

DRAFT: 2-10-2014



III. NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A. INTRODUCTION

Achieving the community’s vision and goals requires strategic thinking about the current and potential needs and opportunities of Norcross and then prioritizing those that make the most sense to pursue based on the Strategic Goals. The following section identifies the key needs and opportunities that the City will pursue by substantive element of the plan, including Population, Housing, Economic Development, Land Use, and Transportation.

Starting with initial visioning discussions and extending through action planning workshops and meetings with the public and Steering Committee, the following list includes the top needs that were derived. These are needs and opportunities that are addressed in the Community Work Program.

B. POPULATION

Populations are defined by the individuals, families, and households that reside within their boundaries which, in turn, define a community. Their background, family structure, daily activities, and aspirations for the future shape the services, infrastructure, and facilities that a community is required to provide and the housing, jobs, and retail it can attract. People matter. The overall population trends and anticipated growth that define Norcross are an important element of defining who we are and where we are going in the future. The characteristics of our population will play a key role in the decisions that our City and other public/private partners make about Norcross in years ahead.



The City of Norcross has long-maintained the reputation as a quaint suburban, residential community, central to the Atlanta job market with easy access into the city. Over time, this role has changed as the Atlanta region grew outward into the suburbs. Norcross has become a central location known not only as a desirable place to raise a family but also as a well-suited location for business due to its accessibility to the region.

1. Baseline Assessment

a. Growing Population

The last official count registered the City of Norcross’s population at 9,116 in 2010. This count occurred two years before the City’s annexation of the large swath of land located northeast of the Jimmy Carter Blvd/I-85 Interchange — arguably one of the most impactful decisions that the City has made, with the support of its residents. The annexed area includes a mix of primarily commercial, industrial and residential uses. As a result of annexation, it is estimated that the city’s population increased by 41% between 2011 to 2012 (the year annexation became official) bringing Norcross to an estimated 16,000 people. This is the largest, single-year increase in population experienced by the city in its history. The city’s population grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, but these growth spurts occurred over 10 year periods and coincided with similar, more significant growth in Gwinnett County, which makes annexation impacts more influential.

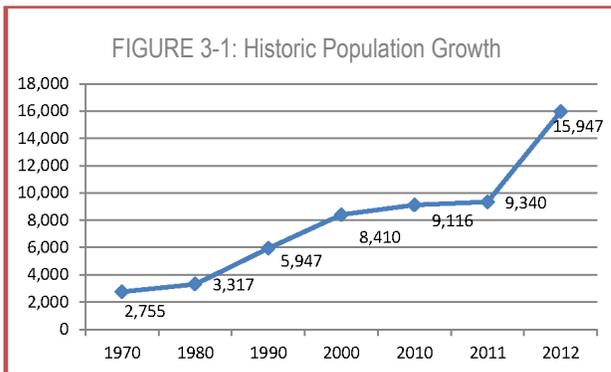


TABLE 3-1: Historic Population Change (1970-2012)

Year	Norcross	Avg. Annual % Increase	Gwinnett Co.	Avg. Annual % Increase
2012	15,947	71%	823,100	1%
2011	9,340	2%	814,100	1%
2010	9,116	1%	805,321	3%
2000	8,410	4%	588,448	7%
1990	5,947	8%	356,500	11%
1980	3,317	2%	166,808	13%
1970	2,755		72,349	

Source: 2010-1970 Census of U.S. Census Bureau;
2001 & 2012 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population

b. Household Characteristics

In 2010, there were 3,161 households in the City of Norcross, 66% of those were family households (where two or more people are related by birth, marriage or adoption). The average household size was 2.88 people. If we include the households within the 2012 annexed area, the total number of households increases to 4,828. Approximately 71% of the 1,667 households in the 2012 annexed area are family households. The average household size of the annexed area is notably larger at 3.52 people. The characteristics of the annexed area will influence short and long term trends and related housing needs.

TABLE 3-2: Racial Diversity, 2010

	2010 City of Norcross		2012 Annexed Area		Norcross 2010 + 2012 Annexed Area*		Gwinnett Co.		Georgia	
Total Population	9,116	100%	5,868	100%	14,984	100%	805,321	100%	9,687,653	100%
White alone	3,722	41%	1,991	34%	5,713	38%	429,563	53%	5,787,440	60%
Black or African American alone	1,801	20%	963	16%	2,764	18%	190,167	24%	2,950,435	30%
American Indian & Alaska Native alone	60	1%	70	1%	130	1%	4,038	1%	32,151	0%
Asian alone	1,167	13%	553	9%	1,720	11%	85,292	11%	314,467	3%
Some Other Race alone	1,960	22%	1,997	34%	3,957	26%	70,492	9%	388,872	4%
Two or More Races	395	4%	292	5%	687	5%	25,292	3%	207,489	2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census, SFI

*The 2012 annexed area was calculated using 2010 Census block level data for the 2012 annexed area.

TABLE 3-3: Hispanic/Latino Population

	2010 City of Norcross		2012 Annexed Area		Norcross 2010 + 2012 Annexed Area*		Gwinnett Co. 2010		Georgia 2010	
Total Population	9,116	100%	5,868	100%	14,984	100%	805,321	100%	9,687,653	100%
Not Hispanic or Latino	5,525	61%	2,212	38%	7,738	52%	643,286	80%	8,833,964	91%
Hispanic or Latino	3,591	39%	3,656	62%	7,247	48%	162,035	20%	853,689	9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census, SFI P4

*The 2012 annexed area was calculated using block level data for the 2012 annexed area from the 2010 Census

c. Cultural Diversity

Norcross has become known as a place that is welcoming and accessible to various cultures, and as such, has become an increasingly diverse community. Its increased ethnic diversity offers an opportunity to leverage the unique cultures that make-up the city.

Based on 2010 Census data for the area annexed in 2012 and the existing Norcross population at the time, it can be deduced that the city is: 18% African American, 11% Asian, and 26% Some other race alone.

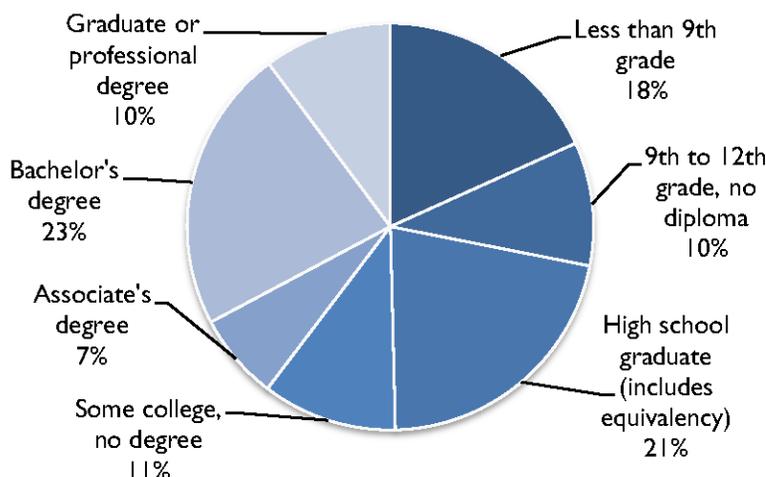
The city has a slightly lower percentage of African Americans compared to the county and state, yet a higher number of people that are of some other race. It is likely that this number is associated, in part, with the high number of Latinos residing in the city.

