LEARNING FROM THE BELTLINE:

PROGRESS TOWARDS EQUITABLE PARK DESIGN IN ATLANTA

by

NICHOLAS NEWHALL RIKER

(Under the Direction of Katie Marages)

ABSTRACT

Using three parks along the Atlanta Beltline as case studies, I argue for the central role of community involvement and the importance of history in designing equitable park spaces. Through an examination of the BeltLine's current community input process and by looking at three parks (Historic Fourth Ward Park, DH Stanton Park, and Enota Park), I explore the changes in the surrounding communities as those parks were built. I apply the lessons learned on those three projects to suggest a more equitable process for another park along the BeltLine in a neighborhood that has been historically disinvested and is at a high risk for gentrification and displacement. Through this exploration, I find that while the BeltLine offers opportunity for equitable development, it can only happen with a strong emphasis on community design and reckoning with the unique racial history of Atlanta.

INDEX WORDS: urban planning, park design, equity, equitable, BeltLine, Atlanta,

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Bachelor of Arts, 2012

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

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August 2023

DEDICATION

To my MLA cohort: it always gets done.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all of the amazing professors that helped me in creating this thesis, most notably Dr. Katie Marages, my major professor, for her guidance throughout and for sheparding me across the finish line. Thanks to the rest of my reading committee: Dr. Alfie Vick, Dr. Steven Holloway, and Marco Ancheita for reading and revising. And finally, thank you to my wife, Liz, for keeping me sane while writing and always being in my corner.

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INTRODUCTION

> "[The Atlanta BeltLine] is full of high hopes -- for an Atlanta that is more racially integrated, less congested and, in a change refreshing to many here, more focused on improving the lives of residents rather than just projecting a glittering New South image to the rest of the world." —*The New York Times,* 2016[1]

The Atlanta BeltLine is a major green infrastructure project in Atlanta, Georgia, a city with a long history of disinvestment and racial and economic segregation. The ultimate goal of the project is to convert 22 miles of former railroad lines into multi-use trails and a transit system, with parks and other greenspaces branching off the primary pathway. As originally conceived and promoted, the BeltLine was meant to stitch neighborhoods in the city back together, creating a functional, beautiful space for Atlanta residents to enjoy. However, some worry that the trail's development is pushing historically disinvested groups out of their communities. By finally paying attention to areas that were disinvested, Atlanta and the BeltLine project are driving longtime residents out from their neighborhoods, furthering the negative effects those residents have felt for years.

For landscape architects and urban designers, the BeltLine represents a great leap forward in terms of reclaiming urban space for pedestrians and residents of the city and will likely be looked at as an example for many projects in the future. The BeltLine offers alternative transportation routes to moving through the city while creating a massive greenspace that offers

[1] Richard Fausset, "A Glorified Sidewalk, and the Path to Transform Atlanta," *New York Times* (New York, NY) 2016.

many health benefits to nearby residents. The project is a great example of adaptive reuse, where elements from an industrial past, i.e. rail ties, warehouse equipment, etc., are incorporated into a new design that fits the current culture and daily use of a modern metropolis. In addition, the incorporation of new park space along the trail corridor shows a commitment to providing adequate and accessible greenspace throughout a city. Not all outcomes from the BeltLine are necessarily positive, however, and landscape designers need to learn from those, too. Many critics of the project, including urban studies scholars, have pointed to the potential for gentrification as a major issue, and have argued that the BeltLine and its surrounding development are pushing lower-income residents out of their homes and neighborhoods.

In this thesis, I argue that the BeltLine and its parks bring opportunity for equitable development, but it can only happen with a strong emphasis on designing with the community and reckoning with history. Community engagement alone, and especially only at early stages of the design process, is not enough to create equity in a city with a long history of development along racial lines. Atlanta's developmental history has created segregation and disinvestment throughout the city, leading to a sense of distrust of developmental authorities from certain communities. The BeltLine needs to rebuild trust in those communities by grappling with that history in order to get a better sense of what the community actually wants and have a better chance to protect those that are vulnerable. To be engaged with the community is to be engaged with its history, learning along with the residents what the community needs to thrive in the present day.

Race, Wealth, and Atlanta's Development

Race has always been innately tied to development in Atlanta. The city, in its infant form as Terminus, was founded after native peoples were forced off land that would become the nexus of several different railroads. Railroads came to Georgia for the plantation crops, building capital off the backs of enslaved people. In the post-Civil War era, as the city grew and aimed to become a leading metropolis, racial patterns of segregation began to emerge. While prominent people like Henry Grady were championing the vision of a "New South," they did nothing to disrupt the established patterns and order of white supremacy in the city."[2] Certain neighborhoods were regarded as white-only, while black folks were left to figure out housing for themselves in the spaces in between the new, planned neighborhoods and suburbs[3] that began to emerge in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This was the beginning of the segregated racial distribution that we still see today.

Beginning in the 1910s and beyond, racial segregation gained official status, with Jim Crow laws and other policies designed to keep black and white people apart. When racially restrictive laws were struck down by the court system, the City Council passed class-based zoning laws that survived court challenges, becoming "a legally defensible tool of racial exclusion."[4] Often, white people took it upon themselves to keep Black residents out with threats of violence and actual harm. Perpetrated by hateful groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the

[2] Dan Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty First Century Atlanta* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022).
[3] LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009).
[4]Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty First Century Atlanta*.

Columbians, these acts of violence created even more barriers for Black housing in Atlanta.[5] Black leaders recognized the threat of violence and the lack of housing options for Black residents and pushed for new Black neighborhoods to be built in undeveloped areas, increasing housing stock and reducing overcrowding.[6] While these proposals did alleviate some issues, they also further contributed to the deep racial segregation happening in Atlanta, creating new Black-only neighborhoods, and separating Black residents from whites.

After World War II, government subsidies for single-family housing and the ubiquity of the automobile created another new pattern in Atlanta, with wealthy white people moving north to the suburbs to "live at a distance from the city's blacks, whom segregation had concentrated in the near south side."[7] This pattern continued through the early 2000s, leading to the disinvestment of central neighborhoods and a general disregard for public space within them. Some wealthier neighborhoods, especially those on the northern side of the urban core, retained access to high-quality public space, like Piedmont Park in Midtown. These spaces were generally better thought out, well-funded, and well-maintained. Neighborhoods to the south and west, however, struggled to keep public spaces safe and functional, as in the case of Maddox Park on the Westside.[8] Even as the city was sprawling out towards the suburbs, the African American population remained "equally (if not more) likely to live in racially segregated neighborhoods."[9]

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[5] Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
[6] Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty First Century Atlanta*.
[7] Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).
[8] Mark Pendergrast, *City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America's Urban Future* (2017).
[9] Karen Pooley, "Segregation's New Geography: The Atlanta Metro Region, Race, and the Declining Prospects for Upward Mobility " *Southern Spaces* (2015), https://southernspaces.org/2015/segregations-new-geography-atlanta-metro-region-race-and-declining-prospects-upward-mobility/.

In the last twenty years or so, there has been another shift, with younger, higher-income people moving back into the urban core. This has pushed lower-income people out of their homes once again, further out to the south and west of the city center. Central neighborhoods lack low-income housing, with most new development aimed at capitalizing on the higher incomes of the newcomers. Today, Atlanta is still segregated—black people, especially poor or working-class, generally live in certain neighborhoods, while other neighborhoods are whiter and wealthier. As seen in the census map on the following page (Figure 1)[10], the Black population of the Atlanta metro area is generally concentrated to the south and west sides of the city, while the white population is concentrated in eastern intown neighborhoods and suburbs to the north.

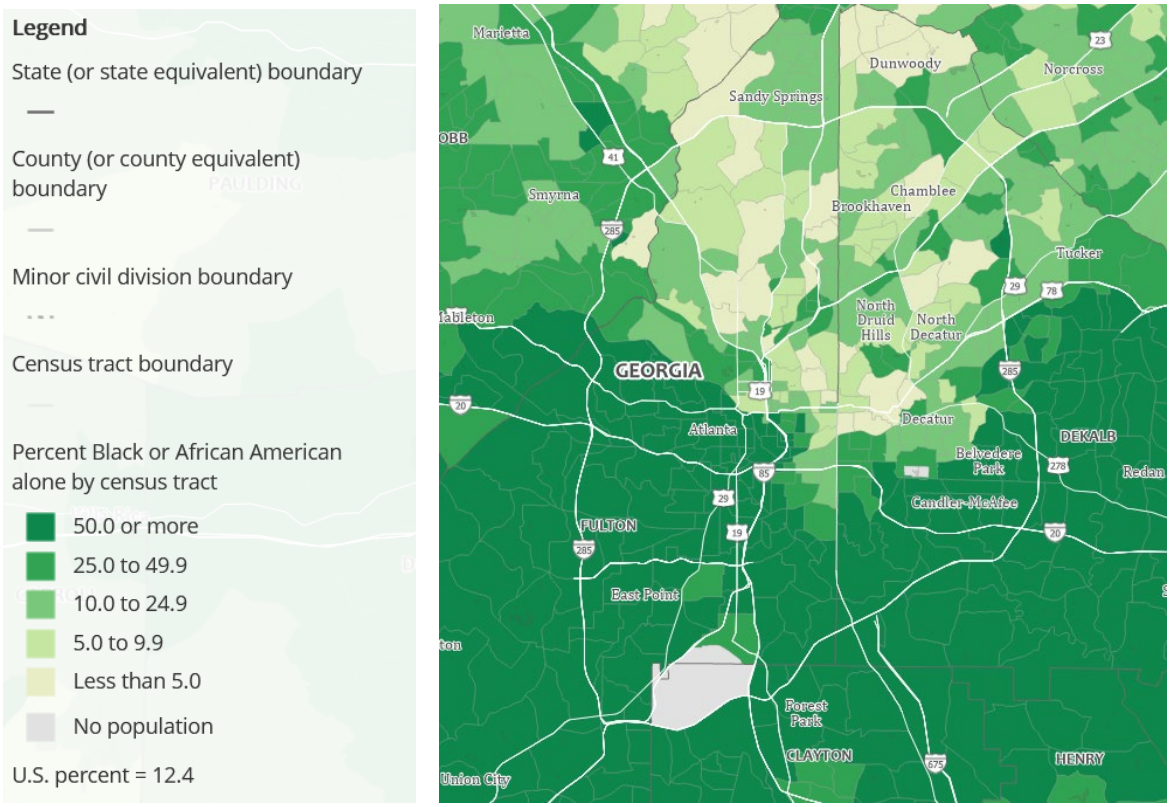

Figure 1: Map showing Black population concentrations in Atlanta metro area.

[10] *2020 Census Demographic Data Map Viewer,* (US Census Bureau, 2023).

