



DOWNTOWN REPORT CARD

How Atlanta's doing on the make-or-break factors

FACTOR	ON THE UPSIDE	ON THE OTHER HAND	OUTLOOK
Residential Growth A	The loft and condo craze. Georgia State's evolution into a residential campus.	Atlanta has fewer residents under 18 than most U.S. cities. Affordable housing is limited.	The worse commuter traffic gets and the higher gas prices soar, the better downtown looks.
Visitors C+	The aquarium will draw 2 to 3 million people a year. World of Coke will solidify the Centennial Olympic Park area as a tourist hub. Atlanta is one of the top convention destinations in the country and the No. 1 tourism destination for African-Americans .	A big fish tank alone is not enough to qualify as a tourist destination : Atlanta draws less than half of Orlando's tourists; the perception remains that this is where you come to a convention alone, not with the family in tow. The King Center needs to be spruced up.	If those sharks Ralph and Norton can take on Mickey, we're in business. But pursuing a civil rights museum as aggressively as a NASCAR hall of fame should be a no-brainer.
Retail C	New projects like Marietta Place promise the kind of mixed-use development that has proved successful in Midtown, Decatur and other intown areas.	The downtown Kroger closed . Macy's is vacant . The retail remaining at Underground is visitor focused.	There needs to be a residential base to support retail. The infusion of Georgia State dorms and new condo dwellers should help create critical mass.
Safety A-	Serious crime dropped by 33 percent between 2000 and 2004. Aggravated assault and larceny are down by a third, and burglary is down by almost two-thirds. A new anti-begging law's in effect.	Police Chief Pennington says he needs 100 more officers to adequately police downtown. But the public perception that downtown's unsafe remains, largely because of panhandlers.	Pennington is putting five additional officers in the tourist area around the clock. They'll be on foot, bikes and horseback. But will they be enough to change powerful perceptions?
Transportation B-	New signage is great. Traffic flow adjustments around Allen Plaza and Williams Street will help considerably. Georgia State's Decatur Street facelift is promising.	If visitors (from elsewhere or our burbs) can't find a place to park , Atlanta shoots itself in the foot. Tourists can't navigate the ATL on public transport like they can other major cities.	The sexiest idea, the Peachtree streetcar, has a \$300 million-plus price tag, and no one's offering to pay. But the 22-mile Belt Line of transit, trails and parks is gaining momentum.
Entertainment C+	The city has new tourist attractions and great venues for big sporting events and concerts . The Braves and Falcons are still big draws.	What about locals ? Outside of big-ticket events, there's not a lot of casual nightlife. Underground may be improving, but it has a long way to go. The Hawks still suck.	The big stuff is happening; now we need to sweat the small stuff. Underground's facelift is great, but it needs more promotion to locals.
Environment B	The Peachtree Corridor clean-up project is under way—with flower baskets, cleaning, banners and other improvements. Vendors are regulated.	Shuttered storefronts distract from clean-up efforts. People won't walk down spruced-up streets unless there are more places to stop and shop or eat.	Retail and residential growth will have a bigger impact than flowerpots.
Education C-	The mayor's pushing school improvements in her New Century Economic Development Plan. Atlanta Public Schools elementary grade test scores are slowly trending upward.	The mayor has little actual control over what happens in the APS. The woman who does, Beverly Hall, is making steady but very slow gains.	When there are more downtown residents with children , they'll exert more pressure on Atlanta Public Schools. But this won't happen anytime soon.
Homelessness B	The new Gateway 24-hour service center is open, and agencies, businesses and the city are cooperating more than ever. Mayor Franklin has adopted this as a personal cause.	There are an estimated 7,000 homeless people downtown. Gateway only has 400 beds. Redevelopment of housing projects like Grady Homes improves downtown's environment but reduces affordable housing availability.	There's a difference between people who are aggressive panhandlers and people who are homeless due to hard times . Until everyone gets it (that means the "advocates" for the poor too), this remains a political minefield.
Atlanta's Image B	Half the outside world thinks we're hipper thanks to hip-hop . Half of metro Atlanta thinks downtown's cooler 'cause of condos .	The other half of the outside world thinks we're Gone With the Wind meets airport waiting rooms. The other half of metro Atlanta still thinks downtown is scary.	If Brand Atlanta will make a difference remains to be seen, but at the end of the day, improving the downtown experience for locals and visitors, not slogans, is what will make the real difference.