Using the same methodology, it is estimated that approximately 48% of the Norcross population is Hispanic/Latino. This denotes an important jump since 2010, when 41% of the population was Hispanic. As is shown to the table to the right, Norcross has a notably higher Hispanic population than the county and state.

d. Educational Status

Roughly 1/3 of the Norcross population 25 years of age or older holds a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, which is consistent with county. Another 7% holds an Associates degree and 22% have their high school diploma. It is important to note that 28% of the population has no high school degree. This poses potential challenges to increasing earning potential and job opportunities for the a subgroup of residents.

FIGURE 3-2: Norcross Educational Attainment



Source: U.S. Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates- includes residential population 25 years and older

e. Average Household Income

Per the 2010 Census, the average household income of Norcross residents was \$68,490. Norcross’s average household income was notably lower than Gwinnett County (\$83,232) and Metro Atlanta (\$73,267). The city’s lower average is likely a reflection of the disparity between the highest and lowest paid residents. The Town Center LCI (2012) found the LCI area (Downtown area) to have an average household income of \$83,372. The LCI study projects average household income will increase by 2.2% between 2010-2022.

2. Priority Population Needs and Opportunities

1. Maintain an Environment of Multi-cultural Acceptance and Tolerance

Pursue measures to better integrate different community groups into Norcross culture – including opportunities to facilitate multiculturalism and bilingualism.

2. Continue to Attract the Creative Class

Continue to Attract the Creative Class. Promote and plan for housing and attractions that appeal to millennial population, young professionals, and creative professionals of all ages.

3. Support Lifelong Community Initiatives

There are limited programs and resources (including housing) that facilitate growing old in Norcross. There is a need to expand these opportunities.

4. Expand Community Engagement

Continue to increase ways for people of all ages, to become engaged in community activities. Promote available facilities, programs, and events that support the different segments of the community's population.

5. Connect the two sides of Buford Highway.

Bridge the gap between the population living east and west of Buford Highway through design improvements in redevelopment projects, transportation enhancements increasing connectivity, and public resources and programs.

C. HOUSING

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of a community and housing is one of the most basic building blocks of neighborhoods. The type, value, age, condition and tenure of housing units the set the character of neighborhoods and, in turn, greatly influence the City's ability to attract and maintain residents and businesses. Because housing plays such a vital role in the life of the community, assessing how the city's housing profile has changed over time and identifying the key issues that affect the local housing market are integral tasks in updating the city's vision for the future.

1. Baseline Assessment

a. Housing Stock

As of the 2010 Census there were approximately 5,443 housing units within the current boundaries of Norcross; 3,576 within the 2010 city limits and 1,876 within the areas annexed by the City since 2010. Table 3-4 provides a snapshot of the changes in the City’s housing characteristics between the 2000 and 2010 Census.

Between 2000 and 2010 Norcross’ housing stock grew by 35%, a significant increase over the 1% growth in the preceding decade. This growth also changed the mix of housing available in the city; the percentage share of attached single family units (i.e. townhomes) increased, while multifamily decreased.

The cost of housing in Norcross increased in the 2000—2010 time period: the median rent went up 3% and home values increased 35%. However in 2010 these costs were lower than in Gwinnett County, on average.

TABLE 3-4: 2000 & 2010 Dwelling Types

Dwelling Types	2000		2010	
	Norcross	Gwinnett Co.	Norcross*	Gwinnett Co.
Detached Single-family	1,319	150,017	1,809	205,540
Attached Single-Family	459	7,716	841	17,432
Multifamily	996	46,929	1,104	58,844
Mobile Homes, Boat, etc.	10	5,020		4,783
Total Units	2,784	209,682	3,754	286,599

*2010 Norcross figure is for area within 2010 city limits only

Sources: 2000: Gwinnett Consolidated Plan, Community Assessment Part 2, 2006. 2010: US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006-2010 Table DP04

TABLE 3-5: Comparison of Median Home Values

	2000	2010	% Change
Norcross*	\$126,800	\$171,500	35%
Gwinnett Co.	\$140,600	\$194,200	38%
Georgia	\$100,600	\$161,400	60%

*2010 Norcross figure is for area within 2010 city limits only

Sources: 2000: Census 200 SF 3 Table H085.
2010: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010 Table DP04

TABLE 3-6: Comparison of Median Gross Rent

	2000	2010	% Change
Norcross	\$842	\$870	3%
Gwinnett Co.	\$824	\$954	16%
Georgia	\$613	\$808	32%

*2010 Norcross figure is for area within 2010 city limits only

Sources: 2000: Census 2000 SF 3 Table H063.
2010: US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006-2010 Table DP04



There are many housing options in Norcross: stately older homes in the City’s historic district, garden-style apartments, suburban-style single family subdivisions, and newer small lot single family homes and townhomes near the city’s historic center.

b. Drivers of Housing Change

Two significant forces have shaped the housing profile of Norcross since it was analyzed for the previous Comprehensive Plan in 2006: the recession and annexation. Across the country, the mortgage crisis and increased unemployment rates have had a disastrous effect on the housing market. In Norcross this is evident in the increases in cost burdened households :34% of homeowners and 47% of renters in 2010 vs. 26% of home owners and 41% of renters in 2000; and increase in vacant housing units: 11.6% in 2010 vs. 3.9% in 2000.

The city’s annexations in 2011 and 2012 increased the number of housing units in the City by 52% and also contributed to the city’s changing housing landscape. The annexations added large areas of attached and multifamily housing (See Figure 3-3). The annexations also shifted the tenure of occupied housing from 57% to 52% owner occupied.

c. Age of Housing

The map below depicts the age of the dwellings in Norcross for structures built in 2008 or earlier. Due to the recession, extremely few new housing units have been constructed in Norcross since then.

Three-fourths of the city’s current housing stock was built after 1980 and about a third was built in 1980s. The majority of the city’s housing is found in suburban style neighborhoods located south of Buford Highway. The city’s oldest dwellings are clustered in and near the historic downtown. The date built is unknown for approximately 4% of the city’s housing structures.

