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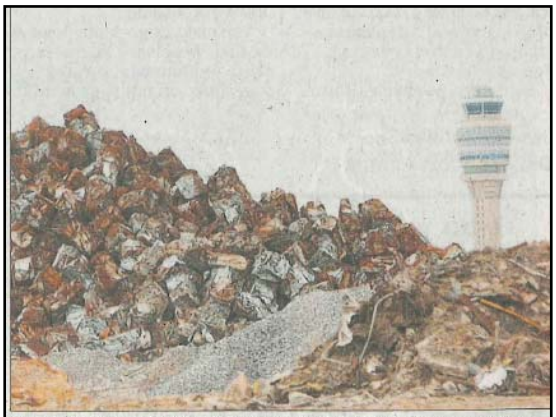
Business

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Solar energy project planned for former Ford site



Plans are under way for a parking area with awning-type structures covered with solar panels at the former Ford plant site in Hapeville, where crushed metal filled an area in May 2009. Staff 2009 photo

Installation expected to begin in June if terms are finalized in April.

By **Rachel Tobin**
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Soon, 30 acres of solar panels could greet drivers along I-75 and those flying above, as well as provide shade for cars stashed near Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

The panels – essentially awnings – would cover thousands of surface parking spaces planned for the former Ford plant in Hapeville and near the new international terminal set to open next spring.

If built, the project would be the largest solar array in Georgia, said Walter Brown, who until recently chaired the board of the Georgia Solar Energy Association. "It's the perfect place to do something like that," he said, given the site's visibility near the world's busiest airport.

Solar advocates have long said Georgia lags in solar energy development, but recent tax incentives and a drive by Georgia Power to buy green energy have helped spur $40 million in new solar energy development the past few years, Brown said, and Jacoby Development's would be the largest.

Jacoby bought the 122-acre Ford plant in 2008 for $40.3 million. The recession slowed development of offices, residences and shops, but a parking facility always was the first order of business, said Scott Condra, senior vice president of development for Jacoby. The panels would generate about 10 megawatts of power, or enough to serve about a third of the airport's needs, he said.

The firm still is negotiating a purchaser of the power, a potential parking operator, a solar panel installer, and potential bond and tax credits. But Condra expects to finalize terms in April and get the project started in June.

Brown said he believes people will pay a premium to park beneath shade producing solar energy. "The economics of a solar system like that really make sense, if you can charge a buck to $2 premium per day to park under a cover, and you are generating power."