

PRIVATE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE: A CASE STUDY OF PIEDMONT PARK

by

BRITTANY YVONNE DAVIS

(Under the Direction of Amy J. Ross)

ABSTRACT

Atlanta's premier park, Piedmont Park, operates under a public-private partnership between the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta. Controversies within the park raise important questions about the consequences of allowing a private group (the PPC) to control a public park, the extent of the PPC's authority, and the implications for the park's status as a public space. Drawing largely on interviews and newspaper articles, this thesis explores the ramifications of this partnership through analysis of the partnership's mechanics. Using this as a foundation, attention turns to how the partnership affects various groups of park users, the condition of the park, and the park's ability to function as a public space. As privatization and public-private partnerships escalate, it is increasingly important to examine the specifics of each partnership and ensure the arrangement allows for accountability and continued public control and oversight of public resources.

INDEX WORDS: Atlanta, Piedmont Park, privatization, public-private partnership, public space, public parks

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABG	Atlanta Botanical Garden
APD	Atlanta Police Department
AJC	<i>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i>
DPRCA	Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs
FOPP	Friends of Piedmont Park
MARTA	Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority
MNA	Midtown Neighbor's Association
MPSA	Midtown Ponce Security Alliance
NPU	Neighborhood Planning Unit
PPC	Piedmont Park Conservancy

CHAPTER 1

A TRIP INTO PIEDMONT PARK



Figure 1. Map of Piedmont Park. Courtesy of the Piedmont Park Conservancy.

Piedmont Park is a 185-acre park located in midtown Atlanta, Georgia, between tall office buildings, hotels, high-rise condominiums, and quaint neighborhoods. With its meadows, playing fields, forests, trails, and venues for jazz and arts festivals, Piedmont Park is a unique Atlanta landmark and “indisputably Atlanta’s premier park” (Harnik 2000, 169).¹ Its size and prominence in a city with only 7.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 persons makes it notable (Harnik 2000). More importantly, its central location in midtown Atlanta, an area that has long been associated with minorities thanks to its physical proximity to the Old Fourth Ward and the presence of members of the lesbian and gay communities, has seemingly made it accessible to

¹ Piedmont Park includes four ball fields, two soccer fields, a swimming pool, two playgrounds, a dog park, four walking/jogging trails, twelve tennis courts, an open field, two pavilions, and a gazebo (Atlanta n.d.).

vast swaths of Atlanta's citizenry. The park is accessible via Atlanta's public transportation system, MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority).² The park's prominence, from its size, location, range of activities offered, and legacy as an Olmsted park, gives it a unique role in Atlanta. Like other significant sites, Piedmont Park's stature makes it the site of controversy regarding what the park is, what it should be, and what it represents.

At the heart of this research is an inquiry into public space in an effort to further our theoretical and empirical understanding of what public space is, and how it has become contested in urban contexts. This research project, like many others, is motivated by questions of access, exclusion, and power (Mitchell and Staeheli 2006). Public parks are a particularly interesting battleground since they are traditionally owned by the public for their use and enjoyment. Are public-private partnerships threatening the traditional role and status of the public park? Is the nature of a park fundamentally changed as its relationship to its users and park management changes and, if so, how? To address these questions, this thesis examines the literature on neoliberalism, partnerships, privatization, and public space to develop and theorize the ways in which public-private partnerships change relationships of and to a particular space, in this case Atlanta's Piedmont Park and the partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy (PPC) responsible for managing the park. In the analysis and discussion, I argue that using a public-private partnership to manage and operate Piedmont Park has negative consequences for the park's promise as an inclusive place fostering interaction, its status as a

² Piedmont Park is located within one mile of two MARTA train stations, the Arts Center Station and the Midtown Station, in addition to having three bus routes, routes 27, 36, and 101, with stops on the park's borders. While there are many ways to access the park, Atlanta drivers are noted for their reliance on the personal automobile. As Cain Williamson said in an interview, "It's not hard to get there without using a car. ... obviously Atlanta is just basically a car-based city and you're not going to get people to give up their cars" (Williamson 2007), suggesting that while the possibility for using alternative modes of transportation to get to the park exists, many park users do not avail themselves of this option.

public space, and civic engagement with the park, even though the material improvements to the park have been widely noted as a success.

The story of the almost three year long controversy over the construction of a parking deck provides an entry point for understanding how the public-private partnership is changing Piedmont Park and the park's relationship to its users. The very idea of building a parking garage within a park is appalling to many, as is the plan to extend a drive across the park to provide cars with the ability to drive into and through the park to reach the deck. The debate drew my attention, and the attention of many others across the Atlanta metropolitan area, to Piedmont Park, the park's management, and the decision-making processes involved. From its initial failure to solicit public input to the "rigged" mayoral taskforce assigned to assess the proposal, the parking deck debate may foreshadow what is to come.

Controversy over Parking

The decision to construct an 800-space parking garage in Piedmont Park has been nothing if not controversial. The parking deck itself is a joint venture between the Atlanta Botanical Garden (ABG) and the Piedmont Park Conservancy. Plans call for the ABG to raise money for and finance the construction of the parking deck then share the revenues with the Piedmont Park Conservancy and a parks trust fund (National Association of Olmsted Parks 2006; *Friends of Piedmont Park Inc. v. Atlanta Botanical Garden* 2007). While opponents and supporters of the parking garage acknowledge the need for additional parking in and around Piedmont Park to better accommodate park users and increase the park's accessibility, the location of the deck in the interior of the park has attracted the ire of opponents. *Creative Loafing* labeled the debate "one of Atlanta's biggest not-in-my-back-yard controversies in a decade"

(Wall 2004). The backyard in this case was Piedmont Park, with opponents of the deck arguing that the deck would cause “irreparable damage to the park's design integrity” (Nagel 2005). The deck represents a deviation from the 1995 Piedmont Park Master Plan, which had the eventual removal of all automobiles from the park as its goal (National Association of Olmsted Parks 2006).

The parking deck plans were originally approved in an unannounced, closed meeting of the Piedmont Park Conservancy Board of Directors on November 18, 2004. Under duress from activists opposing the deck, the Georgia State Attorney’s office, and the Atlanta City Council, the Conservancy agreed to conduct a revote on the decision at a public meeting. The result of the meeting was not what those opposing the deck might have hoped for. More board members voted in favor of the deck at the public meeting (21-2, with 2 abstentions) on December 21, 2004 than did in the private meeting (18-3, with 3 abstentions) (Wall 2004).

Following the decision of its board, the Piedmont Park Conservancy had to seek the approval of the Atlanta City Council to modify its master plan, including the addition of the parking deck to the park. As required by the City of Atlanta, the proposal for the 53-acre expansion of Piedmont Park, which includes the parking deck, was circulated to and voted on by Atlanta’s neighborhood planning units (NPU) within the city. Eighteen of the nineteen NPUs opposed the deck. In addition, the Atlanta Urban Design Commission’s recommendation was not in favor of the deck. In support of the parking deck were the Mayor of Atlanta, Shirley Franklin, the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs (DPRCA), and the mayor’s special taskforce (National Association of Olmsted Parks 2006). An alternative option, proposed by the Atlanta Beltline, called for two decks to be built on either side of the park, using the Beltline’s proposed trolley route to connect them rather than constructing a parking deck in the park

(Midtown Neighbors Association n.d.). On November 21, 2005, the Atlanta City Council voted 12-3 to amend the Piedmont Park Master Plan to authorize the construction of the parking deck and the expansion of the park. After the vote, Diane Harnell-Cohen, Commissioner of DPRCA said, “The parking deck is fiscally responsible as money is being raised by the Piedmont Park Conservancy³ and the Atlanta Botanical Garden. The plan also allows for an increase in safety and separates vehicular and pedestrian traffic in Piedmont Park for the first time ever” (City of Atlanta 2005).

The Friends of Piedmont Park (FOPP), which led the opposition to the parking deck, filed a lawsuit against the ABG, the Piedmont Park Conservancy, and the City of Atlanta in January 2007. Their lawsuit alleged that the groups violated the Georgia Open Records Law, failed to properly bid the deck’s construction, and that the deck constitutes an unlawful conversion of public land to private uses, in an effort to obstruct and, hopefully, prevent the construction of the parking deck. Judge T. Bedford Jackson Jr. heard evidence from plaintiffs and defendants in August and September 2007. The plaintiffs lost on four of the five counts of the lawsuit, with the judge ruling that the Piedmont Park Conservancy must make available to the public any records it has pertaining to the parking garage related to the area of Piedmont Park for which they are responsible.⁴ With Judge Bedford Jackson’s ruling, the ABG was free to begin construction of the parking deck. Rock blasting to clear the room in the ridge of the park where the deck will be located was slated to begin on February 13, 2008. Blasting is slated to occur once per day until the middle of May 2008 (Midtown Neighbors Association 2008).

³ The veracity of this statement is questionable. Most public statements say that the Piedmont Park Conservancy will be the beneficiary of the parking deck because its construction is being paid for by the Atlanta Botanical Garden.

⁴ The Piedmont Park Conservancy is not responsible for all of Piedmont Park’s current acreage. The Atlanta Botanical Garden leases the land on which the gardens are located from the city of Atlanta in an arrangement that predates the formation of the PPC.

Both sides inflamed the dispute regarding the location of the parking garage as they worked against one another. The Friends of Piedmont Park positioned itself in fervent opposition to the deck, likely preventing them from being brought to the table and taken seriously by those making the final decision regarding the deck. By holding secret meetings and hiring lobbyists to influence neighborhood groups and city council, the ABG and PPC made themselves easy targets of those opposing the deck. The inclusive process the PPC claims to use in reaching major decisions about the park seems to be an illusion in light of the way in which it conducted itself initially regarding the parking garage proposal by ABG. Finally, because the parking deck proposal was submitted as part of the broader proposal for the 53-acre expansion of the park, which had attracted attention and support, voting against just the parking deck would have been nearly impossible for city council. Improving parking is an important aspect of improving access to Piedmont Park, a need heightened by the upcoming park expansion, which the PPC included in its arguments advancing the parking deck as part of its park expansion plans. The strong opposition to the parking deck likely had to be balanced against widespread support for the expansion, leaving city council to do what was deemed best for all Atlantans: expanding the park.

The parking garage dispute initially attracted me to Piedmont Park. I found myself interested in how all of these actors interact with one another and with the park, and how these interactions influence and shape the park landscape as seen and used by the park's patrons. In an article commenting on the deck plans, Michael Wall, a staff writer for *Creative Loafing*, asks,

Should a private organization like the conservancy be given as much sway as it has over the park? If the conservancy does get that much sway, shouldn't the city ensure that conservancy officials do a better job of authentically soliciting public input? And can private groups like the conservancy and the garden really be counted on to look out for everyone's interests — taxpayers, park users, the environment — as opposed to their own interests? (Wall 2005)

His questions stimulated my own, leading to my primary research question: How does the formation of a public-private partnership between a municipal government and a privately-funded nonprofit organization affect the park's management, park users, and access to the park?

The key to answering this question comes not simply from looking at the partnership as presented by city government officials, city employees, the Piedmont Park Conservancy staff, and the Conservancy's Board of Directors, but also from citizens who do not participate in the partnership but have a stake in what happens in and to the park. Official documents can mask 'ground truths' about the operation and effects of a particular partnership and management decisions, resulting in conflicting representations of the situation. This research brings together accounts of the partnership from a variety of official and unofficial sources to gain a broader understanding of not simply *how* the public-private partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy operates and the reasons for its proclaimed success, but also to investigate effects on the park's physical condition, its relationship to Atlanta's citizens who are presumably the park's owners and chief constituents, and the park's status as a public space. The subsequent chapters in this thesis examine each of these affected areas in detail. The results are complex and suggestive of the complications that can arise when public-private partnerships are put in place.

Piedmont Park

Piedmont Park went through a downturn in the 1970s, suffering from "misuse" as people used the park to engage in illicit activities. This was a problem for the surrounding neighborhood as residents faced a possible decline both in property values and in neighborhood attractiveness to outsiders. As a result, efforts were made beginning in 1976 to "bring Piedmont back from the

brink” (Harnik 2000, 169). As part of efforts to increase use of the park, organized events began to be held in Piedmont Park in the 1970s and 1980s. Increased park usage was accompanied by a decrease in funding from the city budget resulting in “a clear deterioration of Piedmont Park” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2005). In response to what they perceived as the park’s worsening condition, citizens formed the Friends of Piedmont Park in the 1970s, stating that their goal was “to make the Park more enjoyable for today's park users and to protect the Park for use by generations to come” (Friends of Piedmont Park 2007b). The Friends of Piedmont Park wanted to support the city’s efforts in Piedmont Park by organizing volunteers, holding park cleanups, and helping the city improve the park’s condition. Some of their early efforts include starting a tree mulching initiative, supporting the closure of the park’s roads to vehicles, and successfully fending off a plan by the City of Atlanta to fill the park’s 10th Street Meadow with rubble that was to be the by-product of a planned highway project (Friends of Piedmont Park 2006). Seeing the need to not just advocate and organize but also raise money to support the park, several members of the Friends of Piedmont Park, along with business and community leaders, created the Piedmont Park Conservancy (Harnik 2000; Abramson 2007; Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007a).

The Piedmont Park Conservancy was formed when “a small group of concerned citizens and park neighbors joined together to form Piedmont Park Conservancy in 1989 in effort to save historic Piedmont Park from ruin” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2005). The Conservancy’s mission is “to enhance and preserve Piedmont Park as a vital, urban green space for all Atlantans” (McCown 2007b). In 1996, the PPC launched its first capital campaign to fund the park’s Master Plan, which focused on park restoration and was adopted by Atlanta City Council in 1995. By mid-1999, the Conservancy had raised \$6.5 million in part through major, private

financial support from sponsors including the Woodruff Foundation, NationsBank, and Georgia Pacific (Harnik 2000). Since its inception, the capital campaign has raised over \$22 million for park restoration projects, mostly from private sources (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007c).

Many of the claims made by Piedmont Park Conservancy on their website arouse suspicion about the nature of its partnership with the city of Atlanta. In particular, the PPC boasts, “Over the years, the Conservancy has take on more of the City’s daily duties, now fulfilling nearly 85% of Piedmont Park’s maintenance needs” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2005). When large-scale events are held in the park, the PPC hires, manages, and pays off-duty police officers to provide security. In addition, in May 2004, management for the city of Atlanta’s security contract was assumed by the PPC (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2005). Thus, in the areas of park maintenance, park management, and security, the PPC has assumed responsibilities previously and traditionally held by the municipality and its Parks and Recreation department.

Piedmont Park has been modified in ways that would not fit in with the Olmstedian vision in recent years.⁵ In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries where the spatial structure of urban parks and their facilities are being reconsidered and reconfigured (Young 1995), the desires of the community should play an important role in shaping the management practices and policies used to govern the park. A park’s design and structure ideally reflect the ways in which the community uses the park (Solecki and Welch 1995), and efforts have been made to ensure this occurs in Piedmont Park. Participation at the grassroots level in the planning and implementation processes of policies governing or affecting land-use helps ensure that plans

⁵ Olmsted believed parks would improve the health of cities by providing a place for weary city dwellers to go, relax, and recreate. He hoped parks would be a meeting ground where diverse persons could come together and interact (Cranz 1982; Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005).

meet the community's goals and have the support of those whom they affect (Bengston, Fletcher, and Nelson 2004). As part of the efforts to ensure the park serves its constituency, citizens are encouraged to offer their input to those in charge through the Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU-E and NPU-F border Piedmont Park), the Piedmont Park Advisory Committee, and through Town Hall meetings held by the Piedmont Park Conservancy and in District 6 (the city council district in which Piedmont Park is located). As the Conservancy plans an expansion of Piedmont Park which will enhance the total accessible and usable parkland by over 40%, the inclusion of the community becomes particularly important. This park expansion will include additional facilities for citizen use by making the park more accessible to users of all abilities. Some highlights of the planned expansion are a large, interactive water feature similar to the fountain in Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park, additional trails, a new playground, and access to the creek located within the park's boundaries. In order to fund this expansion, the Conservancy is raising \$72 million through a capital campaign (McCown 2007b).

Just as Piedmont Park is growing and changing, so are the neighborhoods surrounding it. That urban parks are connected to a rise in adjacent property values has been known for well over a century (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992; Boone and Modarres 2006). Poorer residents have relocated as higher property taxes force them out of their previous neighborhoods. Others move because of the large payout they can receive for selling their property to developers. Renters face rising rents as property owners struggle to keep up with rising property values, leading those who cannot afford increased rents to relocate to other areas. Combined with the movement towards the privatization of park management and resources, this trend is troubling. It suggests the possibility that urban parks may no longer be public spaces open and accessible to all (Mitchell 1995). Another factor changing the face of Piedmont Park today is the increased

population in the surrounding neighborhoods as Atlantans tire of their lengthy commutes and more amenities are located within the city limits. There is also some gentrification of the surrounding neighborhoods. The movement of higher income persons into inner city areas may be a factor in the increased participation of these nearby residents in urban parks in close proximity to where they reside (Tate 2001). These transitions have the possibility of inhibiting or limiting access to the park by certain groups of people and allowing the elite—either corporate, political, or social—to control an area with a long history as a public resource. If the control of an urban park is placed in the hands of a minority group—either by class, ethnicity, or elite status—the overall role of the urban park as a public space may be eroded as limits are placed on whom and what activities are deemed acceptable there (Mitchell 1995).

Given the responsibilities taken on by the PPC, it is difficult to perceive the City of Atlanta-Piedmont Park Conservancy partnership in the traditional sense of an equal arrangement between two parties for sharing resources, responsibilities, and power. Through its operational and decision-making authority, the Piedmont Park Conservancy has the opportunity to change the nature of Piedmont Park both as a park and as a public space. The resulting transformations, both subtle and overt, are the focus of this research investigation.

Drawing on the literature on public-private partnerships, the second chapter examines the City-Conservancy partnership, using categories to define and describe the partnership based on the way it is officially defined by both parties. The goal is to understand how this specific partnership fits into the partnership literature, both within and beyond the literature on parks partnerships. I argue that the Piedmont Park partnership is, in large part, a nontraditional partnership because the City of Atlanta has devolved much of its authority—and therefore its power—to the Conservancy without a strong accountability system in place. Chapter three

examines the work of the public-private partnership focusing in particular on the park from the perspective of its users. I argue that while the interview data demonstrate the PPC is seen as extremely successful at delivering on its mission of enhancing and preserving Piedmont Park, there may be negative consequences associated with this accomplishment. Diminished accessibility, exclusion of specific persons, and reduction or exclusion of citizen input and participation may be unintended consequences of the PPC's success. Building on the accessibility issues and potential for exclusion, chapter four tackles the question of whether Piedmont Park can still be considered as and labeled a public space. Using the Sunday evening crowd of African-Americans who gather in the park as an example, I argue that due to the partnership's mechanics and materiality, Piedmont Park loses certain hallmarks of a public space. The conclusion, chapter five, brings all of these points together to draw broader conclusions about the potential and consequences of public-private partnerships within the context of public parks and considered more broadly. Caution seems to be the key, along with guarantees of accountability and assurances that go beyond token gestures to ensure citizens are not excluded from publicly-owned property, either directly or indirectly.

Piedmont Park has an important role in Atlanta as both an historical and a cultural resource. Listed with the National Olmsted Parks Association, Piedmont Park has a connection to a broader legacy of U.S. parks designed or inspired by of Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux. Piedmont Park provides "one of the few remaining connections to Atlanta's past" (Silverman 2007), through its listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the historical markers placed throughout the park. The cultural legacy is not prominently marked, though it is arguably more significant. Modern Piedmont Park has had a prominent role in Atlanta's gay community, something that may be unknown to the general population

(Williamson 2007). As Atlanta struggles to create a “parks culture” and increase political support for parks among its citizenry, Piedmont Park stands as a testament to the value found in and offered by a quality park (Dusenbury 2007). As “something of an oasis in Midtown Atlanta” (Silverman 2007), Piedmont Park offers unique opportunities to blend the cultural, ecological, and historical without having to travel outside of the city. These opportunities make continued access to and preservation of Piedmont Park extremely important for people of all ages.

Methodology

Bringing together various accounts on the public-private partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy is a key facet of this research project. To that end, I employed a multi-methods approach using semi-structured interviews and primary and secondary documents. I conducted thirteen interviews with a variety of persons relating to Piedmont Park, including Debbie McCown, President and CEO of the Piedmont Park Conservancy⁶, Doug Abramson, President of the Friends of Piedmont Park, and Trisha Clymore, organizer of the Atlanta PRIDE Festival.⁷ All of the interviews were conducted between June and November 2007, and reflect the status of the park as of that point time, though some changes have occurred between the time of the interviews and the completion of this thesis. The interviews occurred at a variety of locations in Piedmont Park and in the surrounding Midtown area. Interviewees were asked a number of questions about their experiences with Piedmont Park, with Piedmont Park’s management, and about any changes they have noticed in the park over time. I asked if the park is welcoming to everyone, part of a broader cultural or historical

⁶ Since the completion of data collection, McCown has resigned her position and left the Conservancy.

⁷ A complete list of persons interviewed can be found in Appendix A.

legacy, and about what, if any, improvements they feel Piedmont Park needs or that they would like to see.

Primary and secondary documents were collected from a variety of sources. I obtained primary documents regarding the partnership, its formation, and its governance from the Piedmont Park Conservancy, the City of Atlanta's Office of Parks, the Friends of Piedmont Park, and the Atlanta City Council. The primary documents provide the context and background information and perspectives that some participants contested in their interviews. They provide an official layer to the discourse on Piedmont Park and its public-private partnership, permitting an analysis of the multiple layers of discourse taking place in and around the park. These official perspectives are supplemented by secondary documents obtained primarily from two Atlanta newspapers, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, a large daily publication that circulates throughout the metropolitan area, and *Southern Voice*, a weekly newspaper serving Atlanta's gay and lesbian community. The newspapers publish news articles, editorials, and blog posts relating to Piedmont Park, which I monitored from November 2006 to March 2008. Within these discourses are clues about the nature of the partnership, the partnership's presentation to the public, and how Piedmont Park is perceived and used today. Articles in *Southern Voice* made me more aware of certain issues involving Piedmont Park, particularly those facing the lesbian and gay community, that are excluded from the mainstream discourse surrounding the park. Including the perspectives of those authoring documents, be they individuals, news agencies, or institutions, allows the multiple discourses surrounding and concerning Piedmont Park to emerge more clearly. Doing so, however, presents an analytical challenge as I work to synthesize and analyze, making sense of the cacophony presented by the data.