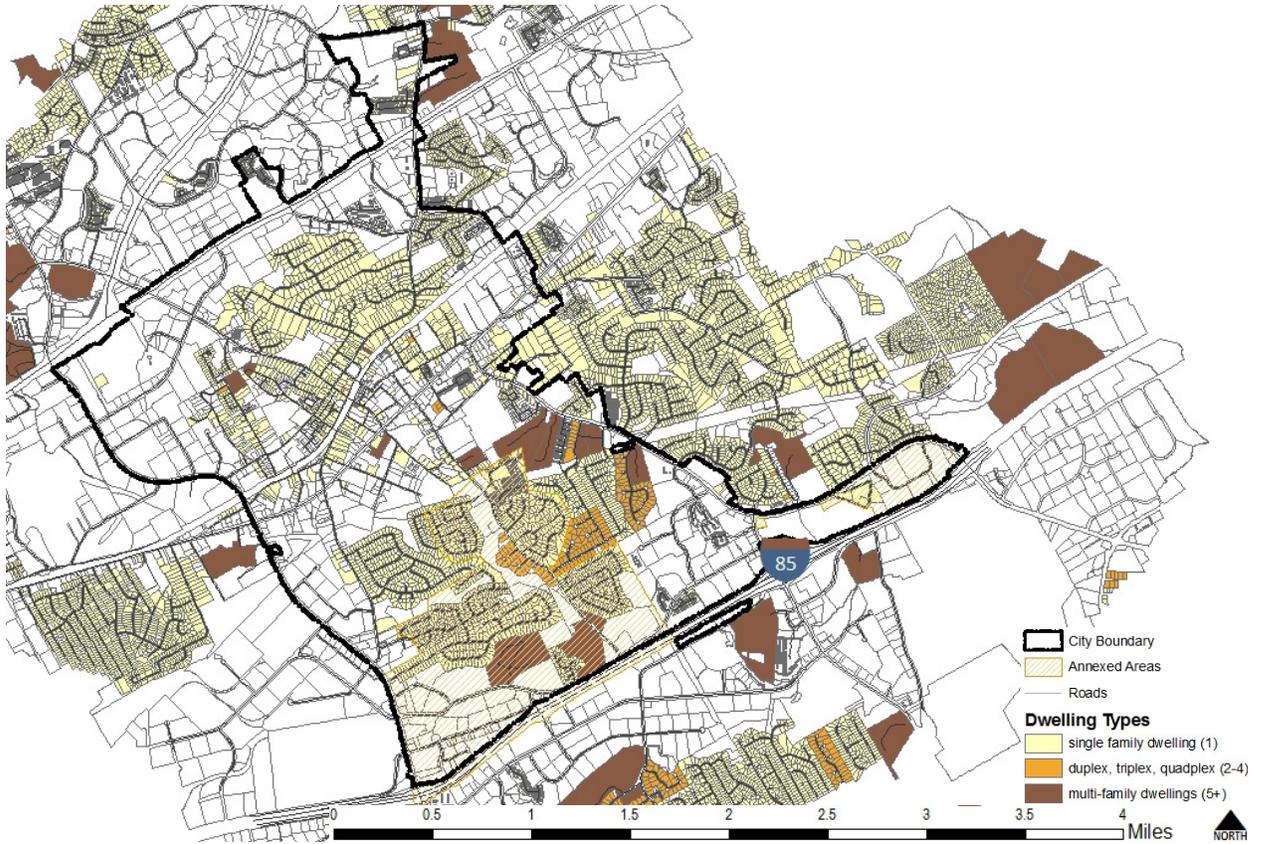


FIGURE 3-3: Dwelling Types

Source: City of Norcross GIS Dept. and Gwinnett County GIS Dept.

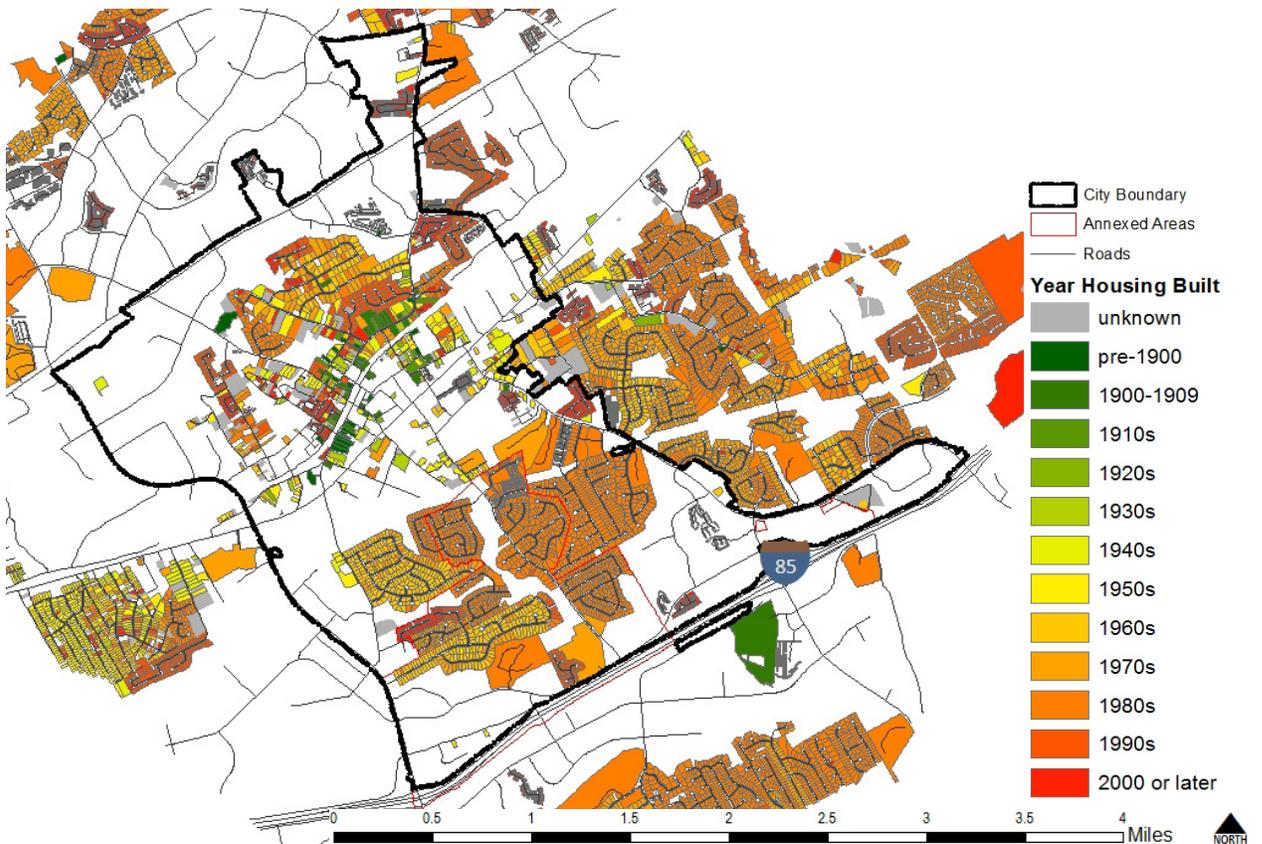


FIGURE 3-4: Year Housing Built

Source: City of Norcross GIS Dept. and Gwinnett County GIS Dept.

d. Looking Ahead

Now that the housing market is starting to rebound, housing starts are picking up in Norcross. The City permitted about 200 new single-family units from April–August 2013, including nearly 150 units in downtown. Housing development will likely continue to increase, barring a significant rise in interest rates.

