

16-year-old IHOP employee shot, killed; teen arrested, A3

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

It's Worth Knowing What's Really Going On.

CONTINUING COVERAGE PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING CENTER

Training center fallout may linger

State and local leaders risk lasting consequences whatever their stance on controversial project.

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The furor over Atlanta's controversial public safety training center could have long-lasting ramifications, bleeding into Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens' expected bid for a second term in 2025, and the races for governor and

other statewide offices the following year. The progressive opposition has brought together environmentalists who oppose transforming a forest into a law enforcement facility and activists who worry it further militarizes policing in Atlanta despite demands for a community-driven approach. The mayor and a bloc of 11 mostly liberal council members



Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens is clearly the top elected city official finding himself in tight political spot.

who voted for the project have taken most of the flak for the project, and opponents rounding up signatures for a petition drive to block the construction have promised payback at the ballot box.

Dickens has come under fire for not only voting for the project as a councilman, but working with Republicans to make sure the facility gets built. In the latest alliance, the city and the state this month banded together in response to a lawsuit by calling the referendum effort "invalid" at its core. Republicans have stepped up their calls for a project that supporters say is crucial to bolstering public safety and fueling recruitment efforts for the understaffed police department. And they've

assailed what they see as examples of legitimate protest transforming into acts of domestic terrorism that have resulted in serious charges against opponents of the proposed \$90 million center. The state's top Democrats, meanwhile, have walked a careful line as dozens of protesters have been charged with domestic terrorism, and investigators probe the January shooting death of an activist by police during a raid of the forest site.

Center continued on A6

TOP LOCAL STORY THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

EVERY DAWG HAS HIS DAY

Former UGA golfer Brian Harman wins British Open by six shots, while fellow Bulldog Sepp Straka finishes in tie for second at Royal Liverpool.



FINAL LEADERBOARD

WINNER			
Brian Harman	67-65-69-70	-13	
TIED FOR SECOND			
Sepp Straka	71-67-70-69	-7	
Jon Rahm	74-70-63-70	-7	
Jason Day	72-67-69-69	-7	
Tom Kim	74-68-68-67	-7	

Ex-UGA golfer Brian Harman kisses the Claret Jug on Sunday after winning the British Open at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Hoylake, England. Harman had gone 167 tournaments over six years since his last win in the 2017 Wells Fargo Championship. This is only his third title in his 11 years on the PGA Tour. JON SUPER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

INSIDE SPORTS
» Read the full story about Harman capturing the historic Claret Jug for his first major win, B1
» Bulldogs Nation celebrates Open Championship victory by former Georgia star, B2

LOCAL IN-DEPTH HOUSING

Which office buildings would you consider living in?

Adaptive reuse seen as solution for pair of downtown challenges.

By Zachary Hansen
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Outdated office buildings litter downtown Atlanta, leaving floors of empty cubicles and corner offices that few tenants want. The plight threatens the revitalization campaign of the city center and has prompted downtown's leaders to hire a New York consultant to see which buildings might be good candidates for a second life as apartments or condos.

Downtown civic organization Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) and the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District (ADID) told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution they chose urban development consulting firm HR&A Advisors to analyze downtown's infrastructure, architecture and regulatory environment to explore the viability of office-to-residential conversions. "It's a sign of the times," CAP President A.J. Robinson said. "This is a subject that's not going away." Adaptive reuse, where a building is changed from one use to another without being torn down,

Housing continued on A6



The historic W.D. Grant Building was built in 1898 and is one of the oldest buildings in Atlanta. A Texas-based development team is converting its upper floors into apartments. AJC FILE

DIGGING DEEPER ENERGY

Panels help office parks go green

Property owner sets up solar arrays at two suburban locations.

By Evan Lasseter
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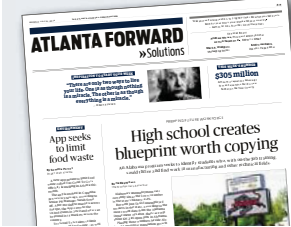
The Palisades office park overlooking I-285 in Sandy Springs is dwarfed by other Central Perimeter landmarks like the King and Queen buildings. Though the midrise buildings along Peachtree-Dunwoody Road might not catch the eye of passersby like their taller neighbors, what the buildings draw from the sun could turn them into a local model for how to make existing office buildings friendlier to the environment. Atlanta Property Group, the owner of Palisades, recently installed solar arrays that the company says will produce about 15% of the campus' power needs. The 2,000 panels top a Palisades parking garage and the roofs of the office buildings. The commercial real estate firm has also installed a set of panels at the smaller One Point Royal complex in Alpharetta that it says could accommodate about a quarter of that campus' electricity needs.

