Implementation of beautification efforts should be coordinated with Keep Alpharetta Beautiful and the proposed Community Beautification Day (see POTENTIAL ACTION 11.5).

POTENTIAL ACTION 11.5: Coordinate an annual Community Beautification Day in partnership with Keep Alpharetta Beautiful.

The City should conduct a large-scale, community-wide outreach plan to inform residents and businesses of the community beautification initiatives outlined in POTENTIAL ACTION 11.4, and to solicit volunteer commitments for a first annual Community Beautification Day. Homeowners associations, private businesses, parent-teacher associations, religious institutions, and other relevant partners should be engaged to lead volunteer recruitment efforts, organize volunteer teams, and assist in the implementation of targeted projects consistent with the neighborhood and corridor beautification plans (see POTENTIAL ACTION 11.4). Keep Alpharetta Beautiful should be leveraged as a key resource in coordinating volunteer action teams that are not affiliated with any of the aforementioned entities. Local and regional media should be leveraged to publicize efforts.

POTENTIAL ACTION 11.6: Develop a community-wide challenge - 100% Green by 2015 - to encourage the adoption of environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient practices by all residents and businesses in the City of Alpharetta.

The City of Alpharetta was recently recognized by the Atlanta Regional Commission as one of only two gold-certified "Green Communities" in Metro Atlanta in 2010. This award was based on the extensive efforts of the City to incorporate "green" practices, from energy efficiency to green building to green purchasing. The City was also recognized for supporting private sector investments in green building and requirements of commercial recycling, among other efforts. The City clearly takes great pride in this recognition; residents and business should share in this pride as well.

The City of Alpharetta should develop a community-wide challenge - 100% Green by 2015 - that encourages all City residents and business to make at least one investment in "green" or sustainable practices by 2015. There are numerous potential investments, including but limited to weather-stripping, window replacement, the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs, and other such investments. The City should partner with Georgia Power, Sawnee EMC, Fulton County Water Department, and other relevant utilities to create and implement an educational campaign that will fully inform all residents and businesses of the challenge, while also providing information and tips on maximizing energy efficiency and reducing their utility bills. The City and its partners should also ensure that these educational materials include any and all relevant incentives at the state and local level that are available to businesses making certain investments in energy efficiency or green building.

CONCLUSION

The City of Alpharetta has positioned itself well to support tremendous growth that has occurred in recent decades. The City's strong public schools, telecommunications infrastructure, well-planned business parks, and highly-educated population will continue to provide benefits for the community in the years ahead. However, the City's successes of years past cannot be assumed to simply continue into the future. The world of economic development is more competitive today than ever before, and communities are investing more – *not less* – in the midst of fiscal constraints brought forth by the most recent economic recession. The creation of this new *Economic Development Plan* for the City of Alpharetta is intended to help move the City towards a more proactive approach to economic development in the years ahead. In today's highly competitive and rapidly-changing economic landscape that is rife with uncertainty, communities cannot afford to be reactive.

With continued commitment to a high-quality and welcoming community combined with a reinvigorated effort to build a more comprehensive economic development program, Alpharetta can become an even stronger community; one that is envied by others nationwide.

Effective implementation of this *Plan* will require cooperation and collaboration among numerous organizations and individuals. The development of effective and collaborative working relationships between the various entities that will contribute to implementation will be critical to successfully launching a variety of initiatives. Further, it is important to remember that this is a multi-year *Plan*. It cannot be done all at once. Successful communities know that economic development is a marathon, not a sprint.

APPENDIX A: BEST PRACTICES

Potential Action 1.1: Economic Incentive Policy

Best Practice: City of San Marcos, Texas

The City of San Marcos, Texas is located along Interstate 35 between the highly successful and competitive communities of San Antonio and Austin. In order to compete for the rapid influx of jobs to the state of Texas, the City of San Marcos has developed a comprehensive incentive policy to better position itself alongside the fast-growing and relatively development-friendly communities of Austin and San Antonio. The City's incentive policy includes a wide variety of financial and non-financial incentives, including but not limited to:

- ✓ Permit and development impact fee waivers
- ✓ Fast-track permitting
- ✓ Freeport exemption
- ✓ Property tax abatements
- ✓ Tax-increment financing
- ✓ Sales tax rebates
- ✓ Revolving loan fund
- ✓ Reinvestment zones

A full list of incentives as well as detailed descriptions of each program and associated eligibility criteria can be found here:

http://www.ecodevsanmarcos.org/pdf/SM_Incentive_Policy_2008.pdf

Potential Action 2.8: Developer's Day in Downtown

Best Practice: Central Atlanta Progress (Atlanta, Georgia)

Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) is a non-profit organization that helps to guide the strategic redevelopment of Downtown Atlanta through a variety of programs and services. CAP hosts an annual "Downtown Development Day" to inform business owners and developers of new initiatives in Downtown Atlanta, promote underutilized parcels that are prime for redevelopment, and provide educational opportunities to interested parties regarding downtown revitalization. The "Day" is partially supported by a sponsorship from the Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW) of Atlanta and tickets are sold to individuals interested in the full program. The program varies each year but generally includes an optional tour of underutilized parcels, a keynote speaker, and breakout sessions. While such a large program and ticket sales are not appropriate for Alpharetta, the simple act of convening various downtown stakeholders on an annual basis to discuss redevelopment opportunities has helped to kick start a number of projects in Downtown Atlanta, and could potentially do the same for Downtown Alpharetta.