2. Priority Housing Needs and Opportunities

1. Encourage Desirable Residential Development

Work with private sector to support desired residential improvements and new housing. There is a need to continue to diversify housing mix to accommodate millennial population and employees of area businesses.

2. Maintenance of Existing Housing Stock

A common concern among the population is the desire to see the quality of existing housing either maintained or improved in consistency with the Norcross Code of Ordinances. There is a stronger need for this on the eastern side of Buford Highway. Activities include code enforcement, support programs for owners, etc.

3. Expand Interparcel Connectivity and Interior Sidewalks

Community members would like to be able to get to more places on foot and bicycle. The City should facilitate pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between residential areas and nearby commercial nodes and community facilities.

D. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development is a critical component to a strong and vibrant community. From a most basic sense, it is the act of attracting, maintaining, and helping incubate new businesses while helping sustain and build desirable and appropriate job opportunities for the area labor force. Economic development is critical to ensuring a strong local tax base and high quality of life for a community. Without jobs and business, cities would have a difficult time surviving, without higher taxes on residential properties. Employers are attracted to communities for a variety of reasons: availability of a trained labor force, favorable land use, tax, and business policies, proximity to business partners, and quality of life, to name a few. Understanding these drivers as well as the current industry mix and greater economic trends defining the economic environment are critical to ensuring a community's long term economic success.

1. Baseline Assessment

a. Existing Industry Mix

As demonstrated in Table 3-7, the Norcross economy has a diverse industry mix, with wholesale trade employing the greatest number of people (24%) and having the highest value business transactions at just over \$3.16 million. Professional and scientific as well as administrative and support services also have an important presence at 14% and 13% of overall private employment.

A notable 23,000 people worked in the city in 2007. This is over double the population in 2010 of 9,116. This indicates a strong local tax base but also suggests the opportunity to provide additional housing options in the city that could capture a greater number workers as residents.

b. Labor Force

As shown in Table 3-8, the Norcross labor force (resident population working or looking for work) includes an estimated 80% of the city's population over age 16. Based on sample data collected over that time, the unemployment rate for Norcross between 2007 to 2011 was roughly 6.5%, which was lower than both Gwinnett County (7.9%) and Metropolitan Atlanta (8.8%).

1. Commute to work

The mean amount of time Norcross workers spend commuting to work is 29.8 minutes, and a notable 35% either used an alternative commute method to driving or worked at home.

2. Occupations

The Norcross labor force works in a variety of occupations, with the greatest contingency of the Norcross working in management, business, science & arts occupations (30%), followed by natural resources/construction/maintenance (21%), followed by sales and office occupations (20%), and service occupations (17%).

3. A Regional Perspective

Norcross has access to a large labor pool in the Atlanta region. According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) had a total civilian labor force of approximately 2,799 million in July of 2013. Of that group, approximately 8.6 percent were unemployed. The Georgia Department of Labor does not maintain current records for labor force statistics for Norcross due to size; however, data for Gwinnett County is maintained. In July 2013, Gwinnett had a labor force of approximately 445,000 and an unemployment rate of 7.9%, notably lower than that of the overall Atlanta MSA. Nearby DeKalb County and Fulton County, had unemployment rates of 8.9% and 9.3%, markedly higher than that of Gwinnett County.

TABLE 3-7: Norcross Industry Mix

	Number of Establishments	% of Total	Annual Payroll (\$1,000)	% of Total	Number of Employees	% of Total
Manufacturing	73	6%	62,505	6%	1,492	6%
Wholesale trade	207	16%	331,600	32%	5,518	24%
Retail trade	201	15%	72,687	7%	2,650	12%
Information	68	5%	156,226	15%	2,412	10%
Real estate and rental and leasing	97	7%	42,557	4%	777	3%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	240	18%	184,061	18%	3,133	14%
Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services	89	7%	112,009	11%	2,900	13%
Educational services	11	1%	937	0%	54	0%
Health care and social assistance	95	7%	40,948	4%	1,371	6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	11	1%	1,977	0%	146	1%
Accommodation and food services	104	8%	22,176	2%	1,712	7%
Other services (except public administration)	111	8%	20,971	2%	844	4%
TOTAL	1307	100%	1,048,654	100%	23,009	100%

Source: 2007 Economic Census, U.S. Census Bureau

TABLE 3-8: Labor Force by Occupation

	Georgia		Gwinnett County		Norcross	
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	1,512,405	35%	146,476	38%	1,497	23%
Service occupations	706,914	17%	58,596	15%	1,176	18%
Sales and office occupations	1,088,320	25%	105,841	27%	1,251	19%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	410,562	10%	39,383	10%	1,724	26%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	559,790	13%	38,299	10%	913	14%
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	4,277,991	100%	388,595	100%	6,561	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table DP03

Norcross' Major Employers

- RockTenn *Corporate offices*
- FedEx *Major logistics hub for Southeast*
- Carmax *Dealership*
- Suniva *Manufacturing of high-efficiency solar panels*
- Waffle House *Corporate offices*



Photo Credit: Rock Tenn

c. Employment Growth Projections

The Norcross Town Center Plan LCI update, completed June 2012, projected a 76% increase in area population growth between 2009-2036 based on regional projections. They anticipate the greatest growth occurring in manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail, finance/insurance/real estate, and services. The projections are made for the Norcross Superdistrict, the greater Norcross market area, which is believed will be the key driver of development trends for future office and industrial space in the city.

d. Incentives, Resources and Tools

The City has key incentives to help retain and attract new businesses: an Opportunity Zone (OZ) along Buford Highway and Jimmy Carter Boulevard, a second OZ planned for the south side of the city (providing tax credits for jobs), the Downtown Development Authority, two Tax Allocation Districts at Jimmy Carter and Beaver Run to promote redevelopment, the Gwinnett Village CID supporting reinvestment and business growth, and a supportive business climate. Because economic growth extends beyond jurisdictional boundaries, county, regional, and state trends and resources are critical. The Gwinnett Chamber/Partnership Gwinnett, is a valuable partner in achieving the City's economic objectives along with the Metro Atlanta Chamber, GA Department of Economic Development and others.

Gwinnett Target Industries

- Supply Chain Management
- Information Technology Solutions
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Health Sciences and Services
- Headquarters and Professional Services

2. Priority Economic Development Needs and Opportunities

1. Maintain and Improve Infrastructure

To maintain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining business, especially corporate offices and high tech companies, Norcross will maintain and improve its supportive infrastructure, including transportation, utilities, and communications.