Atlanta has a history of aspiring to be a leading, world-class city. In his book "Imagineering Atlanta," Charles Rutheiser describes the way fostering an image has impacted the development of Atlanta, pointing to "an irrepressible spirit of boosterism" that has led decision-making throughout the city's history.[11] Atlanta is especially interested in crafting this image to attract mobile capital, appealing at various times to northern dollars, international consumers, big business, and more. Rutheiser argues that Atlanta's image making led to "impressive but profoundly uneven development."[12] In the book, Rutheiser focuses heavily on the infrastructure associated with the 1996 Olympics served to further divide the city instead of uniting it as was promised. The Atlanta BeltLine, a massive green infrastructure project meant to stitch the city back together, fits nicely into the "imagineering" narrative: a huge undertaking, using taxpayer money, to sell Atlanta as a green metropolis and continue its image making as a world-class city. This comes through in ABI's marketing efforts, where they identify their mission as being "they catalyst for making Atlanta a global beacon of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable city life."[13]

However, critics of the BeltLine have raised concerns that it is causing and will cause more gentrification throughout Atlanta, wiping out neighborhoods instead of connecting them. Gentrification is a complex, multi-faceted, and incredibly pressing issue facing cities around the world. Generally, the process is "the movement into a previously working-class area by upper-income households, generally professionals, managers, technicians, the new gentry, resulting in

[11] Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta : The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*, Haymarket Series, (London: Verso, 1996).
[12] Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta : The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*.
[13] Inc. Atlanta Beltline, *2022 Annual Report* (2023), https://beltline.org/2022-annual-report/.

the displacement of the former lower-income residents."[14] This definition misses a bit of a key element, which Tom Angotti covers in his book *New York for Sale*:

> Throughout the city's history, working people without wealth have been shunted from one city tenement to another, especially after they make improvements to their housing and neighborhood. As tenants and small business owners invest their time and money to gradually upgrade their neighborhoods, real estate investors become attracted to these areas and anxious to capitalize on the improvements. As investors larch and small move in, they effectively appropriate the value generated by others. This is the essence of what is now known as gentrification. It is not simply a change in demographics. It is the appropriation of economic value by one class from another. [15]

The emphasis on appropriation of value is important here. It is not just upper-class people moving into an area that has traditionally been working-class. Instead, it is upper-class people noticing value within a traditionally working-class neighborhood—value often created by the hard work of the working-class residents—and taking it for their own.

In Atlanta, gentrification often happens through a racial lens, where the wealthy displacers are white, and the lower-income residents being displaced are people of color. Due to historical racial segregation patterns and systemic racial discrimination as covered above, people of color are at a higher risk for being pushed out of neighborhoods when new development comes in, especially in the core of the urban metropolis.

Green Gentrification

The concept of green gentrification, also known as ecological or environmental gentrification, is a unique lens through which to view the gentrification process in regard to

[14] Marcuse, Peter. "Abandonment, Gentrification, and Displacement: The Linkages in New York City." In Gentrification of the City, edited by Neil Smith and Peter Williams, 153-57. New York, NY: Allen and Unwin, Inc., 1986.
[15] Tom Angotti, *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

green spaces in urban environments. Scholars define green gentrification as "greening initiatives that create or restore environmental amenities [which] draw in wealthier groups of residents and push out lower-income residents, thus creating gentrification."[16] Green gentrification is focused on improving the environmental quality of neighborhoods, which then leads to an influx of higher-class residents and the displacement of lower-class ones. Green gentrification differs from the overall concept of gentrification due to the fact that most of the greening efforts are done by outside investors, both public and private, as opposed to neighborhood residents and businesspeople.[17]

Sarah Dooling takes a harsher view of green gentrification in what she defines as ecological gentrification: "the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green spaces that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population…while espousing an environmental ethic."[18] Dooling emphasizes the shifting perception of gentrification from the displacement of lower-class individuals to a welcomed tool in the process of "revitalization."[19] Claims of the BeltLine causing gentrification would fall under a green gentrification umbrella, as the investment in the project is from outside capital and a large purpose of the project is to improve green spaces and transportation around the city of Atlanta. In fact, neighborhoods surrounding the BeltLine have already seen evidence

[16] Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis, *Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).
[17] Gould and Lewis, *Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*.
[18] Sarah Dooling, "Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 3 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00860.x.
[19] This view is furthered in an analysis of the BeltLine as a tool of racial capitalism that Jess Martínez has done in her recent article: "'Are We Just Killing People?': Centering Racial Capitalism in the Green Gentrification of the Atlanta BeltLine" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 47, no. 3 (2023): 444-60. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13154.

of green gentrification. A study done by Dan Immergluck and Tharunya Balan in 2017 examined the change in housing values along the BeltLine corridor from 2011-2015. The researchers found that "proximity to the Beltline has a major effect on home prices…depending on which portion of the Beltline a property is near, values rose between 17.9 percent and 26.6 percent more for homes within a half-mile of the Beltline than for properties located elsewhere in the city."[20]

Some researchers have pointed to a "just green enough" strategy for combatting green gentrification, mainly focused on community participation and involvement within the park planning process.[21] Curran and Hamilton concluded in their study of Greenpoint, Brooklyn that all the residents of an area, both longtime and recently arrived, should get together to figure out how to slow gentrification caused by greening efforts,[22] aiming for a solution that will "be just green enough to improve the health and quality of life of existing residents, but not so literally green as to attract upscale 'sustainable' LEED-certified residential developments that drive out working-class residents and industrial business."[23]

Since the phrase was coined by Curran and Hamilton, there has been some debate about whether a "just green enough" strategy is actually equitable or whether it results in lower-quality environmental restorations or amenities.[24] While the idea of "just green enough" is intriguing as

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[20] Dan Immergluck and Tharunya Balan, "Sustainable for whom? Green urban development, environmental gentrification, and the Atlanta Beltline," *Urban Geography* 39, no. 4 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2017.1360041.
[21] *Just Green Enough: Urban Development and Environmental Gentrification*, ed. Zarina Patel Julian Agyeman, AbdouMaliq Simone and Stephen Zavestoski, ed. Winifred Curran and Trina Hamilton, Routledge Equity, Justice, and the Sustainable City, (Routledge, 2018).
[22] Winifred Curran and Trina Hamilton, "Just green enough: contesting environmental gentrification in Greenpoint, Brooklyn," *Local Environment* 17, no. 9 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2012.729569.
[23] Curran and Hamilton, "Just green enough: contesting environmental gentrification in Greenpoint, Brooklyn."
[24] Lauren E. Mullenbach and Birgitta L. Baker, "Environmental Justice, Gentrification, and Leisure: A Systematic Review and Opportunities for the Future," *Leisure Sciences* 42, no. 5-6 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2018.1458261.

a solution to slowing gentrification, there has been little research on what those strategies look like in physical form. In a study of park, location, size, and function, Rigolon and Németh determined that park function and location are strong predictors of gentrification, but size is not.[25] Their study, though, is limited in its scope and the way it analyzes the different functions of parks.

Designing for Equity

Other practitioners suggest that community design can be used as a tool to combat green gentrification and build equity in public spaces. Community design, also known as participatory design, is a creative practice that brings members from outside the design fields into the design process, "challenging designers to seek meaningful, ethical, and effective ways to design with communities."[26] Starting in the 1960s, community design grew out of a recognition that landscape architects were creating spaces for people without necessarily considering those people's needs:

> "The profession of landscape architecture found public participation threatening. As the President of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Ted Osmundson, admitted in 1969 our membership was 'to all intents and purposes, a gentlemen's club in the truest sense of the word,' white, male, college 'educated people doing a nice thing.' They worked 'in the suburbs and beyond' for clients who represented corporate not democratic interests. The model they followed was top down; considering diverse viewpoints from the grassroots masses was blasphemous. Landscape architects, like other professionals at the time, were insecure, fiduciary elites whose expertise was vulnerable to public scrutiny. To one African American participant, the landscape architects he worked with

[25] Alessandro Rigolon and Jeremy Németh, "Green gentrification or 'just green enough': Do park location, size and function affect whether a place gentrifies or not?," *Urban Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019849380.
[26] David de la Pena et al., *Design as Democracy: Techniques for Collective Creativity* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2017).

> were 'fat-cat establishment-oriented reactionaries' who were landscaping urban freeways and urban renewal projects that destroyed the neighborhoods of people of color."[27]

Community design hopefully offers an alternative to the established pattern: an opportunity for diverse perspectives within the design process, allowing community members to have input in creating spaces for themselves, helping to democratize the process and create more equitable outcomes. Many projects have successfully used community design to approach equitable design solutions. The Lafitte Greenway was previously an abandoned shipping and rail corridor in New Orleans damaged during Hurricane Katrina. Design Workshop worked with the community to convert the unused land into a vital park and transportation system, giving the neighborhood much needed greenspace, recreation opportunities, and additional stormwater infrastructure.[28] "The designers made concerted efforts to engage with the community through the planning process, setting specific goals to increase neighborhood pride, enhance community representation, and ensure residents feel a sense of satisfaction with the direction of the neighborhood."[29] In Los Angeles, a strip of land along a highway, which ripped through neighborhoods of color during its construction and severely damaged communities, had become an informal dumping ground. In 2014, SWA Group partnered with the City of Lynwood to create a linear park, getting input from the community every step of the way. Community members joined in on-site for ideation and design meetings, and helped the team apply for grants to fund

[27] Randolph Hester, "Scoring Collective Creativity and Legitimizing Participatory Design," *Landscape Journal* 31, no. 1-2 (2012).
[28] Kurt Culbertson, "A Holistic Approach to Sustainability: Lessons from the Lafitte Greenway Project in New Orleans, Louisiana," *Edinburgh Architectural Research Journal* 33 (2013).
[29] "Lafitte Greenway," Landscape Performance Series, 2021, https://www.landscapeperformance.org/case-study-briefs/lafitte-greenway#/overview.

the park. SWA brought community members in during the construction phase as well to help set the park up for success by creating programming that could continue once the park opened.[30]

Elsewhere, in Chicago, a community design nonprofit organization called Human Scale worked with MKSK to revamp a community garden in the Uptown neighborhood. The neighborhood was home to the Winthrop Avenue Family, "the descendants of a group of Black families who for much of the 20th century were confined to this one block of the predominantly white neighborhood." Human Scale and MKSK worked with the community to revitalize the garden, offering a more functional space for neighborhood residents with space to congregate and an opportunity to reconnect to the site's history through storytelling and signage.[31] In San Francisco, GLS Landscape | Architecture recently completed designs for updating a deteriorated public housing project in Portrero Hill. In addition to including the community in the design process, empowering residents and building trust, GLS phased the project in such a way that no resident had to relocate for construction, allowing the community to stay strongly connected to their neighborhood as it changed.[32] These examples show that by involving residents and other community members throughout the design and construction process, community design can deepen a project's significance to its surrounding neighborhood.

