

## City of South Fulton seeks more mixed use development

BY RANDY SOUTHERLAND  
Contributing Writer

When voters approved a referendum last November to create the new City of South Fulton, the result was Georgia's ninth largest municipality with 99,250 residents. Many also see it as the key to jump-starting economic development in this area of the Southside.



Samir  
Abdullahi

"They have an opportunity to really brand themselves," said Samir Abdullahi, project manager at Select Fulton, the economic development organization made up of Fulton County and the Development Authority of Fulton County. "They're going to be one of the top 10 cities by population in the state. However they decide to present themselves will impact the development side of the community."

South Fulton is now transitioning services from Fulton County as it assumes responsibility for government functions ranging from issuing permits to providing police and fire protection. All of these departments must be in place by the end of 2018, but city leaders are working to get as many as possible under city control by early next year.

The first acquisition was planning, a department vital to business and development.

Planning came over with just one original employee and the city is tasked with filling about 15 additional jobs within the office. Without a full roster of staff in place, the process of issuing some permits had to be temporarily halted.



Camilla  
Moore

"So the city in conjunction with the county both had to issue moratoriums (on permitting) and we had to put those in place because we didn't know how



JOAHN VITELLI

"For businesses to come to our city we need to make sure that from a public safety standpoint that we are a safe city," said Mayor Bill Edwards, whose development priorities are mixed-use projects and new residential.

many (staff) were going to come over," said Camilla Moore, chairman of a commission formed by Gov. Nathan Deal to lead South Fulton's transition to cityhood. "So we're glad we had a moratorium because we're going to need that

time just to hire the planning staff."

To ensure that critical permits were issued during the transition, the city hired a third party contractor to handle these routine tasks.

Once these functions are up and

running, the city is committed to providing a smoother and faster process for developers and ordinary citizens, according to William "Bill" Edwards, the former

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**SOUTHSIDE MARKET REPORT**

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Fullon County commissioner who was elected South Fulton's first mayor.

"You come in for permitting and you go straight to the city as opposed to the county and that directly affects economic development for the city," said Edwards. "We have to do things just a little bit differently."

A top priority for the city will be developing plans for zoning to guide the location of businesses in the most appropriate areas of the new city.

"Right now South Fulton is being impacted by previous decisions and from nearby cities who are inundating us with warehousing," the mayor said.

**"Our land use plan is going to be very important to us."**

**BILL EDWARDS,**  
Mayor, South Fulton

Edwards wants to encourage more mixed-use developments and in particular more residential housing to replace the city's aging housing stock.

"Our land use plan is going to be very important to us," he said. "It will set the tone. We want all kinds of business. We're not trying to throw any business away, but we need to make sure when you come to South Fulton that you're going to have a place where you can prosper. We don't want you to have a negative impact on the quality of life of residents already here."

Taking over services formerly handled by the county has presented unique challenges not usually faced by new cities.

County employees who were providing services to the area can choose whether to accept employment with the city or seek jobs elsewhere in the county.

The new city must complete the transfer of services and agencies from the county by December 2018.

In addition to the retail around Old National and Roosevelt Highway, South Fulton also has industrial development at Roosevelt Highway and South Fulton Parkway and office development in the Old National Highway south of Interstate 285, according to Select Fulton. These areas are considered prime locations for new development.

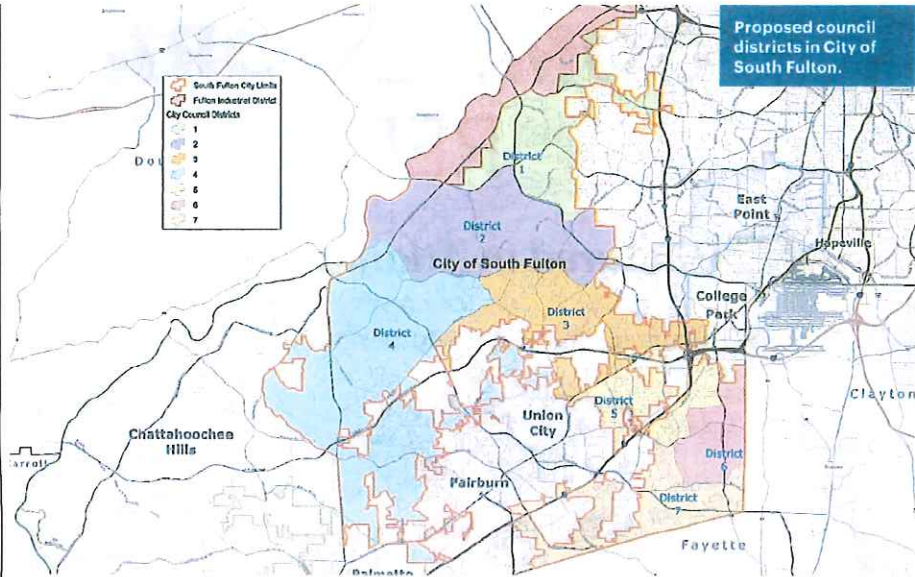
The Old National Highway area is already getting two new medical office complexes, according to Edwards.

**CITY OF SOUTH FULTON**

**Economic Development Snapshot**

- ▶ Labor force: 39,553 (16-plus age)
- ▶ 2014 workers: 14,641
- ▶ Number of businesses: 2,000-plus
- ▶ Top industries:
  - Wholesale trade
  - Educational Services
  - Retail trade administration and support
  - Waste management and remediation
  - Accommodation and food services

SOURCE: SELECT FULTON



SPECIAL

"The key point is we have to make sure they put them in the right place," he said.

Fostering economic development also means overcoming long-standing negative impressions that South Fulton is plagued by crime and poor schools.

"For businesses to come to our city we need to make sure that from a public safety standpoint that we are a safe city," said Edwards. "From an educational point of view we have to make sure that our educational system is up to snuff. Those two things right there will tell you how effective you have been in economic development."

Attracting these new developments will require changing minds about the area.

"They're interested in recruiting and trying to make this development happen," said Abdullahi. "A lot of the times perception can be your biggest enemy. When the reality on the ground doesn't align with perception, then people go with perception."

Recruiting more employers will reduce the number of local residents – an estimated 39,000 – who travel outside the city for work.

"So it's not as if they don't have talent in the city," said Abdullahi. "That's one of their big opportunities for them to figure out how do we develop this community for the current residents?"

With its close proximity to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the south Fulton County area has attracted one of the largest concentrations of warehouse and logistics space in the nation. It also has a number of undeveloped tracts of land especially on the western side of the city that could become prime spots for new development.

"You come over to the east side closer to the airport and some of that is developed," said Abdullahi. "I would consider some of that underdeveloped and there are some big opportunities for


redevelopment and better use of some of that land."

These areas are attractive to distribution operations such as Amazon.com Inc., which need to be close to both population centers and transportation

networks such as highways, rail and the airport.

The city may also be able to attract corporate operations such as Delta Air Lines Inc. and Porsche Cars North America that have locations around the airport.


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