2. Promote Buford Highway Redevelopment

Redevelopment of Buford Highway is pivotal to creating a more connected community and achieving the vision of the Norcross Activity Center LCI and the Jimmy Carter Boulevard/Buford Highway Redevelopment Plan.

3. Maintain and Enhance a Business Friendly Environment

Further the City's reputation as a great place to do business, through continued local economic development efforts and work with other economic development partners to support, retain and attract business and to promote entrepreneurship.

4. Continue to Support the Arts

Increase the arts and attractions of Norcross to attract additional residents and visitors. Potential reuse of the OFS site for filming could be leveraged to further this goal. Additional resources on the northeast side of Buford Highway could in part accommodate these things. The City's cultural diversity and number of foreign born residents could be further leveraged to this end.

E. LAND USE

The land use component of the Comprehensive Plan is the plan's foundation: it provides a snapshot of the City's current development pattern and the vision of how the City of Norcross intends to develop, redevelop, and stabilize over the next twenty years. The various land uses in the City: residential, employment, institutional, parks, etc. are the basic building blocks of the community. The relationships of these land uses and the connections among them are what drive the other topic areas addressed by the Comprehensive Plan. The Future Development Map developed during the planning process will capture the consensus vision for the city's future development pattern. The map then serves as a guide for City leaders as they review rezoning applications and development proposals, make infrastructure improvements and additions, and site civic investments such as parks and fire stations.

1. Baseline Assessment

a. Existing Land Use

The City of Norcross currently encompasses 3,306 acres or slightly over 5 square miles. The accompanying table provides a breakdown land uses in the city for it's current boundaries and for the area covered by the 2008 comprehensive plan. Employment generating land uses including: commercial/retail, institutional/public, heavy and light industrial, and office/professional; take up slightly less than half of city's land area. Residential land uses including: estate, low, medium, and high density, and multi-family, account for just over one-third of the land area, and approximately a tenth of the city's land remains undeveloped.

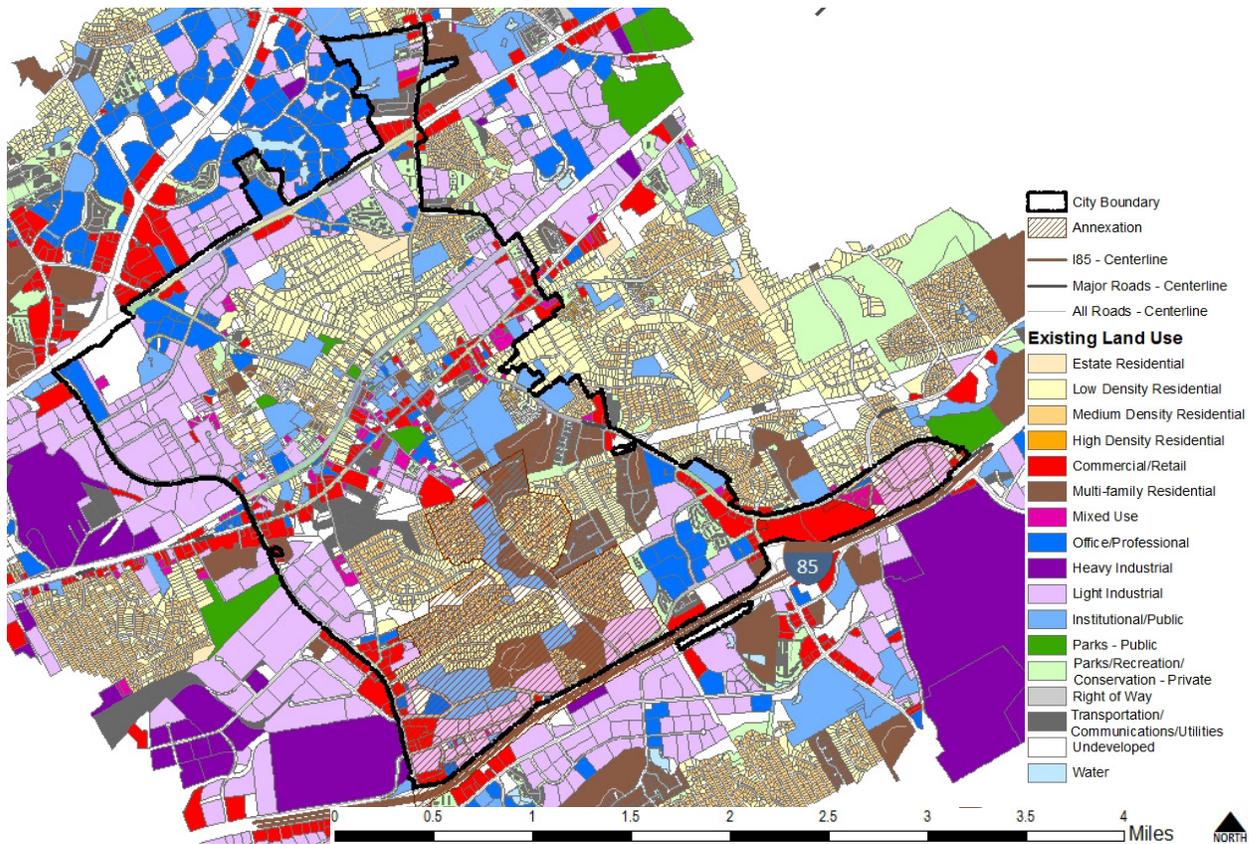


FIGURE 3-5: Existing Land Use

Source: City of Norcross GIS Dept. and Gwinnett County GIS Dept.

b. Effects of Annexation

Since 2008 annexations have increased the size of the city by one-third (approximately 830 acres). The largest annexation made by Norcross was the 2011 annexation of the area of unincorporated Gwinnett County bounded by Jimmy Carter Blvd, I-85 and the Norcross city limits along Beaver Ruin Road. In 2012 the City annexed the area between Beaver Ruin Road and I-85 to the north of Indian Trail Lilburn Road. These annexations create a new gateway to the City and provide a major presence on the I-85 corridor.

Medium density and multi-family residential land use made the most significant gains in terms of acreage and proportion of the city. Mixed use and office/professional land uses had the most significant decreases in percentage of total area of the city. Overall the changes in the city's boundaries have increased the percentage of the city used for residential land uses as residential land uses gained approximately four percent. Employment, recreational, undeveloped, and other land uses all experienced lost approximately one percent.

c. 2030 Gwinnett Unified Plan

The 2030 Gwinnett Unified Plan Future Development Map (completed in 2008) shows the recently annexed areas of Norcross as a developing into a Regional Mixed Use Center. These areas are meant to become the County’s “most intense concentration and mix of commercial, employment and residential developments.” Land uses encouraged in these areas are mixed use, office professional, ultra high density residential, high density residential, institutional public and public open space ¹. Freestanding commercial/retail establishments and townhouses are acceptable as minor components of developments. Light and heavy industrial, single family and estate residential are discouraged land use categories. Regional Mixed Use Centers may also serve as principal Transit Oriented Development (TOD) locations should transit services extend to them.

