



## City of Atlanta Project Greenspace Public Forum Series #1 January 23 – 25, 2007

### Record of Public Forum Meetings

#### *Introduction*

The City of Atlanta and its Consultant Team conducted a total of three Public Forum meetings throughout the City to inform citizens about its new initiative, Atlanta's Project Greenspace, provide an overview of the City's greenspace resources, and obtain valuable input on citizens' concerns and ideas to improve and better connect the City's open space and parks to people. The public forum meetings were held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at three sites: 1) Piedmont Park Conservancy, 2) Adamsville Recreation Center, and 3) Rosel Fann Recreation Center. A total of 133 stakeholders and citizens attended the three public forum meetings as follows:

- January 23<sup>rd</sup> – Piedmont Park Magnolia Hall, a total of 83 citizens;
- January 24<sup>th</sup> – Adamsville Recreation Center, a total of 32 citizens; and
- January 25<sup>th</sup> – Rosel Fann Recreation Center, a total of 18 citizens

The meeting format included a brief welcome by Steven R. Cover, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Community Development (Piedmont Park and Adamsville) and Deputy Commissioner James Shelby (Rosel Fann), followed by an introduction of the consulting team. A formal presentation was conducted by Mr. David Rouse of Wallace Roberts and Todd, LLC. Mr. Rouse used PowerPoint slides to provide an overview of Project Greenspace, discuss the benefits of greenspace to the city and its residents, and summarize issues related to the current inventory of greenspace (parks and open space, sensitive environmental resources, and streetscapes and plazas) in Atlanta. A survey was then administered by Mr. Christopher Atkinson of Wallace Russell and Todd, LLC. Mr. Atkinson used PowerPoint slides and images to poll meeting participants on 11 preliminary greenspace goals and 23 potential types of greenspace. Meeting attendees were also invited to submit written comments on the survey forms. Following the survey, the meetings were opened up for comments and questions on greenspace issues. Ms. Miriam P. Cummings of Malvada Consulting Group facilitated the comments and questions sessions. Each public forum meeting was recorded and reports will be available for public record.



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#### *Comment/Q&A Sessions*

Public Forum Meeting #1 – Tuesday, January 23, 2007

*Magnolia Hall - Piedmont Park Conservancy*

- Q: We spend billions of dollars to build-up foreign countries. Could we take a portion of those dollars to develop committees of volunteers to build and maintain our parks?  
A: The Opportunity Bond is not for maintenance -it is only for Acquisition and construction development.
- C: Atlanta lacks access to any major body of water. I would like to see greenspace access to the Chattahoochee River.
- C: I enjoyed the presentation. Plan needs to be put into action and not on the shelf.
- C: Use the old prison farm that the City owns as greenspace for things such as festivals and growing vegetables.
- C: The 1993 plan calls for 7.4 acres per thousand. We need to talk about more than 10 acres per thousand.
- C: City needs to protect the boundaries on all land that it buys, mark their boundaries, and make sure they stay protected and not be used for dumping.
- C: Add to the plan a little more about the concept of connections of a system of parks.
- C: Minor waterways need to be reclaimed like Clear Creek and be part of our greenspace plan.
- C: In addition to community gardens, grow organic gardens.
- C: Connect public transit to larger parks with active recreation and festivals.
- C: Examine parks for under use and redevelop them for more active use.



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- **Q:** Is there any chance of restoring streams to fishable levels (not necessarily edible) in terms of reduced pollution and enhancing fish populations such as shoal bass and sunfish? This would enhance parkland and forested areas in particular.

**A:** The City of Atlanta is committed to protecting and restoring water quality in all of the rivers and streams within its jurisdiction. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is responsible for setting water quality standards. The EPD classifies all waters into categories, which have different standards depending on the designated use of the water body. These uses include: drinking water supply, fishing, wild river, recreation, coastal fishing and scenic river. Waters in the State of Georgia that do not meet the water quality standards are placed on the Georgia 303(d) list. To view this list, please visit <http://www.gaepd.org/Documents/305b.html>. If a river or stream that you are concerned about is not on the list, it does not necessarily mean that it meets state standards because water quality can change over time and some water bodies have not yet been monitored. For additional information, please see <http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubs/PDF/B1242-3.pdf>.