Still, some researchers have raised questions about whether community design as it is done today is actually equitable and achieving the goal of inclusion, or whether these input meetings are just another opportunity for people in power to make decisions for those without

[30] "Ricardo Lara Park Methods," Landscape Performance Series, Landscape Architecture Foundation, 2021, https://www.landscapeperformance.org/case-study-briefs/ricardo-lara-linear-park#/project-team..
[31] Zach Mortice, "Family Gathering," *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, 2023.
[32] "ASLA Awards | HOPE SF: Rebuild Portero," 2022.

power. Randolph Hester, one of the early advocates of community design, suggested in a 1985 paper that community design "has metamorphosed from mass action of the poor and black to highly technical methods serving the mainstream of society." [33] Hester also raised the issue of trust when working with communities, especially those that have been marginalized in the past. Often, design professionals are seen as outsiders coming in to radically alter the built environment, improving the space from the designer's perspective but not recognizing that the changes might not work for those already there. Even worse, designers are sometimes seen as purposefully pushing already marginalized residents out of their neighborhoods in the name of "better" design. Especially in Atlanta, where people of color have been pushed out of their homes in the name of urban renewal and "improving the city," there is a rightful distrust of design professionals. This might show up in the form of being vocally against development at community meetings to not attending community engagement meetings at all, based on the belief that the designers will ignore the community will anyway. For the BeltLine, this means a deep-seated need to build trust among the residents of the neighborhoods the corridor runs through. There is also the issue of needing to appeal to many different interests, and not just being able to focus on those of disadvantaged groups. As Umut Toker explains, the multi-faceted nature of community development projects "require the community designer to be able to bring together multiple agendas and reconcile the objectives of the institution, the local government, and the community."[34] Toker goes on to say that this is where the contemporary community designer can shine, using their skills to help different parties "understand the underlying interests behind

[33] Randolph Hester, "Participatory Design and Environmental Justice: Pas De Deux Or Time To Change Partners?," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 4, no. 4 (1987).
[34] Umut Toker, *Making Community Design Work* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

positions and discuss common community interests, with the goal of promoting decision making."[35] Toker points to this being a reason that contemporary community design has moved away from empowerment as a goal.

While investment in new green space can lead to green gentrification, a growing number of practitioners are coming to the realization that in practice, "place—the unique space where the physical environment meets the social, emotional and spiritual aspects unique to human life—is one of the most important drivers of equity and prosperity in communities."[36] These spaces, whether they be parks, plazas, seating areas, or any other space where people can congregate, can be drivers of social change: "improving not only the built environment but the overall physical, mental and economic health of communities."[37] The BeltLine and its parks system could and should be such places that not only revitalize disinvested communities in Atlanta, but also to make them places of equity.

Design professionals have recently been grappling with the ways public space can impact equity. The Civic Commons, a project dedicated to reimagining and improving urban public space, organized a multi-disciplinary panel to explore the role of the public realm in delivering equity and prosperity in communities, hoping to provide actionable advice for practitioners working in these spaces. In their report, the authors argue that it is not enough to just invest in new public spaces, but there must be work done in conjunction with improving the physical environment in order to make them truly equitable places. They lay out three main goals for

[35] Toker, *Making Community Design Work*.
[36] Donald Taylor-Patterson et al., *Place Driving Equity: An evidence-based action guide on the role of public space for shared prosperity*, Reimagining the Civic Commons (2021).
[37] Taylor-Patterson et al., *Place Driving Equity: An evidence-based action guide on the role of public space for shared prosperity*.

designers: (i) eliminating racism and building trust, (ii) delivering health equity, and (iii) advancing equitable wealth creation.[38]

The first goal addresses the issues of systemic inequalities and their aftereffects, like distrust of people wanting to change a neighborhood. For designers to be successful, they need to rebuild the public's trust, or at the very least, reduce the amount of distrust, and help to repair some of the damages systemic injustices have caused. The main takeaway of this point is to not hide away from the "legacies of racism and inequity in the public realm,"[39] but rather tell the story, use it as a lesson, and create new public space that is welcoming to all. The second goal is also a reaction to systemic injustices but focusing more on the environmental health effects. Communities of color are less likely to have access to facilities and resources for physical activity, have worse street and pedestrian infrastructure, and have "fewer and more dangerous public spaces."[40] In addition to physical health, mental health issues can be worsened by disinvestment. Designers can work to combat these issues by prioritizing active transportation infrastructure, focusing on Vision Zero or complete streets projects to improve space for outdoor activity, and working with different municipal departments to create safer connections between newly invested outdoor spaces. Finally, the third goal focuses on using the public realm as a conduit for equitable wealth creation and building wealth in historically disinvested communities. One of the best ways to do this, the authors argue, is to "invest directly in people

[38] Taylor-Patterson et al., *Place Driving Equity: An evidence-based action guide on the role of public space for shared prosperity*.
[39] Taylor-Patterson et al., *Place Driving Equity: An evidence-based action guide on the role of public space for shared prosperity*.
[40] Taylor-Patterson et al., *Place Driving Equity: An evidence-based action guide on the role of public space for shared prosperity*.

through local hiring and procurement initiatives"[41] giving neighborhood residents financial support as their physical space is getting improved. A lot of these solutions depend on outside funding, from grants or philanthropic sources, but they provide a good roadmap for how to improve both the built landscape of a community and the well-being of the residents in that community.

In addition to incorporating the above strategies, the physical design of a park can bring about equitable use. In the seminal *The Social Life of Urban Spaces*, William Whyte discusses how park elements can influence use, showing how people interact with a built environment and other people within it. A number of major concepts stood out in Whyte's studies, but the most applicable to today's designer is the importance of various types of seating and the strategies for combating what Whyte calls "undesirables." For Whyte, there can never be enough seating in a public plaza or park; seating creates opportunities for interaction and social engagement in a way that open space alone cannot. In addition, Whyte discusses the problem of "undesirables," by which he often means people experiencing homelessness or perceived criminals. He talks about the importance of designing for trust, saying that the best way to make a space safe is to "make [it] attractive to everyone," creating an atmosphere of safety by having people in the space.

More recently, Walter Hood, a landscape architect practicing in Oakland, CA, with projects around the country, started to fully consider the racial history of a neighborhood that contained the parks he was designing. In addition to site analysis and observation about how people used the spaces, Hood dug into the deeper history of each site, creating a fuller picture

[41] Taylor-Patterson et al., *Place Driving Equity: An evidence-based action guide on the role of public space for shared prosperity*.

before starting a design and leading to a more meaningful design in the end. In many of his projects, Hood includes design elements to acknowledge the site's history and allow future users to engage with that history.[42]

Methodology

In this thesis, I will argue that the BeltLine is not doing enough to create equity along its corridor and provide some insight into ways that the organization could do more. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the National Recreation and Parks Association definition of Equitable Parks and Recreation Access as a baseline for equity: the just and fair quantity, proximity, and connections to quality parks and green space, recreation facilities, as well as programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone.[43] This working definition provides the framework for how to judge whether parks are equitable. In Chapter 3, I will provide a brief history of the BeltLine project, as well as look at the community engagement guidelines set out for the planning process as a whole, and some of the ways those have been successful or not. For this section, I will be employing archival documents from the BeltLine, Atlanta City Council records, and media coverage of the project.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I will look at three parks along the BeltLine: Historic Fourth Ward Park, DH Stanton Park, and Enota Park, comparing the design processes that each of them went through. These parks are all in different stages of development, in different neighborhoods with different demographics, and have had different design and approval processes. A common

[42] Walter Hood Jr., "Beyond Nomenclature: Urban Parks for Cultural Diversity," *Places* 15, no. 3 (2003).
[43] Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation. Activate ATL: Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. (2021).

thread between them is that historically, the neighborhoods these parks are located in have been made up of a majority of black residents. By examining these parks and their surrounding areas, I can begin to unravel the relationship between community engagement, park development, design process, and gentrification, and begin to discuss what would make park development more equitable in the future, both for parks along the BeltLine corridor and beyond. For these chapters, I will use a combination of archival research, interviews, and site visits to inform my findings. The source material for the archival research is from the BeltLine and various non-profit and community organizations. The interviews were conducted with designers that worked on a specific park or had knowledge of the process. And finally, the site visits consisted of thirty-minute observation sessions at each completed park over varying days of the week, times of day, and weather patterns.

In Chapter 7, I look ahead to a future park project along the BeltLine and suggest some possibilities for deeper, richer, and more impactful community engagement. I will also discuss how community engagement can go beyond just the design process creating a more equitable park system.

