

**ROSWELL
DOWNTOWN
DEVELOPMENT
AUTHORITY**

Contributing writer Elizabeth Hamilton transports us back to 1963, when Roswell Plaza first opened and offered the convenience of retail, grocery and dining to a community starved for modern conveniences, while uncompromising in the preservation of our collective past. Next, Hamilton methodically walks us through the twists and turns in the years-long process to purchase, manage and eventually sell the nearly abandoned strip to a developer vetted by the DDA and the City.

THE
SOUTHERN SKILLET
RESTAURANT



Photo by Rob Hamilton

WELL DONE

ROSWELL

Downtown Development Authority

Roswell's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Board

L-R: Board Chairman Randy Schultz, Steve Rowe, Michael Curling, Vice Chair Monica Hagewood, Dave Schmit, Trent Perry, and Secretary/ Treasurer David Lyon.

By Elizabeth Hamilton



After six years of collaboration, the redevelopment plan for Roswell Plaza is underway, and it is transformational for downtown Roswell.

Roswell Plaza was one of the first shopping strips in north Atlanta, when first developed in 1963. The community was thrilled to have retail and restaurants closer to home, and it soon became a community gathering area for Roswell's residents. It's interesting to note, that at the time, "downtown" Roswell was known as the area around Roswell Historic Town Square, near the Roswell Mill, while the Canton Street area was mainly residential, and known as, "Uptown".

Rendering provided by S.J. Collins Enterprises and Armada Hoffler Properties, Inc.



“The individuals serving on the DDA provided the mechanism, and more importantly the expertise, for the purchase, management, planning, and ultimately, the sale of the Roswell Plaza property to the City” ”

Nancy Diamond
former City Council Member

The long and winding road from Plaza to Post

By Elizabeth Hamilton

By the mid-1980s, inevitably, Atlanta's urban sprawl made its way up GA400N, to undeveloped land outside of downtown Roswell; and residents began building homes and schools further out. The high-quality retail and grocery chains naturally followed their customers into suburbia, and *Roswell Plaza* lost anchor tenants, like Sears, to Alpharetta's new Northpoint Mall.

Historic district zoning allowing residential homes to become available for commercial use, and it wasn't long before artists, cute boutique shops, and locally owned, chef driven restaurants began opening along *Canton Street*.

Eventually, despite the success of Canton Street, *Roswell Plaza* became appealing primarily to discount stores; and the structure needed revitalization in order to 'keep up' with the surrounding area.

A commercial real estate developer had purchased *Roswell Plaza* at the height of the market, right before real estate values decreased rapidly with the 2008 recession. When attempts by the owner to redevelop the site failed to gain traction, the City reached out to work with the owner to explore what was financially viable and allowed by code.

City Council knew the importance of this pivotal location and decided to bring in the experts, the **Roswell Downtown Development Authority (DDA)**. The DDA was/is made up of experienced Roswell residents

- volunteers. Members at the time the DDA was re-started included directors *Lonnie Mimms, Ralph Mills, Richard Hessler, Charles McMillan, Dave Schmit, Monica Hagewood and David Lyon*. Since 2012, *Randy Schultz, Steve Rowe, Michael Curling and Trent Perry* have been appointed to vacated positions.

Even after 2 years of effort, there was still a gap between what was acceptable to the City and the DDA, as well as, what was feasible for the developer. When attempts by the owner to redevelop the site failed to gain traction, negotiations began

for a 20-year lease agreement with a new discount store within the *Roswell Plaza*. The DDA sought to cease this opportunity and put the property under contract in 2015. The City closed on the property in early 2016. *Mayor & City Council* asked the DDA to lead the redevelopment.

"The individuals serving on the DDA provided the mechanism, and more importantly the expertise, for the purchase, management, planning, and ultimately, the sale of the *Roswell Plaza* property to the City. *These local citizens volunteered* countless hours over several years - at no cost to taxpayers - making the entire project possible." said **Nancy Diamond**, former Council Member. Owning the property meant the City could be more deliberate about getting the right project in this pivotal location.

PROPERTY OF THE CITY OF ROSWELL

The first order of business for the DDA was to gather community input. The DDA Board members held two town

hall style meetings and conducted online surveys, to gather data on what the community hoped for this property. Additionally, the DDA collaborated closely with Council, and with input from Roswell's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to make certain this property met most of any stakeholders' requirements.

The DDA reported to City Council that the following

findings resulted from listening to community and Historic Preservation Commission input:

The community hoped the property would become a 'place to go', a destination for locals and visitors alike, with possibly a bakery, restaurants, and a co-op market. Design was very important to those who weighed in, who insisted the developed property captures the evolving vibe of the area and integrates well with our historic assets by incorporating durable and timeless materials.