A key component City’s comprehensive plan update is assessing the current development pattern of the annexed areas and determining how best to incorporate them into the city’s overall development context and vision for the future. Contemplating the appropriateness of the County’s plans for the area is an important part of this process.

d. 2012 Town Center Livable Centers Initiative (LCI)

The 2012 Town Center LCI land use plan portrays a few changes from the current land uses at the heart of the city. These changes include changing area of light industrial and commercial/retail uses at the Buford Highway/Jimmy Carter Boulevard intersection to mid-rise office, the addition of a new greenspace on the portion of the Norcross Elementary School property fronting Lawrenceville Street, the office professional areas of the block bounded by Academy Street, Mitchell Road, Buford Highway and Suwanee Street. to low to mid rise mixed use (3 to 5 floors), as well as mid-rise mixed use on the block directly across Buford Highway that backs up to Summerour Middle School and the area bounded by Buford Highway and the cemetery. Lastly the corner of Buford Highway and Lively Avenue is envisioned to become a commercial/retail area.

1. Land uses defined in the 2030 Gwinnett Unified Plan Future Development Map

2. Priority Land Use Needs and Opportunities

1. Revisit Zoning and Development Regulations.

Since the last update of the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Norcross has seen much progress, many changes, and annexation. As such, there is a need to revisit and consider edits to the zoning and development regulations of the city.

a. Sign Ordinance

Amend sign ordinance to address improvements identified by sign ordinance evaluation.

b. Repurposing of old buildings

The City currently has an excess of office space. There is an opportunity to convert some of this space to flex space or other more flexible uses.

c. M-1 Zoning District

Revisit the M-1 zoning district to ensure appropriate users are allowed in the district. As the City's only industrial zoning district, it is important that this district preserve the industrial base of the community.

d. Parking

Amend parking ordinance to provide for banking of parking.

2. Promote Development of Mixed Use Nodes at Key Gateway Intersections

Continue tradition of strong planning to support smart zoning, redevelopment, and development decisions. This should include updating the Norcross Activity Center LCI and the Jimmy Carter Boulevard/Buford Highway Redevelopment Plan in coordination with County and CID partners.

3. Promote Redevelopment along City's Principal Roadways

Redevelopment along key roads like Buford Highway, Beaver Run, and Jimmy Carter Boulevard and reworking these roadways is essential to connecting the City's different neighborhoods. Balancing land use and transportation improvements will be essential to achieving the area vision.

4. Improve gateways and wayfinding signage.

Everyone should know when they have arrived in the City of Norcross through the aesthetic use of monuments and architectural treatments, and should easily be able to find community facilities and attractions. This need is already being pursued by the City and should continue to be a priority in the next five years as the City works to integrate newly annexed portions of the city.

F. TRANSPORTATION

The transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan can be categorized as a composite of goals, objectives, policies, maps, and programs intended to guide the city’s future framework for its various modes of transportation. The transportation infrastructure plays a key role in setting the stage for future development in local governments. This includes roadways, sidewalks, transit, bike lanes, freight systems, and public transit. This transportation element describes the city’s existing transportation network and assesses the strengths and opportunities as well as the deficiencies and weaknesses into consideration for the next twenty years. For example, the element can compare the local policies and objectives with those of the metro area, identify the local facilities by functional class, and incorporate state, regional, and federal transportation plans and studies that are applicable to the city.

1. Baseline Assessment

a. Existing Roadway Network

Roadways are typically the most utilized public resource in a local government. They are used for travel between homes, employment centers, activity centers, and recreation. Roadways are an important element in the quality of life for citizens as they connect people to and from their destinations. For the City of Norcross, the city’s roadway network is comprised of primary arterials, major collectors, and local streets such as Buford Highway, Beaver Run Road, Holcomb Bridge Road, and Thrasher Street (just to name a few). A few of these facilities, such as Buford Highway, Thrasher Street and South Peachtree Street, are part of roadway or streetscape projects that are currently being improved.

The existing roadway facilities in Norcross serve one of two purposes; they either facilitate mobility or provide access to the various land uses in the city. Mobility and accessibility for roadways are typically measured by a functional classification system that groups streets, roads, and highways into classes based on their functionality or service provided. This functional classification is further used in describing how an individual road or highway is important to the overall roadway network for an area. The following map depicts the roadway classification for the city of Norcross, based on data from the Georgia Department of Transportation.

b. Existing Transit, Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trails Network

In terms of transit facilities, the city of Norcross is served by the Gwinnett County Transit service. There are only five local bus routes in the city at this time (with stops along Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Singleton Road, Buford Highway, South Peachtree Street, and Holcomb Bridge Road), with one of the routes providing a connection to the Doraville MARTA Station. Additionally, there is a GDOT Park & Ride facility located at I-85 and Indian Trail Road that provides access to the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) Express Bus System. Past studies have shown the need for a coordination effort between transit use and pedestrian activity in the city. This is due to some of the bus stop locations being along corridors with heavy vehicular traffic and the potential risks for pedestrians crossing the street.

Currently, there are no dedicated bicycle facilities in the city of Norcross. This is due to the fact that many of the primary roadways in the city not having adequate shoulders or spacing as well as the safety concerns regarding high traffic volumes. There are opportunities for some shared bicycle-automobile use on some of the lower volume streets in the city and this has been documented in some of the past studies by both the city and the ARC. Additionally, the city has no existing multi-use trails but according to the Parks and Greenspace Master Plan, there are proposed opportunities to connect to existing off-road systems in the county by utilizing utility corridors, greenways and other connections between recreational facilities to serve as transportation routes.

As for pedestrian facilities, they exist in most areas of the city, especially the downtown area. The city has recently installed wider sidewalks and streetscapes in some downtown areas with plans to expand to other areas. Although the sidewalk facilities downtown are functional, there are gaps existing in areas so they do not operate as a complete, comprehensive pedestrian network. Also, the city is currently working on two award-winning sidewalk projects, one of which, is for ADA accessibility improvements throughout the city. Additionally, Norcross is looking to utilize pedestrian modes for travel to and from some of the schools to foster healthy physical activity. Figure 3-7 depicts the transit and bicycle/pedestrian and trail facilities (both existing and proposed) for the city of Norcross.

2. Priority Transportation Needs and Opportunities

1. Pursue Funding & Implementation Partnerships

Pursue partnerships with the Gwinnett Village CID, the private sector, and funding partners to achieve needed transportation improvements.

