



From the Mayor's Desk

May 2020

Making the best of difficult times

It is easy to focus on what has changed in our lives lately. Some of us have lost people we know to this dreadful virus. Others are out of work. All of us miss spending time with family and friends. But despite these difficult times, there is still progress being made and economic activity under way.

According to the Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce, there are still 188 projects in the pipeline in Gwinnett County, and projects are still coming in. Even in the face of this pandemic, there are companies growing in Peachtree Corners. It may take a few months longer, but you will see ribbon cuttings and some exciting new development along our major corridors.

The doors of City Hall have been closed, but there have still been meetings with folks looking to build and open businesses here. Many current deals in the pipeline are on hold or have been pushed back for 60 days, as banks are slow to close on loans because they are overwhelmed with applications. But there are a lot of projects still moving forward. There are 14 hotels under construction across Gwinnett County and only three have paused. The others are moving forward.

Our hope is that our recovery will start a little more quickly than in other areas, as our markets are more diversified than others. The reality that we face today is that retail and restaurant sales have taken a historical hit across the board.

Things have obviously been quiet for retailers too, but Trader Joes and Simply Mac have been extremely busy. I am told Simply Mac is likely doing their best sales to date. As I'm sure you are aware, many of the restaurants are offering curbside pickup. Consumers who were once opposed to this type of service or technology have adopted it and are now accustomed to the ease-of-use and convenience.

The pandemic has forced not only change, but more creative thinking, and changes to how we do business. Some companies have switched verticals and are going in a different direction. Other businesses, like Anderby Brewery, have had to pivot, and shift to more online merchandising. There has been a surge in E-commerce, as people order food and hardware items online, and just about everything else.

Logistics has been a challenge, as grocery stores have struggled to keep up with demand and restaurants have struggled to get rid of food. Grocery and food delivery services like Shipt, Amazon Fresh, and Instacart have exploded.

As we continue through 2020, there will be changes in every facet of business. Third-party logistics is expected to grow on the supply side. Hapag-Lloyd is expecting a good recovery too, be it in the fourth quarter. The company is postponing its order for six new ultra-large ships until next year.

In the office market, we might see some slow-downs in corporate relocations as companies reassess the situation. But Metro Atlanta is expected to perform better than the national average, according to real

estate analysts. We may see changes in how offices are set up as well. Open floor plans may have seen their hay day. In our office buildings, we may see more automated doors, plexiglass barriers, temperature-taking technologies, and more offices with doors. The use of robotics will probably increase, even though they can come down with viruses of their own kind.

One thing I have noticed is a sense of greater cooperation. Cities in Gwinnett County have come together and planned together during regular online meetings. The Gwinnett Municipal Association (GwMA) is a great example of this cooperation. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created by the cities of Gwinnett to help foster better cooperation among the cities of Gwinnett; to improve the understanding of the complex issues that cities face; and to provide for maximum efficiency and economy of taxpayer dollars. Together, we can all move forward.

We are seeing similar cooperation on the private side. Bayer Properties, which manages The Forum, has held weekly COVID Committee/Task Force meetings with their tenants. Executives and the leasing and management teams for each property get together and discuss best strategy. We see that the retailers who had the foresight to make their products and services easy to get into their consumer's hands are the ones who are enduring this challenging reality.

I'm convinced that Innovation will be born out of this time. And Peachtree Corners is ideally positioned to foster innovation, with the launch of Curiosity Lab last September. There is an expectation that we will bounce back from this rapidly, and Peachtree Corners has positioned itself well for recovery. We have seen good growth in jobs since 2010. Higher-educated people are our competitive advantage.

Thus, Gwinnett is still in a good spot, despite a health crisis like never before. Over the long run, we have a lot going for us and we should not only make a full recovery, but emerge stronger from this experience. In the meantime, please keep patronizing our local businesses. Tip generously. Get some fresh air, but be cautious because we are not out of the woods just yet.