Environmental experts promote solar as a clean alternative to burning coal and other fossil fuels, which contribute heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere that are exacerbating climate change. Many office tenants are pushing landlords to make their facilities greener to meet corporate environmental goals. The Environmental and Energy Study Institute estimates 40% of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions come from commercial and residential properties. Jonathan Rodbell, partner and co-founder of Atlanta Property Group, said the solar investments in Palisades and One Point Royal are part of the company's commitment to decarbonizing the already built environment.

Solar continued on A6

INDEX

Classifieds	C5	Lotteries	B2
Comics	C6	Obituaries	A10
Crossword	C3	Sports	B1
Inspire	C4	Television	C2
Living	C1	Weather	B8



SOLUTIONS, A13 Alabama's idea is worth copying

Program in 25 high schools statewide seeks to identify students who, with on-the-job training, could thrive and find work in manufacturing and other technical fields.

MORE TOP NEWS, A3 Biden to establish national monument to Emmett Till

Three sites in Illinois and Mississippi will honor Black teen from Chicago abducted, tortured and killed in 1955.

Volume 75, Number 205



7 22011 00002 1



FROM PAGE ONE



Solar panels have been installed atop a parking garage and on building rooftops at the Palisades office complex in Sandy Springs, resulting in cost savings and energy efficiency, the buildings' owner says.

Solar

continued from A1

“We want our tenants to feel like they are part of a community that cares about the environment,” he said. Corporate America and local governments are among the largest entities pushing solar and other energy efficient investments. Tech giants like Facebook owner Meta, Microsoft and Amazon have invested heavily in renewable energy sources to offset or reduce carbon emissions. The city of Atlanta has deployed solar on the roofs of more than 20 buildings.

Georgia is among the top states in the country for installed solar, but the vast majority of its capacity is in the form of utility-scale arrays – not smaller rooftop residential and commercial installations. A recent report by the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy found that less than 9% of the solar connected to Georgia Power’s system is “distributed,” an industry term for electricity generated near the location where it will be used. Solar advocates have warned that Georgia’s rooftop solar sector will continue to lag without changes to state policies.

Atlanta Property Group said its installation of about 800 kilowatts of solar at the nearly 650,000-square-foot Palisades makes it one of the largest solar arrays at a multitenant office property in the Southeast. The One Point Royal location uses more than 500 solar panels, and the group pegs it as a 200-kilowatt solar site. “That’s a very substantial installation,” said Sam Culppepper, an architect at Southface Institute, a sustainable building nonprofit. These two buildings offered good locations for solar panels because of unob-



Rooftop solar at the Palisades complex is promoted as a win-win for environment. PHOTOS BY BEN GRAY/BEN@BENGRAY.COM

structed, south-facing views, Rodbell said. The Atlanta Property Group expects the solar panels will generate a total of 1.15 million kilowatt-hours of clean energy in the first year of operation. For comparison, 1 kilowatt-hour of electricity could power 10 hours of television watching. Palisades has a cache of energy certifications from ENERGY STAR and LEED, while also featuring a 2-star Fitwel Rating. Fitwel focuses on oxygen health and general wellness, Culppepper said. The \$2 million solar investment between the two campuses relied on federal tax credits extended by the Inflation Reduction Act, President Joe Biden’s signature health and climate bill, saving the company around 30% on each of the projects. Ramtin Motahar, founder of Atlanta Joulea, a software platform that reduces energy costs, said the investment is pushing the envelope for decarbonizing commercial buildings. The Atlanta Property Group has also invested in

updates to heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems across its properties. The company recently partnered with Atlanta Tech Village, known as Atlanta’s startup hub, to lower the building’s carbon intensity. The partnership includes an initial building evaluation followed by a strategic recommendation, according to a release about the partnership. When it comes to renewable energy investments, solar is a renewable resource particularly useful in the Southeast. The South has low latitude, which opens it up to more sun exposure, and Georgia tends to have a lot of bright days, Culppepper said. This leads to greater production from the solar plants. In addition, the state already has a burgeoning solar industry with manufacturers such as Qcells. “There’s a lot of existing infrastructure to support more solar here,” Culppepper said. While Atlanta Property Group’s solar investments

help the environment, the sustainability measures also lead to utility savings. The One Point Royal plant, installed in-house, is expected to generate 25% savings, which Rodbell said created an “attractive return on costs” when paired with the tax credit. The Palisades installation was contracted to Atlanta’s Cherry Street Energy and will not bring in direct savings, Rodbell said, because Atlanta Property Group will pay the company the power costs in exchange for building it. “We’re focused across our entire portfolio on doing the best we can to keep them as efficient as possible,” Rodbell said. Staff writer Drew Kann contributed to this report. This coverage is supported by a partnership with IEarth Fund, the Kendeda Fund and Journalism Funding Partners. You can learn more and support our climate reporting by donating at [ajc.com/donate/climate/](https://ajc.com/donate/climate/)

Center

continued from A1

Many have avoided voicing explicit support for the project even while criticizing the demonstrations that turned violent. “I think the choice between public safety and justice is a false choice, and not one that we have to make,” U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock said. “I support law enforcement, I support the right of people to have their voices heard in this conversation. I’m going to do everything I can as a U.S. senator representing the people of Georgia to make sure the people are safe.”