I originally intended to survey park users as well but met with a great deal of resistance. I asked for permission to conduct the survey from Chris Nelson, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Piedmont Park Conservancy, in May 2007. He initially responded saying that I needed the approval of the Conservancy staff in order to conduct the survey. I sent him a copy of the survey materials, per his request, but never received a response. Later communication with the PPC staff indicated that no such permission was ever needed. Unfortunately, I spent nearly five months trying to gain permission that was unnecessary. The loss of the survey means data from a wider cross-section of park users is absent. The survey was intended to ask park users questions about whether the park is an inclusive space, changes in the park's condition, and citizen involvement in the decision-making process. In an effort to compensate for the absence of this data, I obtained summaries of the data collected from the marketing user studies conducted on behalf of the Piedmont Park Conservancy by Dr. Ken Bernhardt of Georgia State University. However, due to the differences in the questions asked, it is impossible for the marketing user studies to replace the survey I designed.⁸

After document collection and interview transcription, I coded each text twice. Like Hastings, I paid attention to “the use of specific vocabulary and imagery and to the rhetorical mode of the interchange between interviewee and interviewer” (Hastings 1999, 95). The first time, predetermined categories and themes were identified. These predetermined categories (privatization, corporate donation(s) or sponsorship, financial support, volunteer, citizen involvement or engagement, development, park management, access or accessibility) were determined from the literatures on park management, nonprofit organizations, and public-private partnerships to facilitate the process of situating my findings within these literatures. In the

⁸ The survey itself is included for reference only as Appendix B.

process of coding, I quickly discovered that my predetermined analytical categories were not particularly useful for coding the data I had. A second round of coding used emergent themes in the texts, identifying themes in particular texts and then searching for them in others. Through the second round of coding, it became possible to identify and begin to analyze the unique aspects of Piedmont Park and its public-private partnership. Given the park's highly specific socio-historical context, such analysis seems necessary since there are likely situations that arise in Piedmont Park that have not arisen—or at least have not been published on—in other contexts.

Underpinning the analysis in this project is critical realism. Critical realism provides a theoretical framework for thinking about how necessary and contingent structures and a particular socio-historical context gave rise to and affect the actions and practices of particular agents, in this case the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the city of Atlanta government. Following other critical realists, I believe that the world is socially constructed, that research is always influenced by assumptions, and that there are causal powers underlying social phenomena (Bird 1989; Cruickshank 2003; Fairclough 2005). My aim in this thesis is explanation: I offer explanations for why and how the public-private partnership has transformed Piedmont Park and the effects of this transformation on the park's users and the park as a public space. Additionally, I aim to contribute to theoretical debates by providing empirical data on partnerships that is often missing in the partnerships literature. Through these empirical data, linkages between neoliberal processes and a particular partnership, which is absent from much of the partnerships literature, can be shown and the effects of a partnership on public space can be illuminated. Following Fairclough, I find great utility in using critical discourse analysis within a critical realist framework in order to understand the discourses put forth by those working in and around Piedmont Park and the resulting social phenomena. I hope to contribute to theoretical

debates by providing empirical data to underscore and highlight the contingent relationships to a space that can be fundamentally altered by a public-private partnership.

I view the Conservancy as an organization whose existence was produced by a particular set of conditions arising from a lack of public spending on Piedmont Park's maintenance, and citizen interest in seeing a better maintained park. This viewpoint coincides with the historical narrative of the group's origin. With this socio-historical context as a lens, it becomes possible to understand the actions, interactions, and reactions produced within and in response to the City of Atlanta-Piedmont Park Conservancy. Critical realist ontology holds that social structures are preexisting, human agency is intentional, and that there are open systems (Yeung 1997). The multiple layers of discourse and interaction between the constituents of Piedmont Park, park users, and the park's management present an opportunity to study the "dialectical relationship between social practice and discursive practice and thus [the] close connection between changes in the use of language and social change" (Hastings 1999, 93) as Fairclough does using critical discourse analysis.

With this theoretical framework in mind, I examine the discourse used by the city and the PPC through their public documents, statements, and actions to gain insight into how each party views Piedmont Park, their partnership, the cooperation that exists between them, and the influence they can exert on the park space. A discourse analysis of the documents and interviews conducted with personnel from the PPC and the city forms the core of the data analyzed here. Insights from Fairclough and critical discourse analysis are particularly important for analyzing the various texts. The focus on "how discourse figures in relation to other social elements in processes of social change" (Fairclough 2005, 924) found in critical discourse analysis helps me with my project of analyzing the discourses around the public-private partnership and Piedmont

Park. My analytical approach relies heavily on Fairclough, who says that texts are “points of articulation and tension between two causal forces: social practices and, through their mediation, social structures; and the agency of the social actors who speak, write, compose, read, listen to, interpret them” (Fairclough 2005, 925). My texts, generated from interviews and document collection, articulate the social structures in place in Piedmont Park, including the public-private partnership and the relationship between the park and its users. Each one conveys the agency of its articulator, expressing the thoughts, opinions, and actions of its author(s). Using discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis in particular, a particular perspective on what the partnership is, the work performed by it, and its effects emerges.

Understanding the multiple discourses on and of Piedmont Park, including the identification of voices absent from the discourses, enables a more complete understanding of how the public-private partnership has affected the park space, the park’s users, and the park as a public space. The data indicate that the public-private partnership has refreshed and restored the park, making it more attractive to potential park users. Nevertheless, the partnership presents certain complications that will be explored further in subsequent chapters. Through these discussions, the multiple voices and discourses will be merged so a clearer representation of the situation in Piedmont Park can emerge.

CHAPTER 2

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS?

The commencement of a public-private partnership between the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta is a key, transformative moment in the history of Piedmont Park. Understanding the circumstances that led to the public-private partnership establishes a framework through which the partnership, its role, and its function can be understood. Building on this framework, this chapter discusses partnerships, the trend towards partnerships in parks at various scales, and the critiques leveraged against partnerships with the goal of explicating what, if anything, makes the City-PPC partnership unique and how the specifics of the partnership affect the park. Research has focused on why partnerships are established, without discussing how to differentiate between and among partnerships (Smith and Wohlstetter 2006). Drawing on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), a legal document authorizing and defining the partnership, this chapter closely examines the structure of the partnership, the work performed by each partner, and the partnership's stated goals and aspirations. By examining the MOU and comparing it with the information gathered from interviews, an improved understanding of whether the partnership delivers on its promised benefits and advantages becomes possible. In doing so, this project contributes empirical evidence on partnerships that is largely absent from the literature on partnerships (Hodge and Greve 2007).

Defining 'Partnership'

Definitions of 'public-private partnership' are as numerous and varied as those of 'partnership.' Finding a precise, commonly accepted definition is difficult because scholars often offer subtle variations on the general concept that change the way in which the partners, the power relations between them, and the resources involved are conceived. Peters notes, "We probably cannot provide a definite and stipulative definition of a partnership here, in part because the ambiguity of the term has been valuable both for analytic and practical purposes" (1998, 12). Miraftab says, "The terminological sloppiness in debates about PPPs [public-private partnerships] fosters convenient ambiguities in defining the roles and expectations of each partner" (2004, 92). Without clear, concise definitions of public-private partnership and partnership more generally, assessing the differences between partnerships based on partner roles and the reasons behind partnership formation is difficult. Looseness in terminology can disguise uneven power relations within partnerships (Miraftab 2004), making them more difficult to see, analyze, and discuss. Nevertheless, understanding what a public-private partnership is is important because it serves as an important basis for understanding the particular public-private partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy.

In an early definition of the term the Committee for Economic Development writes, "Public-private partnership means cooperation among individuals and organizations in the public and private sectors for mutual benefit" (1982, 2). Smith and Wohlstetter provide another definition: "public-private partnerships typically consist of voluntary, enduring arrangements that involve significant levels of resource-sharing and joint decision-making" (2006, 250). The formal agreement between the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta certainly fits in with these definitions of public-private partnership. According to Councilmember Anne

Fauver, a public-private partnership is needed for there to be continued improvements to and extensive maintenance of Piedmont Park (2007).

There are many similarities between collaborations and public-private partnerships. The mutual planning towards shared goals, alignment of resources, and sharing in the risks and benefits found in public-private partnerships are characteristics also found in collaborations. A requirement for collaborations is “voluntary, autonomous membership” and that the collaborations “have some transformational purpose or desire to increase systemic capacity by tapping shared resources” (Gazley and Brudney 2007, 390). The closeness in meaning, purpose, and function between collaboration and partnership leads some to use ‘collaborations’ as an operating term, rather than partnership (Gazley and Brudney 2007). However, because partnerships can mask differences in power and contribute to sentiments of disempowerment, the two terms should not be used interchangeably. While partnerships typically involve collaborative work between partners, collaboration implies mutual work and planning throughout the process, which may not be found depending on the nature and structure of a particular partnership.

Definitions of ‘partnership’ and ‘public-private partnership’ shed light on not just how partnerships are conceived but how they operate. The discourse used by participants and observers to discuss partnership provides insight into the processes that take place among partners (Hastings 1999). Entwistle et al. provide a definition of partnership rooted in everyday speech: “In common usage, the word implies an enduring relationship based on equality, trust, reciprocity and common values” (2007, 65). The responses provided by several interviewees corroborate this. When asked to describe what the word partnership means, there were many similar responses: “cooperative spirit... complementary or common goals” (Fauver 2007),

“mutually beneficial relationship” (Williamson 2007). This common definition of ‘partnership’ can leave people with the notion that partnership is unproblematic (Bridgman 2003).

Peter de Haven, one of the interviewees, expressed concern about the ability of partnerships to deliver on their promises based on his experiences with contracts as a technical consultant. He said, “[Master contracts are] euphemistically referred to as partnerships or alliances, which I just find to be kind of cheap, because, I mean, it’s like everybody’s sitting around in a circle holding hands singing ‘Kumbaya, we all love one another,’ whereas really the motivations are the same [to spend as little as possible from the client’s perspective]” (de Haven 2007). De Haven highlights an important point: while proponents of partnerships present a rosy picture of everyone collaborating and cooperating with one another, realization of this lofty goal is difficult in practice. ‘Partnership’ then can mask inequalities in partner status and suggest a degree of cooperation that does not actually exist.

Much of the scholarly discussion of partnerships comes from two specific contexts: urban regeneration policy in the United Kingdom and human service delivery in the United States (such as education, housing, and employment training). The expansion of partnerships into other fields and within other contexts suggests the need to study partnerships that have evolved outside of these contexts. Surveying government officials and nonprofit organization leaders in the state of Georgia, Gazley and Brudney (2007) found that governments offer monetary resources while nonprofits offer particular expertise. The City of Atlanta-Piedmont Park Conservancy partnership differs from this, at least in its active portrayal. The City of Atlanta offers limited financial resources to the Conservancy and does not assist financially with the routine maintenance of the park. Citizens concerned about the park had already formed the PPC, implying that the organization originally had no technical expertise to offer the City, though it

did have local knowledge that City employees and officials may have lacked. Today, the City of Atlanta government is likely more dependent on the financial resources provided by the Conservancy than it is on the Conservancy's specialized expertise on Piedmont Park.⁹ Unlike the PPC, the City of Atlanta cannot solicit for and use private donations for specific parks without facing allegations of favoritism. By having the PPC raise and collect the money, any ethical dilemmas regarding the equitable distribution of corporate funds throughout Atlanta's parks and recreation system are avoided. Thus, the partnership between the City and the PPC disrupts privatization in its "hollow state" conception, which is effectively the neoliberal state, where the public sector depends on private sector expertise in its outsourcing (Gazley and Brudney 2007, 399).

The empirical data gathered by Gazley and Brudney supports some of the assertions made by proponents of partnerships. Government executives report cost savings and increased access to volunteers as a result of partnerships, and they are more likely to report these than are nonprofits. Gazley and Brudney found that "partnership benefits do not appear to be reciprocal: Local governments report more benefits and gain confidence in their partners at higher levels than do nonprofit organizations" (2007, 403). In light of this, it is important to ask whether the confidence of government officials in their nonprofit partners is deserved or misplaced. Understanding partnerships also requires paying attention to the origins of the partnership and the degree of formalization found in the relationship between the partners (Miraftab 2004; Gazley 2008).

⁹ Though the City could not raise funds in the same manner, and to the same degree, as the PPC has and continues to do, the City could certainly hold town hall meetings, form advisory committees, hire consultants, and draft plans in a similar way to what the PPC has done.

The Rise in Partnerships

Neoliberalism is a contributing factor to the growth in partnerships. Neoliberalism is a specific, historical form of capitalism associated with particular political economic practices (Harvey 2005). David Harvey offers a comprehensive definition of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey 2005, 2)

Brenner and Theodore say, “The linchpin of neoliberal ideology is the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development” (2002, 350). As Peck and Tickell note, in neoliberalism “lean government, privatization, and deregulation” are privileged (2002, 394). Working with nonprofits in partnerships and other forms of collaboration to provide financial and material support allows the government to downsize itself by privatizing or outsourcing public service provision. As states devolve some of their responsibilities to the private sector, including nonprofits, these groups in turn become part of the governance structure that emerges (Pincetl 2003). Though this process appears neoliberal in nature and origin, scholars have not used that specific term to connect broader processes with localized situations. This may be because neoliberalism as a process is spatially differentiated and highly contingent (Hackworth 2007). Because of the contingencies involved, it may be difficult to isolate and explicate distinct neoliberal processes as they occur in and throughout the landscape, leading those discussing partnerships to use other economic terms and processes in their explanations.

Neoliberal governance projects include “deep cuts to state fiscal and administrative resources and functions” (McCarthy and Prudham 2004). Developing new ways of providing

public services through less reliance on government financing and support thus becomes the neoliberal project (Hackworth 2007). Budgetary cuts to key areas, like parks, strained the abilities of governments to meet citizen desires for services, resulting in maintenance backlogs, fewer maintenance staff, and an inability to make capital improvements to parks (Cranz 1982; Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992; More 1998). These local budgetary crises connect to the economic restructuring that has occurred under neoliberal capitalism, tying the fate of local commodities like public parks to regional and global scale forces (Heynen and Perkins 2005). Partnerships and other forms of collaboration with the private sector became part of the discourse as a means of providing services without requiring additional government expenditures (McCarthy and Prudham 2004). From this, partnerships could signal “a wider hybridisation process between markets and societies” or serve as a means of making up for the market’s inadequacies in providing services equitably (Larner and Craig 2005, 403). Given the desire of neoliberals to privatize the state’s services due to alleged state inefficiency, the inclusion of partnerships, often considered a derivative of privatization¹⁰, as a governance tool is unsurprising (Linder 1999).

The United States in the 1990s saw neoliberalism naturalized as “the proper mode of governance for a variety of geo-institutional contexts” (Hackworth 2007, 9), becoming increasingly linked to social conservatism. Drawing a parallel between market failures and government failures, neoliberals were able to justify rolling back government intervention (Hackworth 2007). Turning specifically to the PPC-City of Atlanta partnership, the four dominant relations of the neoliberal agenda are evident: governance, privatization, enclosure, and

¹⁰ Linder writes, “Partnerships arise as a derivative reform in areas where full privatization seems less tractable, perhaps due to technical problems attending the assignment of property rights” (Linder 1999, 37).

valuation (Heynen and Robbins 2005). Through the partnership, a new political reality in which the park exists develops (governance), a natural resource is placed in the hands of individuals and corporations (privatization), a previously common resource becomes more exclusive (enclosure), and Piedmont Park is reduced to a commodity as donations and sponsorships assign it a particular price (valuation). The dialectical destruction and creation tendencies of neoliberal capitalism have served to destroy public space and urban public services (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Heynen and Perkins 2005; Hackworth 2007).

The neoliberal intervention into government particularly affected parks since historically they have been publicly financed and maintained. As Rosen says, “The municipal finance industry has noted the public’s willingness to pay for parks” (1997, 215). The public’s willingness to pay for parks combined with a neoliberal governmental desire to devolve municipal services has meant that parks must find other sources of funding if they are to survive and provide the services citizens have come to expect. Through neoliberalization, private property rights are increasingly seen as legitimate, threatening public ownership. This is particularly problematic in the case of public resources like municipal parks. If they become privately owned, public access to the facility, the space, and the amenities provided therein is lost, perhaps irrevocably in today’s era of inner-city gentrification.

An inequitable distribution of green infrastructures, such that poorer citizens have diminished access to and lesser quality amenities, may result (Heynen and Perkins 2005). Piedmont Park’s proximity to the headquarters of prominent businesses and near historically black neighborhoods raises particular concerns regarding the change in the way in how the park’s resources and amenities are provided. As businesses place a value on parks through their donations which support privatization, the resulting enclosure of the previously public space can

be exclusionary (see Chapter 4). The neoliberalization of public services has important implications for their equitable distribution, as state institutions become less involved in the regulation of relations between citizen and capital (McCarthy and Prudham 2004). The public-private cooperation finding its way into public services and particularly into recreation and parks threatens the ability of local governments to provide quality recreation facilities and equitable access to these facilities.

Hackworth writes, “One of the foundations of neoliberal governance at the local level is public-private cooperation” (2007, 61). While this may be the case, much of the literature on partnerships does not explicitly address neoliberal government policies as a factor or influence or even mention the term ‘neoliberal(ism)’. Pincetl’s (2003) explanation of the rising role of the role of nonprofits in parks in Los Angeles cites budgetary reasons without explicitly mentioning neoliberalism. She writes, “Integrating nonprofits enables the further shifting responsibility [sic] away from the state and enables developing governance solutions to the provision of public services, such as parks” (Pincetl 2003, 995).

The literature on partnerships lags behind on larger issues of urban political economy through its failure to specifically reference neoliberalism in discussions of the historical circumstances and processes leading to the formation of a partnership. There are a few notable exceptions: Linder (1999) and Miraftab (2004). Linder notes that some of the ideologies behind privatization, which play a role in how partnerships are conceived and what they embody, draw on neoliberal ideas (1999, 38). He devotes a section to neoliberalism as an ideological referent in his article examining the multiple meanings of public-private partnerships. He explains that neoliberals “want to privatize the state because it is intrinsically inefficient” (Linder 1999, 42), connecting this to partnerships by saying, “Partnerships have been viewed as a retreat from the

hard-line advocacy of privatization” (Linder 1999, 42). Thus, partnerships can be seen as a middle ground that decreases inefficiency without requiring the complete privatization of the government. While Linder has made these connections between partnerships, privatization, and neoliberalism explicit, few scholars have continued this work. Miraftab, like Linder, explains that public-private partnerships emerge from neoliberals and neoconservatives. She explains, “Neoliberal and neoconservatives support PPPs [public-private partnerships] as a market-enabling strategy, by which the private sector’s role is supported by the resources of the government, the community, and the NGOs” (Miraftab 2004, 91). She goes on to connect economic and political decentralization with partnerships, though she does not reiterate the linkage between these decentralization processes and neoliberalism.

The failure of the partnerships literature to include neoliberalism in its discussions of the processes enabling and leading to the formation of partnerships suggests a disconnect between the literature on political economy and the literature on public-private partnerships. Even though some of the partnerships literature cites processes contributing to partnership formation that political economists would recognize as neoliberal, their failure to use the term ‘neoliberal’ separates them from other discussions of neoliberal processes and their effects. The empirical data included in this research attempts to bridge this gap by examining the partnership and explaining the neoliberal elements found therein. As McCarthy and Prudham keenly point out, “Neoliberalism ... is significantly constituted by changing social relations with biophysical nature” (2004, 275). In restructuring the social relations towards nature, the shift towards public-private co-operation links itself with the enclosure of the commons (McCarthy and Prudham 2004), a stark prospect for the future of public parks. It is this prospect that has led to some of the criticism partnerships have faced.

The Partnership Model

Partnerships are designed “to draw on systematic, structural differences in perspective” (Griffiths 2000, 389). In the partnership model of government-nonprofit relations, “The nonprofit sector and government are drawn to partnerships because they complement each other: the strengths of one are the weaknesses of the other and vice versa” (Swanstrom and Koschinsky 2000, 65). An empirical study of Georgia public managers and nonprofit organizations found that securing resources is a motivating factor for partnering with governments seeking expertise and nonprofits seeking funding” (Gazley and Brudney 2007). Though this may be prevalent in Georgia, it was not the case for the City-PPC partnership. The Piedmont Park Conservancy came to the table with the ability to raise and spend money on Piedmont Park that the City of Atlanta was unable to do. The City did not provide the PPC with any particular expertise, though some former city landscapers are now employed by the PPC to maintain the park’s landscaping. The desire to share and better leverage resources for a specific purpose is a cited benefit of partnerships that seems to entice participation, likely based on the potential to “do more with less”. The City-PPC partnership enables both parties to better leverage their resources (the City’s limited funds and the Conservancy’s fundraising prowess), though not in the way discussed by Gazley and Brudney (2007). The question then is whether partnerships are successful in doing this and what, if any, negative effects arise from partnering.

The bringing together of different perspectives is seen as an invaluable component of partnerships because it enables the transfer of resources, which is a key aspect of partnerships (Peters 1998). The need to bridge differences between partners is important for forming a collective identity to serve as a foundation, likely part of Bridgman’s (2003) motivation for using

a bridge metaphor to differentiate between partnership structures. Looking specifically at urban parks, Low, Taplin, and Scheld say, “The benefits of collaborative approaches have not been fully realized” (2005, 11), indicating that partnerships and other forms of collaboration have been unable to fully deliver on their promises, making critical examination of these claims an important part of any study of partnerships.