- **Q:** Can we limit spending by allocating some of the \$72M to developing a system of volunteers (1 weekend per month) to maintain/develop the parks?

**A:** The Opportunity Bond is not for maintenance -it is only for Acquisition and construction development.

- **Q:** When will the Consent Decree funds be applied in the South River Watershed? So far little has been spent.

**A:** (see table below)

**Greenway Acquisition Accomplishments (fee and easement)**

	Atlanta	DeKalb County	Total
South River \$	\$816,905.09	\$398,087.50	\$ 1,214,992.59
South River acres	59.65	17.95	77.6
South River parcels	10	2	12

Consent Decree funds are required to be spent by March 31, 2007. The City has committed 100% of these funds, on properties and easements either already acquired or under contract to close in February or March 2007. In addition to the \$25 million, the City has approximately \$600,000 in uncommitted interest. We



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are actively negotiating with several landowners throughout the City to expend these funds.

- C: It looks like there's intention to allow online input and participation, but not functional yet. I represent a group of 500 families who are very interested but have trouble attending meetings.

A: Meeting PowerPoint presentations have been posted and summaries will be added as soon as they have been transcribed. In addition we now have a comments section. Please see: <http://atlantagreenspace.com/tellus.htm>.

### Public Forum Meeting #2 – Wednesday, January 24, 2007 *Adamsville Recreation Center*

- Q: What unique ways are there to raise capital for greenspace projects?  
A: There are a lot of methods that can be used – park authorities, dedicated funding sources, real estate transfer taxes, bonding. We will be looking at all of these. The issue is that it needs to be sustainable and recurring and deal with management and maintenance.
- Q: What is the timeframe for this process?  
A: Fifteen months for the plan and anywhere from ten to twenty years to get the whole plan in place.
- Q: Lack of parking is a problem in Atlanta. How will it play into planning for greenspace?  
A: That is outside of the scope of the greenspace plan. The City will be developing a transportation master plan that will address the parking issue.
- Q: Will there be a tax increase? Is there federal funding for this type of project?  
A: Funding is something we need to look at. We are not at that stage yet. We need to look at other options, other than tax increases. The plan will look at different funding mechanisms.
- C: If you really want to know how we feel about some of the things on the survey, give us an evaluation scouring from 1 – 10. It gives you a sense of how people feel about something.



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- **Q:** The City of Atlanta has a CDP, the Department of Transportation has a CDP, the Regional Authority has a CDP, and the Beltline has a CDP. Is this plan in isolation?

**A:** This is part of the City's Comprehensive Development Plan. Planning staff coordinate with both the BeltLine Inc. and ARC.

- **Q:** How can we give the Planning Department more support?

**A:** You can contact Dee Merriam the greenspace planner for the City. Dee will give you her card after the meeting.

- **Q:** What is this initiative's relationship to the Beltline Project, and was there funding given to this Greenspace project from the Beltline Project?

**A:** No BeltLine funding is being used for Project Greenspace. This project is a citywide project and comprehensive. The Beltline Project has a greenspace aspect to it, but is a site specific development project. Project Greenspace is about citywide policies and procedures.

- **Q:** I applaud what you are doing here. Are you going to include private own greenspace or just the City's greenspace?

**A:** The intent of this plan is a framework structure that will show how everything fits together.

- **Q:** The city cannot plan for private property, short of violating rights. How can the City plan for private greenspace?

**A:** The intent is not to tell private owners what to do with their land, but to show what can be done with land to preserve greenspace. Project Greenspace will establish the City's vision and provide for coordinated incentives to make it happen.

- **C:** I do not want our public dollars going to anything private.

- **C:** Please do not schedule your next round of meetings on April 19. We have an environmental symposium at King Chapel at Morehouse College.