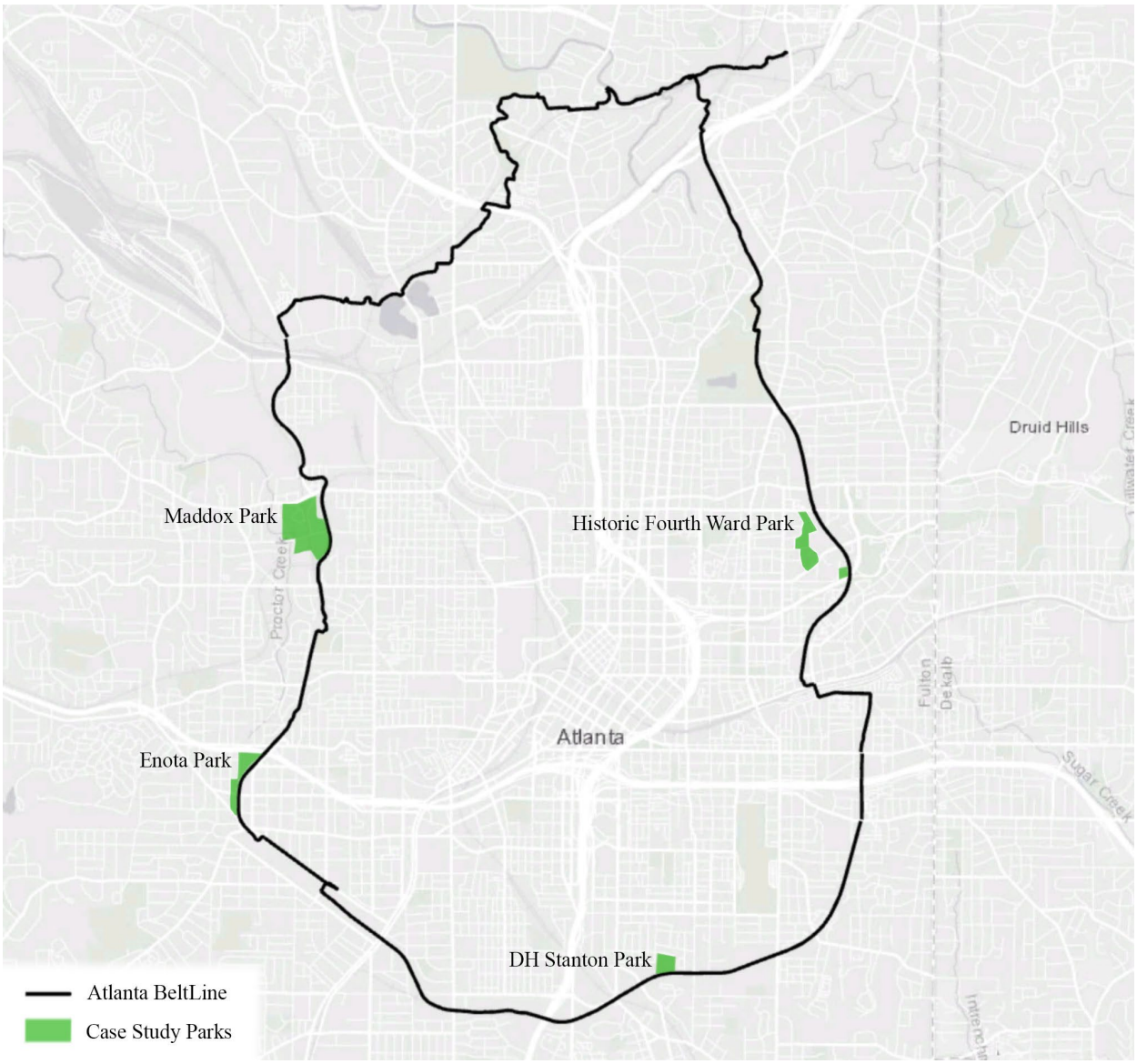

Figure 2: Atlanta BeltLine Map and Case Study Parks

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON THE BELTLINE

Overview of the Planning Process

The BeltLine project stands as an example of both Atlanta thinking ahead while neglecting to examine the past. The project, which gained recognition as a master's thesis by Ryan Gravel at Georgia Tech, was initially conceived to reclaim unused space within the city for transit uses, such as light rail, bike, or pedestrian pathways. Due to Atlanta's rail history, there were several rail lines that were no longer in use or being phased out, mostly overgrown and not serving a purpose. Gravel, formalizing ideas from others, proposed reactivating these corridors, creating a loop around the city's core that would connect neighborhoods, provide transit, and add functional green space.[44] Gravel's thesis, while mostly theoretical, sparked the interest of various planners and developers in Atlanta. Eventually, The Trust for Public Land, a non-profit organization working to create and improve open spaces around the US, hired Alex Garvin, a prominent planner at the time, to do a full feasibility study. This study, titled "The BeltLine Emerald Necklace: Atlanta's New Public Realm," laid out a plan for implementing the project: detailing necessary rights-of-way, how to cope with certain areas, and more.[45] Thirteen "jewels," or public park spaces, either with direct access to the proposed BeltLine or off proposed spurs,

[44] Ryan Gravel, "Belt Line - Atlanta: Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy" (Master of Architecture & Master of City Planning Georgia Institute of Technology, 1999).
[45] Inc. Alex Garvin & Associates, *The Beltline Emerald Necklace: Atlanta's New Public Realm* (2004).

were included in this plan. The parks were separated into three categories—expanded parks, new parks,and mixed-use. Expanded parks were parks or greenspaces that existed when the plan was created, but in limited form. Garvin and his team's suggestions focused on expanding these spaces to make them more functional and offer new uses to the community. Two of these proposed expansions, Enota Park and Maddox Park, are examined in this study. New parks consisted of newly added greenspace, using land near the railroad lines that was either vacant or unused at the time of the study. Historic Fourth Ward Park, discussed in later chapters, was initially proposed in this section. Finally, mixed-use spaces incorporated parkland and development, creating new neighborhoods in vacant or underdeveloped spaces along the BeltLine. These are not within the scope of this study as they involve more than park design.

Gravel's thesis and the initial plan from Garvin and Associates had grand visions for the BeltLine project. In order to implement them, the Atlanta City Council and the Atlanta Development Authority, now known as Invest Atlanta, created Atlanta BeltLine, Inc (ABI), an agency responsible for all the land procurement, development of the trail itself, and partnering with private developers or other entities to create the BeltLine jewels. More information about the roles of ABI and its counterpart organization, Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, is shown in the video still from ABI (see Figure 2). For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to know that ABI took on the role of project manager for the BeltLine.[46]

[46] More information on the organizational structure of Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. and the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership can be found in Mark Pendergrast's book *City on the Verge* or at www.beltline.org.

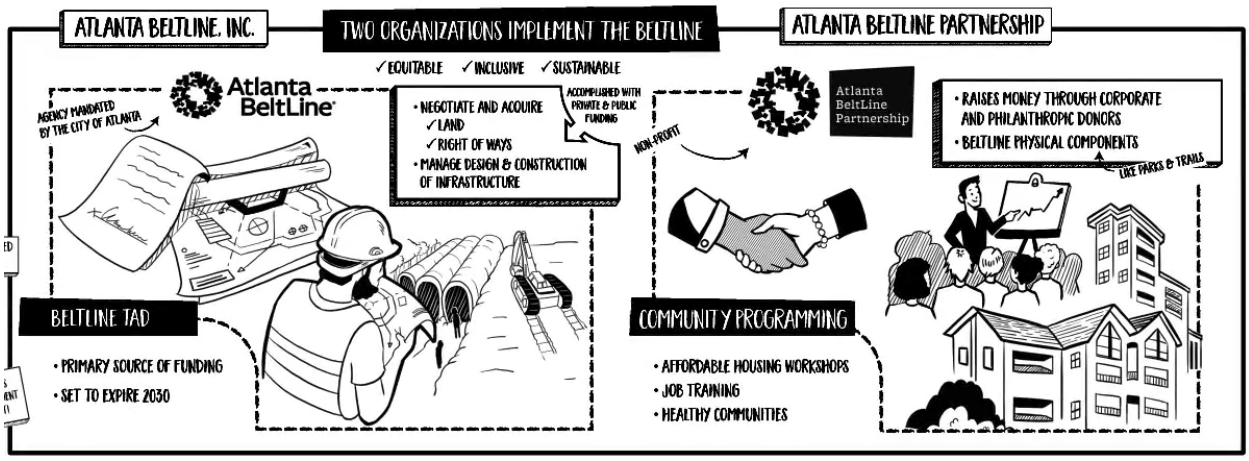

Figure 3: Organizational structure of Atlanta BeltLine.

After Garvin's plan was complete, ABI continued ahead with planning, breaking down the twenty-two miles into ten subareas, and engaging design teams to help complete the work. The design teams, which were made up of landscape architects, planners, architects, engineers, and others, created master plans for each of the ten subareas, with separate master plans for the parks as appendices. Working from the subarea master plans, ABI put out Requests for Proposals for design teams to complete certain pieces of the project and see them through construction. The subarea master plans informed the programs for each of the parks along the BeltLine, creating a working list of goals for these design teams. The team then designed a concept, presented it to the community, redesigned based on feedback, then presented the new version to the community. The whole process was then repeated to give the public many opportunities to have input, as demonstrated in a video still by ABI (see Figure 3).

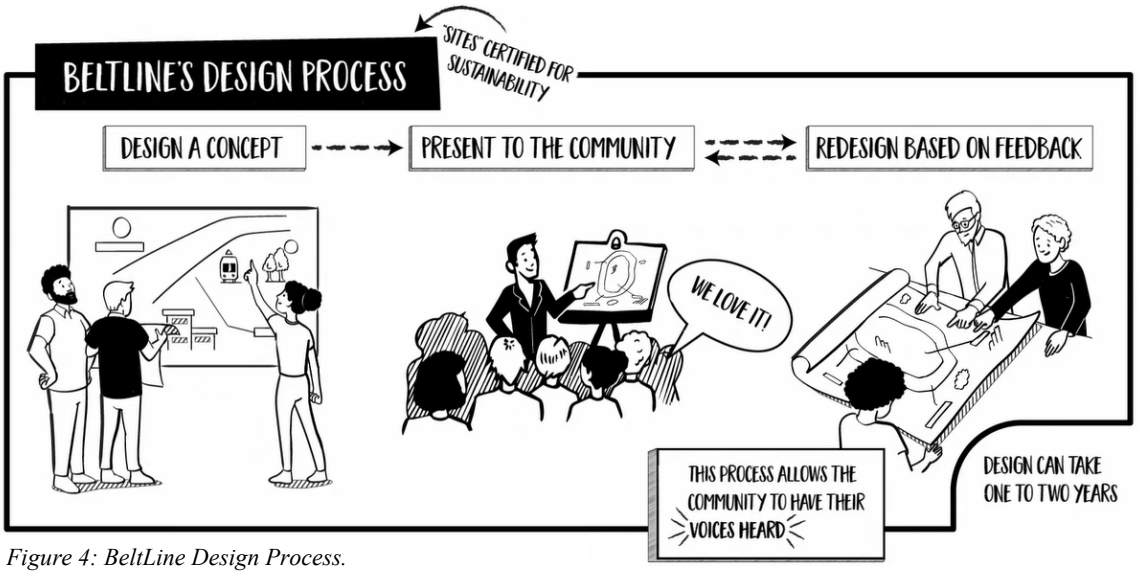

Figure 4: BeltLine Design Process.

Community Input for the BeltLine

ABI identified community input as a pillar of their development plan[47] and worked to create a strong program for community engagement. In fact, community engagement throughout the BeltLine planning process was enshrined in law. In the initial action to set up the Tax Allocation District from which much of the BeltLine would be funded, the Atlanta City Council noted the importance of community involvement in the planning process.[48] On July 17, 2006, the Council passed a resolution mandating the creation of a Community Engagement Framework to guide how ABI would incorporate community input during of the project[49] (see Figure 4). On their website, the BeltLine lays out its community engagement process, detailing "Ways We

[47] Inc. Atlanta Beltline, *Equitable Development Plan* (2009).
[48] For more information on the setup of the TAD, see Immergluck (2022) and Pendergrast (2017).
[49] Atlanta City Council, 06-R-1576 BeltLine Citizen Participation Framework Enabling Legislation, (2006).

Keep You Informed" and "How We Get The Word Out."[50] ABI divides its methods for community engagement into two categories: Community Meetings and Gatherings.

Community Meetings cover several different types of activities. The first, Quarterly Briefings, are held four times a year for overall project updates. The next, Citywide Conversations, introduce concepts and educate the community on various topics related to the Atlanta BeltLine and offer the opportunity for the wider community to provide feedback. Finally, Study Groups enable direct community input into planning, design, and implementation, with topics ranging from park design to transit planning. The BeltLine corridor is divided into 5 Study Group segments (N, NE, SE, SW, W), with each Study Group comprised of community leaders from each area who provide direct feedback on concept and draft plans.

Gatherings can take the form of Pop-Ups, smaller events that provide project information, either directly on the Atlanta BeltLine or in surrounding communities; Meet & Greets, which are non-traditional, family-friendly events, typically held outside in parks or near playgrounds to connect the project with the people, often conducted in conjunction with local community events; or Resident Round Tables, which allow ABI staff to hear big and small ideas directly from community members.[51] All of these types of community meetings occur with regularity, with topics ranging from as small of a scale as a parklet design to as large as the overall project's Strategic Implementation Plan. In addition to these meetings led or coordinated by ABI, the projects are required to be presented to Neighborhood Planning Units (NPUs), boards made up of neighborhood residents that can approve projects or not, depending on the community needs.