Proponents of partnerships say that partnerships are mutually beneficial and that joining together will produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Larner and Craig 2005). Proponents argue, “Partnerships (among other things) require actors from each sector to adopt characteristics and points of view that once defined and stabilized the identities of their counterparts” (Linder 1999, 36). In working together, individual partners can gain from the resources brought by other partners with the aim of drawing together resources that would otherwise remain disparate (Balloch and Taylor 2001; Larner and Craig 2005). Whether these specified benefits are actually derived from partnerships remains to be seen (Hodge and Greve 2007). Partnerships also offer the private sector a chance to influence or change the public sector through mutual involvement and interaction (Hastings 1996). Scholars must critically assess the arguments made on behalf of partnerships and whether the partnerships deliver their promised results. One significant factor affecting the partnership’s success is how it is configured and the risks held by the various partners. While the goal of this project is not to assess the “success” of the City-PPC partnership, a critical examination of the partnership’s ability to deliver on its promises is needed in order to better understand the arguments made by supporters and opponents of partnering and this particular partnership.

Critics of the partnership model note the uneven distribution of power in partnerships “with government policies and rules and private funders usually setting the agenda and the

goals” (Swanstrom and Koschinsky 2000, 65). The Conservancy must abide by the City’s park rules and regulations though it can add to them as it sees fit. If as Swanstrom and Koschinsky argue, “The rules of the game unbalance the partnership in favor of governments” (2000, 68), there are inherent problems in partnerships that need to be addressed since the partners are not on an equal footing. Critics of the City-PPC partnership in Piedmont Park often make the reverse argument, believing the partnership is unbalanced in favor of the PPC. In a true partnership, the balance of power would not be tilted towards either partner; instead, power would be shared equally among the partners.

Partnerships raise distinct issues of equity, access, democracy, and participation, posing threats to minority groups, many of which are similar to the general problems associated with neoliberalism. Within environmental policy partnerships, concerns about whether partnerships will shift the burden of environmental problems or lack of environmental resources to poor and minority areas often arise (Kamieniecki, Shafie, and Silvers 1999). The PPC cannot shift its or the park’s problems to certain groups though it can limit access to the park by particular groups and their ability to participate in the park’s democratic processes of meeting and planning. The financial arrangements behind partnerships present another area of concern for partnership critics. When the government partners with private organizations, businesses have the opportunity to select the specific interests and initiatives they support and neglect others, a situation that government taxation, where everyone is subject to taxes regardless of their interest in the specific initiatives to be funded by taxpayer dollars, prohibits (Katz 2004). The result can be an unequal distribution of business donations whereby some particular parks, such as Piedmont Park, receive more dollars than others, leading to stratification in the quality of parks and recreation facilities within a city. Using business donations to achieve a higher-quality park

can disrupt power relations in the partnership by shifting the balance of power to the side of the PPC, through its connections to businesses, since “money is power.”

An uneven distribution of power can allow the partnership to recreate existing relations, thereby perpetuating the disempowerment felt by some in partnerships (Atkinson 1999). If government rules and private donors are setting the partnership’s agenda, those not donating money to the PPC or serving as City of Atlanta employees or elected officials comprise the disempowered. Consequently, the promise of empowerment, or giving power to individuals, and thereby social capital, goes undelivered by partnerships that are unable to redefine the relationships between those in power and the disempowered (Atkinson 1999). Community participation alone is not enough to change the existing power relations; there must be a commitment to giving power to the community for empowerment to be successful. As Byrne writes, “Is empowerment possible? The answer would seem to be: not through partnership, because that at best attempts to reconcile irreconcilables and at worst, which means usually in practice, offers the objects of policy, at the very most, some role in influencing the implementation of strategies that have already been decided upon” (2001, 256). There are real concerns that this has become the situation in Piedmont Park (see Chapter 3). In other words, the practice of partnerships precludes public participation because the key decisions have already been made by those in power, who then turn to the public for a token stamp of approval. The partnership itself, through its promises of inclusion and participation, can mask imbalances in responsibilities and decision-making (Bridgman 2003). Nevertheless, cooperation is considered the hallmark of partnerships (Linder 1999).

A lack of financial resources, knowledge, and social capital can inhibit citizen access to policy and participation in the processes of partnership. Theoretically, everyone should have the

same access to and ability to participate in the policy process (Kamieniecki, Shafie, and Silvers 1999; Rosenau 1999). Individuals and public interest groups may find themselves unable to participate at the same level as others in the partnership financially, which can limit their access to the policy process. Evidence suggests that citizen input is reduced by partnering (Rosenau 1999). Urban policy is often determined by “the power of actors in often informal coalitions of interest,” a system that privileges those who are already privileged (Byrne 2001, 249).

Partnerships formalize a previously informal situation, furthering the privilege and power of some and the disempowerment of others. In this situation, citizen input can be reduced either because citizens recognize that their input is ignored or does not receive serious consideration or because those in power see no need to solicit or obtain citizen input. As Balloch and Taylor put it, “Partnership working has too often been dominated by the more powerful partners and has not ‘delivered’, especially for the communities and service users who are now a required part of most partnerships” (2001, 8). Consequently, partnerships are challenged with “achieving equity and a reasonable level of public participation” in the policy process (Kamieniecki, Shafie, and Silvers 1999, 120).

The Piedmont Park Conservancy attempts to achieve public participation in the partnership through the Piedmont Park Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee’s purpose is “to solicit input from a diverse number of parties on the implementation of the Piedmont Park Master Plan related specifically to capital projects and programming” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007b). However, the composition of the Advisory Committee leads to doubts about its efficacy. Though the committee’s membership is supposed to be representative of Atlanta, its members come from “appropriate City of Atlanta departments, neighborhood organizations and constituent groups” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007b). Organizations and

constituent groups select their own participants in the Advisory Committee. In all likelihood, those appointed to the Advisory Committee are those with power and/or influence in their organization. This participation structure effectively excludes those who are not already engaged in citizen participation through another group, since they are no at-large or ad-hoc positions on the Advisory Committee.

Other costs of partnerships result from the effort of two parties with different agendas, perspectives, and personnel to integrate their activities and energies towards a specific agenda. Some of the potential institutional costs that may result are “mission drift, the possible loss of institutional autonomy or public accountability, cooptation of actors, greater financial instability, greater difficulty in evaluating results, and the expenditure of considerable institutional time and resources in supporting collaborative activities” (Gazley and Brudney 2007, 392). The dynamic nature of partnerships means that partners must evolve and adapt to resolve challenges that can arise during the course of the partnership (Mayo 2001). The question those engaging in partnerships must continually ask themselves is whether the benefits of the partnership are sufficient to cover the risks undertaken.

Government in particular faces distinct challenges in forming effective public-private partnerships. The use of public-private partnerships may lead to governments experiencing “a loss of control, threats to authority, or greater difficulty in holding private organizations accountable to public standards” (Gazley and Brudney 2007, 390). Several interviewees raised concerns about this, suggesting that the partnership’s effectiveness has led to less government involvement in the Conservancy’s actions. If the government feels its authority is threatened, it may decide to terminate the partnership, even if the partnership’s key outcomes are being achieved. The difficulty in holding private organizations accountable is particularly problematic

when it comes to private organizations with caretaker responsibility for public resources. Without specific guidelines in place, the private organization can make decisions without consulting the public. The result can be the takeover of a resource by a private organization, effectively fulfilling partnership's description as a tool of government privatization.

Partnerships and Parks

The rise in partnerships occurs as a reform where reassigning property rights is difficult (Linder 1999). In spaces like parks where ownership does not readily change hands, complete privatization can be difficult, leading to partnerships where the government retains some control over its property without having the fiduciary responsibilities attendant with that ownership. The nonprofit sector has played an important role in funding parks and open space through its leadership in building public-private coalitions (Pincetl 2003). In Georgia, government-nonprofit collaboration in parks and recreation was reported in 40.2% of Georgia cities and 50% of the state's counties (Gazley 2008), indicating the extent to which these collaborations have become part of Georgia's political landscape at the local level. One of the key ways in which partnership with nonprofits can benefit governments is "through the nonprofit mobilization of resources that governments themselves are not able to mobilize" (Pincetl 2003, 994). Nonprofits involved in parks are able to raise funds for specific purposes through capital campaigns and donation solicitation, mobilize volunteers, and receive donations of materials for construction or beautification, unlike government agencies. As a result, parks have welcomed public-private partnerships because they have brought increased fundraising, public support, and new ideas to public parks (Rosen 1997).

The most successful public-private partnerships in park management involve large parks with a regional attraction (Dusenbury 2007). While the Central Park Conservancy's success in raising money for renovations and improvements is laudable, urban park scholars have noted that other New York City parks, such as Prospect Park in Brooklyn which shares many of the same features of Central Park, have trouble raising even one-tenth of the money raised annually by the Central Park Conservancy (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005). The geography of investment in public parks favors the 'flagship' parks, with neighborhood parks receiving less private investment both financially and in ensuring their future (Katz 2004).

The formation of partnerships for specific parks allows for improved maintenance and security in those parks while other parks see their needs go unmet. In theory, partnerships should permit the parks department to shift its financial resources to parks without partnerships or friends of the park groups. One noted success of the Central Park Conservancy is that "the effort [the partnership] has freed the city parks department to devote funds and staff time to smaller neighborhood parks" (Rosen 1997, 216). Given the financial resources necessary for a parks partnership, parks in impoverished areas are less likely to see the influx of funds necessary to ensure those parks are safe, attractive, and well used. The result is an inequitable distribution of usable park space, with the higher quality, better maintained, safer parks concentrated in wealthier or more politically connected areas of the city. Thus the improvement of flagship parks comes "at the expense of less visible and less prestigious neighborhoods parks and playgrounds" (Katz 2004, 173). In these areas of disinvestment, citizens may lack the social capital needed to bring resources, including the nonprofit sector, to their community (Rosenau 1999). The result is an uneven geography where significant nonprofit and/or private sector investment in parks

continues to flow to the parks already receiving it while other smaller or less renowned parks receive little investment in their basic infrastructure.

For Katz, the increasing prominence of “private self-serving initiatives sponsored by organizations and ‘partnerships’ such as the Central Park Conservancy” is leading to a complete restructuring of what public life means (Katz 2006, 106). The trouble with private funding is that private initiatives often serve the interests and desires of the wealthy (Katz 2006). When governments rely on private sources to fund resources such as playgrounds, parks, and museums that previously relied on public funding, they place these resources in a precarious position in which their very survival depends on an organization or group of citizens with the financial means to guarantee that survival. Piedmont Park finds itself in such a position today, relying heavily on the funds raised by the Piedmont Park Conservancy to finance its maintenance and everyday operations. Approximately 85% of the total operating budget for Piedmont Park comes directly from the PPC. This reliance on private funding can make the park and the PPC, which is responsible for the park’s day-to-day operations, beholden to the interests, desires, and needs of the wealthy. This can further reduce the social and cultural diversity present in the park and the park’s ability to cater to a socially and culturally diverse population.

The pitfalls of partnerships extend beyond just the changes that occur in the space where the partnership operates. Because partnerships attract attention to and garner support for specific public spaces, their presence can lead to further government disinvestment in public space. Those who tout the success of partnerships do not consider that by promoting their example as a means of dealing with shortfalls in government funding, they are promoting inequality in the quality of and access to public parks for citizens (Katz 2004). Thus, the overwhelming success of the Piedmont Park Conservancy in transforming Piedmont Park into a safe, attractive public park

may detract from the very real needs of other parks. In the face of difficulties encountered trying to form an effective park conservancy or friends-of-the-park group, the stunning success of groups like the PPC can make it seem easy and erode government support for parks by offering the potential of significant private investment. Local governments in and around Atlanta have taken notice. Mayor Shirley Franklin remains committed to parks and open space and, faced with a budget crunch in the 2008 fiscal year, allowed the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs to escape the budgetary process without cuts to its budget (Dusenbury 2007).

The Memorandum of Understanding

A formal arrangement between the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta began in 1992 when the partnership was initiated with the development and passage of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This legal document establishes the responsibilities of the City, the responsibilities of the Conservancy, and spells out actions the Conservancy may and may not take. It formalizes the relationship between the partners in a contractual way. Legally, the MOU allows the Conservancy to operate, maintain, and restore Piedmont Park through raised funds (Rashied 2007). Since the passage of the original document, the MOU has been modified twice, once in 1995 and again in 2006 (Rashied 2007).¹¹ The MOU's purpose is "to lay the foundation for a cooperative working relationship between the Parties [the City of Atlanta and the PPC], and to establish the role of each Party in that relationship, as the Parties continue to work together to further their common goal of preserving, restoring, developing, enhancing, rehabilitating, and maintaining the Park" (MOU 2006, 1). In establishing the purpose of the

¹¹ The completion of the Piedmont Park Master Plan, the implementation of which is part of the partnership, in 1995 necessitated the passage of a new Memorandum of Understanding that included specific provisions related to the Master Plan. Every ten years, a new MOU must be passed, leading to the passage of the current MOU in May 2006.

partnership in this way, the MOU seems to be a good representation of what Hastings (1996) describes as resource synergy. The two parties combine and coordinate their resources in the same sector, resulting in financial benefits that presumably are equally shared.¹²

While the terms of the MOU may seem extremely specific, to the PPC the document is less specific than they would like. Mark Rusche, a lawyer and Vice Chair of Financial Development for the Conservancy, said in an interview that he would like to see many additions to the MOU but that the city is unwilling to undertake this task. Specifically, he would like the MOU to be more explicit about what the PPC is and is not permitted to do. The city attorney's office drafts and negotiates MOUs on behalf of numerous city partnerships and does not have the staffing or resources to include detailed information in every single MOU, according to Rusche (2007).

In describing its purpose, the MOU states that in pursuing the goals of the partnership set forth therein, "the Parties will remain sensitive to the impact of work and activities in the Park upon residents of the surrounding neighborhoods and will strive to accomplish these goals in a manner that minimizes disruption to the neighbors" (MOU 2006, 1). The MOU specifies the responsibilities of each party in the partnership and spells out how specific functions in Piedmont Park will be carried out. Asked if the MOU is effective, Councilmember Fauver said, "[Yes,] it defines what the Conservancy is—what the city is responsible for, what the limits of the Conservancy's use of the park is" (2007). Though Peters (1998) labels contracts as optional and not a defining characteristic of public-private partnerships, the emphasis placed on the MOU by

¹² Financially, the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta are not equal stakeholders in Piedmont Park. The Conservancy raises and spends the bulk of the funds used to support Piedmont Park annually. The greatest financial benefits are then reaped by the City, which reduces its expenditure of money on Piedmont Park without diminishing the ability of citizens to have the services and amenities they desire.

Fauver, McCown, Mitchell, and Rusche suggests that within the context of this particular partnership, the Memorandum of Understanding has an important role.

Interviewees provided valuable insight for understanding how the partners perceive their partnership and relationship with one another. Rusche says there is “always a bit of tension in the partnership” but they still “ought to be encouraged” (Rusche 2007). Asked about the relationship among the partners, Fauver said, “I think they have a *very good* working relationship. Our [the City of Atlanta’s] commissioner of parks and recreation, Diane Harnell-Cohen, is superb at both communicating and building relationships and she thinks very highly of the Conservancy and vice versa” (Fauver 2007). In spite of the tensions that partners often face in partnerships, the City and the PPC both seem to have recognized that these tensions are inherent and developed means for handling them to create and maintain a solid working relationship.

Cary Aiken, a member of the Friends of Piedmont Park, has an entirely different perspective from his position as an outsider to the partnership. He opposes many of the projects proposed by the Conservancy, favoring instead a return to the Olmsted Brothers plan and Olmstedian ideas of historic preservation in the park. When asked about the partnership, he said, “The city has sort of abdicated their responsibility to preserve the park in a way that I think would be meaningful, that they would be a little more engaged in that process rather than completely abdicating it to the Piedmont Park Conservancy” (Aiken 2007). He continues, “It’s gone a long way from partnership to where the Conservancy pretty much gets *carte blanche* to do whatever they want and it’s not much oversight, I don’t think. I don’t—It’s just not apparent” (Aiken 2007). He uses powerful words like “abdicate” and “*carte blanche*” to emphasize his belief that the partnership is not really a partnership in that the two parties engaged are not equal partners. His comments convey the fears raised by opponents to partnerships. In his mind, the

partnership process has become completely one-sided, with the PPC having all of the power and control. This resonates with Mayo who says, “Partners do not typically come from positions of equal power. Power relationships can take varying forms at different levels and these relationships can become more rather than less unequal over time” (2001, 44).

Aiken’s statement that the City is abdicating its responsibility and giving *carte blanche* to the PPC is an explicit statement about the power relations he sees at work in the partnership. To apply Bridgman’s (2003) terminology, the two partners are not meeting on the bridge; instead, the City is going all the way to the Conservancy, at least as Aiken sees things. If the PPC is meeting the City, rather than the two partners meeting in the middle, using the word ‘partnership’ disguises inequality. This inequality is one of the problems cited by critics of partnerships. Gazley reports that in only a few government-nonprofit partnerships can the partnerships be described as being between equals (2008). Considered in tandem with neoliberalism, the imbalance in the partnership suggests that the government has effectively privatized the provision of a particular public service—a safe, well-maintained, enjoyable Piedmont Park. Equality in the partnership would serve to remedy the neoliberal problem somewhat by ensuring that the government is not completely privatizing a public space while increasing the efficiency of the services provided to the public. Thus using the term ‘partnership’ masks this privatization, which can make it more difficult to discuss and combat by those opposed to the partnership in concept or in its material manifestation.

In their partnership, both the City and the PPC share responsibility for the outcomes of their and one another’s activities in the park, though the face of one partner may be more public than the other. Peters explains that “the autonomy and negotiated decisions of partnerships produce mutual shared responsibility which ... can make accountability for these decisions

difficult to ascertain for the average citizen or even for oversight organizations” (1998, 13).

Asked about the accountability in place, Fauver said, “There clearly is from the city as to what the Conservancy is supposed to do. It’s a little harder on the Conservancy side because they’re, they have to do more negotiating rather than just decision-making” (2007). The City of Atlanta, specifically Atlanta City Council and the DPRCA, have expectations of what the PPC will do and how it will act that stem from the MOU. Nevertheless, there seems to be a contradiction in the perception of oversight of the Conservancy, perhaps because the shared responsibility makes accountability more difficult as Peters (1998) says. As mentioned earlier, Aiken does not think the City does its job in terms of overseeing the PPC’s actions, and he is not alone in thinking this. To allay citizen fears that the PPC is taking over Piedmont Park, the City should not only ensure that the Conservancy fulfills its side of the agreement but also fulfill its own responsibility to provide oversight of the PPC and hold the PPC accountable. In doing so, the City would be able to make it clear both to its partner and to its citizens that it has not abandoned Piedmont Park and is not outsourcing or otherwise devolving its overall responsibility to the park and its users even though the park is operated by a private entity.

Through a critical reading of the MOU, an understanding of how the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta view their partnership and relationship to one another emerges. The MOU says, “The City and the PPC have established a cooperative, public-private partnership with each other so that the City can assist the PPC with its mission. The City wishes to continue this public-private partnership” (MOU 2006, 1). These two sentences are incredibly revealing. First, they define the partnership as one where the City wishes to and does receive assistance from the nonprofit sector, specifically the Piedmont Park Conservancy, in developing and maintaining Piedmont Park. Second, from the statement it is unclear whether the City has its

own interest in helping the PPC achieve its mission. The mission of the City's Office of Parks is "to improve, preserve, protect and maintain the City's parks and public green spaces as a safe and enjoyable enhancement to the quality of life for all residents and visitors to the City of Atlanta" (City of Atlanta 2008a), which is actually quite similar to the PPC's mission for and vision of Piedmont Park. While the City's mission cannot be as specific as the Conservancy's, it would be a mischaracterization to suggest that the City initiated the partnership to support the Conservancy in its mission. Historical evidence suggests that the PPC approached the City about the idea of a partnership as part of the organization's desire to raise funds for the park that could be spent in a meaningful way to make a difference in the park's maintenance and appearance. Through the partnership, the City benefits from the resources and services provided by the Conservancy, as the PPC assists the City by carrying out projects the City may lack the finances or resources to do on its own. Upon the completion of construction or installation of projects in Piedmont Park, these projects become City of Atlanta property (MOU 2006)¹³, further suggesting that the PPC helps the City's Office of Parks carry out its mission.

The second section of the MOU addresses the roles of the Conservancy and the City in their working relationship with one another. Per the MOU, the City maintains "its authority to make all final decisions regarding the Park, but shall exercise this authority in the spirit of good faith cooperation with the PPC" (MOU 2006, 1). The phrase 'good faith cooperation' appears several times in the MOU in describing how the two parties will act towards one another. The phrase suggests that the City relinquishes some of its absolute decision-making authority in order to have a functional working relationship with the Conservancy. Though DPRCA, the mayor of

¹³ The relevant passage reads: "Title to all of the PPC's improvements of such a nature as cannot be removed without substantial damage to the Park, or some portion thereof, shall vest in the City upon completion of construction or installation" (MOU 2006, 5).

Atlanta, and Atlanta City Council make final decisions, to refrain from violating the conditions set forth in this document, cooperation between the City and Conservancy to reach a decision is necessary. In maintaining this authority, the City is able to check the Conservancy's power and overrule the decisions it makes, though this may not be in the spirit of good faith cooperation.

The financial details outlined in the MOU differ somewhat from the presentation of the financial situation given by the Conservancy on their website. The Conservancy claims to handle "more than 90 percent of the Park's daily maintenance care and security" ("About the Conservancy" 2007). According to the MOU, "The PPC shall have primary responsibility for raising additional funds for the Park, and will oversee the use of funds it raises, making certain that the funds are utilized consistent with the Master Plan and this MOU. The PPC may solicit and receive funds from individuals and corporate sponsors" (MOU 2006, 3). Use of the word 'additional' is crucial because it suggests that some of the funds for Piedmont Park come from the City's accounts. The Conservancy never specifies this on its website, though City Council resolutions have authorized additional funding for park renovations in the past.