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- Q: How will recommendations be made for areas that do not have any greenspace?  
A: This is a framework plan and will give guidance on where additional greenspace is needed.
- Q: Will the PowerPoint presentation be placed on the website?  
A: Yes, in the Maps and Documents section.
- C: Educate the public on the different funding mechanisms at the next round of meetings.
- Q: Will the current three meeting sites be kept for the next round of meetings?  
A: The City will keep the same three sites unless citizens recommend other sites.
- Q: Are the TAD areas of Greenbriar, Fort McPherson, and other Southwest Atlanta areas being incorporated into this plan?  
A: Yes, all areas are being addressed.
- Q: Are there criteria for these open spaces for pocket parks?  
A: There are a lot of these small parks and they do not add up to very much acreage. One of the issue is they are very hard to maintain. Parks departments generally prefer that neighborhoods adopt them and maintain them. But such spaces are important because they are accessible.
- C: Put up signs in small pocket parks to tell the public that they can adopt the park.

### Public Forum Meeting #3 – Thursday, January 25, 2007

#### *Rosel Fann Recreation Center*

- C: It would be great to have a goal of higher than 10.5 acres that the 1993 Plan has. We should be striving to have a higher goal here, fourteen years later.
- C: An education initiative dealing with environmental issues should be done for citizens. Add education as a goal.



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- Q: Are there any plans to integrate your plan on a regional basis with other jurisdictions?  
A: Yes. We have been working with the ARC on regional initiatives.
- C: Bike lanes are lacking in Atlanta.
- C: Need to look at the issue of safety in parks, especially at night.
- Q: Are there team members with green space experience working on this project? Is the team looking at other greenspace successes?  
A: The team has green space experience throughout the country. The team is looking at other successes.
- C: If a park is active there is less chance of safety being an issue.
- C: The community needs to be educated on greenspace and its benefits.
- C: Taking care of trees on the rights-of-way is a problem.
- Q: Are there opportunities to capture park spaces in inner city Atlanta?  
A: The team is looking at development incentives.
- C: Create an educational booklet on how tax dollars are used for greenspace and other things.
- C: We need sidewalks to get to the green space.
- C: Create a brochure on the different terminologies so citizens can understand what their tax dollars are being used for.
- Q: Who are the players in the City looking at the different initiatives - Greenspace, Beltline, and Rock Quarry? Do they coordinate with each other?  
A: The different City departments are all working together in collaboration on these projects:
  - Project Greenspace is managed by the Planning Bureau



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- BeltLine is managed by BeltLine Inc and Planning
- Bellwood Quarry is managed by BeltLine Inc and the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs
  
- Q: What happened to the South River Water Reclamation project?  
A: The Watershed Department worked with the South River Gardens Community Organization to create a butterfly garden and walking trail on the South River Facility Property. The trail leads to the South River. In addition in 1994 there were plans to create a public park on watershed facility grounds, but budget restraints and a re-design of facility upgrades prevented the project.
  
- C: Develop a policy on rights-of-way.
  
- C: We need to take advantage of alternative forms of energy.
  
- C: Focus on multi-functional green space.
  
- C: Educate the developers.
  
- C: Include park trails for the disable.

### *Survey Results*

Meeting participants were asked to rank 11 preliminary greenspace goals and 23 potential types of greenspace. For each goal or greenspace type, they were asked whether they 1) disagreed with it or considered it to be not important; 2) had a neutral opinion; or 3) agreed with it or considered it to be important. The survey results indicate overall consensus that the goals and greenspace types presented are important. To understand how participants ranked individual goals and greenspace types, “weighted scores” for each goal or type were developed by assigning a score of -1 for each “disagree” vote, 0 for each “neutral” vote, and +1 for each “agree” vote. The combined results from all three meetings are shown in the following tables. (A perfect score, or all “agree” votes for a goal or greenspace type, would equal 125.)