“Take us backward” Warnock and U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff have each raised concerns about the arrest of three people charged with financial crimes linked to the protests against the training complex.

The charges led DeKalb District Attorney Sherry Boston, one of the region’s most prominent Democrats, to withdraw her office from prosecuting cases, citing “fundamentally different prosecution philosophies” with Attorney General Chris Carr, a tough-on-crime GOP ally of Gov. Brian Kemp. Carr, who is expected to run for governor in 2026, pits his stance in life-and-death terms: “We will not waver when it comes to keeping Georgians safe and putting a stop to violent crime in our state.” Republicans say it makes political sense to highlight their stance on the center – and the liberal opposition to it. Polls show public safety rivaled the economy as a top issue in the 2022 midterm, and mayoral contenders in the 2021 race hinged their agendas on ways to combat violent crime and recruit more officers.

“It’s hard to imagine a more out-of-step position than defending left-wing lunatics who are literally waging war on the police, and yet that’s where Georgia Democrats find themselves,” said Stephen Lawson, a veteran GOP strategist. “For Republicans, it makes the law-and-order message pretty easy – and winning in 2024 and beyond that much more doable.” Few Democratic officials have publicly opposed the project, which also means openly opposing Dickens and other Atlanta establishment party leaders, and risking being painted by Republicans as soft on crime. One of the exceptions is state Rep. Ruwa Romman, a Duluth Democrat, one of the few elected state Democrats who publicly oppose the project. She initially took a more cautious approach to the complex, but she changed her mind after a recent visit to the site. “I’m opposed to the center now, but not out of some idealistic notion,” she said. “I believe it’s a misuse of public funds. I saw giant runoff ponds, construction debris and other issues. We

still don’t know how much money this project will cost in the end.” Like other opponents, she questions the strategic aim of an elaborate site that includes a shooting range, a “mock city” to train authorities on conducting raids and a driving course for high-speed police chases. “Crime prevention is so much more effective,” said Romman. “Policies that have failed us and left our jails overflowing with inmates only take us backward.”

A thorn for Atlanta leaders

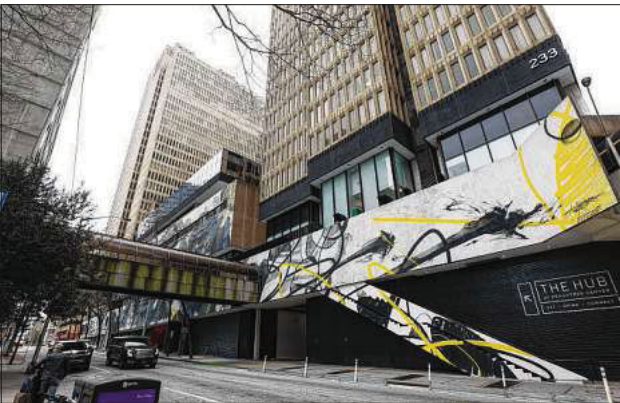
Much to the dismay of local politicians, the widespread outcry over the training center didn’t stop when the clerk rang the bell on the funding vote last month. The next morning, opponents had already announced their next move: a ballot referendum to pose the question to voters. Scarlett Mayoralgo, an organizer with the Georgia Working Families Party, said the referendum effort is just the beginning. “I hope that the council and the elected leadership of the city understand and receive this as a sign that we will do whatever we need to do to make sure the will of the people is the direction in which Atlanta is going,” she said. “As we move forward, (we will) be sure we elect people who understand government is meant to act in accordance with the people.” Over more than 21 hours of public testimony against the controversial project at City Hall, speakers lambasted council members for their final vote OK’ing the hefty price tag for the project and reminded them that constituents control their fate at the ballot box. It’s unclear how the controversial project will impact reelection bids for Atlanta’s leaders, but the saga to overturn the city’s plans is far from over for organizers. The mayor himself said in a March interview that he hoped the feud over the training center doesn’t define his first term as mayor. “I’ll be honest, each day I tried to wake up and convince myself that this shouldn’t be top of mind,” he said. “Because I still am truly dedicated to declaring this year the ‘Year of the Youth.’” But even some City Council members are skeptical whether or not there’s a path forward for local leaders who ran for office on a progressive platform. “Trust is a very easy thing to lose and a very hard thing to get back,” said council member Liliana Bakhtiari, the most outspoken opponent of the training center on council. “I do believe that the future consequences will be that there’s going to be less faith in us. And that there are going to be people that feel that they don’t have us to depend on and that they have to take matters into their own hands when it comes to issues of safety and community.”