Included in its responsibilities is that the Conservancy must "actively pursue and engage in fundraising to support initiatives for enhancing the Park" (MOU 2006, 6). The MOU does not specify the amounts but concretizes the expectation that the Conservancy will raise money to pay for improvements and upgrades to the park that otherwise would not be possible using solely City of Atlanta funds. The City must pay for utilities in the park, maintain the park's infrastructure, provide the park with basic police services, and protect the Conservancy's investments in the park, all of which specified in the MOU. Additionally, the City is responsible for using "all commercially reasonable efforts to ensure that all funds committed by the City to the Park are used effectively, efficiently, and as intended" (MOU 2006, 6). The City reimburses

the Conservancy \$75,000 to \$110,000 for providing additional security services to the Park, based on the available budget (MOU 2006). Based on the MOU, it is readily apparent that the City has not abandoned Piedmont Park in a financial sense since the City still provides the money for some of the services needed for the park to operate effectively. This twists the neoliberal concept of outsourcing service provision because while the PPC is now providing the services in Piedmont Park, the City of Atlanta is still paying for some of those services. The partnership does not adhere to the tenets of neoliberalism in this regard, which may explain why much of the literature on partnerships does not actively engage with neoliberalism.

The MOU spells out the process that the City and the Conservancy must follow when planning for the park's future, especially in regards to new designs and the development and following of a Master Plan for Piedmont Park. The Conservancy is responsible for creating "an environmentally friendly Park design that will include, but is not limited to, green spaces, lighting, native plant landscaping, Clara Meer [the lake in the park], paths and water fountain(s), consistent with the Master Plan" (MOU 2006, 6). Notably, the MOU does not specify how the PPC should solicit input for and design the park, other than suggesting that it be consistent with the Master Plan. The planning process is a critical point at which community participation and, through participation, empowerment can be part of Piedmont Park and the PPC. In not specifying that citizens need to be consulted and included in the planning process, the City, through the MOU, misses an excellent opportunity to ensure the community maintains an active role in shaping Piedmont Park.

The Piedmont Park Master Plan governs general park operations. If the PPC wishes to install a new master plan, they:

must comply with the City's review and approval process for park master plans, said process to be established by the Commissioner. The City's approval and review process

shall include, but not be limited to, a presentation by the PPC to the local Neighborhood Planning Unit for its review and comment, submission to and consideration by other City Neighborhood Planning Units if applicable, the review and comment by the Urban Design Commission, and approval by the Atlanta City Council and Mayor. (MOU 2006, 2)

While this process may seem extensive and inclusive of citizens, it may not be sufficient to ensure citizen participation in the park's planning process. In the case of the parking deck dispute, citizens felt excluded from the process because the city council and the mayor ignored their opposition to the deck at the NPU level.

The public-private partnership has clear effects on the ability of the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy to follow through on their missions and achieve their goals. The partnership allows the Conservancy to leverage City resources in the course of fulfilling its mission. The influx of money, volunteers, and other resources brought by the Conservancy to the partnership provides the City with access to resources it might not otherwise be able to access and utilize. With the addition of these resources to Piedmont Park, the City can serve its citizens in two ways: first, by providing them with an improved park without having to raise taxes, approve a bond, or charge access or user fees; and secondly, by diverting funds that were previously allocated to Piedmont Park to other parks throughout the city parks system that are in need of improvement.¹⁴

Without the MOU in place to govern the relationship, the two parties might not see the benefits derived from partnering with one another. Like other partnerships with formal agreements, the City-PPC partnership has a designated lead and some shared decision making (Gazley 2008). Through the partnership, the Conservancy is guaranteed the ability to conduct

¹⁴ It is unclear to what degree this has been the case within the Atlanta parks system. In 2007, the budget for the Office of Parks did not decline, even as the City faces financial constraints. Additionally, Atlanta's ongoing efforts to improve the amount and quality of its greenspace were noted by several interviewees. This suggests that the parks money that might otherwise have been spent on Piedmont Park has been diverted to other parks owned by the City.

certain activities and provide various services to the park, emblematic of the City outsourcing and privatizing its services to a private group. The PPC's relative independence from the city of Atlanta's financial accounts enables them to provide donors with assurances about when, where, and how their donations will be used and furnish their donors with detailed outcomes after projects are completed. The City has great reason to enter into and continue its partnership with the Conservancy because it allows the city to provide a world-class regional park without spending the money needed to maintain such a large space.

Classifying the City-Conservancy Partnership

Countless frameworks, typologies, and categorizations exist for classifying, examining, and understanding partnerships. Hierarchical typologies of partnerships focus on the level and extent of interaction between employees of the partner organizations. Discussion of partnerships in this way is common, though it ignores the context in which partnerships form and operate. In placing partnership types in a hierarchy, there is an assumption that certain forms of partnership are preferable to others. An alternative is to divide partnerships based on their origin, the resources exchanged, the partnership's form, and the depth of employee interaction (Smith and Wohlstetter 2006), which enables a more nuanced understanding of a specific partnership.

Walker's framework for examining parks partnerships builds on legal concepts to look at the partnership as a form of business association. He includes four parameters: structure, control, assets and liabilities, and risks (Walker 1999). Using his framework, in the partnership between the City and the Conservancy, both parties are general partners involved in business operations and unable to come and go as partnership activities evolve. The codification of their relationship in the Memorandum of Understanding forms a legally binding contract to which the parties are

obligated to adhere. Each partner brings assets and liabilities to the partnership. The Conservancy brings resources, organizational strength, and an interested constituency of park users and businesses to Piedmont Park. However, because it is a nonprofit organization dependent on private donations, it could experience a reduction in donations that would leave it unable to deliver the services it has committed to delivering, which is a significant liability.

Two of the city's primary assets, its public image and constituencies, can also be its greatest liabilities. Having allowed park maintenance to decline in the past, the Office of Parks must prove to its constituents that it is capable of getting the job done today in order to have a positive public image. Because of the City's reliance on the Conservancy for daily park operations, the public images of these two partners are closely intertwined. Several interviewees expressed uncertainty about who is responsible for taking care of the park and, though they like the way the park is today, were unsure of who is responsible for the park's present condition. The Conservancy has resources at risk in the partnership since it does not necessarily own any of the improvements it makes to the park. Consequently, if the City were to terminate the partnership, the Conservancy would lose the financial and material resources it has put into Piedmont Park.

Bridgman uses a bridge metaphor to think about public-private partnerships because "partnerships often require the bridging of differences for achieving a common goal" (2003, 213). To form a successful partnership, the Piedmont Park Conservancy and the City of Atlanta have to bridge any differences they may have about how to maintain the park, how much money is required, how to define accountability, and how to govern their relationship. The common goal of the City and the PPC is clear. While they may have had differences initially, many of these were likely related to financing and the City's inability to dedicate greater financial resources to

the park or the City's inability to guarantee the PPC a long-term future in the park. The limit of the bridge metaphor is that it fails to include the "limited" partners—as Walker puts it—or those who are not directly involved in the partnership and lack control but are affected by the partnership's actions. Some examples of limited partners in Piedmont Park include the nearby neighborhood associations (Ansley Park Civic Association, Morningside-Lenox Park Civic Association, Midtown Neighbors Association, Piedmont Heights Neighborhood Association, and Virginia Highlands Civic Association), the Friends of Piedmont Park, parents groups, and the neighborhood planning units. These groups do not have much control over what happens operationally in Piedmont Park, though the actions taken affect them, resulting in the potential for these groups to be assets to the partnership and to experience risk over which they have little control. They are excluded from the primary partnership table because the MOU codifies the partnership as existing solely between the City and the PPC.

A key point in public-private partnerships involving the government is that the partners are both principals, rather than there being a principal-agent relationship. As principals, all participants in the partnership are expected to contribute resources to the partnership and share responsibility for the partnership's outcomes (Gazley and Brudney 2007). The partnership structure suggests that the City and the PPC are each principals though, as stated earlier, it is difficult to see how the City and the PPC share responsibility for the partnership's outcomes. Though the PPC downplays the resources brought by the City to the partnership, by framing both parties as principals, the MOU takes into consideration the City's resources and contributions to the partnership.

On its website, the Piedmont Park Conservancy claims to follow "a community-inclusive process for gathering input on improvements" via the Piedmont Park Advisory Committee which

is formed to provide input on major initiatives in the park (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007a). The statement suggests the Conservancy values community participation and may be aware of the obstacles to participation that public-private partnerships can present. The Advisory Committee, in theory, is an excellent means through which to mediate this potential problem. Whether the Advisory Committee delivers on this is another matter. Councilmember Fauver admitted to never attending Advisory Committee meetings. She believes that the Advisory Committee's discussions are conveyed to the Piedmont Park Board of Directors and the Atlanta City Council, negating the need for her involvement at that (community) level (Fauver 2007). Her decision raises important questions about the Advisory Committee's efficacy. Since the Advisory Committee is the only level on which citizens have direct involvement—admittedly involvement mediated by various groups who may be in a better position to leverage social capital and achieve results (Kamieniecki, Shafie, and Silvers 1999)—the absence of officials on that level could limit the citizen opinions heard by those in power in the Conservancy and in the partnership.

While the extant scholarship on public-private partnerships lacks sufficient empirical data to answer the questions as to whether and how partnerships deliver on the benefits they promise, this research represents an effort to add to scholarship through its empirical contributions. By examining and analyzing how the partnership between the PPC and the City functions and how people feel about the partnership, some empirical evidence about the partnership's effectiveness is gained. The partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy adds important empirical data that questions the efficacy of such arrangements, existing and changing power relations, the distribution of resources, inclusion of the community, and the ability of the

partnership to provide the services it purports to deliver. Taking all of these into consideration, one must ask: Is pursuing a public-private partnership an adequate solution for municipalities seeking to finance, maintain, preserve, and expand local parks and recreation areas? Public-private partnerships are complex and what may be best or ideal for some may not be for others. While the advantages of the partnership from the perspective of the City and the Conservancy are clear, what remains to be discussed are all of the concerns raised by critics of partnerships. Access, citizen participation, and the public nature of the park are all at risk in the current City-PPC partnership. The subsequent chapters address this through careful examination of two specific instances where park users have felt challenged by their presence in the park. These incidents show that the critiques of partnerships are valid, suggesting that the partnership's benefits may not outweigh its accompanying disadvantages.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONSERVANCY'S PARK

The partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy has changed the landscape of Piedmont Park dramatically. The park's users have been vocal; expressing their pleasure and displeasure with the changes the Piedmont Park Conservancy has made and is making to their beloved Piedmont Park. The PPC's mission is "to enhance and preserve Piedmont Park as a vital urban green space and as a cultural and recreational resource that enhances the quality of life for all Atlantans" (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007a). Since parks are ostensibly places for everyone and where everyone should feel welcome, the Conservancy's stewardship of the park should be on behalf of everyone, rather than a select few. The question then is whether the park delivers on this promise and why it might not. The renovations done by the Piedmont Park Conservancy also raise important issues regarding how the changes affect the park, who feels comfortable using the park, and the definition of a "better" Piedmont Park. As the Conservancy carries out its mission of maintaining and improving the park for everyone in Atlanta, one must turn a critical eye towards how the PPC goes about delivering on its mission and if it is successful at doing so.



Figure 2. Homeless person sleeping in Piedmont Park.

Piedmont Park's Homeless

Like many urban parks, Piedmont Park has attracted a number of homeless persons for numerous years. Passersby in Piedmont Park cannot help but notice the park's homeless, who are mostly African-American males. On fair weather days, they can be found throughout the park, sitting on the benches, relaxing on the grass, or even sleeping overnight in the park. Their presence makes some uncomfortable, leading some visitors to feel unwelcome in the park, particularly after dark. While interviewees expressed the sentiment that the homeless should not be forcefully removed from the park, it remains unclear how, if at all, the presence of homeless affects park users and their behavior. The Urban Camping Ordinance passed by Atlanta City Council in December 1996 threatened fines and/or jail time to those found residing or storing their personal belongings in a public park (Hopkins and Nackerud 1999). Many in Atlanta viewed this ordinance positively: "The ordinance has been applauded by business interests, certain residents, and city officials as a needed measure toward ensuring public safety on downtown streets" (Hopkins and Nackerud 1999, 270). In the first twelve months following the passage of the ordinance, 58% of those arrested for infractions had committed them in parks.

Hopkins and Nackerud suggest these arrests “occur primarily in parks and during hours and seasons when pedestrian traffic is high [which] suggests that arrests may be more closely associated with concern for downtown appearances than for the public safety of homeless persons or others” (1999, 288). While the ordinance criminalizes sleeping overnight in the park, my observations showed that there are still persons who sleep in the park with their belongings.

Debbie McCown and George Dusenbury IV told the same story about how other park managers look to and praise Piedmont Park because the homeless there do not disturb park users. Their recounting made it sound as though the homeless presence is a nonissue in Piedmont Park because the homeless do not bother the park users through their physical presence or their actions, i.e. they are not begging for money or food or relieving themselves in plain sight (Dusenbury 2007; McCown 2007). Correspondingly, several interviewees indicated there are few direct confrontations between homeless persons and park users in Piedmont Park.

An anonymous commenter on a weblog suggests that there are confrontations between the homeless and so-called neighborhood vigilantes. The commenter was writing to advocate for a campaign for a better Midtown to combat the perceived racism, bigotry, and injustice of certain groups, including the Midtown Neighbor’s Association, the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance, the Midtown Business Alliance, and the Piedmont Park Conservancy. The commenter posted a list of demands, the seventh of which states, “An end to neighborhood vigilantes harassing homeless folks in Piedmont Park, Central Park, and other places where EVERYBODY has a right to be! WE WANT ALL PEOPLE WELCOME IN GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS!” (Anonymous 2007). The posting indicates that there have been negative interactions between homeless persons and the neighborhood groups looking out for their neighborhoods and

interests. The controversy with the homeless extends beyond and through Piedmont Park, affecting the interactions in the area.

The City of Atlanta's park rules state that Piedmont Park, like other city parks, is closed from 11:00pm to 6:00am daily (City of Atlanta 2008b). Consequently, no one is allowed to sleep in the park overnight and, according to McCown, the homeless in Piedmont Park abide by this. My observations of Piedmont Park in the mid-morning contradict this as I observed several persons asleep on the grass near Piedmont Avenue. They had blankets to cover themselves and personal possessions with them, suggesting that they use the park as a place to sleep at night. Park rules prohibit tents or canopies without the approval of the Commissioner of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs (City of Atlanta 2008b), meaning that anyone that sleeps in the park, whether during the day or at night, must do so without erecting any protection from the elements. I hypothesize that those sleeping overnight in the park do not erect tents because they do not want to attract attention to their presence, which could result in the park rules prohibiting overnight use being enforced.

Alida Silverman, a former National Association of Olmsted Parks board member, said she cannot imagine that anyone would feel unwelcome in the park. She said the homeless are all over the park and are part of an urban problem that should not be taken care of by the police, indicating that Atlanta's lack of social services is a factor contributing to the presence of homeless persons in Piedmont Park (Silverman 2007). Christina Hruska, a park user, sees Piedmont Park as a place where everybody in Atlanta is welcome but said the homeless make some unspecified group of people feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. She proposed that people consider the perspective of the homeless rather than having a negative visceral reaction to their presence (Hruska 2007). A third interviewee, Rob Brawner, feels that the homeless should be

able to use the park like everyone else (Brawner 2007). As residents and citizens of Atlanta, the homeless are as entitled to use the park, according to the posted rules, as any other group of park visitors is. Nevertheless, their presence, for reasons that remain unclear, seems to evoke a negative reaction that others, including McCown, the president of the Conservancy, feel the need to explain and act upon.

There are no physical barriers preventing the homeless—or anyone else—from accessing Piedmont Park. During the park's operating hours, their presence is only an issue insofar as they may be asking passersby for money or making lewd or harassing comments to other park users. Treating the homeless like any other group of park users seems to be a very logical choice. However, mentioning the term 'homeless' can evoke negative reactions from some park users, politicians, and the urban elite. While the Conservancy cannot specifically exclude them from the park or prevent their entrance, there seemed to be some unspoken resistance to their presence in the park. Visitors to the park were observed avoiding eye contact with or looking in the direction of the homeless sitting on benches in the park. Mothers seemed to avoid walking with their children near the homeless, sometimes going out of their way to do so. To some people, the homeless persons may detract from the park's "pristine" vistas and the themes of relaxation and recreation associated with parks.

The homeless in Piedmont Park can be seen as emblematic of the park's "image problem". The publicity department at the Piedmont Park Conservancy has done a great deal to ensure that images of Piedmont Park's beautiful vistas, scenic meadows, and renovated facilities are in the public eye. Image is an important aspect of the recreation experience, with evidence suggesting that a person's use of a place relates directly to their image of that place (Hayward and Weitzer 1984). Images of a homeless person sleeping in the park with their personal

belongings nearby contradict the images of Piedmont Park in public circulation. While the landscape and facilities matter, the park's clientele can be a more significant factor affecting people's decision to use a particular park (Hayward and Weitzer 1984). The veracity of these negative perceptions is less important than the perceptions themselves, which some officials use to advocate for changes to and in the park (Mitchell 1995). If people are choosing not to use Piedmont Park because of the homeless, who are part of the park's clientele, park managers will likely choose to take some action on the issue, if for no other reason than to ensure that their park does not experience a decline in users. As a result, the issue of "managing the homeless" became one of several the Friends of Piedmont Park and, later, the Piedmont Park Conservancy tackled to be able to label Piedmont Park a world-class park that is open, accessible, and safe.

Remaking Piedmont Park

The Piedmont Park Conservancy commissioned seven marketing research studies from 1998 to 2004 to collect data on the park's users. According to the summary results of the 2004 survey, the majority of Piedmont Park's users are single, come to the park once a week or more frequently, and do not have children or own a house or condominium. Most of the park's users (73%) are between the ages of 25 and 44 and are male (60%). Since 1998, the percentage of park users visiting the park alone has decreased from 44% to 27% in the 2004 survey. The park's users rate the park highly: 8 in 10 rate it as excellent or very good overall with only 1% rating the park as fair or poor. The survey asked respondents about changes to the park. Over three-quarters have "noticed changes in the park in the past few years" and 96% of those noticing changes had a positive opinion of them (Bernhardt 2005). The data from this survey raise important questions about the changes in the park resulting from the City-PPC partnership and the work of the PPC.

Interviewees were asked several questions about the park and the park's role in Atlanta's culture. They were asked, "Do you think the park is a place where everyone is welcome?" Most responded with some variation on the idea that Piedmont Park is a place where everyone is welcome. Peter de Haven said, "I can't really think of any demographic that would feel unwelcome there unless you're sponsoring like nude beach week or something like that" (de Haven 2007). Aiken believes, "It's a wonderfully diverse park in terms of the people that come there" (Aiken 2007). Councilmember Mitchell described Piedmont Park as a great place to hang out and said it lacks physical barriers that might exclude people from the park (Mitchell 2007). Hruska offered a slightly different perspective, answering the question with "Yes and no." She pointed out that some may feel unwelcome in the park after dark, suggesting that the homeless presence in the park contributes to this sentiment in some (Hruska 2007).

The interviewees clearly conveyed the idea that Piedmont Park is an Atlanta landmark where everyone does—or at least should—feel welcome. Given that interracial tensions can arise over, and in, park space, it is important to consider that only two of the interviewees appeared to belong to racial minorities. This is important since interracial tensions in parks can "result in lowered use, temporal and spatial displacement of a group, and racial and ethnic segregation of users within a park" (Gobster 1998, 48). Without having spoken to more racial minorities in Piedmont Park, it is difficult to assess whether or not these are ongoing issues in Piedmont Park.¹⁵ More significantly, these interracial tensions can "serve to produce physical harm as well as feelings of fear and discomfort" (Gobster 1998, 48). These tensions would affect the concept of the park as a space and place where everyone is welcome and the park's role as a cultural gathering place where persons of all racial and ethnic backgrounds can interact freely and safely.

¹⁵ The next chapter addresses interracial issues in Piedmont Park in greater detail.

Olmsted viewed his parks as places where the immigrants arriving in the nineteenth century could mix, mingle, and thereby develop into a more elevated society (Moday 2004).

The common sentiment expressed by interviewees that Piedmont Park is a place where everyone feels welcome may be more indicative of the general sentiments associated with parks than it is of Piedmont Park and the PPC's management of the park. The nineteenth century urban parks created by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux were mainly "conceived as escapes into healthy, restorative, romantic, idyllic, pastoral settings" (Tate 2001, 194). These ideas about urban parks persist, shaping the visions of parks that people hold today. Fitting with this image is one of a park where everyone interacts and recreates together, without barriers based on race, class, or other issues, though this potential often goes unfulfilled in parks. To fulfill this promise, Piedmont Park should be free of barriers and offer opportunities for cross-cultural interaction.

Though Councilmember Mitchell said the park lacks physical barriers, there are distinct physical barriers in Piedmont Park, as Brawner pointed out. Brawner cited physical barriers to the park and the lack of road access as factors that may exclude people from the park (Brawner 2007). Without being connected to a major road network or being in close proximity to a MARTA rail station, the park's location can make access difficult for both the able-bodied and the disabled. Many areas of the park are not easily accessible to the disabled (Mitchell 2007), in part due to the Olmsted-designed infrastructure which includes stone staircases and sloping hills and fields. As aesthetically pleasing as these staircases may be, they form obstacles to the disabled seeking to move across and fully enjoy Piedmont Park. The paved concrete pathways around Piedmont Park may make it easier for the physically disabled to navigate Piedmont Park, though the lack of easy access to the park may serve as an additional hindrance. Disabled

persons likely find their access to the park hindered or their park experience diminished by these walkways and slopes that are considered part of Piedmont Park's scenic attraction and beauty.

Councilmember Fauver said, "A lot of people say it's the rich white man's park, which is not true at all. If you're there on a weekend, it is very diverse, maybe even 50-50 in terms of racial mix¹⁶... [It] brings together different people from different sections of the city" (Fauver 2007). Fauver's comment brings together two different aspects of the park. In the first sentence, she refutes claims made by the PPC's opposition, including the Friends of Piedmont Park, who allege that through their designs and plans, the Conservancy is turning the park into a playground or private club for Atlanta's white male elite. Her characterization likely exaggerates the racial diversity of the park but the point she makes is significant: Piedmont Park does have a diverse group of users, meaning the PPC must serve constituencies that have different, perhaps competing, visions of and desires for the park. The last part of her comment illustrates the opportunity and promise of the park to be a place not just where everyone can come but a place where people can come together who might not otherwise interact. Her comment suggests the park has a way of bridging the city's geography by serving as a common ground for interaction.