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Table 1. Preliminary Goals

	<b>Weighted Score</b>
Goal 1: Increase parkland acreage	<b>100</b>
Goal 2: Develop greenways and trails	<b>112</b>
Goal 3: Improve park maintenance and security	<b>118</b>
Goal 4: Improve facilities and programs	<b>97</b>
Goal 5: Protect environmentally sensitive lands	<b>116</b>
Goal 6: Protect and restore tree canopy	<b>114</b>
Goal 7: Increase community gathering spaces	<b>98</b>
Goal 8: Integrate history/community identity	<b>78</b>
Goal 9: Establish source of funding	<b>112</b>
Goal 10: Establish public/private partnerships	<b>100</b>
Goal 11: Promote greenspace within development	<b>104</b>



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Table 2. Types of Greenspace

	<b>Weighted Score</b>
<b><i>Parks and Open Spaces</i></b>	
1. Regional park with major activities	92
2. Neighborhood park	99
3. Beauty spot	69
4. Parks integrated with development	91
5. Active recreation	87
6. Passive recreation	97
7. Security and safety	101
<b><i>Community Gathering Spaces</i></b>	
8. Plazas	69
9. Places for special events	76
10. Places for regular events and street life	95
11. Places for neighborhood events	97
12. Community gardens	78
<b><i>Natural and Cultural Resources</i></b>	
13. Stream bank protection and restorations	100
14. Forested areas	95
15. Public Art	64
<b><i>Greenspace Connections</i></b>	
16. Streetscapes	100
17. Multi-purpose trails	100
18. Stream and river corridors	89
19. Trails connected to your neighborhood	91
<b><i>Gray vs. Green Infrastructure</i></b>	
20. Street and boulevards	88
21. Brownfield site redevelopment	86
22. Stormwater management	103
23. Stream channel treatment	97



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#### *Sample Written Survey Comments*

Meeting attendees were also invited to submit written comments on the survey forms. The following provide a representative cross section of comments submitted in writing.

#### *Goal 1 - Increase Parkland Acreage*

- Parkland raises the value of the community. Preserve as much parkland as possible and ensure equitable distribution in all areas of the City. Southwest Atlanta has been overlooked for a long time.
- The City's current goal should be raised to 15%. The target should be closer to the national average of 19%. Do not compromise quality for quantity.
- Focus on high density pedestrian populations rather than gross accumulation of acreage. This will improve Atlanta's QOL. Piedmont is overused. Create more large parks in other parts of the City.

#### *Goal 2- Develop Greenways and Trails*

- Develop systems that connect greenways and trails.
- Design trails that will aid the visually impaired, use pervious surface, and be compatible with surroundings.
- Use an adaptive management strategy making greenways as ecologically sustainable as possible and increasing urban forest.

#### *Goal 3- Improve Park Maintenance and Security*

- Place telephones (911) on bike trails and walking trails; improve park access; increase staff at parks; and utilize volunteers.
- Improving park maintenance will make parks look and feel more secure. Parks are not being properly maintained.
- Look at competitive private bids or bundling to cut cost. If funding is lacking for maintenance and security, do not increase acreage.
- Lower maintenance costs by using xeriscaping and native vegetation.

#### *Goal 4 - Improve Facilities and Programs*

- Provide quality transportation for seniors 60+ and special consideration for 80+ and the disabled. Adequate parking, lighting, sidewalks, pedestrian friendly intersections, drinking fountains and restroom facilities are needed.
- Provide streetscapes in depressed neighborhoods.



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- Increase park events.

#### *Goal 5- Protect Environmentally Sensitive Lands*

- Greenspace should have multiple purposes. Protecting floodplains should not exclude other uses like trails or passive recreation.
- Develop sensitivity to landfills and locating greenspace areas near landfill
- Educating citizens on environmental sensitivities is very important.
- Require 300 foot-wide riparian corridor along all creeks.
- Brownfield's should never be converted to recreation use.
- Think outside the box. Look at heat island effects – green roofs; storm water usage, filtration and cleansing; and decrease parking.

#### *Goal 6 - Protect and Restore Tree Canopy*

- Do not use this goal to prevent development in areas with significant tree canopy. More education is needed on this issue.
- Strengthen Atlanta tree ordinance. Many of our trees are old and weak. We need to invest in other different types of trees for visual esthetics as well as shade.
- Reclaim roadway by planting trees in medians.
- Homeowners should have the ability to cut down dangerous trees on private property. Encourage developers not to clear cut.

