

Life at the Perimeter

Two new and growing cities are changing the traditional divide between inside the Perimeter (ITP) and outside (OTP). Folks in Dunwoody and Sandy Springs live at the Perimeter — an ATP lifestyle that includes easy access to intown activities but big houses and yards of suburban life.

City	Dunwoody	Sandy Springs	Smyrna	Metro ATL
Population	40,746	98,941	45,839	5,251,899
Median age (years)	38	37	34	35
Bachelor's degree and higher	68%	61%	47%	34%
Median household income	\$90,355	\$74,581	\$54,806	\$59,882

Source: Google maps

considered places like Inman Park, Sherwood Forest and Ansley Park — with their lavish homes, big yards and neighborhood patterns — to be suburbs.

The layout of those neighborhoods doesn't differ much from the intown areas of Sandy Springs, Sjoquist said.

What sets Sandy Springs apart is it became its own city, but one without a downtown.

That means it — and Dunwoody — can't be absorbed to become part of a larger city, yet neither has a historical center.

"It's a suburban community that is developing some sense of place, some sense of centrality," Sjoquist said. "They are becoming much more complex communities."

Other cities that sit ATP have made that shift,

"You have the advantages of a more traditional suburb, but you have it close in. You basically have it all."

Ken Wright
Dunwoody mayor

with varying results.

Smyrna; for instance, took 20 years to build a downtown from scratch. The southeastern Cobb County city — which sits ATP just west of Interstate 75 — has won awards for its creation. And 47 percent of its residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, 13 percentage points higher than the region as a whole.

The picture is more mixed in Doraville, which sits ATP to the east. Though the city is sliced in two by the Perimeter much like Sandy Springs, Doraville also is divided by a MARTA rail line and the former GM factory.

The city lost its downtown to some of those divisions and has pinned its hopes on recreating a center city with development of the 165-acre plant site. A proposal that may have launched that goal died earlier this year.

"It takes time to build a downtown," said Sandy Springs Councilwoman Karen Meinzen McEnerny. "We've got the great neighborhoods and great employment centers. We just need to strengthen our identity with a downtown."

A downtown Sandy Springs — planned for the area just north of I-285 and west of Roswell Road — could disrupt Judy Alembik's "magic of 20" travel time.

Still, she said she welcomes change because of how much life ATP has somehow managed to stay the same.

She and her husband,

also an attorney, handed over the family law practice to one son, but the drive to Buckhead remains a breeze.

Traffic has increased on Riverside, where a new shopping plaza opened just a year ago. But a few weeks ago, Alembik she saw a family of deer — "mama and two babies" — roaming around her three-acre wooded yard.

When she takes to walking the grounds herself, she points out the azaleas and holly, creeping ivy and even walnut trees.

Aaron Alembik landscaped the property himself, planting every shrub and flower and making a small back lawn to enjoy the natural splendor

"My boys said we could leave and move any time we want, and I said 'forget it,'" Judy Alembik said. "You are going to take me out of this house feet first. We couldn't have thought then how central our house would be, but it is. Who wouldn't want to live in the middle of everything?"

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