The perception that Piedmont Park is a park for Atlanta's white elite may be more pervasive than the interview data suggests. Interviewees were not asked directly about their perception of the park's intended audience. Gobster says, "Lower income minority neighborhoods may not have access to quality open space environments like upper income

¹⁶ The marketing research studies label the park's users as "racially diverse" because 25% are members of minority racial groups (Bernhardt 2005). It is difficult to reconcile these two statements without additional data. Visual observations I conducted suggest that park users include African-Americans, Caucasians, Asians, and Latinos, though a breakdown into percentages would vary spatially depending on what area of the park is observed. Furthermore, Fauver's statement is based on her perception of the park; she did not directly ask respondents about their racial background, as far as I know.

majority neighborhoods do” (Gobster 1998, 53). The separation of Piedmont Park from the Old Fourth Ward, an historically African-American Atlanta neighborhood, and the opposition to the presence of the homeless and the African-American gays who use the park as a gathering space only serves to further this idea. Piedmont Park is surrounded by predominantly Caucasian neighborhoods and the park boosts the surrounding area’s real estate values. Given the composition of the park’s immediate neighbors, one can see why some suggest the park caters predominantly or exclusively to the white elite, who live in close proximity to the park, attend the public meetings about the park, and make their opinion known both through their words and through their money and influence. The data collected hint at this though no interviewee ever said this overtly.

The allegations that the PPC caters to Atlanta’s white elite challenge the Conservancy’s stated mission of preserving and enhancing the park for all Atlantans. Although the interviewees did not spell out the specifics of these allegations, there seemed to be a general perception that the Conservancy catered to its large contributors, which includes numerous businesses based in Atlanta and their top officials. The Friends of Piedmont Park has alleged that the PPC wishes to treat the park as a country club, designed and suited for certain persons, rather than as a public park open, accessible to, and used by the diverse citizens living in and visiting Atlanta and the park.

Doug Abramson, president of the Friends of Piedmont Park, offered memos and a personal narrative explaining why he believes the park caters more extensively to the elite, particularly the white elite, than it does to other demographics. He sees a future where Piedmont Park could become a country club for Atlanta’s white elites as access fees, parking costs, and membership fees are instituted and rental costs increase (Abramson 2007). His fears are likely

grounded in the neoliberal processes transforming Atlanta's city government, wherein the government emphasizes having services pay for themselves, which the current fiscal shortfall heightens. Rather than inclusiveness being determined by "a group's proximity to political and economic power" (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005, 13), which seems geared towards the inclusion of the white elites, the Conservancy could combat these allegations by reaching out to park users of all ethnicities and including them in the management and decision-making processes.

The diversity of Piedmont Park's users raises particular issues that park managers should consider when planning and managing the park, though there is no clear evidence that the PPC has done so in the past or is doing so at this time. Recreation research demonstrates that while park users share a core set of interests and concerns, there are different use patterns within and among racial and ethnic groups (Gobster 2002). To ensure the park serves everyone, Low, Taplin, and Scheld say, "Accommodating the differences in the ways social class and ethnic groups use and value public sites is essential to making decisions that sustain cultural and social diversity" (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005, 4). Paying attention to this cultural diversity and the various needs of diverse park users could lead to more involvement in park governance and increase community empowerment (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005). The PPC should endeavor, based on its mission, to be inclusive at all stages of its planning process. Inclusiveness may require a greater effort on the Conservancy's part to include and ensure the involvement of citizens of varying ethnicities and social classes. Nevertheless, it is important because it can help reduce allegations that the PPC, through the park, seeks to serve only a small portion of Atlanta's population, a segment that mirrors much of the PPC leadership in its skin complexion and social class.

The question of whether the park delivers on its promise as a space for everyone deserves additional consideration in light of the news articles published in the summer of 2007 on the possible disruptions to the park caused by the presence of a large crowd on Sunday evenings.¹⁷ The large homeless presence in Piedmont Park, brought about by a confluence of situations, has also been mentioned in the past as a possible issue or problem the park's management needs to handle. Councilmember Mitchell suggested that there may be invisible barriers and/or fences that lead certain people to feel excluded or unwelcome in Piedmont Park (Mitchell 2007). Mitchell did not specify whether these barriers are erected based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors, likely because their invisible nature makes their identification and examination difficult.

Improving the Park

The Conservancy's mission of enhancing and preserving the park does not specify the terms of either, leading to the question of why enhancements are made and the broader consequences of these actions. Often the Conservancy refers to its projects in the parks as either restoration or improvement projects. For whom are they improving the park and how do these "improvements" affect the park? The answers to this question are elusive and highly contingent on whom you ask. While most people would agree that the park is "better" since the Conservancy became involved in 1992, explicating exactly what is meant by "better" is difficult.

Interview participants were asked about any changes they have seen in the park over the years. Councilmember Fauver repeatedly used the word 'renovations' to describe changes the Conservancy has initiated in Piedmont Park. She said, "They've made a number of major

¹⁷ For additional information on the Sunday evening crowd, see Chapter 4.

renovations. They've redone the bathhouse. They have redone the playscape—one of the main playscapes. They have drained and redone the lake. And rebuilt the gazebo. And have dealt with drainage issues in the meadow and totally revamped and upgraded the Active Oval” (Fauver 2007). These improvements are all significant and, as Fauver said, likely would not have occurred without the Conservancy, resulting in changes that she describes as very beneficial for the park (Fauver 2007). Mark Rusche, a Conservancy board member, said the Conservancy took a horrible place and restored it to a wonderful place, including providing people with venues they can use (2007).

After listing the renovations attributable to the Conservancy, Fauver said, “The city is going to renovate the swimming pool. That’s one of the few renovations that the city has done” (2007). The media portrayal, fostered in part by the Conservancy, is that the Piedmont Park Conservancy is responsible for major upgrades to the park, including the bathhouse and pool renovations currently ongoing. The Conservancy marginalizes the City’s financial role in providing for the pool’s renovation, instead focusing attention on the fundraising and planning efforts it has led and organized that are resulting in the project being carried out. The suggestion is that the City is incapable of carrying out such a large project, given the budgetary constraints it faces, so the Conservancy has stepped in to provide this service for the community. The publicity on the pool and bathhouse renovations largely fails to mention the contribution of the City to this particular park project. The City’s continued involvement is indicative of the nature of the partnership, especially insofar as it contradicts government outsourcing as typically conceived of by neoliberals.

Other interviewees had similarly positive reactions to the work that has been done by the Conservancy in the park. Williamson said, “I think a lot of the reason that Piedmont Park is the

premier park is because there is a Conservancy associated with it and they spend so much time and effort beautifying the park, keeping it up, having programs in that park, [and] attracting attention to the park” (Williamson 2007). There seemed to be a consensus that the PPC has done a lot of work to turn the park around, though the improved park has attracted its own problems. Williamson noted, “The more attention you attract to the park, the more problems there are with the maintenance of the park but if you don’t attract attention to the park then the park falls into disrepair. So I mean you have to have this balance, this line between different things” (Williamson 2007). While the Conservancy’s work in the park is laudable from the perspective of park users and City officials, there are clear trade-offs that have occurred. The City can no longer take credit for Piedmont Park looking the way it does, deferring this to the Conservancy, even as it pays for large improvements such as upgrades to the Piedmont Park pool to the tune of a couple of million dollars.

Paying for Improvements

The Piedmont Park Conservancy, per the Memorandum of Understanding, is responsible for doing significant fundraising in order to provide services for and maintenance and capital improvements to Piedmont Park. While the Conservancy may be financially responsible for the majority of the upgrades made to Piedmont Park in the last two decades, the City of Atlanta still has an active financial role in providing for these upgrades, as Fauver’s comments indicate. The Conservancy relies predominantly on private donations for the money needed for its operation, organizing capital campaigns to raise significant amounts of money for specific projects and upgrades to the park. One option not available to the Conservancy is charging user fees to access Piedmont Park, because the City of Atlanta does not allow city-owned parks to charge entrance

fees. Nevertheless, the involvement of the PPC permits the park to expand, improve, and change in ways that would likely be impossible under city-only financing. Parks researchers have noted, “Parks that depend on general local government funds appear to fare worse those [sic] that have direct sources of dedicated income” (Tate 2001, 196), suggesting that the presence of the Conservancy is a crucial element shaping Piedmont Park’s physical appearance.

There are clear indications in the past two years that the Conservancy is searching for additional sources of revenue. An ordinance passed by the Atlanta City Council in 2006 (Ordinance 06-O-0287) gives the Conservancy permission to operate a concessions program in the park as a means of fundraising, citing the Conservancy’s need to raise a great deal of money to pay for the services it performs. In order to be able to sell concessions, a specific ordinance providing for concessions sales in Piedmont Park was necessary because the Atlanta Code of Ordinances (section 110-3[6]) specially bans vending in parks (MOU 2006). The Piedmont Park Conservancy already receives money from individuals, corporate sponsors, via its capital campaigns, and through facility rentals, yet it seeks to add additional revenue to its accounts through concessions, either done by them or operated by a vendor they contract with. In light of the City’s budget problems, the PPC presents its additional fundraising through the concessions program as mutually beneficial because any profits are to be shared equally with the City.

In September 2007, the Piedmont Park Conservancy held a “Green Concert” as a kickoff fundraiser for its capital campaign for the North Woods expansion. The concert featured performances by the Allman Brothers and the Dave Matthews Band and, as a green concert, attendees were discouraged from driving and encouraged to utilize public transportation, carpooling, walking, biking, and other modes of transit to arrive at the park. Concert tickets sold

out in the first 48 hours they were on sale, with over 50,000 tickets sold (Nelson 2007). The concert raised the Conservancy's profile and highlighted the North Woods expansion project.

Private donations from individuals and corporations comprise a great deal of the Conservancy's funding. The Conservancy has received over \$23 million in donations from local businesses, foundations, and individuals to support its efforts to restore and preserve Piedmont Park (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007c).¹⁸ The factors motivating individual and corporate donations vary but often can be linked to the value derived from access to or enjoyment of Piedmont Park. Sam Burch donated to the Conservancy for the first time last year, doing so in part because he enjoys the park (Burch 2007). Individual park users may donate to a conservancy because the park provides greenspace and amenities they wish to enjoy and that might otherwise cost them money to use (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992). Since the park is a public park without access fees, some justify or rationalize their donations as paying the access fees that might otherwise be required to enjoy a beautiful park. Individuals whose historical memory includes the periods when Piedmont Park was not maintained as well may have an additional incentive to donate directly to the Conservancy in an effort to prevent a recurrence of the past. The Conservancy promotes the value of individual contributions, saying, "**Through the generosity of private donors, Piedmont Park Conservancy funds the majority of park maintenance, security and improvements**" (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007d, emphasis in the original). Interestingly, these claims overlap with the reasons given on the Corporate Giving page touting the results of corporate donations. The usage of 'private donors' does not explicitly differentiate between individuals, businesses, and foundations, making it impossible to assess how different types of private donors support the Conservancy.

¹⁸ Requests for more details on the percentages of overall funding from individuals and corporations received no response.

Corporate giving allows businesses to “enhance their public reputations and to create goodwill with customers, employees, and regulators” (Brown, Helland, and Smith 2006, 875). Piedmont Park’s location in Midtown Atlanta places it in physical proximity to the headquarters of numerous corporations, law firms, and other major businesses. The PPC implemented the Chairman’s Circle program in 2005 to “provide companies with public recognition for the generous annual contributions they make to sustain Conservancy operations” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007c). As part of this program, the Conservancy hangs banners in the park to recognize these donors, a change to the park which required the approval of City Council and which is included in the latest Memorandum of Understanding. Five levels are listed on the Conservancy’s Corporate Giving page: Donor (\$5,000+), Partner (\$10,000+), Protector (\$25,000+), Guardian (\$50,000+), and Conservator (\$100,000+). At each level, the donor receives certain benefits, including recognition in the Conservancy’s Annual Report and complimentary usage of a Piedmont Park Conservancy event facility (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007c). These benefits allow corporate donors to receive a tangible benefit—use of an event facility that would normally require a rental fee—in exchange for their support of the Conservancy. Thus, the donations can be seen as an upfront fee for facility usage and, at the higher donation levels, as payment for event coordination and support services to be delivered by the Conservancy’s staff.

With the great deal of funds pouring into the park through the Conservancy, one necessarily wonders about the specific role the city maintains in terms of funding the park, both in its ongoing maintenance and for capital improvements. Interviewees questioned this as well. Asked how improvements should be paid for, Williamson said:

I think the city should not abandon its responsibility to the park just because the Conservancy is there bringing cash and resources to it. I definitely think the city has a

responsibility to the park and I'm not saying that they don't honor that responsibility now. I don't know how much money they put into the park as compared to the Conservancy but I think that the citizens of Atlanta have a responsibility to maintain the park because it is the signature, premier park in their city. (Williamson 2007)

Graham Balch echoed this theme of the citizens needing to take financial responsibility for the park. He said, "I'd like to see more ownership" from the citizens of Atlanta (Balch 2007). Rather than citizens just falling back on saying that they support the park through paying taxes, Balch suggests a small annual membership fee or donation of volunteer hours to help ensure citizens are committed to a better Piedmont Park (Balch 2007).

The Piedmont Park Conservancy makes many claims about the projects supported by donor funds, but these claims lack detail. The Conservancy does not provide information on how donations break down between those from individuals, businesses, and foundations, nor does it clarify how much money it receives annually. Raising over \$21 million in 16 years is impressive. However, given that many of the Conservancy's restorations and renovations have cost upwards of \$2 million per project, one must ask if it is enough. The Conservancy did not provide any financial information to show how much of the received money goes towards regular operating expenses (overhead) and maintenance compared to the amount used to fund specific restoration, renovation, and preservation projects. Combining money received from private donations and, in the future, from concessions sales allows the Piedmont Park Conservancy to carry out its operations, including regular maintenance of the park, restoration of the park facilities, and preservation of the park for future generations.

Effects of Improvements

There are concerns about the effects the Conservancy's improvement, restoration, and renovation projects have on the park and its users. The Conservancy has made great strides

towards fulfilling some of the original elements of the 1912 Olmsted Brothers plan for Piedmont Park and they have done so in less than two decades. With dramatic changes to the park occurring since the 1995 Master Plan was approved, there are likely some negative effects associated with them. Particular concerns were pointed out by Doug Abramson, President of the Friends of Piedmont Park, and Trisha Clymore, Assistant Director of Atlanta PRIDE and the person responsible for organizing the annual PRIDE Festival, which typically takes place in Piedmont Park. Their concerns represent two different perspectives on the potential harmful effects of the continued “improvements” to Piedmont Park, presenting an alternative perspective to that presented by the Piedmont Park Conservancy, the City government, and other proponents and supporters of the Conservancy’s work. Abramson’s concerns relate to ensuring the park can deliver on its mission of preserving and maintaining the park for future generations. He worries that continued projects and related changes to the park may transform the park from a public park into a private club (Abramson 2007). Clymore’s concerns center on the continued affordability of the park and its facilities for large festivals, like the PRIDE Festival and the Dogwood Festival, who rent park space and facilities to carry out their annual events (Clymore 2007). For nonprofit organizations and other community event organizers, continually rising fees can jeopardize the future of their event.

In an interview, Abramson specifically mentioned being concerned with public accessibility, maintaining the community’s diversity, and “privatization encroachments” in Piedmont Park (Abramson 2007). He provided several memos produced by the Friends of Piedmont Park addressing these concerns. One, “Piedmont Park: Public Park or Private Club?”, addresses the FOPP’s opposition to the construction of a parking deck in Piedmont Park, focusing specifically on the concerns raised in a lawsuit filed in January 2007 (Friends of

Piedmont Park 2007c). The FOPP raises concerns about public access to the park: “The parking deck will support the Atlanta Botanical Garden’s plan to hold fancy parties but will not increase the public’s access to the Park” (Friends of Piedmont Park 2007a). The change from free parking in a surface lot to paid parking in a garage is one opposed by the FOPP, arguing that the change converts public resources to private uses. Though this argument was unsuccessful legally, it is important to consider when examining how the PPC affects the public nature of Piedmont Park. In charging for access to the parking deck, which will become the only place to park in Piedmont Park, the ABG and the PPC are charging a fee for the convenience of being able to park one’s car without risk of being ticketed or towed. The fee for parking is similar to the entrance and parking fees commonly charged by state and national parks to those entering. Without knowing the amount of the fee, which will be set by the City of Atlanta (likely in concert with the ABG and the PPC), it is difficult to assess the full impact the parking fee will have on Piedmont Park’s users and their ability to conveniently access the park.

The Friends of Piedmont Park also address the need for a commitment to diverse community input in the planning for Piedmont Park, arguing for changes in the planning process to ensure planning decisions are not made by “small cliques with special interests” (Friends of Piedmont Park 2007c, 2). They worry that special interests are taking precedence over public interests, possibly as a consequence of insufficient checks and balances on the Conservancy and other private organizations (like the Atlanta Botanical Garden) that handle public functions (Friends of Piedmont Park 2007c). The planning process is an integral part of the overall renovation and improvement process in Piedmont Park so the exclusion of particular groups or voices from the meeting room is troubling.

Festival fallout

The major festivals hosted in the park each year have been affected positively and negatively by the improvements to Piedmont Park brought about by the Piedmont Park Conservancy. These festivals include the Dogwood Festival, typically held in April, the Atlanta Jazz Festival, typically around Memorial Day, the Atlanta PRIDE festival in June, and the Peachtree Road Race which typically ends at Piedmont Park in July. Moday writes, “These special events are great for Piedmont Park because they allow the park to fulfill its role to society as a place where people can convene and enjoy an open-air setting while also intermingling with other people” (2004, 12). However, the specialized nature of many of these events complicates the notion that they foster a setting where diverse peoples can come together and interact. Moday says, “These special events do have a negative effect on the park contributing to a general loss of beauty” (2004, 13), ignoring the cultural, historical, and social opportunities offered by festivals in the park. Of more concern for the improvements to the park is the impact these festivals have on the park’s landscape due to the large numbers of people they attract to the park, typically in excess of 50,000 people per festival over the course of the event. According to Chris Nelson, the PPC’s chief operating officer, the large-scale events cause compaction that is the main cause of deteriorations in the park’s appearance (Moday 2004).

The PRIDE Festival has been held annually in Piedmont Park for thirty-seven years, according to Clymore. There are two financial concerns Clymore faces annually as she plans for the PRIDE Festival: first, the cost of facility rentals, and second, the cost of damages that occur to the park grounds as a result of the festival. In order to hold the festival in Piedmont Park, PRIDE must pay \$9,000 to obtain a Class A Festival permit from the DPRCA, which is paid directly to the City government. In addition to this, Atlanta PRIDE must pay the PPC to rent

specific Piedmont Park facilities for use during the festival and arrange for security at the festival through off-duty police officers. The costs for all of these are large, totaling in the tens of thousands of dollars that must be paid upfront (Clymore 2007; Williamson 2007).

The park improvement projects planned by the PPC have a considerable effect on the festivals that use the park as their primary site. Clymore and Williamson expressed concern about the way upcoming projects will affect their festival and the location of particular venues during their three-day event. Regarding the renovations to the Bathhouse and the pool currently underway, Williamson said:

The logistical nature of the event relies so heavily on that section of the park that we're going to have to figure out how to do things otherwise. So I think all the improvements that are going on are necessary and we should encourage them, and it's just growing pains. I mean, we'll have to figure out how to use the park while it's growing and improving. (Williamson 2007)

The renovations and improvements challenge the festivals by changing the sites within the park that can be used during the event but they also have another effect on festival organizers.

As facilities have been renovated, their rental fees have increased, forcing festival organizers to develop innovative ways to recoup the additional expenditures required to hold their festival. Williamson said, "To own the park basically for the week, we have to pay something. If we want to use the Pavilion, that's more. If we want to use the Bathhouse, that's more. If we want to use Magnolia Hall, that's more" (Williamson 2007). Given the high costs associated with holding a festival in Piedmont Park, such an opportunity is certainly not available to every group that might be interested. Even the rental fees for specific facilities seem problematic since they can prevent citizens from reserving and enjoying the gazebo or other park structures due to their expense. Yet the Conservancy seems unconcerned with this issue. Balch noted that Debbie McCown, the president of the PPC, said publicly that if she could rent out

every square foot of the park every weekend, she would (Balch 2007). Doing so would inhibit the public's access to the park. McCown's position, which can be taken to represent the position of the Conservancy, indicates the PPC is unconcerned with how facility rentals limit the ability of all Atlantans to freely use and enjoy all that Piedmont Park has to offer. In charging these facility rental fees, which many would find unaffordable, the PPC contradicts the spirit of its mission statement because it makes the park inaccessible to some, rather than enhancing the park and making it available to everyone.

Festivals face another burden not seen or borne by park users: they are responsible for compensating Piedmont Park for any damages caused by their event. Clymore explains, "We pay for any damage to the park. And that can be damage you don't even see, which is compaction. The event organizers will get a bill from the Conservancy for damages" (Clymore 2007). The size of the bills, which are paid directly to the PPC, was not specified though she did say they can be very large. The stated purpose of these bills is to enable the Conservancy to recoup the costs it must invest in repairing and restoring the park to the condition it was in prior to the festival. While this work is important, given the millions of dollars raised by the PPC and the cultural value to the community of the festivals, it is worth questioning why the event organizers are solely responsible for footing the bill.

The number of fees and charges associated with having an event in Piedmont Park effectively limits the number of events held in the park. Those interested in organizing a large, free public event must find numerous vendors and sponsors to be able to afford to do so in Piedmont Park, making it difficult for newcomers to hold a successful event. Consequently, the festival options available in Piedmont Park are limited and may not have broad appeal to Atlanta's residents.

A Better Park?

The struggle to balance the current needs and desires of park users with the historical preservation of the park and the fulfillment of the 1912 Olmsted Brothers' plan is ongoing. Even as interviewees praised the work the PPC has done, they suggested areas where they would like to see improvement when asked. Aiken, who is interested in the historical aspects of the park, would like to see the Conservancy's goal become "restoration" rather than focusing on improvements (Aiken 2007). However, the competing demands of park users often mean that historical restoration and preservation seem to take a backseat to infrastructure and facility improvements and expansions.