<http://www.atlantadowntown.com/business/downtown-development-day>

Potential Action 4.2: Entertainment Impact at Regional Malls
Best Practice: NorthPark Center (Dallas, Texas)

NorthPark Center in Dallas, Texas is one of the largest and most successful high-end retail malls in the country. The Center is known for its art and architecture and is surrounded by numerous complementary retail centers, similar to the North Point corridor in Alpharetta. The Center’s owners engaged in a lengthy planning process in the 1990s to redevelop the mall and ensure its long-term economic sustainability. A component of this strategy was the attraction of a major entertainment venue. In 2000, NorthPark announced that it has secured a large AMC movie theater including an IMAX theater. A new outside courtyard area with restaurants was developed adjacent to the theater. Dave and Busters – a multi-purpose entertainment venue – also announced that it was locating a facility just a few blocks from NorthPark. The result was a resurgence of younger shoppers to an older area of Dallas. The Center has also benefitted from public transit access connecting Downtown Dallas and NorthPark Center via train.

Potential Action 6.1: Website
Best Practice: City of Arlington, Texas

The City of Arlington, Texas has developed a best practice economic development website that effectively communicates the City’s economic development objectives to prospective businesses as well as residents. The City’s economic development website provides an overview of the City’s economic development strategy, Champion Arlington. The website has specific pages dedicated to each of the City’s various incentive programs, as well as detailed demographic and economic information on the community presented in the form of downloadable “annual growth reports.” The City also maintains its own site search website – Arlington iSites – that is enabled with a geographic information system (GIS) to help prospects and site location consultants browse available sites and properties.

<http://www.arlingtontx.gov/business/>

Potential Action 6.1: Website
Best Practice: Greater Richmond Partnership, Inc.

Originally launched in 1994, the Greater Richmond Partnership overhauled its website in 2003 earning it a national award in website design from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). In addition to providing high quality, up-to-date information on the local workforce, available buildings and sites, and cost of doing business, the website has some unique features that attempt to connect a variety of users to Greater Richmond. Some of these features include:

- An online photo tour provides users with a “sense of place” by showcasing Greater Richmond’s neighborhoods.

- A “Companion” Partnership website written in Chinese to leverage international development opportunities (www.we-usa.com).
- A specific portal for women- and minority-owned businesses that connects entrepreneurs to financial resources, government contracting opportunities, and technical assistance providers.
- A featured video called “Speaking of Richmond” which highlights specific areas of competitiveness for the region.
- Custom Report Generator allowing users to build customized reports with detailed data and information about the region.

<http://www.grpva.com>

Potential Action 6.1: Website

Best Practice: Sioux Falls Development Foundation (Sioux Falls, South Dakota)

The Sioux Falls Development Foundation maintains a wealth of information on its website. The Foundation has created community profiles for the Sioux Falls metropolitan area as well as individual profiles for 15 distinct communities in the region. The website also access includes access to a variety of publications including the Foundation’s bi-monthly newsletter, site location studies, business directories, and many other publications. The website includes detailed information on available incentives and individual buildings and sites. Overall, the website has a tremendous amount of information for a community of its size and is very user-friendly for site selection representatives that need immediate access to specific information.

<http://www.siouxfallsdevelopment.com/>

Potential Action 6.3: Marketing Collateral

Best Practice: Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation (Martinsville, Virginia)

The Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation has developed an attractive one-page “Community Profile” that is the organization’s primary piece of marketing collateral. It is well-designed yet features an immense amount of information, including but not limited to demographics, employment composition, top employers, climate, a regional map, local tax rates, information on educational institutions, and key facts covering cost of living, unionization, and developable land. All of this information is contained within a single, double-sided sheet that can be provided to external audiences with a brief yet highly informative marketing piece.

http://www.yesmartinsville.com/content/file/mhc_community_profile_may2010.pdf

Potential Action 6.3: Marketing Collateral**Best Practice: Raleigh Economic Development (Raleigh, North Carolina)**

Raleigh Economic Development (RED) is a partnership between the City of Raleigh and the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce. RED operates unique websites for each of its various target clusters. Each of these websites is customized with information specific to stakeholders in each cluster and in some instances is accompanied by downloadable brochures and information packets. Content varies between the brochures for each cluster yet all have tremendously high publication and design quality. Content includes profiles of key cluster companies and innovators, critical resources and educational assets, relevant data, background information on key initiatives, and important contact information.