2. Expand Bicycle Infrastructure

There is a desire to be able to get around town via bicycle, both for recreation and to visit community facilities, shop, and work. This is documented by the Parks Master Plan. Building bike infrastructure in the city should be an initiative of Norcross. Example communities of successful bicycle infrastructure programs include the City of Roswell and City of Decatur, both of which have a historic town core.

3. Improve Downtown Railroad Crossing Safety

Improve safety around railroad crossing in the Downtown area.

4. Expand Sidewalk Infrastructure

Increase walkability throughout the city by expanding the sidewalk infrastructure between destination points and closing gaps that exist in the existing sidewalk system.

5. Increase Local Public Transportation Options

Need to increase local public transportation to take residential community where it needs to go. Further analysis is needed to determine whether such initiative is feasible or warranted.

6. Maintain Street Resurfacing Program

The City has comprehensive street resurfacing program that has overseen resurfacing 25 percent of the city's street. This initiative should be continued to maintain high quality and safe roadways for residents and economic development purposes.

7. Manage Traffic Flow

Community members have identified the need for improvements along the city's major roads. Managing traffic flow should emphasize traffic calming along the city's internal roadway network and efficient movement of traffic along the city's boundary roadways which are designed to accommodate through traffic.

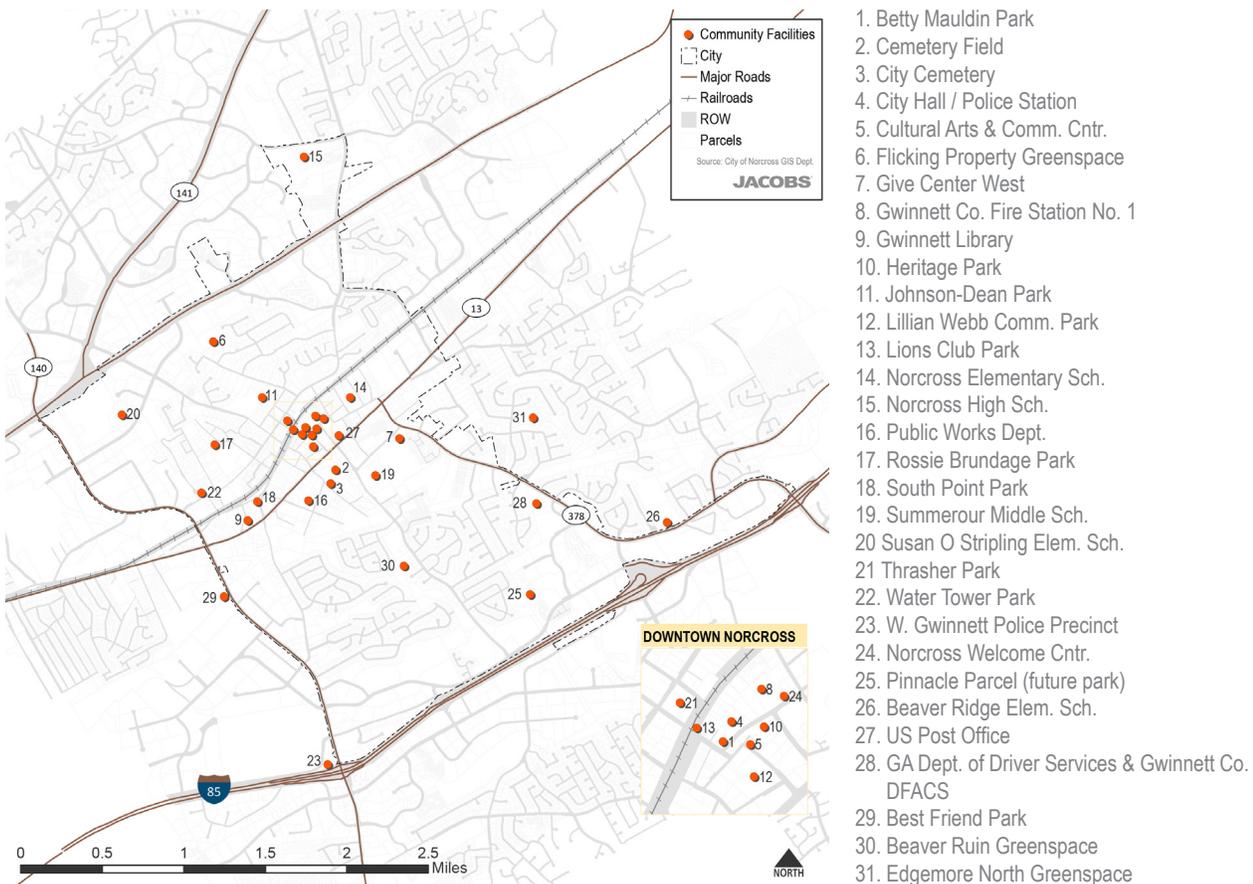
G. COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

The services local governments provide, and the facilities they maintain, contribute greatly to the quality of life and economic prosperity of a community. Answering the question of whether these services and facilities will remain adequate as the local development landscape and demographics change over time is a critical component of comprehensive planning.

1. Baseline Assessment

a. Current Community Facilities in Norcross

There are a number of community service and facility providers serving the Norcross community. The City of Norcross Public Works Department has responsibility for most city services and facilities. The department has three major divisions: Norcross Power (the city has provided electrical service since 1973); Public Works (responsible for streets, city facilities, and stormwater management); and Parks and Recreation. The City also provides police, planning and development services. Additionally, Norcross has joined with Gas South to provide discounted natural gas rates for community members and the city contracts with a private hauler for sanitation services. Gwinnett County provides water and wastewater services, fire protection, libraries, schools, and health and human services. The State of Georgia provides unemployment and driver services from a facility located in the city.



1. Betty Mauldin Park
2. Cemetery Field
3. City Cemetery
4. City Hall / Police Station
5. Cultural Arts & Comm. Cntr.
6. Flicking Property Greenspace
7. Give Center West
8. Gwinnett Co. Fire Station No. 1
9. Gwinnett Library
10. Heritage Park
11. Johnson-Dean Park
12. Lillian Webb Comm. Park
13. Lions Club Park
14. Norcross Elementary Sch.
15. Norcross High Sch.
16. Public Works Dept.
17. Rossie Brundage Park
18. South Point Park
19. Summerour Middle Sch.
20. Susan O Stripling Elem. Sch.
21. Thrasher Park
22. Water Tower Park
23. W. Gwinnett Police Precinct
24. Norcross Welcome Cntr.
25. Pinnacle Parcel (future park)
26. Beaver Ridge Elem. Sch.
27. US Post Office
28. GA Dept. of Driver Services & Gwinnett Co. DFACS
29. Best Friend Park
30. Beaver Ruin Greenspace
31. Edgemore North Greenspace