#### *Goal 7- Increase Community Gathering Spaces*

- Make more pocket & beauty spots. Every quadrant of the City should have gathering spaces. Southwest Atlanta (outside I-285) lacks a facility that could accommodate more than 300 people with parking.
- Community spaces should have community centers and community gardens like Brownwood Park in east Atlanta.
- Incorporate community involvement in creating community gathering spaces.
- Special events and festivals negatively impact residential areas.

#### *Goal 8 - Integrate History/Community Identity*

- Not sure if parks is the place to do this. More important than history/community identity is the development around parks.
- This is not a huge priority. It will come once the infrastructure is established.



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- There should be flexibility in allowing change and diversity in cultural representation.
- Art should not be tied to this initiative.
- The presentation should speak toward implementation of Arts & Culture.
- Protect and enhance historical sites and use reproduction amenities as benches, trash cans, lighting, and signage.

#### *Goal 9- Establish Source of Funding*

- Will the community be taxed?
- It is very important to have dedicated funding. Developers should be assessed fees.
- Funding for maintenance is critical.

#### *Goal 10- Establish Public/Private Partnerships*

- Will private organizations be able to buy into and be part owner?
- Focus on partnerships with civic and educational institutions.
- Get major corporations to buy into the partnership.
- Private investors should not be allowed to limit public access to parks.

#### *Goal 11 - Promote Greenspace within Development / Provide Greenspace Initiatives*

- We need a law requiring greenspace in all commercial development.
- We desperately need to have greenspace buffers between developments and communities.
- Give tax incentives to developers who provide significant public greenspace. Have an overlay like the Beltline overlay for the entire City.
- Promoting greenspace within developments should not be carried to where it creates barriers to redevelopment. Redevelopment which reduces the impact on virgin land outweighs set-aside requirements for new development.
- Providing greenspace incentives should be a tool to a goal, not a goal in and of itself.

#### *Additional Goals & Comments*

- Identify future park needs/budgets/design.
- Provide essential habitat for wildlife.
- Provide food in a sustainable way by creating community and organic market gardens.



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- The Parks Department does a poor job maintaining Atlanta's parks.
- Centennial Park is too grey. Green it up.
- Atlanta needs more art. It takes the City too long to install commissioned work. Public opinion of art should not make the art acceptable or not acceptable.
- Establish and maintain constant citizen involvement.
- Many good contractors will not do business with the City, due to its flawed accounts payable system. Improve the City's contracting system.
- Require all new development to comply with plan. Assess a fee for noncompliance.
- Enforce environmental regulations. Stop granting variances to developers. The City needs adequate staff to monitor and enforce storm water runoff laws, trees preservation, etc.

### *Next Steps*

The comments gathered at each of the three public forums will be synthesized with the data analysis and used to develop a comprehensive strategy for creating a world-class greenspace system for the City of Atlanta. The next series of public forums, scheduled for late spring or early summer 2007, will involve citizens in defining actions that can be taken to implement this system. Please visit our website at:  
[www.atlantagreenspace.com](http://www.atlantagreenspace.com).

### *Meeting Advertisement*

The meetings were advertised through a variety of methods, including:

- Paid advertisement in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution;
- A press release distributed to local media outlets through the City of Atlanta Communications Department;
- Public notices distributed to Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU's), City of Atlanta Departments, special interest groups, libraries, coffee shops and retail;
- Post cards mailed to over 6,000 City of Atlanta residents, faith-based organizations and businesses; and
- Website postings at [www.atlantagreenspace.com](http://www.atlantagreenspace.com).



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*Staff and Consultants*

**City of Atlanta Representatives:**

Steven R. Cover, Planning Commissioner  
Dianne Harnell Cohen, Parks Commissioner  
Dee Merriam, Parks, Open Space, and Greenways Planner  
James Shelby, Planning Deputy Commissioner  
Joyce Sheperd, City Council - District 12  
Flor Velarde, Planning Assistant Director

**Consulting Staff Present:**

David Rouse, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC  
Christopher Atkinson, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC  
Miriam P. Cummings, Malvada Consulting Group  
Liz Clarke, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC  
Marguerita Lance, Malvada Consulting Group