[50] "Planning and Community Engagement," 2023, 2023, https://beltline.org/the-project/planning-and-community-engagement/.
[51] Atlanta Beltline, "Planning and Community Engagement."

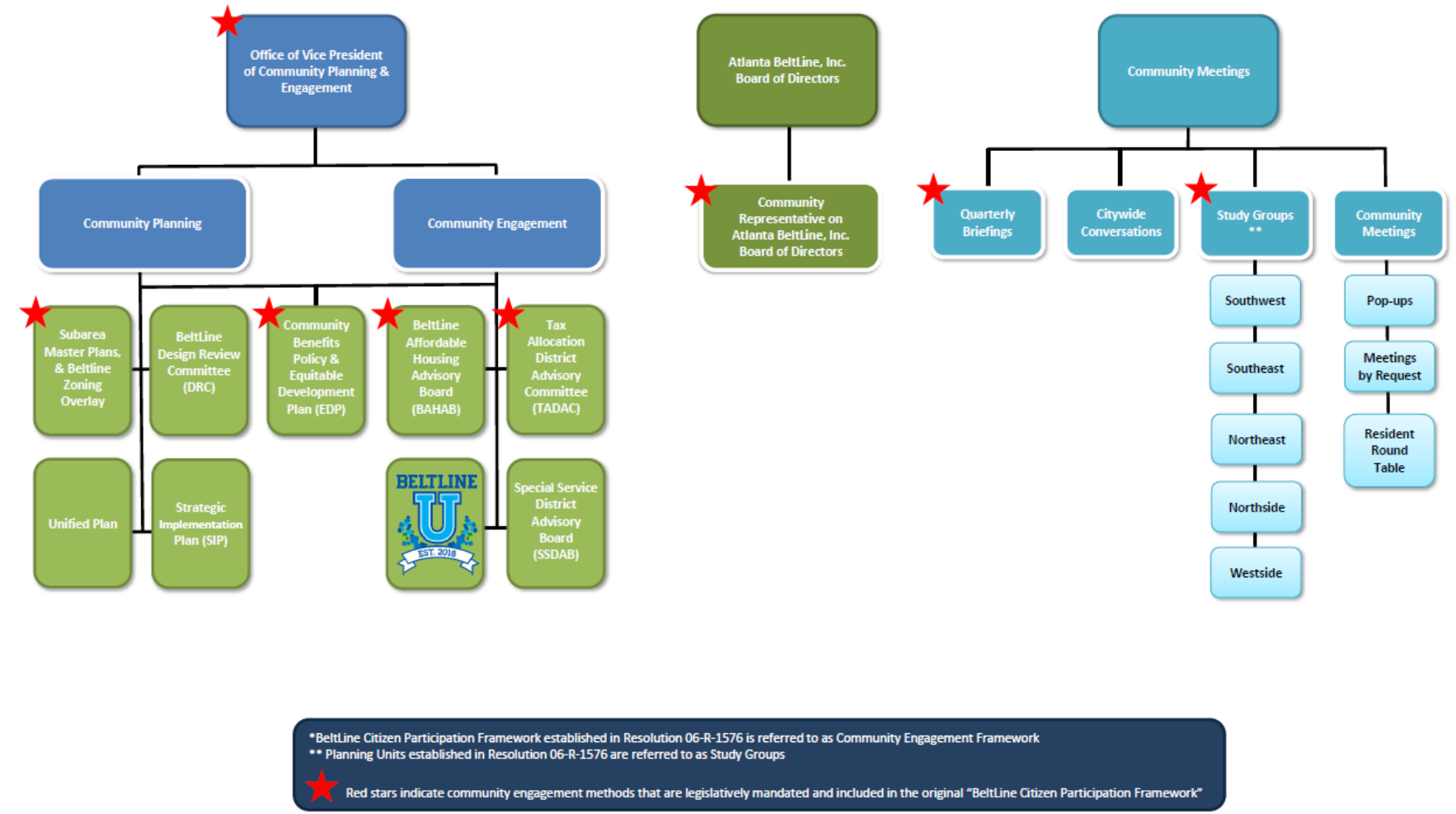

Figure 5: BeltLine Community Engagement Framework.

These different forms of community outreach all work fairly well to communicate the plans of ABI to residents of the neighborhoods that the project affects. According to the ABI website, they have hosted 434 meetings with a total of 17,965 attendees since 2006. From 2018 to mid-2021, ABI engaged 7,124 people at 130 different meetings around the loop. These are large numbers by community engagement standards, but only represent a small portion of the population affected by the project. In the BeltLine Subareas as defined by ABI, the population in 2018 was 111,284, meaning that ABI has only engaged 6.40% of residents immediately affected by the project in the last five years and only 16.14% overall.[52] The actual percentage of residents could be lower if people attended more than one meeting, which seems likely.

Equity on the BeltLine

Early on in the planning process, ABI recognized that the BeltLine had the potential to "bring lasting physical enhancements to Atlanta's urban core," but worried about "these changes com[ing] at a price for those living in its surroundings."[53] On their website, ABI states their vision regarding equity: "All legacy residents, new residents, and business owners – regardless of age, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, ability, income, or political ideology – benefit and prosper from the economic growth and activity associated with the Atlanta BeltLine."[54] To account for this, ABI laid out their Equitable Development Plan or EDP, detailing guiding principles for the development of the trail, parks, and surrounding areas. It focused on four guiding principles and divides each of those into a

[52] Neighborhood Nexus, *BeltLine Fact Sheet* (2023).
[53] Atlanta Beltline, *Equitable Development Plan*.
[54] Atlanta Beltline, "Planning and Community Engagement."

number of objectives. For the purposes of this paper, I will only discuss the strategies that relate directly to park development. First, ABI wanted to focus on the integration of people and place strategies, using a place-based strategy, i.e., the trail itself, to improve the lives of the people living there. ABI planned to achieve this by enhancing quality of life through the BeltLine project, including the addition of new transit and park systems that can lead to healthier, happier residents. In addition, ABI wanted to minimize displacement from the increased land values through creation of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which helped fund the preservation of existing and the construction of new subsidized and affordable housing. ABI also hoped to preserve culturally and historically significant resources that can help make communities durable and stable by connecting people to the places where they live. ABI suggested that this can be done through public art to allow for unique neighborhood/community-based expression.[55]

The second guiding principle of the EDP was the reduction of local and regional disparities. ABI argued that the BeltLine will concentrate development in the urban core as opposed to the suburbs, where it had been occurring for many years. In addition, ABI suggested that they would focus new development on previously disinvested neighborhoods in order to balance out the flow of capital and create an equitable distribution of environmental amenities throughout the city. A third guiding principle was promotion of triple bottom line investments. The triple-bottom line is a progressive business model for urban sustainability, focusing on the three pillars of economic development, environmental improvements, and social equity. The fourth and final guiding principle in the EDP was inclusion of meaningful community voice, participation, leadership, and ownership. This principle followed the governmental mandate to

[55] Atlanta Beltline, *Equitable Development Plan*.

include the community in the BeltLine planning process, but pushes it further, allowing for adjustments and changes along the way to encourage more active participation from the community. Also in this principle, ABI discusses the need to "develop strong, trusting relationships with community leadership…to create a healthy channel for direct input and feedback."[56]

The EDP was a good beginning attempt at creating a plan for equitable development when working on a transformational project such as the BeltLine. While the EDP strived to lay out concrete plans for equitable development, it ended up being fairly vague and thus unenforceable. In the first objective of the first principle, the report suggested that park development "creates healthier, more connected communities and stimulates economic development through…land acquisition, park development, [and] park maintenance."[57] While this statement is likely true, the plan failed to provide details about how this happens or any specifics regarding park space in Atlanta or along the BeltLine. Perhaps multiple versions of this document could have been crafted as the project moved through development stages, focusing on specific strategies to use during each phase.

In 2010, recognizing that they were nearing the end of their first development plan, ABI embarked on the process of creating a Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) to map out how the rest of the BeltLine project would be completed. The SIP involved a large community engagement phase to give the community "the opportunity to rank the project prioritization criteria."[58] ABI held two rounds of meetings with stakeholders. The first round occurred in

[56] Atlanta Beltline, *Equitable Development Plan*.
[57] Atlanta Beltline, *Equitable Development Plan*.
[58] Inc. Atlanta Beltline, *2030 Strategic Implementation Plan* (2013).

November and December of 2012 and included meetings with the BeltLine advisory committees, a citywide conversation, and study group meetings. During this round of meetings, approximately 578 people participated in meetings and an online survey, according to ABI. ABI took the feedback from the first round of meetings and adjusted their planning goals. The second round of meetings saw roughly 140 participants in March and April of 2013. In regard to parks, the public that came to these meetings and filled out the survey ranking criteria for prioritizing projects along the BeltLine corridor. In order of priority, the criteria are: (i) project readiness; (ii) development impact, (iii) equity, (iv) leverage existing greenspace, and (v) financial options. An initial ranking of prioritization criteria at the first meeting suggested that the Equity criterium and the Existing Greenspace criterium were in opposite places. This changed due to public input at that first meeting, showing that the public has an interest in advancing equitable park solutions. ABI defined the equity criteria as "the ability of the project to serve disadvantaged populations; the consideration of the project's geographic location along the Atlanta BeltLine in relation to projects that have already been completed; consistency with / promotion of ABI Equitable Development Plan."[59] Following these meetings, ABI started to divide the remaining projects into tiers based on these prioritization goals and laid out plans for completing these projects in three distinct time periods (see Figure 5).

[59] Atlanta BeltLine Atlanta Beltline, *2030 Strategic Implementation Plan*.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PARKS BY PHASE

Project Name		End of Period 1	End of Period 2	End of Period 3
Parks	Boulevard Crossing	Open	-	-
	Murphy Crossing	Open	-	-
	Enota	Open	-	-
	Westside, Phase I	Open	-	-
	Westside, Phase II	Design	Open	-
	Maddox	Design	Open	-
	Four Corners	Design	Open	-
	Lang Carson	Design	Open	-
	Historic Fourth Ward, Phase III	Planning	Design	Open
	Intrenchment Creek	Planning	Design	Open
	Hillside*	*	*	*
	Waterworks*	*	*	*

*Property owned by City of Atlanta, Department of Watershed Management

Figure 6: Implementation of Parks by Phase in 2013 SIP.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORIC FOURTH WARD PARK

Historic Fourth Ward Park (HFWP) was initially proposed by Garvin as "North Avenue Park." In the subsequent master planning stages, the park was highlighted as an important piece of the BeltLine system. The park is sited just south of Ponce City Market, a building that was formerly City Hall East, and before that the Sears building, along one of the first completed sections of the BeltLine. The Trust for Public Land worked with the city to develop this park, using it as an opportunity to achieve stormwater management goals. In addition, EDAW, a landscape architecture firm, completed the initial public input and master planning process. Following the process ABI laid out for completing projects, the park was sent out for proposals, where HDR and Wood+Partners won the opportunity to design Phase I and II, respectively.