Several interviewees noted infrastructure improvements to the park, particularly renovation of facilities and better parking. Those who do not live within walking distance of the park mentioned parking since Piedmont Park only has a small surface lot for its daily visitors. De Haven said, "As far as infrastructure within the park, ... I think that's all fine. I will say, some of the picnic amenities sort of seem a bit seedy," due to the occasional homeless person or beggar one may see (de Haven 2007). His comment suggests two separate areas perceived as needing improvement: the park's shelter and picnic facilities and the possibility of encountering a homeless person or beggar in Piedmont Park. The latter aspect of his comment raises the concerns noted above that the homeless may increasingly feel unwelcome in the park. Groups seeking to remove the homeless from the park likely use comments like those made by de Haven to enhance support for their cause, particularly since de Haven chose not to hold a wedding event

in Piedmont Park due to the perceived seediness of the park's shelter facilities. Improvements to the picnic and shelter facilities are likely part of the PPC's plan because improved facilities would attract attention as a possible rented venue for events.

Hruska focused less on the physical aspects of the park, emphasizing the need for additional educational opportunities through and in Piedmont Park. She thinks the park should be associated with an educational center so it can become a place where people come to both learn and play (Hruska 2007). Currently, the PPC offers day camp programs during the spring and summer, field trip programs led by a naturalist, and Saturday safaris for elementary-age children (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007). Promoting the park as an environmental education resource has a dual purpose: it can introduce Atlanta's youth to parks and their environmental value and, by promoting park use among children, can increase park usage as children encourage their parents to bring them to the park.

The changes to Piedmont Park since the Conservancy began its serious work in the park over a decade ago are visible to nearly all who visit the park. The PPC's work has shaped the park landscape into what it is today. As Fauver said, "I think that more people in District 6 and certainly all over town are now using the park because ten years ago it was pretty dreadful and [there was] much, much deferred maintenance. And since then, it's gotten crisp" (2007). The Conservancy has organized volunteers for park cleanups, used its financial resources to improve park facilities and amenities, and encouraged programming that invites the community into the park. Through all of these activities, park usage has increased, raising awareness of the value urban greenspace provides. A side effect of these improvements can be the displacement of certain demographics of park users from the park, particularly because private donors can exert influence over the direction taken by the Conservancy in Piedmont Park using their wealth.

The remarkable work done by the PPC has been noticed by people throughout Atlanta and beyond. In many ways, Piedmont Park is a better park today than it has been in the past. The Conservancy says, “Truly, Piedmont Park looks better today and is more safe than ever” (Piedmont Park Conservancy 2007c), showing they regard their efforts highly. With renovated and improved facilities, the park is more accessible to a wider range of potential park users. One example is the new boundless playground that allows children of varying abilities to enjoy the play area. However, there can be negatives to the projects undertaken by the Conservancy. Whether Piedmont Park can deliver on its promise as a park for all Atlantans remains to be seen. As Clymore said, “The Conservancy has done an *enormous* amount of work on behalf of the city for Piedmont Park and they have a significant amount of power” (2007). The power resulting from the PPC’s efforts is a cause for concern, particularly since they wield this power over a city asset and resource. The dramatic changes to Piedmont Park over the last fifteen years leave many questions about whether the park is becoming a private country club for Atlanta’s rich, white elite or whether the park remains a community place where everyone can gather to relax, recreate, and socialize. The next chapter examines this issue in more detail.

CHAPTER 4

THE PUBLIC SPACE OF PIEDMONT PARK

Sunday Evening in the Park

Imagine for a moment that it is a Sunday evening and you are headed to Piedmont Park. You walk to the park along Piedmont Avenue, arriving at the 12th Street park entrance. Entering the park, you notice a large, predominantly African-American crowd. The crowd is boisterous, socializing, dancing, and enjoying a leisurely evening in the park. How might you respond? Would the crowd's presence make you feel less welcome? Would you turn around and walk away from the park? Would you choose to use another park entrance to access the park? Or would the presence of the group evoke a different or no reaction?

In July 2007, the crowd gathering on Sunday evenings near the park entrance at 12th Street and Piedmont Avenue to Piedmont Park received a great deal of attention, primarily from the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance and the Piedmont Park Conservancy. The attention from these groups sparked articles in *Southern Voice*, numerous blog posts, and the formation of the Midtown Inclusion Alliance. The large crowd, estimated to be in the hundreds, consists primarily of African-Americans, many of whom have gathered on Sunday evenings at the park for years. These meetings have historically allowed African-American lesbian and gay members of the community to meet and socialize without fear of prejudice. According to Angel Luis Poventud, a gay Midtown resident, "Anyone who's been in Midtown for four or five years knows that Piedmont Park is where black folks meet on Sundays because it's a safe space for them where they can be themselves away from their families, who might not be accepting" (Lee 2007c). An event that has been occurring for over a decade suddenly attracted attention for reasons not

explained in the media or in interviews, which focused largely on the crowd's actions and the feelings of others towards the group's presence. Blog posts suggest the attention stem from changing perceptions about who Piedmont Park is for and wanting a certain clientele to use the park and be visible in it.

The gathering has attracted attention from a neighborhood security group, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, and the Atlanta Police Department (APD), all of whom issued statements last summer regarding the Sunday gatherings. The statements address several issues related to the gatherings: a potential 'security' issue, the crowd being linked to crime in the surrounding neighborhoods, emergency vehicle access, and trying to mediate any future problems that could be an offshoot of the gatherings. Officer Darlene Harris, the LGBT liaison for the APD, said, "Nothing has been proven as far as that crowd being linked to any crime in the area" (Lee 2007c). Her statement casts doubt on the claims alleged by the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance (MPSA) in its July report.¹⁹ The July MPSA report included a section entitled "Serious Issues in Piedmont Park," focused specifically on the Sunday night crowd. Much of the outside reporting on the issue appeared in *Southern Voice*, a weekly newspaper geared towards Atlanta's LGBT community. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the city's main newspaper, did not mention the Sunday crowd or the related discussion, suggesting this is a niche issue of particular concern to Atlanta's gay and lesbian community though it has broader implications for Atlanta's citizens.

¹⁹ Founded in 2003, the purpose of the MPSA is to work "to unite the residential and business communities to solve Midtown's serious crime problems, and improve the quality of living here. Since its founding, the MPSA has provided an ongoing contribution towards sustained improvements in the safety, security and good public order in the Midtown community" (Midtown 2007). The service area of the MPSA patrol does not include Piedmont Park.

The MPSA report states that the crowd ranges in size from 500 to 1000 people who gather weekly at Piedmont Park's 12th Street entrance. Described as "probably the most dangerous ongoing situation we have encountered so far" (Gower 2007, 3), the report goes on to say that the crowd engages in illegal activities and fighting, in addition to being linked to other crimes in the area. In the report, the MPSA admits they do not fully understand the crowd, its activities, or its intentions, nevertheless claiming, "Most regular park visitors are afraid to use this area of the Park on Sunday evenings" (Gower 2007, 4). Gower's phrasing is telling because it suggests that the black LGBT crowd members are not regular park visitors in spite of their regular visits to the park. The MPSA seems to be suggesting that Caucasian, heterosexual park visitors are the norm, with others being unwelcome in the park. The report says the MPSA will continue to investigate the situation though there have been no updates on the situation in subsequent MPSA reports or newsletters as of January 2008.

According to Myra Reeves, a DPRCA spokesperson, the group's presence raises concerns regarding emergency vehicle access to the park. The crowd's physical location and size may inhibit emergency vehicles from accessing the park, which could result in a potentially dangerous situation in the event of an emergency. No evidence of an actual disruption to emergency services in or around the park due to the crowd has been presented, suggesting the concern is to prevent—not redress—an incident. It seems this concern led to the involvement of Atlanta police officers in the situation. Officer Darlene Harris, the LGBT liaison for the APD, responded to questions about whether the group was being targeted by the police saying, "They're more than welcome to come and congregate at the park — that's what the park is for... We're just trying to curtail anything that could be a problem later" (Lee 2007c, 2).

Responses to the crowd and the MPSA Security Report have been ongoing. In an effort to clarify the allegations reported by the MPSA, Debbie McCown, president of the Piedmont Park Conservancy said, “We’ve been very careful not to stereotype any group — all we know is it appears the problems have increased on Sunday evenings. ...Folks have been gathering for years at the 12th Street entrance, and it hasn’t been a problem until recently. What we were saying to the group is, ‘Help us find out why’” (Lee 2007a). McCown suggests the nature of the gatherings has changed, which has resulted in a problem, though she does not specify why it has become a problem or how it was brought to the attention of the Conservancy. In a personal interview, McCown said the *Southern Voice* article misrepresented the involvement of the PPC and the organization’s position (McCown 2007a). That Chris Nelson, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the PPC, made a presentation about the Sunday evening crowd to the MPSA at their July 2007 safety meeting is not debated. The question then becomes why the Piedmont Park Conservancy felt it was necessary to bring the group’s presence to the attention of the MPSA. Other neighborhood association reports from July 2007 do not indicate receipt of a similar report from the Piedmont Park Conservancy nor do they address the specific issue of the Sunday night crowd at the 12th Street entrance. In response to reports and concerns about mistreatment from private security forces patrolling the Midtown area raised by the LGBT community, the Midtown Inclusion Alliance was formed in August 2007. The coalition’s purpose is to counter the security tactics being used by the MPSA, the Midtown Neighbors’ Association, and the Piedmont Park Conservancy (Lee 2007b). The alarm bells sounded by the MPSA also attracted attention from City Council, particularly from those members concerned that a specific minority community was the target of the security patrol’s efforts due to their minority status and accompanying misconceptions.

The MPSA security report helps create a culture of fear in two ways. First, the report explicitly references illegal activities, fighting, and other dangerous actions attributed to the Sunday evening crowd. Secondly, the MPSA report suggests that viewing the documentary film, “Paris is Burning”, which chronicles minority drag queens and their subculture of balls in the 1980s in New York City, may help with understanding the 12th Street crowd. It is unclear why the MPSA believes viewing a film about a different subculture, from a different time period, and in a different geographic location will shed “valuable insight” into what is happening in Piedmont Park today. By associating the crowd with this film, the report intimates that crowd members engage in non-normative behavior, are part of a distinct subculture, and that members are part of a particular “scene”. In making this connection, the report suggests that the behavior of the Sunday crowd is unwelcome because it breaks norms and brings something to the park that not everyone may want. In some ways, the report harkens readers to the 1970s and 1980s when crime plagued Piedmont Park, when some people associated the park with African-Americans and crime resulting in concerns regarding personal safety in the park (Tate 2001; Abramson 2007). The report highlights a specific way in which unsavory or unwelcome behaviors when brought into Piedmont Park, a public space, can diminish the park’s positive experience. Underlying this is the connotation that the Sunday evening crowd is unwelcome, perhaps due to the racial background or sexual orientation—or the intersection thereof—of its participants.

These incidents are not the first time there has been a conflict between the gay community of Piedmont Park users and security forces, whether from the Atlanta Police Department or hired private security forces. The story of the Sunday evening crowd highlights concerns about safety and security, the discourse of urban fear, and the changing nature of public

space. Changes in management, operating practices, and the increase in discourses of fear have sparked profound changes in how public space is conceived in recent years. The unfolding of last summer's story about the Sunday night crowd is just one manifestation of Piedmont Park's changes. Some interviewees noted changes to Piedmont Park, the surrounding neighborhoods, and the demographics of park users. One even suggested that Midtown and the Piedmont Park area are no longer gay-friendly (Williamson 2007).

Understanding what public space both is and is not provides a lens through which to comprehend how public space has become an important battleground in urban contexts. This research investigation, like many others, is motivated by questions of access, exclusion, and power (Mitchell and Staeheli 2006). The aim is to show how the changing nature of Piedmont Park as a public space has resulted from park management changes and, at least partially, in response to the growing culture of fear in urban areas. Drawing on definitions and theories of public space and the literature on the privatization of public space, this chapter specifically contests the idea that Piedmont Park is a public space. Public parks are often cited as an example of a public space (Kohn 2004; Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005; Smith and Low 2006; Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). I argue that specific management practices and lived experiences should be considered to help determine if a publicly owned park is also a public space. Specifically, the issue of the privatization of public space must be addressed to assess how the movement towards the private management of public space affects the public status of those spaces. Understanding how changes around public space have affected Piedmont Park, which is frequently described as a public space, provides a lens for understanding some of the factors that have played a role in the conflict between the private security forces and the Sunday night group at the park's 12th Street entrance.

What Is Public Space?

Scholars have taken on the arduous task of defining public space, offering definitions and using examples to support their claims. One frequently used example is of public parks as an example of a public space. Numerous definitions of the term public space exist²⁰ and, through their use, one can contest the categorical inclusion of parks on the roster of public spaces. In both common language and academic literature, the term public space is used to refer to the open spaces of a city (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). The term ‘publicly accessible space’ emerges as an alternative to the use of ‘public space’, with one of the key differences being the emphasis placed on specific qualities viewed as an essential component of public space. These qualities, the value of the term ‘publicly accessible space’, and the utility of a continuum between public and private will all be discussed to assess how Piedmont Park fits or clashes with notions of what a public space is.

In their introduction to *The Politics of Public Space*, Smith and Low inform the readers that though there are many divergent meanings attached to public space, they use the term to mean “the range of social locations offered by the street, the park, the media, the Internet, the shopping mall...” (2006, 3), offering a hybridized definition of public space. Their definition aggregates the street and the park, publicly-owned spaces, with the privately-owned shopping mall. Within the realm of public spaces, there is variation according to the degree of publicness found in a particular space, which varies from one example to the next. As Smith and Low point out, “Public space is traditionally differentiated from private space in terms of the rules of access, the source and nature of control over entry to a space, individual and collective behavior sanctioned in specific spaces, and rules of use” (2006, 3-4).

²⁰ Some of the difficult in defining ‘public space’ stems from the difficulty in defining the public. While worthy of its own review, that discussion will not be entered into here.

Kohn argues for viewing “public space as a cluster concept” (2004, 11), taking into account the multiple and sometimes oppositional definitions of public space thereby allowing for the inclusion of various factors and aspects into the determination of what delineates a public space. Kohn goes on to propose a specific definition of public space with “three core components: ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity” (2004, 11). Based on this tripartite definition, being publicly owned and accessible is not enough to define a space as public, instead the interactions that occurs among people there must be taken into account (Kohn 2004). These interactions may become threatened when changes to public space are made.

Public spaces are social spaces or spaces of sociability. In this sense, they are produced through social action and interaction. The relationships that produce public space can, in this sense, be exclusionary since “public space and the social relations that it hosts are co-produced” (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008, 119). Only through exclusion can spaces become inclusive and have the quality of publicness (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). This transforms public space into an almost paradoxical concept. The exclusion necessary for public debate and interaction to be permissible limits access or participation, a feature that became associated with the word private in the fifteenth century (Williams 1983).

Piedmont Park certainly meets the first criteria put forth by Kohn: the City of Atlanta, a government entity, owns the parkland. Measuring the accessibility of Piedmont Park is more difficult. Though the park is located near downtown Atlanta and on several MARTA bus routes, some argue that it is difficult to reach because it is nearly a mile from the park to the nearest MARTA station. Like other city-owned parks in Atlanta, Piedmont Park is open to the public from 6am to 11pm daily. Though this does place some limits on park access, the closure of the park in the nighttime hours does not make the park a private space. During the hours the park is

open, there are no physical barriers controlling or guarding entrance to the park, another indication that the park is not a private space per the definition set forth by Smith and Low. On the question of intersubjectivity, Piedmont Park is difficult to assess. Some park users have noted that the park lacks diversity. Ceasar Mitchell, an at-large representative on the Atlanta City Council, signals that there may be invisible barriers in the park limiting the ability of park users to interact and engage with one another freely (Mitchell 2007). Staeheli and Mitchell would likely conclude that Piedmont Park, like Millennium Park in Chicago, is a hybrid space: “It is publicly-owned, but the trappings of private ownership and commerce are woven into the fabric of the place” (2008, xviii). This suggests that in these hybrid spaces there is a different experience for park users and a different image of the park. Weaving private elements, capitalism as neoliberalism, and commerce into Piedmont Park challenges the park’s status as a public space.

Public or Private?

If the meaning and definition of public space is bound up with the distinction between public and private as Smith and Low suggest (2006), it is important to take into account the defining characteristics of a private space and use those to determine if a space is private. Private space is “demarcated and protected by state-regulated rules of private property use” (Smith and Low, 4). Thus, a private space involves private property whose rights are protected by the state through legal mechanisms. A public park is, by virtue of being public, not subject to the state rules regarding private property use because it is not, by definition, private property. Nevertheless, there are ways in which publicly owned property can appear to be a private space. The placement of signs bearing rules and regulations, warnings against certain behavior, and the

presence of security guards and gates can also be taken as signs that a space is private in that access may be limited to a specific group or controlled by a specific entity. These signs can lead to a contradiction between what a space says it is (for instance, public) and how it functions (by restricting access and behavior, thereby seeming private).

Henri Lefebvre sees a contradiction between what public spaces should do and what they are doing. Instead of being enclosed like private life and the private sphere, public space should “be an opening outwards” (Lefebvre 1991, 147). To be an opening outwards, public space would provide people with the opportunity to interact with diverse groups of people and have a variety of encounters and experiences. If, as Lefebvre says, the current situation is the opposite of that, then public space is becoming similar to the private sphere. Instead of inclusion, one finds exclusion and finite limits on the possibilities of actions and activities, similar to what one finds in the private sphere and in private spaces. From this perspective, classifying a publicly owned, privately managed park is difficult because public parks, particularly those well kept and accessible to potential users, often become crowded social spaces. Rather than explicitly classifying a space as either public or private, a better classification system might use gradients or a continuum to assess the relative publicness or privateness of a particular space.

Public spaces exist along a continuum of relative publicness (Németh and Schmidt 2007). According to Németh and Schmidt, both of whom are planners, one can categorize specific locations based on “concepts of ownership, management, and accessibility” (2007, 284). In order to locate specific public spaces on the continuum, they developed and tested a methodology for measuring the security of a publicly accessible space based on how controlled that space is. This methodology divides control practices into four approaches: regulatory, fortress, panoptic, and animated (Németh and Schmidt 2007, 285). The authors use the term ‘publicly accessible space’

throughout their paper to refer to parks, squares, and plazas that are both publicly-owned and privately-owned. Their decision to use this term privileges the notion of accessibility, while diminishing the role of ownership and management. This contrasts with the use of ‘publicly accessible space’ by other authors who use the term to refer to space that is not explicitly public space due to being privately owned and controlled (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). Drawing on the concept of normative ideals, Németh and Schmidt argue that “ideal publicly accessible spaces are those that encourage interaction among the most diverse set of users possible,” (2007, 285) before adding that a space can be highly accessible while being unsuccessful as a public space.

The concept of publicly accessible space is important because it removes ownership from the list of factors determining whether a space is public or private. A park or plaza may be privately owned but if there are no security guards, gates, or other obstacles preventing or precluding public access, it can be highly successful as a publicly accessible space without being publicly owned or guaranteeing public access. Ownership is rarely a simple issue. While issues of property and property rights may be prominent, the lack of modern-day commons in the United States makes reliance on ownership as a demarcation of what is a public space problematic (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). Because of the complexities involved in using ownership as a criterion upon which to declare a space public or private, thinking about the relative publicness or privateness of a space may be more useful. One way to do this is to think of a continuum from public to private on which spaces fall.

The continuum approach suggests that there are few absolutes in determining whether a space is public or private; instead, determinations are relativistic and relational. To locate specific spaces on the continuum, an understanding of the lived experiences of those spaces is necessary (Németh and Schmidt 2007). The story of specific experiences in the park adds a

dimension to the theoretical discussion of whether a specific space is a public space. Publicly owned parks, like Piedmont Park, are widely assumed to be public spaces. However, when an issue like the Sunday night crowd is considered, the murkiness involved in defining Piedmont Park as a public park begins to emerge. While the park may be publicly accessible to everyone during the hours it is open, the MPSA, and perhaps also the PPC, wish to place certain restraints on the gatherings that can be held in the park and where these gatherings occur within the park.

Parks as Public Spaces?

The use of the term ‘public park’ to describe Piedmont Park should also be contested. As Setha Low reminds us, when parks are under the control of park conservancies, the distinction between public and private becomes blurred (2006). Placing conservancies in a position of power puts decision-making in the hands of “a group of private citizens who raise money and then use those funds to run what was formerly a public park” (Low 2006, 83). Thus, Low argues that even if ownership of the park remains public, the park may lose its status as a public park because democratic processes and citizen involvement are disrupted. She gives two examples, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and Central Park in New York City, whose situations have many similarities to Piedmont Park (Low 2006). Should Piedmont Park retain its label as a ‘public park,’ given that private citizens have a great deal of control over the park? The key to answering this question lies in developing an understanding of how, if at all, the Piedmont Park Conservancy works with both the city government and citizens to govern the park. If the PPC misuses its power and manages the park in an authoritarian way without regard to citizen suggestions and complaints, this complicates and possibly improves our understanding of what a public park is. The PPC’s mission is similar to that of Atlanta’s Office of Parks but this does not

obligate the PPC to have the democratic, participatory processes the Office of Parks is presumed to have. The degree of public participation that the Office of Parks solicits merits consideration because public participation in park governance may be lacking throughout Atlanta's parks system. Piedmont Park, under the PPC's management, may not differ widely from other City of Atlanta parks in its management practices. Nevertheless, understanding the relationship between the PPC, the city government, and park users is important for analyzing how the PPC manages the park and the effects of their management practices on the landscape and the park's users.

Several interviewees shed light on the complex relationship between the Piedmont Park Conservancy, the city, and the citizens of Atlanta. McCown, president of the PPC, emphasized how the PPC must go to City Hall, present its desired changes to the Master Plan to City Council, and receive the council's approval before proceeding with major changes to the park (McCown 2007a). While the City Council works with the PPC to manage Piedmont Park, it is clear from examining council documents that council members defer to the judgment of the PPC and its consultants. This process is not unique to Piedmont Park and occurs in other city parks with a conservancy, such as Chastain Park (Dusenbury 2007). One must ask: is City Council just rubberstamping the PPC's plans or are they asking serious questions about the plans put forth prior to approving them? Outside of the parking garage controversy, it seems as if City Council accepts the plans prepared by the PPC, passing them with little debate. This could be because there are members of City Council on the Conservancy's Board of Directors, because the council defers to the experts solicited in the planning process by the PPC, or because of implicit trust between the two partners.