Many hoped a redeveloped Roswell Plaza would spur similar investment and development nearby. Residents wanted the design elements to be uniquely “Roswell.” Also, ideas were considered that would increase the City’s investment in the property.

In the Fall of 2016, the requests for proposals (RFPs) and qualifications were opened to developers; and in the Spring of 2017, one was selected as most suitable for the project. The concept was a village scale plan, comprised of retail, commercial and townhomes. During the due diligence period, the selected developer’s original plans for the property were no longer feasible, and negotiations with the developer were terminated in September 2018.

ROUND TWO!

It must have felt like a big blow to the all-volunteer Board at the DDA, after these individuals had given weeks, months, and now years of their own time (and their families’) in service to the City. New DDA board members joined, *Steve Rowe, Michael Curling and Trent Perry*, while *Dave Schmit, Monica Hagedwood, Randy Schultz and David Lyon* continued to serve.

The DDA didn’t skip a beat, launched a second round of RFPs a few weeks later, and in December 2018, members of the public, the Mayor, the DDA and the Roswell City Council chose **S.J. Collins Enterprises and Amanda Hoffer Properties**,

which had the best understanding of - and commitment to - maintaining Roswell’s historic and cultural characteristics.

The Due Diligence phase lasted months, through several meetings of architectural approvals with the **Historical Preservation Committee**, numerous meetings with City Council and the Georgia Department of Transportation regarding environmental inspections, fire marshal requirements, traffic lights and traffic volume assessments. Council weighed in on important items, such as the open container rulings for restaurant districts, and stormwater pipe capacity.

In addition, the Purchase Agreement had a stickler. The termination of an existing lease to **Family Dollar**, which had six remaining years, was in consideration. It took an entire year for the City, the DDA and the developer to come to an agreement with **Family Dollar**, but once that hurdle was cleared, the closing could be scheduled. Finally, on October 25, 2019, the second selected developer purchased *Roswell Plaza* from the City of Roswell, for \$5,000,000 dollars.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Due to the property’s central location in town, the developers saw an opportunity to improve infrastructure and walkability to the area. “We know that any neighborhood we design has to be supported by the community, and we want to give residents what they’re asking for. The community vision is ultimately



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We used to go to the Sears store in that shopping center to see Santa every year. > Kathy C.

Iron Skillet was my first job in high school. Great people and great patrons! > Becky J.

I loved the big table at the Skillet where anyone could sit and join the talk and food! > Annette L.

There used to be live music at the Southern Skillet. I loved their chicken salad. My office was across Hwy 9 so I could walk to it. > Janet R.

Iron Skillet was my go-to place for Fried Chicken and it had the most amazing people working there. > Carl W.

Johnson’s General Store had one of the first stand-up Pac Man arcade games in Roswell. We would ride our bikes over there with a dollar’s worth of quarters and get lots (too much!) of entertainment out of it. Probably around 1981-ish(?) > Matt C.

”

more important to us than our own vision.” says *Jeff Garrison*, partner at S.J. Collins. It was important to S.J. Collins they go “local” from the beginning, therefore, they collaborated with local interior design company, Linen & Flax Home, on the logo.

The name, **Southern Post**, is the developers nod to Roswell’s rich history, conveying the local community’s desire that the development become a gathering spot, a post, central meeting place. The word choice ‘Southern’ was chosen as a nod to the original community gathering spot, the **Southern Skillet**, which had been in *Roswell Plaza* for years, before closing in 2011.

As Chairman of the *Roswell DDA*, **Randy Schultz**, puts it, “The Skillet created treasured memories and acquaintances for countless Roswellians for many years. It is my hope, as well as those of my fellow Board members, that the **Southern Post** represents the beginning of the creation of new memories and acquaintances that will bind the Roswell community together into the future.”

In February 2020, **Armada Hoffer Properties**, the construction and financial partner for the project, began construction

on **Southern Post**, which will have 40,000 square feet of retail space and eateries, 90,000 square feet of office space, 128 luxury apartments and 10 high-end townhomes. The retail portion of the development will include an additional 630 new parking spaces. And that is the beginning, the ripple affect of fresh new redevelopment is in the works with surrounding properties. How you see downtown Roswell today will soon be energized with greater walkability and will conveniently become a destination for all.

Read more details of the **Southern Post** story, as well as stay up to date with S. J. Collins and Armada Hoffer Properties progress, simply visit www.roswelldda.com/SouthernPost.

If you’re interested in serving on the DDA, you can learn more online: www.roswellgov.com/government/boards-commissions.

Elizabeth Hamilton is the owner of H2Oh. Marketing, LLC (specializing in nonprofits) and resides in Roswell with her husband and two little children. She is the administrative support to the DDA and brings a great perspective to share with our readers.