The neighborhood surrounding Historic Fourth Ward Park, known as Old Fourth Ward, was a historically Black neighborhood, and home to some of Atlanta's key Black leaders and businesses.[60] In 2011, as the BeltLine project was gaining steam, redevelopment projects along the corridor in the Old Fourth Ward started popping up, capitalizing on the draw of the proposed project and the relatively low land values at the time.[61] Projects like Ponce City Market, a redevelopment of a former Sears distribution hub into a high-end, mixed-use center, shifted the

[60] Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty First Century Atlanta*.
[61] Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty First Century Atlanta*.

demographics in the neighborhood, appealing to more young, wealthier, white folks, who moved into old factories and warehouses that had been converted into chic loft-style living spaces. And when those residences filled up, developers started constructing luxury condo buildings anywhere they could find land to do so. As Dan Immergluck points out in his book *Red Hot City*, the change in demographics is "staggering": "The area saw its Black population share decline from seventy-six percent [in 2000] to thirty-eight percent in 2017…Over the same period, the non-Hispanic white population increased by over 280 percent…the share of the population with a college degree increased from twenty-six percent to sixty-four percent, and the median household income increased from just over $31,000 in 2000 to just of $64,000 in 2017."[62] It was clear even during the initial master planning stages that the neighborhood demographics would change as this development occurred: "The influx of residents expected as City Hall East and Ponce Place develop will increase park needs in the area, straining an already overburdened system."[63]

HFWP grew out of the need for better stormwater infrastructure in the neighborhood, according to the Trust for Public Land. A resident and stormwater management professional saw an opportunity for a man-made stormwater pond, and the Trust for Public Land was able to help secure the land and finance the project. Touted as a "coalition" effort, the project gained several supporters from across the spectrum: "Others got involved in the interest of nearby real estate values, while groups like Trust for Public Land are trying to create more places where people can gather and experience nature in the city. Nobody's concern or priority was more important than

[62] Immergluck, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty First Century Atlanta*.
[63] Inc. EDAW, Arcadis & APD,, *Atlanta Beltline Master Plan: Subarea 5 Historic Fourth Ward Park Master Plan* (2009).

anyone else's—as a united coalition, we were able to call a ton of attention to all the problems this one park could help solve." When EDAW started on the initial master plan, the land was a mix of "industrial and commercial property along or directly adjacent to the BeltLine"[64] and the exact parcels that would make up the park were still unknown. EDAW worked with Friends of Historic Fourth Ward Park, a neighborhood group championing the project, and identified program elements that the community desired, as well as considerations and concerns of neighborhood residents. EDAW took those program elements and designed three concepts for the park, all including some combination of those features, which were then shown to the steering committee for feedback. From the feedback, EDAW created a master plan for the park that included a number of those stated programmatic goals, highlighting the stormwater pond, open spaces, and the skate park. Table 1 shows the stated goals from the Friends of Historic Fourth Ward Park plan and the programmatic elements the EDAW plan incorporated, as well as programmatic elements identified in the final constructed site. See Appendix A for design drawings for Historic Fourth Ward Park.

In their master plan, EDAW sited the stormwater pond along the western edge of the park, with event lawns, open meadows, and more green space surrounding the pond to the east. An amphitheater looking towards what is now Ponce City Market leads south to a picnic area, with a flexible play lawn, playground, and splash pad beyond. The majority of the park is separated from the BeltLine by a single row of parcels (now newly constructed mixed-use buildings), but EDAW suggests an extension of Dallas Street to connect with the park and the

[64] EDAW, *Atlanta Beltline Master Plan: Subarea 5 Historic Fourth Ward Park Master Plan*.

trail. The skate park and a multi-use field sit slightly further away from the main park, on a parcel directly adjacent to the BeltLine trail.

Table 1: Programmatic Elements from Historic Fourth Ward Park Planning Process.

Friends of Historic Fourth Ward Park Plan	EDAW Plan	As Built (Split into Phases)
• A soft edge to the lake (without allowing access to the water) • A dog park (clearly defined, and within the less desirable/under-utilized parcels of the park) • Trails (multi-use, including pedestrian, bike, in-line skating, etc.) • Sport fields • Interesting water features (perhaps a waterfall, or some type of interactive fountain) • A space for community interaction (spaces for meeting rooms) • Event space • An outdoor theater (which would accommodate between 500 and 3,000 guests with both permanent and flexible seating, and would encourage BeltLine use, rather than neighborhood parking) • Large lawn space • Picnic areas (both smaller scale picnic tables, and pavilions for larger gatherings) • Active recreation areas (occurring south of Ralph McGill and including multi-purpose fields) • Public restroom facilities • Concession stands (to be located in small kiosks throughout the park) • A library (with a focus on children's literature, and a potential space to hold smaller events, such as movie screenings) • A flexible outdoor event space (able to accommodate markets, small concerts, parties, etc)	• Vehicular Circulation around outside edge of park, including closing east-west streets • Parking • Hierarchical pedestrian circulation including primary paths with tree allees and specific distances • Multi-use fields • Dog parks • Picnic areas • Lawns • Playgrounds • Splash pads • Festival space • Garden rooms • Community garden • Skate park • Outdoor theater • Fitness stations • Sunken garden • Stormwater pond • Gateways • Public art	**PHASE 1** • Stormwater pond with soft edge, separated from paths by plantings or boardwalk • Interest-adding water features, especially after recent rain • Trails, including one at a specific distance for exercise • Open lawns • Amphitheater **PHASE 2** • Multi-use fields • Skate park • Playground • Splash pad • Open lawns • Sculptural terraces • Bathroom facilities

From the master plan, ABI split the park into two phases; Phase I focused on a five-acre section between Morgan St. and Rankin St. and included the stormwater detention pond, while Phase II comprised the other twelve acres, including the playground, multi-use field, and skate park. HDR, a multi-disciplinary firm with a background in stormwater infrastructure, was selected to design and provide construction documents for Phase I of the park, and Wood+Partners was selected to complete the design and construction documents for Phase II. Phase I of HFWP centers on a large sunken pond designed to fill and drain with stormwater as needed, so a sizable portion of the park sits below grade, in a bowl that can accommodate the increased water levels. During the design process, the engineers at HDR worked with the landscape architects to calculate the amount of storage the pond would need to be capable of for various storm events. Keeping in mind the public's safety concerns, the design team wanted to ensure that sightlines through the park were not impacted by the towering walls created for the pond.[65] A concrete and grass amphitheater connects this sunken section of the park to the upper area, where more traditional park elements, like restroom facilities, a splash pad, etc., were added in Phase II. "With stormwater flowing into the pond from its four sides, we designed distinct artistic features for each side, including a step-down channel, a water wall with sculptural elements, a tunnel to bring water into the pond, and subsurface water discharges into a dry stream bed."[66]

Another design firm, Wood+Partners, was selected for the design of Phase II of HFWP. Their process was similar to HDR's, although their program elements differed to accommodate

[65] Inc. HDR, "Historic Fourth Ward Park with Robby Bryant," interview by Nick Riker, 2023.
[66] Inc. HDR, *Speaking of Design*, podcast audio, How a Storm Sewer Project Became an Urban Oasis2016, https://www.hdrinc.com/insights/speaking-design-ep-2-how-storm-sewer-project-became-urban-oasis.

the rest of what was in the master plan. Where HDR focused largely on the stormwater pond, Wood+Partners' design provided more active recreation opportunities to the neighborhood, including a playground, multi-use fields, and a skate park. Nearby residents make good use of these features, in addition to Atlanta residents from other neighborhoods traveling to use them. The skate park in particular is widely used, with skateboarders, inline skaters, and BMX bike riders all using the space while often using the BeltLine to get there. Construction of Phase II of HFWP finished in 2012 with the portion of the park connecting to North Avenue.

The park, with its sunken stormwater pond, contrasts with the surrounding neighborhood, where new-construction multi-story residential buildings create a canyon effect. When the park opened, BeltLine users could see directly from the BeltLine into the heart of the park, where they might have found a spot to sit near the pond or stumbled upon an event in the amphitheater. With all the new construction, the park is basically hidden, so much so that I only saw a few other users walking through without an event happening on a recent day. While the park, at least portions of it like the skate park and field right off the BeltLine, is well known to Atlanta residents, the neighborhood change makes it a little difficult to stumble upon without searching for it. This may suit residents of the new constructions who look out over the park but does not necessarily lead to equitable access and use. For the residents living nearby before the park was constructed, this park has perhaps become a symbol of the wider gentrification happening in the neighborhood, offering a nice amenity but at an extreme increase in cost-of-living.

CHAPTER 4

DH STANTON PARK

DH Stanton Park, located along the Southside BeltLine trail in the Peoplestown neighborhood, was built on a former landfill, covering approximately eight acres with single-family residences along two sides of it. The park consists of a new playground, a splash pad, a baseball field with concession stand, restroom facilities, and a connection to the BeltLine. Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates (TSW), a landscape design firm based in Atlanta, conducted the original studies, and crafted a master plan for the parks and surrounding areas in 2009. Pond Engineering, a multi-disciplinary firm also based in the Atlanta area, completed the final design and oversaw the construction of the park, which officially opened in 2011.

Peoplestown is located in the southeastern portion of Atlanta, south of the central business district and west of Grant Park. Originally a trolley car neighborhood in the Victorian era, Peoplestown was built as housing for lower-, middle-, and upper-income families.[67] Originally, the neighborhood had primarily white residents, but there were segregated Black communities within it. Like in many Atlanta neighborhoods, demographics shifted during the first half of the 20th century with a large Jewish population moving into the neighborhood, then shifted again after the suburban exodus in the 1950s with the population becoming majority

[67] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Peoplestown Parks Master Plan* (2009).

Black.[68] DH Stanton Park sits on land that was once a dumping ground between the edge of the neighborhood and the railroad lines.[69]

Similar to the other parks discussed here, and the BeltLine as a whole, the design for DH Stanton Park began with a grassroots effort from residents in the community. A neighborhood organization, Friends of Peoplestown Parks, teamed up with Park Pride, an Atlanta-based non-profit organization focused on improving parks around the city, to complete a visioning exercise and imagine what DH Stanton Park could be. DH Stanton was not the only park they were considering, though. Another park nearby, known as Four Corners Park, was also examined as part of the visioning process. Over the course of seven community meetings in 2007, 80 residents offered their opinions on what these two parks should become. One of the community's top priorities was incorporating environmentally friendly elements and development principles.[70] In addition, the community recognized the potential to connect the two parks with more greenspace, serving as "the social and cultural spine of the neighborhood, while offering connectivity, recreation, and greenspace as amenities the whole neighborhood can utilize."[71] This combined park design incorporated a number of programmatic elements like multi-use lawns and playfields, playgrounds and splashpad, picnic areas, a recreation center, and an amphitheater overlooking a new lake serving as a stormwater retention basin, similar to HFWP (see Table 2).