FIGURE 3-8: Current Community Facilities

b. Current Plans, Recent Changes and Accomplishments

The City of Norcross has upgraded, expanded, or undertaking planning projects for a number of its community facilities and services in the past five years. Accomplishments of include:

- Opening the new Norcross Welcome Center, the Fire Museum, and improvements to the city's Community Center
- Improvements to Thrasher Park that increased use of the park by 20% and the overhaul of Lillian Webb Park, formerly the city's original baseball field
- Establishing the city's Smart Grid. Recently Norcross partnered with Electric Cities of GA and GE to launch a "smart" system that employs automated metering infrastructure and wireless technology that will allow for more accurate metering, expedient repairs, time-of-use rates, and customer demand response
- Initiating a comprehensive street resurfacing program, the city is now in year three of the five year plan and has resurfaced 25% (+/-) of the city's streets
- Creating a five year plan for the stormwater utility and mapping of the entire system
- Moving the Public Works Department from downtown to Lively Street; the relocation freed up much needed space for additional parking downtown
- Skin Alley Block Improvements. A major streetscaping face lift in addition to installation of conduit, city maintained grease traps, and electrical poles
- Sale of the City's water and wastewater systems to Gwinnett County in April 2013
- Continuing to increase services to Norcross's Hispanic population; the number of Spanish-speaking police officers increased from 3 to 9 and a new Hispanic Citizen Police Academy graduated its first class in September 2013

Prior to the recession, the City made significant infrastructure and facilities improvements in 2007-2009 in anticipation of development that never came. Now as the economy rebounds, there is infrastructure capacity to accommodate the next wave of development and redevelopment.



Thrasher Park Playground



Norcross Welcome Center

c. *Drivers of Change*

Moving forward factors that will effect the needs for facilities and services include:

- Continued implementation of various plans:
 - 2011 LCI Update. This update of the city’s 2001 plan focuses on the development mixed-use projects at key sites in Downtown Norcross and along Buford Hwy
 - Jimmy Carter Boulevard/Buford Highway Redevelopment Plan, completed in 2007 this plan provides a framework for redeveloping the aging commercial strips into a series of mixed-use activity centers. Increasing the intensity of and changing the types of development will shift service and facility needs
 - Parks Master Plan, completed in 2011 this plan identified the number one priority as securing suitable land for active recreation opportunities southeast of Buford Highway
- Annexation. The recent annexation has increased the customer base and service area for city-provided services and facilities. This provides an opportunity to expand the city’s stormwater and parks systems into the Mitchell Road corridor
- Demographic Shifts. The City’s Hispanic population continues to grow as do the percentages of residents under 5 and over 45 years old
- Budgetary Capacity. State and Federal funding sources are uncertain and municipal property tax revenues continue to rebound from the recession, so identifying new funding sources for city improvements is critical; passing of a new special-purpose local-option sales tax (SPLOST) in 2014 is a key priority

2. **Priority Community Facilities and Services Needs and Opportunities**

1. **Improve access to community facilities**

There are limited community facilities outside of the Town Center. Better access to these facilities is needed to better accommodate the population in the newly annexed area and other parts of town.

2. **Continue to Support the Norcorss Police Department and its presence in the Community**

Although the police department is strong and has extended its reach in the community, the perception of limited safety persists in the community, particularly in the area east of Buford Highway.

3. Implement and update the Norcross Parks Master Plan, adopted in January 2011

The plan should be updated to consider recreational needs in the annexed area northeast of Jimmy Carter Boulevard. The Parks Master Plan recognizes the following five top priorities for parks space in the city (listed in order of priority):

- a. Parkland in the Southeast portion of the city.
- b. Connectivity (including safe access to Gwinnett County's Best Friend Park as a top priority, followed by connectivity to all parks and recreational facilities including County or City parks, school, or church).
- c. Soccer fields, informal playing fields
- d. Play facilities
- e. Picnic facilities and passive recreation

4. Construct Additional Parking in the Downtown Area.

Constructing a parking deck in the Town Center is a community priority. A deck will continue to strengthen the Town Center and also allow for a more walkable and dense downtown as envisioned in the Town Center LCI.

5. Maintain and Improve Stormwater Infrastructure

Stormwater infrastructure is aging. In an effort to reduce non-point source pollution and promote redevelopment, the City should continue to implement its five year plan to improve stormwater infrastructure.

6. Implement High Tech Solutions in Service Provisions to Enhance the Community Image

The City should continue to build on its positioning and image as a high tech community in its service provisions.

7. Develop a Citywide Geographic Information System (GIS)system

As demonstrated in other jurisdictions, such as Gwinnett County and several other Metropolitan Atlanta municipalities, there is an opportunity to create a citywide GIS system that will facilitate making secure and public geographic oriented data more readily available for use by city staff and the public.



Lillian Webb Park
Picture Credit: Waymarking.com



New City of Norcross Public Works Building Relocated
from Downtown to Lively St.

H. SUMMARY TABLE

The Table below connects the priority needs and opportunities to the vision statement goals.

PRIORITY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES	GOALS					PRIORITY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES	GOALS				
	SENSE OF PLACE	LIVABLE & SAFE	TRANSPORTATION	ECONOMY	LEADERSHIP & SERVICE		SENSE OF PLACE	LIVABLE & SAFE	TRANSPORTATION	ECONOMY	LEADERSHIP & SERVICE
POPULATION						3. Promote Redevelopment along City's Principal Roadways					
1. Maintain an environment of multi-cultural acceptance and tolerance						4. Improve gateways and wayfinding signage					
2. Continue to Attract the Creative Class						TRANSPORTATION					
3. Support Lifelong Communities initiatives						1. Pursue Funding & Implementation Partnerships					
4. Expand Community Engagement						2. Expand Bicycle Infrastructure					
5. Connect the two sides of Buford Highway						3. Improve Downtown Railroad Crossings					
HOUSING						4. Expand Sidewalk Infrastructure					
1. Encourage Desirable Residential Development						5. Increase Local Public Transportation Options					
2. Maintain Existing Housing Stock						6. Maintain Street Resurfacing					
3. Expand Inter-parcel Connectivity and Interior Sidewalks						7. Manage Traffic Flow					
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT						COMMUNITY FACILITIES					
1. Maintain and Improve Infrastructure						1. Improve access to community facilities					
2. Promote Buford Highway Redevelopment						2. Continue to support the Police Department and its presence in the community					
3. Maintain and enhance a business friendly environment						3. Implement and update the Norcross Parks Master Plan					
4. Continue to Support the Arts						4. Construct Additional Parking in the Downtown Area					
LAND USE						5. Maintain & Improve Stormwater Infrastructure					
1. Revisit Zoning and Development Regulations						6. Implement High Tech Solutions in Service Provisions to Enhance the Community					
2. Promote Dev. of Mixed Use Nodes at Key Gateway Intersections						7. Develop a Citywide Geographic Information System (GIS)					