Examples of cluster-specific profiles include:

http://www.raleigh4u.com/files/CRED_EV_Brochure.pdf

<http://www.raleigh-wake.org/files/games/triple-threat.pdf>

Potential Action 6.3: Marketing Collateral**Best Practice: St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association (St. Louis, Missouri)**

The St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association (RCGA) has developed best practice marketing materials to support the organization's cluster development efforts. Consistently-branded profiles are available for each of the region's targeted clusters. Content includes maps of key companies and resources, descriptions of key assets and resources that support private companies, examples of innovative technologies, and information on supportive educational programs.

Examples of cluster-specific profiles include:

<http://www.stlrcga.org/Documents/library/PlantEmail.pdf>

<http://www.stlrcga.org/documents/AdvManEmail.pdf>

Potential Action 9.1: Business Education Partnership**Best Practice: Business Education Partnership (Paducah, Kentucky)**

The Business Education Partnership (BEP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization started in 1996 that is dedicated to linking education with local businesses in the Paducah, Kentucky area. The organization's mission is to "develop collaborative partnerships between business and education and become a pro-active voice for educational issues at the local, regional and state level." Educational networks of the Partnership include Paducah McCracken County Schools, Paducah Independent Schools, Community Christian Academy, and St. Mary's School systems.

The objective of the BEP is to prepare students to successfully enter the workforce upon graduation from high school or completion of post-secondary

degree. This goal is met by promoting direct interaction between employers and students through classroom presentations, internships, field trips, mentoring, mock interviews, and scholarships.

The Partnership has a comprehensive website, which encourages even more participation and information dispersal throughout the community. Business representatives can volunteer to make classroom presentations, provide internship opportunities, and contribute to other activities to promote interaction between students and businesses.

Potential Action 9.2: Principal for a Day
Best Practice: Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta Public Schools (Atlanta, Georgia)

“Principal for a Day,” coordinated by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and based on national models, has recruited hundreds of entrepreneurs and business, civic and political leaders to spend a day each fall paired with a principal at every one of Atlanta’s public schools – high school, middle and elementary. The program creates awareness of the progress Atlanta Public Schools have made and the challenges they face. The goal is to inspire community leaders to build long-term partnerships with schools to concentrate on boosting student achievement, improving school facilities and creating a better-educated workforce.

Participants are matched with schools based on a number of criteria, including the volunteers’ areas of expertise, interests and immediate needs of the school. Principals for a Day may: engage in class discussions, meet representatives of parents’ associations, read to students, attend special performances, or address a class or school assembly.

Potential Action 9.5: Scholarship, Alpharetta Promise
Best Practice: Kalamazoo Promise (Kalamazoo, Michigan)

The Kalamazoo Promise is a scholarship available to Kalamazoo, Michigan public school graduates that provides eligible students with guaranteed financial aid to attend public colleges and universities within the state. The program is privately funded by a small group of anonymous donors interested in elevating the educational attainment of residents of the Greater Kalamazoo Community.

The scholarships can cover up to 100 percent of tuition, for up to four years of post secondary school, and are based on a scale that takes into account the length of attendance in Kalamazoo Public Schools. The scholarships are available to students who have graduated from Kalamazoo Public Schools, have been students at Kalamazoo Public Schools for four or more years, and meet a variety of other requirements such as regular attendance. Students must enroll full time, take 12 credit hours per semester, and maintain above a 2.0 grade point average.

Potential Action 11.3: Storefront Artists Project**Best Practice: Narrows Center for the Arts (Fall River, Massachusetts)**

The Storefront Artists Project was launched in downtown Fall River by the Narrows Center for the Arts, in partnership with Arts United/Fall River, the Fall River Office of Economic Development, and the Chamber of Commerce. The project is supported in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Fall River Storefront Artists (FRSA) approaches the landlords of empty storefronts to lend their vacant street-front space to an artist or arts organization – defined as anyone engaging in a creative endeavor, including the fine arts (painting, sculpture, printmaking, illustration), performance arts (music, dance, theatre, spoken word, etc.), architecture, interior design, graphic design, or new visual media (video, installation, computer programming).

Artists are transforming the windows into art projects, are visible working inside their studios, and open their spaces to viewers every Saturday and one to three evenings a month. The artists assume responsibility for their utilities and for keeping the street façade clean. In return, the landlord provides the space rent-free until they get a signed lease, whereupon they give the artist a 30 to 60 day vacancy notice. The Arts United organization can also act as a property manager when necessary, intervening to deal with legal or logistical issues and providing funds to handle emergencies. Each landlord specifies the kind of arts activities that would be appropriate to his or her space and the organization's Board chooses the best match from the list of artist applicants.