[68] Paul Joseph Trudeau, "Friend Or Foe: The Viability of Local Designation in the Peoplestown Neighborhood, Atlanta, Georgia" (Master of Historic Preservation University of Georgia, 2005).
[69] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Peoplestown Parks Master Plan*.
[70] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Peoplestown Parks Master Plan*.
[71] Park Pride, *Peoplestown Parks Master Plan Report* (2006).

TSW was selected to complete the master plan for the subarea containing DH Stanton Park. TSW used the Park Pride plan as a starting point, considering the community input from that process and working it into their plans. In addition, TSW conducted community engagement during the design process, allowing nearby residents to guide the planning process and ensure that neighborhood needs were being met. From this process, TSW learned that there was a strong desire for a new recreation center in the neighborhood, possibly to replace an older building housing a youth center, a baseball field in DH Stanton Park, a linear greenway to connect the two parks, a walking trail within DH Stanton Park, relocating basketball courts, environmentally friendly design solutions, and an aquatic center. The TSW master plan included designs for Four Corners Park and called for the "Community Envisioned Park Expansion" to be considered.[72] In addition, it lays out plans for DH Stanton Park that include a baseball field with concession stand in the southeast corner of the park. The plan also calls for a splash pad, pavilion, playground, and natural play area in the middle of the park, centralizing the main features the community requested at the end of a pedestrian promenade. The playground reuses play equipment from the existing site, "preserving the hard work of community volunteers."[73] In addition, a formalized entry plaza invites community members into the park from the corner of Boynton Ave and Martin Street, while providing neighborhood access from the other three sides of the park. The plan also calls for a multi-use field space, with the idea that it can be used for a recreation center to be built at a future time, as requested by the community.

[72] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Peoplestown Parks Master Plan*.
[73] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Peoplestown Parks Master Plan*.

Table 2: Programmatic Elements from DH Stanton Park Planning Process

Park Pride Plan	TSW Plan	As Built
DH Stanton Park • Recreation Center with Parking • Entrance Plaza with Feature Columns • Parents' Pavilion • Playground • Traffic Calming • Splash Pad • Baseball Field with Stands, Press Box, Concessions • Pedestrian Connection to the BeltLine • Tree Plantings • Overflow Parking Four Corners Park • Recreation Center Renovation • New Playground • Basketball Courts • Tennis Courts • Pedestrian Circulation • Picnic Area • Multi-purpose Lawns Park Expansion • Aquatic Center • Free Play Lawns/Sports Field • Wooded Area • Pedestrian Circulation • Amphitheater • Pavilion with Parking • Overlook Pavilion • Lake (Water Reclamation Area)	DH Stanton Park • Recreation Center with Parking • Baseball Field with Stands, Concessions, Restrooms • Lawn/Multi-Use Field • Walking/Multi-use Trails • Playground • Playground Gazebo • Natural Play Area • Splash Pad • Pedestrian Connection to the BeltLine • Entry Plaza Four Corners Park • Recreation Center • Parking Lot • Entrance Plaza with Feature Columns • Parents' Pavilion • Playground • Traffic Calming • Splash Pad • Baseball Field with Stands, Press Box, Concessions • Pedestrian Connection to the BeltLine • Tree Plantings • Overflow Parking Park Expansion • Recreation Center • Parking Lot • Entrance Plaza with Feature Columns • Parents' Pavilion	DH Stanton Park • Baseball Field with Stands, Concessions, Storage • Lawn/Multi-Use Field • Walking/Multi-use Trails • Playground • Playground Gazebo • Natural Play Area • Splash Pad • Restrooms • Solar Array • Pedestrian Connection to the BeltLine • Entry Plaza Four Corners Park • None Park Expansion • None

Following the release of the TSW master plan for subarea 2, ABI released an RFP for the final design of DH Stanton Park and selected Pond Engineering as the firm to complete the work. Pond hewed closely to TSW's plan, keeping the major features where they were in the original plan. Pond sized the field to be ready for little league baseball and suggested a scorekeepers facility/concession stand behind home plate. Pond also designed a splashpad, natural playground area, tot lot, picnic areas, restrooms, and a gazebo. In addition, they designed a pedestrian promenade leading to the center of the park, covered by a photovoltaic roof structure, which harnesses solar energy and sells it back to the grid during the day, allowing the park to buy less expensive energy to run lighting at night.[74] In addition to the environmentally friendly benefits of the solar structure, Pond chose native or naturalized species for their planting plans, incorporated organic maintenance techniques, and reused large stones excavated on the site for natural climbing and sitting elements.[75] Finally, Pond included hard-surface walking trails throughout the park to allow for exercise.

The plan for DH Stanton Park reflects the wants and needs of the community, but there was a chance for ABI to do so much more to offer quality greenspace to a disinvested community. DH Stanton Park was completed in 2011 and has been seemingly well-used by members of the community since then. However, some of the amenities in the park were either never constructed, like the recreation center, or are now closed full time, like the bathrooms that are welded shut. Four Corners Park, meanwhile, is yet to enter the design phase, even though the Strategic Implementation Plan called for it to be completed by the end of this year. In fact,

[74] "DH Stanton Park," https://www.pondco.com/project/atlanta-beltline-park-dh-stanton-park/.
[75] Pond Co., "DH Stanton Park."

community members expressed frustration with the lengthy process and acted by reconnecting with Park Pride to do another visioning plan.[76] The lack of movement on the park has put the onus on the community to organize and provide the greenspace for themselves, instead of ABI providing investment to improve the space. Finally, the connective greenspace, so sought after by the community throughout the planning process, will never come to fruition. The area south of Boynton Avenue has been developed into luxury apartments and townhomes, leaving the Peoplestown community without a foundational greenspace and putting the neighborhood at higher risk for gentrification.

[76] Park Pride, "Park Pride Park Visioning Process with Teri Rye and Andrew White," interview by Nick Riker, 2023.

CHAPTER 6

ENOTA PARK

Enota Park is one of the BeltLine Jewels currently in the design phase. The park began as a community-led playground on a vacant lot, nestled into a residential neighborhood called Westview. Behind the existing playlot, a steep, wooded space connects to the BeltLine, offering an opportunity for a new park. TSW, a planning and landscape architecture firm, completed the master plan for the sub-area Enota Park lies in, as well as an initial master plan for the park. Pond & Company were selected to create the final design and construction documents for the park. The park is in the final stages of the design process, with construction slated to start once funding is secured.[77]

The Westview neighborhood, where Enota Park is located, has a storied history of its own, starting as one of Atlanta's earliest streetcar neighborhoods.[78] While it initially developed as an upper-middle class white suburb, the neighborhood demographics shifted after the end of segregation, with more Black families moving into the neighborhood, becoming a majority Black neighborhood by 1969.[79] The largest greenspace in the neighborhood is the Westview Cemetery, where people can walk, but most other recreation (including jogging, cycling, picnicking, or playing) is outlawed.

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[77] Inc. Atlanta Beltline, "Westview Neighborhood BeltLine Project Updates," (2023). https://www.facebook.com/atlantabeltline/videos/westview-neighborhood-beltline-project-updates-ralph-david-abernathy-rda-access-/159519307000363/.
[78] "Neighborhood History," Westview, Atlanta, GA, 2023, http://www.westviewatlanta.com/about/history/.
[79] "Neighborhood History."

Enota Park was identified as a possible expansion project to create a neighborhood jewel along the BeltLine in this area of Atlanta. While the neighborhood group running the park had done their best to take care of it, including getting updated playground equipment via a grant, there was opportunity to create a meaningful green space in a part of town that does not have many. In drawing up the initial plans for Enota Park, Garvin and his team saw an opportunity in some vacant space that fronted the future-BeltLine: a kudzu-covered ravine along an unused street right-of-way. "In addition to the current playground, an expanded Enota Park will include walking trails and picnic areas. In addition, this expansion will provide this street and its adjacent neighborhood direct access to the Beltline, which it would not otherwise have."[80] The note about direct access to the BeltLine is important, given all the neighborhood changes the development would bring: residents who live in the area should at least be able to enjoy some of the benefits of having the trail.

In 2006, Park Pride facilitated a park visioning process for Enota Park after being approached by a community group looking to improve the greenspace. The process included community meetings to work on visioning and prioritizing of program elements. In that plan, the park is a much smaller scale, mostly focused on the vacant area between the existing playlot and the BeltLine, with connections further south to Cascade Ave, likely due to land constraints at the time. Park Pride is not a land acquisition organization, so they were only working with limited space around the existing playlot. The priorities of program elements from this plan are listed in Table 3. Park Pride released the plan and an estimated budget for the construction of the new version of Enota Park. Park Pride's scope was always to provide the plan, and let the community

[80] Alex Garvin & Associates, *The Beltline Emerald Necklace: Atlanta's New Public Realm*.

go about implementing the improvements at their own pace, when grant money or other funding became available.

A few years later, as the master planning process for the BeltLine got underway, ABI solicited TSW for the master plan for this subarea. TSW, along with ABI conducted a series of community meetings about the area as a whole and Enota Park in particular over the course of six months in early-2010. They used a number of different engagement techniques, including presentations, open question-and-answer sessions, "What I Like/Dislike/What I Want to See" commenting activity, and more. For Enota Park, the process kicked off with an advisory committee meeting on April 15, 2010. At this meeting, representatives from ABI and TSW presented two initial concepts based on the 2006 Park Pride plan to the advisory board of six people.[81] The concepts presented at this meeting were bigger in scale than the Park Pride plan, requiring more land acquisition and planning. Members of the planning committee worried about acquiring the land and what that would mean for community residents, especially those who were renting their homes. ABI suggested that they could talk with these residents during their community outreach event and at future meetings. In addition, ABI and TSW collected feedback about design elements within the parks, both positive and negative. The following week, a similarly structured meeting open to the wider community was held, and about thirty people attended. Again, ABI and TSW presented the initial concept plans and solicited feedback. One of the issues noted by the community at this meeting was the lack of spaces for youth to congregate and fears of delinquency. The designers responded by suggesting that the park features could provide space for youth and programming could offer alternatives to delinquency. In addition,

[81] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Atlanta BeltLine Subarea 1 Master Plan* (2010).

the community raised questions about how the space would be lit, with the designers listening to the community recommendation to light the space as much as possible, with the ability to turn lights off when the park is closed. In addition to recording comments said aloud, ABI included a comment board for community members to vote on program elements.[82] This board was used to inform the design process about which program elements were most important to the community.

