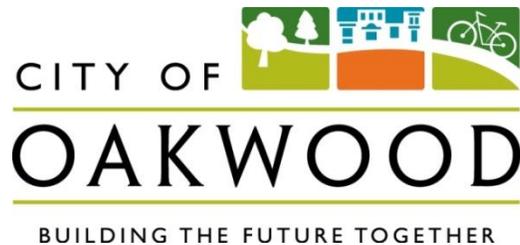


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**NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on August 30, 2014**

## **Georgia Rideshare lot goes unused**

A Georgia Rideshare lot off Exit 17 at Interstate 985 has become more of a truck terminal and homeless haven than a commuter parking lot five years after it was built.

Some improvements have been made recently, through enforcement and other means. But Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown particularly is pushing for ongoing maintenance and better long-term usage of the 360-space lot, which was built as part of a \$75 million Interstate 985 reconstruction project in 2009.

“There’s been minimal use as a park-and-ride lot, which it was intended to be,” he said.

Brown has raised the issue at two recent meetings of Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Hall County area’s lead transportation planning agency, and in discussions with Georgia Department of Transportation District Engineer Bayne Smith.

Other problems that have plagued the lot, which motorists can access from Frontage Road off Ga. 13/Atlanta Highway and Thurmon Tanner Parkway, include overgrown vegetation and inoperative light poles.

“There’s been a lack of maintenance overall and, to my knowledge, not any real police patrolling,” Brown said.

The lot is in unincorporated Hall but at the doorstep of Oakwood, as well as close to University of North Georgia Gainesville and Lanier Technical College campuses.

“It’s a gateway into our city and projects a very negative image,” Brown said.

Oakwood and the two colleges operate an electronic message sign off the lot at Thurmon Tanner and Ga. 13.

“That looks really nice, but you look behind it and you’ve got a blight,” Brown said.

He and Smith talked about possible ways to use the lot, including for overflow parking and as a shuttle stop for the colleges, bus stops for Hall Area Transit and/or Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, and operations by some type of “transit-oriented business.”

“Here you’ve got a parking lot, built with state money, that’s not being used properly,” Brown said.

Setting up a bus line from Gainesville/Oakwood to Exit 4 off I-985 in Buford, where Gwinnett Transit and GRTA both operate bus services to Atlanta, “is a relatively easy thing to do,” said Phillippa Lewis Moss, director of Gainesville-Hall County Community Service Center, which oversees Hall Area Transit.

Such an endeavor “would require greater coordination and resources, but is completely doable,” Moss said. “Anything is possible with political will and matching dollars.”

Ray Perren, Lanier Tech’s president, said the college supports improvements at the lot.

“Although we do not need the area for campus parking at the moment, should Lanier Tech continue to grow at the current pace, we can see a day when we will need this area to serve as an overflow parking lot,” he said.

UNG spokeswoman Kate Maine said the college used the lot last fall while the parking deck at the Gainesville campus was undergoing repairs. The school otherwise has recently expanded its on-campus student parking.

“Any future use of the lot has not been discussed or evaluated,” she said.

The DOT is “working to address concerns ... that are under our jurisdiction,” mainly tractor-trailers using the lot as a truck stop or for storage of trailers, district spokeswoman Teri Pope said.

The agency installed signs prohibiting tractor-trailer use at each entrance to the lot on Aug. 18. And because it has no enforcement powers, the DOT is seeking enforcement of the lot by the Georgia Department of Public Safety’s Motor Carrier Division, Pope said.

Hall County Administrator Randy Knighton said the county Marshal’s Office, which enforces county ordinances, has recently checked for abandoned vehicles at the lot.

“We had great success in having those vehicles removed,” he said. “Right now, I think we’re in pretty good shape (with that situation).”

“Of course, we’ll continue to monitor that area to ensure compliance, to make sure that any vehicle that is there for any other purpose than for park and ride is not there on a permanent basis.”

Brown acknowledges improvements to the lot, “but I still think there’s an issue of who really needs” to maintain the lot.

One option is for Oakwood to try to annex it, he said.

“It doesn’t give us any tax benefit and actually puts a tax burden on us, but it’s important enough that we would be very interested in trying to do that,” Brown said.