In retaining and exercising control over decisions made about the park, Atlanta City Council is working to maintain Piedmont Park's status as a public park. That the same rules

govern Piedmont Park as are in place in the rest of the city's parks, particularly regarding conduct and hours of access, attests to the desire of the City of Atlanta to maintain the park's status and minimize any special treatment that may be received by the park. Nevertheless, the financial situation of Piedmont Park and the fact that it has private management and extensive financial resources places it in a small, elite group of city-owned parks. The oversight of City Council attests to the publicness of Piedmont Park even though private citizens may have control of the park's daily operations. Whether this oversight is effective is unclear. The City Council has mechanisms in place for oversight, showing their awareness of the need to maintain and have the option of asserting public control over Piedmont Park and the Conservancy as needed. The pull of these opposing forces highlights the need for a continuum between public and private. If the city government oversees the work of the PPC and makes the PPC accountable to it, Piedmont Park can be decisively placed on the public side of the continuum, though how far on the public side is a matter open to debate.

The Proliferation of Privatization

Designating space as 'private' or 'public' relies on vague analytical categories and can result in false representations. Most places are not exclusively public or private but exist between the two in a grey area (Kohn 2004). Ambiguity in the concept of public space makes it difficult to specify its value and the threat public spaces face from privatization (Glasze, Webster, and Frantz 2006). Just as defining public space proves difficult and results in a multitude of definitions, so do efforts to define privatization. Writings on privatization frequently present a dichotomy between the public realm and the private realm, obfuscating the complexities of the "socio-economic and socio-political changes associated with private neighbourhoods" and other

forms of privatization (Glasze, Webster, and Frantz 2006, 2). As discussed earlier, spaces exist along a continuum between public and private, limiting the usefulness of such dichotomies. Showing why privatization matters and why we should be concerned about increased privatization is important for understanding how recent developments in park management affect the everyday lives of those using particular spaces. The private forces exerting their influence have expressed a desire for Piedmont Park to fit a certain idealized image. The presence of the homeless and the Sunday evening crowd threaten this image by disrupting it. While their presence presents no concerns for the City of Atlanta, the Office of Parks, or the Atlanta police, it has become an issue because private groups, such as the MPSA and the PPC, have made it an issue. This is emblematic of the negative effects privatization can have on a previously inclusive public space.

Raymond Williams's definition of private is useful for thinking about the distinction between public and private. Since the fifteenth century, private has been used as an opposite to public, which represented a transition in the meaning of the word. Williams writes that, with this transition, "In virtually all these uses [of the word private] the primary sense was one of *privilege*; the limited access or participation was seen not as deprivation but as advantage" (Williams 1983, 242). His inquiry shows how, for centuries, notions of private have stemmed for centuries from notions of what is public. Over time, private became associated with "an even more important movement, in which 'withdrawal' and 'seclusion' came to replaced, as sense, by 'independence' and 'intimacy'" (Williams 1983, 242). Both of these understandings of the meaning of 'private' are important for thinking about whether Piedmont Park is becoming a more private space. While entrance to the park has not yet been curtailed, participation in the park's governance has been limited by the transference of the park to private management. If

private is about “seclusion and protection from others (*the public*)” and “lack of accountability to ‘them’” (Williams 1983, 243), there are many reasons to be concerned about the trend towards public-private partnerships and the privatization of public park spaces.

Privately-managed public spaces are, in many ways, like other public spaces. They remain places where “accidental and planned encounters among all types of people occur” (Kayden, New York (N.Y.). Dept. of City Planning, and Municipal Art Society of New York 2000, vii). Nevertheless, the transition from public management of a public space to private management and/or operation of that space raises numerous questions about how responsibilities should be divided, how to make sure all stakeholders are accountable for what occurs, and how the roles of government and watchdog groups change (Kayden, New York (N.Y.). Dept. of City Planning, and Municipal Art Society of New York 2000). Asking these questions is of the utmost importance if we are to understand not only what management changes are occurring but also the effects of these changes. The transition to private management represents a fundamental change in the way that public spaces are operated. Rather than being paid for by the government, which is funded by its citizens, private organizations become responsible for raising the necessary funds and using those funds responsibly to manage the space in a way that maintains its public nature.

The privatization of public space has distinct and profound effects on those who use or occupy such spaces. Privatization decreases the opportunities to encounter difference traditionally found in—and considered a quintessential aspect of—public space (Kohn 2004). Urban design principles have taken on increasing importance as the spatial design of public spaces is manipulated to produce the notion of security and safety and to exercise control over the urban landscape. Consequently, public space faces a profound threat from exclusionary changes in design patterns and management practices. These changes can exclude people and,

through this exclusion, lessen the cultural diversity of a public space (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005).

Privatizing Parks

Within park management, there has been a movement towards private management, particularly in response to neglect and mismanagement of parks by government. Park restoration has depended heavily on both private advocacy and private management to attract the attention and funding necessary to make improvements to parks, particularly the large-scale urban parks found in New York City, Boston, St. Louis, and Atlanta. The involvement of private forces can negatively affect the cultural equilibrium of a park. The efforts of park conservancies and friends-of-the-park groups should not be denigrated; they effectively raise awareness about park conditions, organize volunteers, and generate and rejuvenate community support of a particular park. Their focused efforts have the ability to bring change to a specific space and a specific community, which may explain their continued growth and why they are touted as “solutions” for parks. The efforts of these groups must not detract from the ability of great urban spaces like urban parks to maintain cultural diversity through including and welcoming persons of all backgrounds to not only use the space, but also to participate in the management and upkeep of that space. Private management brings “reconstructions and assertive management techniques [that] can encode symbols of class privilege and so discourage and even exclude many people of color, immigrants, and poor and working-class people, all of whom should be as welcome in the public spaces of the city as the assimilated white professionals who support the park conservancies” (Low, Taplin, Scheld 2005, 196). These are the same fears held by Doug Abramson and other members of the Friends of Piedmont Park.

The blurring of the finances for public spaces between public and private sources and the geographic unevenness of funding raises questions about the increasing privatization of public spaces and the erasure of boundaries between public and private. As researchers and activists, we must ask to whom the parks will belong and where the boundaries between public and private will be drawn. As Cindi Katz says, privatization allows parks in impoverished areas to remain in need of improvement (2006). The rise of privatization provides a guise under which local governments can shirk their fiduciary responsibilities to public spaces through neoliberalism, placing the responsibility in the hands of private organizations. This disinvestment by the public can lead to ethical bankruptcy (Katz 2004). The spectacular recovery of park spaces like Central Park in New York City and Piedmont Park in Atlanta attracts attention while the unimproved, smaller parks escape notice, making it even less likely these spaces will attract the money necessary for capital improvements.

Piedmont Park in the Sunshine?

Private organizations can work without oversight, accountability, or being subject to the so-called “sunshine laws” to which public agencies and governments must adhere. As a result, private organizations can act without public oversight, a troubling thought since these organizations are operating, managing, or otherwise overseeing spaces that are owned by the public. In their 2007 lawsuit, the Friends of Piedmont Park alleged that the ABG and the PPC are both subject to the Georgia Open Records Act due to their collaboration with the City of Atlanta on the construction of a parking deck in Piedmont Park. The defendants countered that since they are operating under an agreement with the city, all other parties operating on similar agreements,

including all of the airlines at the airport, would be subject to the Open Records Act if they are (Pendered 2007).

On September 12, 2007, Judge T. Jackson Bedford, Jr. ruled that the ABG is not subject to the Open Records Act because it is a “is a private non-profit corporation that is privately funded, privately governed and not performing any public function on behalf of the city of Atlanta” (Atlanta Botanical Garden wins ruling 2007). The judge based this decision on evidence dating back to the ABG’s founding when a group of citizens approached the City about creating and maintaining a botanical garden to be a tourist attraction in Atlanta. The garden’s founders asked for an extended, rent-free lease of city land on which the garden would be constructed. As a result, the ABG operates under an agreement with the City of Atlanta, similar to the leases held by the airlines that use Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Due to the nature of this agreement, legally the ABG is not a government contractor and thus is not subject to the open records law. The ruling regarding the Piedmont Park Conservancy is more complex.

The Piedmont Park Conservancy maintained throughout the legal proceedings that it had provided the plaintiffs with all of its records relating to the parking garage. Simultaneously, they argued that as a private organization they are not required to open all of their records for public review. Judge T. Jackson Bedford, Jr. declared in his September 2007 ruling that the Piedmont Park Conservancy performs a public function, making the nonprofit subject to the Georgia Open Records Act. The ruling means that the PPC must respond to requests for any records it has pertaining to the construction of the parking deck and of the planned access road connecting the parking deck to the surface road network (King 2007). Responding to the ruling, the *AJC* editorial board wrote, “Clearly, the public has a right to know the details of major changes [in] management of the city-owned park; both the Piedmont Conservancy and the Atlanta Botanical

Garden play an important role” (King 2007). However, the ruling does not extend to records held by the PPC that go beyond the parking deck and the access road. The narrow scope of the ruling allows the PPC to continue to keep many of its records secret.

McCown wrote an *AJC* editorial to address claims that the Conservancy does not operate “in the sunshine” and that its work is not open to public inspection. She writes, “The conservancy's work is anything but private. Anyone who wants to see what the group is doing need only come visit” (McCown 2007b).²¹ She proposes that merely seeing the changes undertaken by the Conservancy in the park should allay concerns about the PPC’s actions in the park. There is an implicit suggestion that the motives, costs, and consequences of the projects are insignificant because the final product is the only thing of importance. The final product cannot show whether citizens had the opportunity to provide meaningful input throughout the design and implementation process and, if so, whether this input received serious consideration.

One pitfall of partnership is the reduction of citizen input in the policy and planning processes (Rosenau 1999). McCown addresses this issue, pointing to the fifty public meetings held by the PPC regarding proposed amendments to the park’s 1995 Master Plan during a two-year period and the presence of more than fifty groups on the Piedmont Park Advisory Committee (McCown 2007b). Miraftab says, “Equitable horizontal power relations amongst participants are not possible unless any discrepancies in their socioinstitutional capacities are recognized and addressed” (2004, 93). The Advisory Committee makes no attempts to address the underlying social, economic, and institutional capacities, rendering it incapable of achieving equity between committee participants and the Conservancy. The final product, if it turns out

²¹ This was not my experience in trying to meet with PPC staff. Appointments were not kept and the questions I asked were not answered, complicating research on the PPC and its partnership with the City of Atlanta.

successfully, can mask the inequitable and undemocratic processes that led to it—though these processes are as important as the results they produce. It is at the process level that citizens should be involved but at the final level where McCown seems to want their interest and involvement.

The parking garage is a concrete example of this. The Conservancy voted to approve the deck at a closed meeting; only after public outcry from citizen-activists and elected officials was a public meeting held. The vote produced a decision on the parking deck, designed to alleviate park user complaints about the lack of parking at Piedmont Park. While the result may have been palatable to citizens, the means by which it was reached precluded citizen participation in the process. The contradiction strongly suggests that while the Conservancy says it operates publicly, there are aspects of its operating process that remain hidden from public view, which should not bother citizens.

The open records case highlights some of the legal and accountability problems that can arise when a private organization receives responsibility for maintaining and operating a public space. The Piedmont Park Conservancy argues it is not subject to the Georgia Open Records Act while fulfilling the plaintiffs' request for documents. These seemingly contradictory actions speak to the complexities of the relationship between the PPC and the city of Atlanta. While the PPC may solicit public opinion and input, there are few controls in place to make sure the public's opinion is heard and valued. This raises concerns regarding the privatization of Piedmont Park, which remains city property and as such should be accessible and accountable to the citizens of Atlanta. A counterargument might be that since corporate and private donations make up the bulk of the funding for the park's operating budget, maintenance expenses, and capital improvements, the PPC need not open all of its records to the public since public

financing is not essential to its activities. In discussions with PPC staff, it seemed clear that the organization wishes to keep some of its records private, citing donors who do not wish the extent of their contributions to be revealed as one reason for not opening all of their records to the public. The PPC wishes to maintain its status as a private organization not susceptible to open records laws while retaining its control over a publicly-owned space, which results in the increased privatization of a public space. The PPC's actions move Piedmont Park towards the private end of the continuum.

Securing Public Space

Security and fear have become intertwined with public space. Fear stems from the conception of public space as uncontrolled space where the fragility of civilization is evident (Mitchell 2003). There is an emphasis on the relative disorder found in public space today, contrasted with the previously held idea of public space as a microcosm of social order (Kohn 2004). The association of public space with anarchy makes public space appear undesirable in contemporary cities (Mitchell 2003). The concerns over security are a response to the discourse of fear perpetuated in part by the media's repeated portrayals of violence (Low 2001). Public space today has become part of the urban discourse of fear and the culture of fear that is so pervasive in society. "Fearmongering" compels people to change the design plans, regulatory practices, and controlling mechanisms present in public space. Dissecting and disabling this fear is necessary for public spaces to be successful.

Having a security presence helps control fear, joining security with public space. How managers of publicly-accessible spaces choose to do so this affects the space's accessibility and its ability to foster and encourage diversity. Due to concerns with security, the privatized,

fenced-off, or otherwise secured and separated spaces have increased (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005). Restrictions on certain behaviors are introduced to provide security and order to public spaces, with the goal of enhancing the public space to prevent users from fleeing to more tightly controlled spaces like the home or the shopping mall (Kohn 2004). At this time, the fenced-off or otherwise privatized areas of Piedmont Park have not increased, though restrictions on behavior seem to be forthcoming as the stories of the Sunday evening crowd and the homeless presence in the park illustrate.

As parks have come under private control and received private financing, increases in security, safety, and cleanliness are highlighted as the first conspicuous effects of the change. Increases in funding for parks have provided the money necessary to hire private security guards, to draft and enforce legal measures curtailing or prohibiting certain activities, and to install surveillance cameras, all of which are considered hard control measures (Németh and Schmidt 2007). Under public investment, implementation of hard control measures is more difficult because of the start-up and operating costs associated with them. It would be prohibitively expensive for DPRCA to initiate all of these measures in every Atlanta park; thus private financing is necessary if these measures are to be realized. The introduction of these “produces a landscape that encodes class relations and residential (race/class/ethnic/gender) segregation more permanently in the built landscape” (Low 2001, 45). The installation of these features transforms the park into part of the “fortress city,” leading to the destruction of public space (Davis 1992). These landscapes are becoming more prevalent as privatization and public-private partnerships in parks increase.

Citing security concerns may be the most convenient way for those who wish to eliminate the Sunday evening gatherings at Piedmont Park’s 12th Street entrance to raise support for and

act on their desires. Access to the park for emergency vehicles may be a proxy for justifying design or rule changes that will require the gatherers to either shift to another location in the park or disband altogether. As the operator of Piedmont Park, the PPC is in a position where it can choose to continue the control of the park or to allow the park to fulfill some of the original aspirations for public parks, such as bringing the classes together and offering a space where people can socialize. Whether or not the PPC brought the issue of the Sunday night crowd to the attention of the MPSA and, through that organization, City Council, the news media, and the broader Midtown community, the PPC now faces a crucial decision that may change the face of the park for years to come. They must decide if they want to go along with the fear-mongering of the MPSA by trying to remove the Sunday evening crowd or relocate them to a less visible area of the park.

Busy spaces attract a larger number of users, an extremely circular process. As Németh and Schmidt explain, “This relationship is self-reinforcing: In order for spaces to be perceived as safe they must be well used, but those with a choice will only use spaces that they perceive as safe” (2007, 284), leading to a paradox for publicly accessible spaces. From this, it seems that the presence of a large crowd in Piedmont Park interacting and enjoying themselves would serve as an attraction for others considering using or visiting the park. Even though the crowd is not engaging in illicit or illegal activities, their presence serves to make the park seem unsafe to those outside of the group (Gower 2007). Critics cite the crowd’s presence and activities as reasons people may not use the park. Rowdy crowds may be as much of a deterrent to park use as physical barriers are; both set boundaries that prospective park users are loathe to transgress. The contradiction implies that only certain users and activities deemed appropriate serve to attract additional users to a park. The critics of the Sunday evening crowd may just replace one

issue with another, replacing the Sunday crowd with physical barriers or unused space, neither of which would attract park users.

Reconsidering the Sunday Evening Crowd

The discourses on public space, privatization, and public-private partnerships have shown how the nature of public space has changed and, through this, what some of the contemporary threats to public space are. The move towards privatization can result in reduced access to public space for the common person. Ideally, public spaces are accessible, publicly owned, and nonexclusive spaces that foster diversity. The material reality is sharply different: exclusions form the foundation of public space. The presence of the Piedmont Park Conservancy has brought with it concerns of privatization and worries that the park will begin to cater exclusively to the interests of the wealthy. Accompanying these moves towards privatization and exclusivity are a growth in security concerns and the discourses of fear in the urban environment.

Unease towards the crowd gathering at one particular entrance of the park—a public space presumably intended for and accepting of gathering—provokes concerns of the privatization of public space raised by Kohn. She argues that the growth of private governance undermines public life. Kohn notes that restrictions on speech and assembly threaten “the variation and diversity of collective life” (2004, 4), resulting in a loss that is both political and aesthetic. While it is impossible to point the finger at a specific group for raising the alarm bells about the Sunday night crowd, framing the situation as dangerous and arguing that the group’s presence makes others feel unwelcome in Piedmont Park comes across a call for a remedy to the situation. By casting the situation in a negative light, these private groups are attempting to utilize their influence to restrict how the park can be used and disrupt public life by restricting

the assembly of a specific group of people. Because many members of the crowd are identified as racial minorities as well as LGBT, discrimination based on these identities may also play a role in the reaction the weekly gatherings have received. The APD and Atlanta DPRCA set off fewer alarm bells, which may indicate that the situation is not as dire as some suggest.

By having a presence in and making a claim to public space, the Sunday night crowd in Piedmont Park makes claims both on and as a part of the public (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). While the crowd may not be gathering as a part of a protest, their presence in Piedmont Park promotes the idea that public spaces are places for inclusion and freedom of expression. They are, in a way, carrying out the struggle for inclusion that is a traditional role of public space (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). The MPSA implicitly says the crowd's presence disrupts the park's ability to avoid excluding particular peoples, which suggests the paradoxical idea that the Sunday crowd should then be excluded from the park so as to avoid making others feel unwelcome.

If successful public spaces are those that “adeptly balance liberty with personal security” (Németh and Schmidt 2007, 285), the opposition to the Sunday evening crowd's presence in Piedmont Park indicates that Piedmont Park is not a successful public space. The liberty and freedom to assemble, socialize, and utilize the park is infringed upon by allegations that the crowd members are linked to violence and criminal activities occurring in the areas around Piedmont Park. The MPSA security report privileges personal security, implying that the crowd needs to be controlled to maintain the safety and security of Piedmont Park and the surrounding areas.

Viewing public space as a space of exclusion, like it has always been, changes the understanding of the situation (Mitchell 2003). Piedmont Park is a space of exclusion: activities are prohibited, the park opens and closes at specific times, and hired security guards patrol the

park to enforce the rules and deal with problems that threaten the park's image as a safe space where everyone is welcome. The Sunday evening crowd faces multiple axes of exclusion based on perceptions of its sexual orientation, racial identity, activities, behaviors, and size. No one has, as yet, expressed a desire to see the Sunday evening park crowd completely disbanded, perhaps in recognition of the difficulties taking such a position would present. Nevertheless through the suggestion that the crowd brings activities unwelcome in the park, the crowd is cast as an exclusionary presence. Surely, the goal of reducing crime in the park is laudable, but accomplishing such a security goal by removing "unsavory persons" from the park contradicts the purported ideals about what a public space is and for whom it exists.

Rights to public space are always contested and never guaranteed (Mitchell 2003). The example of the Sunday evening gatherings at Piedmont Park shows that even where steps have been taken to avoid privatization of a public park, the right to physically be in that park must still be contested. Those in power in Piedmont Park and the Midtown community have a vested interest in maintaining the park as a safe, diverse space where meaningful interactions between people of different backgrounds can occur. The park has raised real estate values in Midtown, served as a major regional attraction and destination, and brought in people from outside of Midtown who spend money at area businesses. Continuing to be a regional destination helps the economy of Midtown, something that those in power in the park have an interest in seeing continue since these same Midtown businesses make large donations to the PPC. Ensuring that they work towards this goal is another matter altogether. The increase in private security patrols in the Midtown area suggests residents feel the need for greater security and their efforts to try to cordon off their community from those unlike them who may engage in non-criminal behaviors of which they do not approve. To maintain its right to assemble and socialize in Piedmont Park,

the Sunday crowd must continue to contest efforts to limit, move, or otherwise place constraints upon their gatherings. Ideally, the Piedmont Park Conservancy would speak out on behalf of the group's right to be in that area of the park, working in conjunction with the Sunday crowd, the Midtown Inclusion Alliance, and other interested parties to ensure that the concerns of all parties are addressed.

The issues raised by the presence of the Sunday evening crowd and the negative attention the crowd has recently attracted, illustrate the complexities faced by contemporary public spaces. The transfer of Piedmont Park to private management combined with the limitations on access and behavior, along with pressures to homogenize, have changed the way in which today's park users experience the park. If placed on a continuum between public and private, Piedmont Park would likely fall more on the public side. It lacks gates and fences prohibiting access, is accessible via public transportation, has open spaces that permit interaction between people, and efforts are made to solicit public participation in the design and planning process. It is important to challenge the idea that spaces are dichotomous, that they are either public or private. As Piedmont Park illustrates, a space can have elements found in public space and in private space, which highlights the need to consider spaces on a public-private continuum. Rather than focusing on whether a space is public or private, attention should be focused on understanding the public and private forces at work in a particular space and the lived experiences resulting from their interaction.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROAD AHEAD

Piedmont Park offers unique opportunities for recreation and for research. As one of Atlanta's largest parks and a cultural and historical icon in the city, Piedmont Park intends to solve the ills of society, per Frederick Law Olmsted's vision. With its mission of preserving and enhancing Piedmont Park for future generations, the Piedmont Park Conservancy has arguably helped deliver on the Olmsted Brothers' original vision for Piedmont Park. Yet its efforts to do so have not been without controversy. This thesis has investigated the particular socio-historical context that led to the formation of a partnership between the City of Atlanta and the PPC and the way in which that partnership works today. In investigating the 'success' of the partnership, this thesis has revealed that the partnership's success in improving the overall condition of the park has not come without consequences for access, citizen participation, and democracy. At the root of these consequences is the imbalance in power found in the partnership that has existed since its inception, with the Conservancy having more power than the City and using that power to get its way, even in the face of public opposition. In revealing this, this thesis shows how these unequal power relations affect how the parties benefit from the partnership, their relationship with one another, and the park's status as a public space.