Housing

continued from A1

has emerged as a potentially widespread solution to injecting much-needed housing options within oversupplied office districts. Atlanta has a history of adaptive reuse, but it’s less prevalent than older cities like New York and much of Europe. About 18% of downtown Atlanta’s housing units are in buildings that were previously another use, most often office or industrial, according to CAP. Marilyn Davis, a senior adviser at HR&A, said her firm has conducted similar studies in New York, Boston and San Francisco. She said it’s important to look at both the conversion capabilities of individual buildings as well as the surrounding area. “You have to think about creating places where people want to live, no matter how lovely the building,” she said. “... It’s not just a building in isolation.” COVID-19 upended the office market across the country, as some employees now can work from anywhere or enjoy the flexibility of a

hybrid schedule. Downtown’s recovery has lagged behind other parts of the city, with amenity-rich newer buildings often demanding more interest than older offices. After receiving 13 submissions to conduct the study, Robinson said, HR&A’s experience set it apart, adding that it will receive assistance from Atlanta-based architecture firm Lord Aeck Sargent. The study’s first phase is expected to be complete by October. Metro Atlanta is dealing with a record amount of unwanted office space. Nearly 30% of all office square footage in metro Atlanta was available for rent at the end of June, according to data from real estate services firm CBRE. The lack of demand coupled with high interest rates and a wave of office debt set to mature in the coming years have spurred a new wave of financial distress and foreclosures in large cities. In September, six towers and a mall within downtown Atlanta’s Peachtree Center were returned to their lender, marking the largest foreclosure sale since the fall-out of the Great Recession.



Six towers and a mall in Peachtree Center were returned to the bank in the largest foreclosure sale since the Great Recession. NATRICE MILLER/NATRICE.MILLER@AJC.COM

Other large buildings, such as the W Atlanta-Downtown hotel, Sheraton Atlanta Hotel in downtown and Tower Place 100 building in Buckhead, have also come on hard financial times. Conversions are seen as a way to kill two birds with one stone by replacing unwanted office space with desirable housing. But some buildings aren’t practical to convert into housing. After all, many people wouldn’t want to live in units without windows or with a wonky floor plan. Scott Ziegler, senior princi-

pal with Texas-based Ziegler Cooper Architects, said extra elevator shafts and inflexible design aspects within office buildings are difficult to work around. “Office building elevators are of no use to you, so what do you do with that dead space? The bones are bad,” he said during the National Association of Real Estate Editors conference in June. Downtown optimism Atlanta leaders believe many downtown buildings have good bones, such as 2 Peachtree Street.

The city’s economic development agency Invest Atlanta paid \$39 million in February to purchase the 41-story building from the state of Georgia with the goal of turning it into mixed-income apartments. Five development teams are under consideration to tackle the project, which Atlanta Chief Policy Adviser Courtney English said represents the city creatively tackling affordable housing. “The cheapest housing is the housing that already exists,” he said. The city owns or is involved in several active adaptive reuse projects downtown. Atlanta is redeveloping 104 Trinity Street into a 228-unit community on vacant city-owned land, and the city is working to build new affordable housing at 143 Alabama Street, where the city wants to preserve the former Atlanta Constitution building. The city is also working with CIM Group on its \$5 billion Centennial Yards project, which aims to transform the parking lots and railroad lines known as The Gulch into a mix of housing, office buildings, retail and hotels.

Davis, with HR&A, said the regulatory environment is a crucial, but often overlooked, step for adaptive reuse projects, since they often have to be rezoned and clear layers of red tape. Some cities, such as Calgary, Alberta, have implemented hefty incentive programs for adaptive reuse projects. In response to the pandemic’s impact on the office market, the Canadian city began reimbursing developers at \$75 per square foot for converting offices to other uses. English said Atlanta aims to use every available tool to encourage conversions that make sense, whether that be offering developers ground leases for city-owned land or providing tax abatements through Invest Atlanta. He expects 2 Peachtree to serve as a bellwether for what could come to downtown. “It will send a signal to the market that this is possible,” English said. “We can meet the need of affordable housing challenges that our residents need as well as plant a flag in the ground and say, ‘Look, downtown Atlanta is back.’”