The Piedmont Park Conservancy was originally formed in 1989 as a citizen's group to assist and support the city government's efforts to improve the condition of Piedmont Park's grounds and facilities. The deplorable conditions in the park at that time resulted from the city of Atlanta's inability to provide sufficient funds for parks and recreation. Using the tools of neoliberal governance, the city has devolved its responsibility for providing a well-maintained

public park to the Piedmont Park Conservancy, a situation which will likely continue in the future as the city faces fiscal shortfalls. The fiscal constraints faced by the city of Atlanta compel fiscal restraint, likely contributing to the desire of public officials to enact neoliberal governance policies. Having successfully devolved public services to the private and nonprofit sectors and without having found the money to support the services it maintains, it is unlikely there will be any change to the current relationship between Piedmont Park and the city government. In the face of these constraints, the city of Atlanta government needs the Piedmont Park Conservancy much more than the PPC needs the City, suggesting that the partnership benefits are not reciprocal. Though it was begun as a citizen's group, the PPC has taken on what used to be the City's responsibilities, providing a service the City was unable to deliver. The neoliberalization of park provision has changed the relationship between the government, the people, and the park space, with the imbalance of power in the partnership playing a key role in how these relationships have changed and are currently realized.

Bringing the private and nonprofit sectors into the provision of services, neoliberalism transforms service delivery and mediates the relationship between the government, the people, and the space. In Atlanta, the city government failed to meet its citizens' desires to have a well-maintained public park, which the formalization of a partnership with the PPC changed. The PPC's success in terms of upgrading the park's grounds, completing deferred maintenance, and making the park's patrons feel safer is laudable, though it raises concerns about the material manifestations of neoliberal governance policy which must be addressed. Neoliberalism and the partnership lead to a new relationship where the people can no longer hold the government directly responsible or accountable for what happens within that particular space. The partnership, realized as part of neoliberal reforms made by the city government, brings

privatization to what was previously a public space. The result is a new, hybridized space where concepts of public and private space blend and intertwine.

The neoliberal desires of the City of Atlanta government have changed not only the relationship of the government to Piedmont Park but also the relationship of the people to the park. As the parking garage example in the first chapter indicates, the Piedmont Park Conservancy is able to operate simultaneously within and outside of the public's purview. Though it was founded by citizens, the PPC has ceased to be primarily a group of park neighbors, instead encompassing a wider swath of the community. The City has an accountability system in place with the Conservancy, but the public is not directly involved on the decision-making level, as it could be if the park were operated by the City's Office of Parks. The Citizen Advisory Committee on which the PPC relies for public input is not representative of Atlanta's residents or of the park's users. As a result, the public input process has been corrupted under the PPC. The initial lack of public input on the parking garage and the controversy which led City Council to require the PPC hold public hearings on the matter is indicative of just how little the public's opinion matters to the Conservancy's leadership. The unwillingness of the Conservancy to solicit public opinion indicates that Piedmont Park, a public park, is becoming more private, likely not what the City had in mind when it initiated the partnership.

Having a public-private partnership brings a particular set of challenges to Piedmont Park. As public-private partnerships become increasingly common as a management practice in governments and parks systems in particular, understanding these challenges takes on greater importance. The public-private partnership between the City of Atlanta and Piedmont Park Conservancy has enabled the City to leverage private assets and resources to plan and complete

projects in Piedmont Park that may not otherwise have been done. Through the partnership, the money needed to ensure that the park is a safe, attractive place for visitors, both casual and regular, is raised and spent. The restoration of Piedmont Park into a world-class urban park and regional attraction is likely the biggest success of the partnership. Thus, the public-private partnership brings improvements to the park's management by making the park a more attractive destination for tourists, park users, and event organizers.

The ongoing drought in the southeastern United States has had a dramatic effect on how Piedmont Park's space is utilized. Due to concerns that the grass in the park can not withstand the pressure brought by tens of thousands of festivalgoers in one weekend, the four major Class A festivals that usually occur annually in Piedmont Park—the Dogwood Festival, the Atlanta Jazz Festival, the Peachtree Road Race (which typically ends in Piedmont Park), and the Atlanta PRIDE Festival—have been forced to relocate as of January 9, 2008 (City of Atlanta 2008c). Though moving all four events festivals out of the park cannot be directly attributed to the City, the Conservancy, or the partnership, the movement of these festivals to other venues directly affects Piedmont Park. The park will likely lose visitors, since there are some who visit the park only for these events. The resulting loss of social interaction and diversity makes it more difficult for Piedmont Park to fulfill its promise as a place where people of different social and ethnic backgrounds can meet and interact. The loss of festivals may have a more significant impact since the PPC will not receive rental fees from the festivals for the use of park facilities. Furthermore, with fewer park users visiting, the PPC may take in less money from individuals.

Since signing the Memorandum of Understanding, the Piedmont Park Conservancy has had a great deal of success raising money from a multitude of private sources, both individual and corporate, to support the daily maintenance of Piedmont Park as well as capital

improvements to the park's facilities and the upcoming park expansion. This financial power has produced significant authority for the Conservancy as the MOU cedes increasing control and authority over Piedmont Park to the Conservancy, including giving them the ability to have things like concessions and banners which are not permitted in other city-owned parks. These changes shift the balance of power in the partnership, with the PPC providing more to the City than the City provides to the Conservancy, particularly in regards to money and labor. Having already formed the partnership and reduced its financial expenditures in Piedmont Park, the City of Atlanta has little incentive to drastically change the terms of or eliminate the public-private partnership.

Public-private partnerships ideally—and theoretically—combine the advantages of the public and private sectors, enabling both to achieve their missions and goals with fewer resources and greater success. Working together, the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy are able to serve the public by providing a park with numerous recreational opportunities, desired facilities and amenities, and that is safe for users of all ages. In the 1970s and 1980s, the City of Atlanta demonstrated that it was unable to maintain the park in the condition desired by citizens due to a lack of available money. Now, with the help of the Conservancy, it can and does. Thus, at least in the area of service delivery, the public-private partnership brings a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The Conservancy and the City leverage and combine their individual assets to protect, preserve, and enhance Piedmont Park.

Even as the City-PPC partnership functions in a traditional way by allowing the partners to make better use of the resources available to them, it twists the idea of the typical devolution of service delivery under neoliberalism. The City is still providing services in and to Piedmont Park, in addition to helping to pay for capital improvements out of its funds. The result is a

partnership that fails to adhere to the tenets of neoliberalism. If the goal of the partnership is to provide a better Piedmont Park without City funds, one must ask why the City is still footing the light bill, paying for security, and contributing millions of dollars for capital improvements. Unfortunately, many citizens seem unaware of not only the partnership but the City's continued financial obligations towards the park, which the PPC's promotional materials help to obscure. The City has not outsourced or devolved all of its responsibilities, contradicting the traditional neoliberal view of service provision. It remains an active, involved partner suggesting that the literature on neoliberalism may not adequately address the complexities involved in partnerships.

The ramifications of the public-private partnership now responsible for operating and managing Piedmont Park are large. The City of Atlanta has a number of public-private partnerships and views increasing them as a way to augment the city's expenditures with private funding to enable the delivery of the services needed and wanted by its citizens. Viewed positively by the government, public-private partnerships are presented to citizens as the best means of service delivery without additional fees or taxes, a proposition many citizens find highly attractive. By including empirical evidence of the successes and challenges presented by a specific public-private partnership, this project seeks to help fill the empirical gap in the theory of and knowledge on public-private partnerships. Two areas of concern arise from the empirical data: 1) the lack of accountability measures and standards, and 2) the preclusion of community input and participation.

While the Memorandum of Understanding lays out clear provisions and a hierarchical power structure, the Piedmont Park Conservancy retains *carte blanche* authority for much of the daily decision-making that happens regarding Piedmont Park's operation, management, and planning. The accountability system in place requires the Conservancy to seek approval from the

Commissioner of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs and subsequently Atlanta's City Council if they seek to change the provisions set forth in the MOU. The partnerships literature demonstrates that strong accountability measures, ensuring that each partner checks the authority and work of the other(s), are crucial for a partnership to have long-term success. While key parties indicate that there is a system of accountability in place, it is difficult to see it in action from the data collected for this research. The City of Atlanta government may find it difficult to hold the PPC fully responsible for all of its actions given how dependent it is upon the partnership to provide services in and for Piedmont Park. For this public-private partnership to remain successful, the City and the PPC should establish stronger accountability provisions, including ones that spell out specific consequences for not seeking the other partner's approval prior to taking a major action, and communicate these provisions to the broader community. Doing so could increase citizen support of the partnership and reduce the kinds of conflicts seen when the parking garage was voted on at City Hall.

The inclusion of citizen input and participation is one of the things most often touted about American democratic government. However, the parking garage debate showed that the Piedmont Park Conservancy, along with its partners including City Council, can provide a forum for community input, then ignore the comments received from citizens. The Conservancy has decision-making authority for daily operations and long-range planning, two processes normally controlled by the City's Office of Parks. As a government office, the Office of Parks is more accountable to the citizens, particularly because it is subject to the Georgia Open Records Act and must share plans publicly and with open forums before a decision to proceed with a specific plan is reached. The Conservancy ideally should operate similarly. However, it is only required to make public presentations of its plans as specified in the MOU.

The City can change this situation in multiple ways. First, the City could immediately increase its oversight of the Conservancy by overseeing how everyday decisions are made, attending internal and public meetings of the Conservancy, and making its efforts more transparent to the citizens of Atlanta. Furthermore, the City should seek to amend the MOU to require that the Conservancy make more of its records available to the public, which would increase oversight of the organization by the public and by the City. Second, the City should require the Conservancy to include citizen input and increase citizen participation in its decision-making processes by getting the Conservancy to revamp its Citizen Advisory Committee and hold more Town Hall meetings. These changes should be incorporated into the MOU, if possible, to hold the Conservancy legally accountable for soliciting greater citizen input. Of course these changes will not completely rectify the situation since there is no guarantee that either the City or the Conservancy will listen to the public. If the City enhances the accountability of the PPC and adequately oversees its work, Piedmont Park can be placed towards the public end of the public-private space continuum.

The future of Piedmont Park is in flux as the North Woods expansion proceeds, the parking deck is built, and the neighborhoods around the park continue to change. The features planned in the North Woods expansion may attract additional groups to the park, increasing the park's diversity and better enabling it to be a place for everyone to recreate and enjoy themselves. The parking deck may facilitate the ability of the disabled to access the park, even though the fees charged to park in it may enhance the perception of the park as a private place. These perceptions are dangerous because they can assist in the transformation of the park from a public space to a private one.

Because it is owned by the City, Piedmont Park should remain a public space, open and accessible to all. It can deliver on its potential as a place for cross-cultural interaction by offering programs that have broad appeal to parks users and programs that target specific groups of park users based on their interests. Increasing the parks educational offerings will get more youth interested in parks, outdoor recreation, and conservation, all of which have broader societal benefits. To keep the park public, the City must resist pressures from and thwart the efforts of the PPC to exclude certain individuals or behaviors from the park unless they are breaking the law. The presence of a large crowd of minorities should not be disruptive and the Conservancy's fearmongering enhances the perception that the crowd is a problem. The concerns raised by the Friends of Piedmont Park about public access to the park must also be addressed if the park is to truly be a public space.

The disadvantages of the partnership extend beyond its ramifications on the parks' status as a public space to issues of spatial and social injustice. As Piedmont Park improves, it receives a great deal of attention, detracting from other parks. Neighborhood parks throughout Atlanta suffer from deferred maintenance and a lack of financial support. Their size and location makes it difficult for them to attract the business investment that is vital for a successful park conservancy. This, in turn, reinscribes disadvantages on particular communities that are already suffering by depriving them of greenspace for recreation, enjoyment, and socializing. The Piedmont Park Conservancy's existence actually facilitates this process by promoting the idea that private funding is the pathway to a beautiful park. The Conservancy's donors further this by donating money to and volunteering in Piedmont Park, to the exclusion of other parks that arguably have a greater need for donor resources. Parks in poorer neighborhoods are in decline while some of Atlanta's most wealthy residents have easy access to its premier park. There is no

easy remedy for the situation. The Conservancy's willingness to share the proceeds from the concessions stands with the City and to give the City a portion of the parking garage revenue should help since the money could then be used for other parks. To enhance the park's experience for all Atlantans, the PPC should expand its efforts to help other parks develop friends-of-the-park organizations and conservancies that can support and revitalize individual parks. On a larger scale, the PPC should make sure its donors are aware of the budgetary problems the City of Atlanta faces and encourage them to support other parks in the Atlanta parks system.

By focusing specifically on an urban park partnership, this research raises concerns about public-private partnerships concerning access, the public nature of park space, and the ability of partnerships to meet the needs of park users. Parks partnerships are being hailed as the way of the future and the best option for cities lacking resources to provide better, safer parks to their citizens. The evidence suggests that the exclusion of citizen voices from a previously democratic space threatens public parks as public spaces where political activity is accepted and acceptable. Others have raised this same concern regarding Central Park and Prospect Park in New York (Katz 2006) and People's Park in Berkeley, California (Mitchell 1995). Like People's Park, Piedmont Park, through the PPC, seems to be moving towards the removal of certain "inappropriate activities" like the Sunday evening crowd to accommodate the middle- and upper-class Atlantans who support the park through their use and with their money and volunteered time. Balancing the desires to provide resources to parks with the public nature of parks is difficult. Further research on the best practices in parks partnerships is needed, particularly to

focus on the issue of citizen and community participation and involvement in the decision-making processes.

The transformation of Piedmont Park from a publicly-managed public park to a privately-managed public park has important consequences that merit further consideration, particularly if more parks partnerships are sought and developed in the future. The Piedmont Park Conservancy sees the park as a particular public space, leading to ideological struggles over public space (Mitchell 1995). The City has its own needs but it cannot outsource all of its responsibility for the park without serious consequences. The struggle comes as the City works to balance its needs with the needs of Atlanta's citizens. Balancing these competing ideologies and conceptualizations of public space is important for the future management of Piedmont Park, especially if the park is to remain a public space open and accessible to everyone.

While Piedmont Park's users generally see the change in the park's management as good and/or beneficial, it has also gone unnoticed by many park users who are unaware that there is a public-private partnership responsible for operating the park. Given the "success" of the partnership, that it has remained so thoroughly hidden from park users—at least those I spoke with—is shocking. Hidden from the public eye, the partnership escapes scrutiny and is able to disguise the inequitable power relations between its partners. McCown's suggestion that people visit the park to examine the work of the PPC is inadequate. Citizens, through social movements and involvement in democratic local governance, should critically examine the work of the partnership and the actions of each partner, making sure that those making decisions heed their interests. Citizen engagement increases in importance as neoliberal strategies encourage governments to shrink their areas of responsibility. Citizen leaders and activists should work to develop a dialogue on neoliberalism and partnerships to spread awareness of how these work, the

effects they have on citizens, and to motivate citizens concern in changing governance practices. In these struggles over space, social movements are spawned, which helps urban parks achieve their ideal of bringing citizens together.

Analyzing the discourses around the public-private partnership between the City of Atlanta and the Piedmont Park Conservancy provides a foundation for better theorizing the public-private partnerships found in urban park management. This project grounds the theoretical research on public-private partnerships and neoliberal processes in a public space using empirical evidence to gather and explain the multiple discourses around the City-PPC partnership that have emerged. The empirical data suggest that public-private partnerships may be more complex than has been realized. They also show a disconnect between the official presentation and discourses of the partnership and their material practices. Developing a theory of public-private partnerships that includes this difference is important, particularly as public-private partnerships continue to be developed throughout all sectors of society affecting nearly every aspect of our everyday lives.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Piedmont Park Conservancy

Debbie McCown
Chris Nelson
Mark Rusche
Monica Thornton

Atlanta City Council

Councilmember Anne Fauver
Councilmember Caesar Mitchell

Park users

Graham Balch
Rob Brawner
Sam Burch
Peter de Haven
Christina Hruska
Cain Williamson

Doug Abramson, President, Friends of Piedmont Park
Clay Aiken
Trisha Clymore, Assistant Director, Atlanta PRIDE
George A. Dusenbury IV, Executive Director, Park Pride
Alida Silverman, Board of Trustees, National Olmsted Parks Association

APPENDIX B

PARK USER SURVEY

This survey addresses issues directly related to Piedmont Park. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate.

1. On average, how often do you visit Piedmont Park?
- First time visitor
 - A few times a year
 - A few times a month
 - Once or twice a week
 - Almost every day
 - Every day

2. How long have you been visiting Piedmont Park?
- First time visitor
 - Less than a year
 - 1-2 years
 - 3-4 years
 - 5-7 years
 - 8 years or more

3. Why do you visit Piedmont Park?

4. How do you typically get to Piedmont Park?
- Car
 - Public Transportation (MARTA)
 - Walk /Run
 - Bike

5. Which Piedmont Park facilities do you use most often? You can choose more than one.

- Dog park
- Picnic facilities
- Swimming center
- Walking and jogging paths
- Other, please list: _____
- Lake Clara Meer
- Playground (Saturn and/or Naguchi)
- Tennis center
- The Active Oval

6. Are the facilities that you use adequately maintained?
- Yes
 - Somewhat
 - No

Please use the box below to explain your response.

7. What improvement to Piedmont Park would you **most** like to see? (Choose one.)

- Better maintenance of facilities
- Better lighting
- Longer hours of accessibility
- Better security
- Further development of the park
- Fewer events that attract large crowds
- Other, please explain: _____

8. What mechanisms do you support for funding park maintenance, improvements and programs? (You may choose more than one response.)
 City of Atlanta Individual user fees Corporate donations
 Other, please explain: _____

9. Are you aware of the current Piedmont Park parking garage controversy?
 Yes No

10. Do you support the construction of a parking garage in Piedmont Park? (You may explain.)
 Yes No

Please answer the following questions on a **scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree)**. If you do not know or have no opinion, write NA.

11. Piedmont Park meets my needs as a park user. _____
12. Piedmont Park promotes an inclusive environment where all feel welcome. _____
13. Piedmont Park's condition and maintenance have worsened in the past five years. _____
14. Crime and other negative behaviors have increased in the park in the last five years. _____
15. Having and maintaining parks is important in an urban area like Atlanta. _____
16. Large parks, like Piedmont Park, are not an important part of Atlanta's landscape. _____
17. Piedmont Park is not an important cultural resource in Atlanta. _____
18. As development around the park increases, Piedmont Park's amenities increase in value. _____
19. Those making decisions for Piedmont Park value citizen input. _____
20. Piedmont Park should remain a public space accessible to everyone. _____

21. To the best of your knowledge, who is responsible for managing Piedmont Park?

22. What, if anything, is special about Piedmont Park?

23. Would you continue to visit Piedmont Park if you **had to pay for entrance** to the park?

- Yes No

Why or why not?

24. What is the **maximum amount** you would be willing to pay for entrance to Piedmont Park?
 \$0.01 - \$0.49 \$0.50 - \$0.99 \$1.00 - \$1.49 \$1.50 - \$1.99 \$2.00+

25. Are there specific facilities you would pay to use?

26. What is the **maximum amount** you would be willing to pay for use of specific facilities?
 \$0.01 - \$0.49 \$0.50 - \$0.99 \$1.00 - \$1.49 \$1.50 - \$1.99 \$2.00+

27. Have you ever volunteered at Piedmont Park?

Yes No

If so, through what organization? _____

28. Have you ever attended a public meeting on parks or planning held by the city of Atlanta?

Yes No

29. Have you ever attended a Friends of Piedmont Park meeting?

Yes No

30. Have you ever donated money to the Friends of Piedmont Park?

Yes No

31. Have you ever attended a public meeting held by the Piedmont Park Conservancy?

Yes No

32. Have you ever donated money to the Piedmont Park Conservancy?

Yes No

The next group of questions is to collect some information about you.

33. Gender:

Female Male Transsexual/Transgender Decline to respond

34. Racial/Ethnic Identity (please select all appropriate responses):

Black or African-American Caucasian or White Hispanic
 Asian or Pacific Islander American Indian Multiracial
 Decline to respond

35. What was your approximate household income in 2006?

under \$30,000 \$30,000 - \$49,999 \$50,000 - \$69,999
 \$70,000 - \$99,999 \$100,000 or more Decline to respond

36. What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?

Some high school College degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
 High school diploma or GED Postgraduate work or degree

Some college or technical school

Decline to respond

37. Are there any children currently living in your household?

Yes

No

Decline to respond

a. If yes, how many children are living in the household? _____

b. What are the ages of the children living in your household? _____

38. What is the approximate distance between where you live and Piedmont Park?

0-2 miles

3-5 miles

6-8 miles

8 miles or further

39. Imagine you are giving someone directions to **your house**. What two roads intersect at the last turn they would have to make?

_____ at _____

40. What is the zip code for the place where you live?

APPENDIX C

CHAIRMAN'S CIRCLE COMPANIES

AGL Resources
ajc (Atlanta Journal-Constitution)
Alston + Bird LLP
at&t
Comcast
Cox Enterprises, Inc.
Georgia Power: A Southern Company
GG4 Construction Co.
GPC
Kaiser Permanente
Kim King Associates
Novare Group
Park Tavern
Piedmont Center
Post Properties
Silverman Construction Program Management
SunTrust
The Coca-Cola Company
The Home Depot
The Midtown Community Bank
The Plaza Midtown
Troutman Sanders LLP
Turner: A TimeWarner Company
UPS
Wachovia
Waffle House