The process continued with three more meetings over the next six months. At each of these, ABI and TSW adjusted the concept plans, incorporating community feedback as much as possible to meet their needs. This process resulted in the Subarea 1 Master Plan, detailing the plan for the whole section of the BeltLine through the Westview and West End, including Enota Park and other developments along the trail.[83] Public input for Enota Park focused on environmental, safety, and community issues. The published list of input stated that the community wanted to "incorporate environmentally friendly stormwater management techniques and lighting, ensure adequate visibility into the park from all sides, minimize the impact of small park events on local residents, provide creatively designed gathering places for local residents from all walks of life, and respect and restore the existing stream and tree canopy."[84] In this version of the Enota Park plan, the northern end of the site is more focused on passive recreation, with natural trails through a restored woodland and stream area, an event lawn, and community garden spaces. The southern end of the park hosts more active recreation, with a multi-use field, playground, and basketball court. Circulation through the park is provided by the BeltLine on the eastern edge and trails throughout, made with both hard and soft surfaces to account for

[82] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Atlanta BeltLine Subarea 1 Master Plan*.
[83] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Atlanta BeltLine Subarea 1 Master Plan*.
[84] Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, *Atlanta BeltLine Subarea 1 Master Plan*.

accessibility. TSW proposed entry points at a number of different streets, aiming to increase access to and traffic through the park.

Concurrently with the TSW subarea master plan, a community group conducted a public engagement process to inform a master plan for the Westview neighborhood, a slightly smaller scope than previous master planning efforts and more focused on the neighborhood. This process incorporated some of the planning work done by Garvin and TSW, while focusing mostly on the streetscapes around the neighborhood. To gather community members, the Westview community Organization notified residents, property owners, and businesses via postcards and enlisted a facilitator to run the meeting. The workshop was an all-day affair, with walking tours in the morning for participants "to familiarize themselves with the residential streets, the commercial nodes, and the BeltLine connector."[85] After the walking tour, participants broke into small groups and discussed the issues at hand, then came back together and shared with the larger group. In this plan, they list out requests for program elements within the expanded Enota Park, seen in Table 3. Some of these program items remained from earlier plans, while others were shifted and made higher priority features.

Between the TSW plan from 2010 and 2017, ABI began the process of acquiring the needed land for the Enota Park expansion. In 2017, ABI decided they had enough land to get a finalized design and put out a request for design services for the park. Pond Engineering won the bid and started the process of completing the design. Pond, with the help of ABI, held a series of public meetings to solicit feedback on the designs for this new park. Pond's design team took a lot of cues from the TSW plan but had to make a number of changes due to property constraints.

[85] Westview Community Organization, *Westview Master Plan* (2011).

The initial plots of land that TSW had proposed acquiring did not come through, but others did, necessitating changes in the design. Pond was able to keep the general theme of the TSW design, with active recreation facilities at the southern end of the park and more passive recreation opportunities in the north. However, due to property constraints, the middle section of the park was much skinnier than originally intended, so it became a more transitional space between the two larger portions of the park and the neighborhood and the BeltLine. The designers were able to include a small water feature in this zone, creating a more reflective atmosphere in the midst of the larger park.[86] Learning lessons from DH Stanton Park, Pond made the decision to not include a truly full-sized play field, as they did not want the park to get "overrun by people showing up and playing organized sports."[87] This shows a desire to keep the park accessible to those in the surrounding neighborhood, by keeping more organized activities out and leaving the park self-regulated. Another change involved shifting the basketball court to a new location. Pond followed the TSW plan here by creating an amphitheater-like space along the edge of the basketball court, allowing spectators to sit and watch, creating community by encouraging interaction.

[86] Pond Co., "Enota Park and DH Stanton Park with Sydney Thompson and Matthew Wilder," interview by Nicholas Riker, 2023.
[87] Pond Co., interview.

Table 3: Programming Elements from Enota Park Design Process.

Park Pride Plan	Subarea 1 Park Master Plan Enota (TSW)	Westview Community Group Plan	Pond Plan
Top Priority • Expanded Playground • Entrance feature at Sells Ave. • Gathering Plaza • Major Pedestrian Corridor • Uncovered Picnic Area at BeltLine • Decorative Pillars at Playground • Muse Street Path • Picnic and Landscaping along Muse Street Path • Natural Surface Walkways • Fitness Equipment • Parents Pavilion • Covered Pavilion • Gazebo • Screening Plantings at I-20 • Native Woodland Plantings • Community Garden • Site-Wide Lighting • Site-Wide Site Furniture • Future Lawn • Streambank Creation/Restoration High Priority • Community Center w/ Off-Street Parking & Landscaping • Connecting Path from Park to Langhorn Parkway • Bench Swings • Entrance Feature at BeltLine • Entrance at Langhorn • Bridge Across BeltLine • Large Pavilion • Uncovered Picnic Area • Pedestrian Connection between Enota/Greenwich and Langhorn Medium Priority • Basketball Court	• Entry plazas • Event lawn • Community Garden • Natural Play Area • Trails • Gateway • Overlook • Woodland restoration • Stream restoration • Basketball court with spectator seating • Playground • Multi-purpose play field • Terraced lawn fronting BeltLine	• Event lawn with performance stage • Dog park • Basketball court • Playground • Multi-purpose field • Woodland preserve, preserving as many trees as possible • Stream restoration • Trails • Community garden • Restrooms • Lighting • Bicycle racks • Benches/seating areas • Picnic area • Buffer to I-20	• Restored Woodland • Event Lawn • Picnic Area • Boardwalk • Pavilion • Trail with Overlook • Passive Garden • Plaza at Greenwich and Enota • Bioretention • Buffer Landscaping • Play Structure • Splash Pad Plaza • Restrooms • Half-Court Basketball • Terraced Seating • Entry Plazas • Public Art • Stream Bank Restoration • Hard-Surface Trails • Multipurpose Play Field • Parks Maintenance Building • Pervious Paving • Solar-Power Shade Structure • Shade Structure

The process for the final design of Enota Park was slightly heavier on community engagement than HFWP or DH Stanton, due to the change in property necessitating new feedback from the community. Unfortunately, it appears this is only happening because the park is taking so long to get built, falling behind the schedule laid out in the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) by roughly seven years, and leaving the community without a large greenspace during that time. In that SIP, ABI concluded that Enota Park should be part of the first phase due to the fact that it "rated highest in terms of equity."[88] In another argument for prioritizing Enota Park, ABI remarked on the imbalance of projects in the Southwest section of the BeltLine: "With the majority of park expenditure to date having been in the East and Southeast of the Atlanta BeltLine, delivering parks in the Southwest is of importance in the immediate future."[89] Since then, though, most improvements have happened in other areas along the corridor, in areas that have higher concentrations of white residents and higher median incomes. We will not fault ABI for slowed operations during the Covid-19 pandemic, but years passed between the TSW master plan in 2010, the SIP in 2013, eventually hiring Pond to do a design in 2017, and the park is still yet to start construction. That leaves the community without the vital resource of adequate greenspace in a time when that resource is more important than ever.

[88] Atlanta BeltLineAtlanta Beltline, *2030 Strategic Implementation Plan*.
[89] Atlanta BeltLineAtlanta Beltline, *2030 Strategic Implementation Plan*.

CHAPTER 7

LOOKING AHEAD

The BeltLine Project is rapidly causing change in neighborhoods around Atlanta, whether it be from the trail itself, new parks and greenspaces, or new developments around it. While the Strategic Implementation Plan called for the entirety of the project to be completed by 2030, the current state of affairs makes that an unlikely goal. However, the delay in designing and opening new or improved park spaces offers the opportunity to reaffirm ABI's commitment to community engagement and equity, especially in historically disinvested communities.

Maddox Park

Maddox Park is a park located on Atlanta's west side, in a neighborhood known as Bankhead. Maddox Park sits directly off the BeltLine corridor, although the current rail line sits at a much higher grade and passes over the park. The park itself is one of Atlanta's oldest and most historic parks, originally completed in 1931, although different accounts suggest that it was originally the city dumping grounds.[90] The neighborhood around Maddox Park has seen major changes since the park was built. Originally a first-generation suburb, the area became mostly middle-class housing from the 1930s to the 1960s. In the 1960s, however, the surrounding neighborhoods started to decline, eventually losing half of their population by the 1980s.[91]

[90] New South Associates, *Every Park Tells a Story: City of Atlanta Parks Historic Resource Survey*, City of Atlanta Department of City Planning (2020).
[91] Mactec Engineering, *Subarea 10 Park Master Plan: Maddox Park* (2009).

Today, the area is still struggling to recover, with many vacant and abandoned homes and buildings and people experiencing homelessness.

ABI hired Mactec Engineering to complete the subarea master plan for subarea 10, where Maddox Park sits. The process was similar to that of the other subareas, with community input meetings happening throughout the development of the plan. For Maddox Park, though, there was only one dedicated meeting for the community to provide input on concept plans. At these meetings, the community expressed interest in creating better spaces for children, making Maddox Park a place families could visit after work and providing educational programming. A big emphasis was placed on safety, with people saying that the park needs more visibility and lighting. A major use of the park was as an informal gathering place, often in the parking lot and not even within the park space proper.[92]

Mactec's plans for Maddox Park suggested expanding the park, with the idea that by stitching together disparate park spaces, the project could reconnect the surrounding communities to each other and create a park that meets those communities' needs. The plan called for restoration of the historic core of the park, reopening the pool and rehabilitating other historic structures. In addition, the plan suggested opening the existing greenhouse, which had been a City of Atlanta property, to the community, offering space for community gardens or horticultural societies to grow plants and provide education opportunities. To the west of the historic core, new multi-use trails and fields provide space for organized and casual active recreation, giving the community the capacity to improve their health through exercise. To the south, the park expansion offers natural space for passive recreation, including walking trails and

[92] Mactec Engineering, *Subarea 10 Park Master Plan: Maddox Park*.

a new pond. To the east, the connection to the BeltLine is formalized and solidified through passive greenspace and new development, providing more opportunities for visibility into the park and making it safer.

Unfortunately for the communities around Maddox Park, the design process has slowed and essentially come to a halt. Currently, ABI does not have Maddox Park listed in the "Places To Go: Parks" section of their website. The BeltLine trail construction is making progress, working to create connections to other areas on the West Side but plans for improving Maddox Park have stalled out. On the BeltLine's Investment Data Explorer, linked via their Equity webpage, Maddox Park is not listed as a project ABI has put money into.[93] In classic Atlanta fashion, the focus has been concentrated on the new Westside Reservoir Park just north of Maddox Park.

While ABI is not really pushing a design for Maddox Park anymore, other organizations have answered the call. Small improvements are being implemented by community members, making a direct impact on the park. For years, community members have gathered for cleanup days, taking it upon themselves to maintain the park for everyone. Park Pride recently announced it awarded a grant to install a history trail at Maddox Park, combining fitness equipment with signage to educate the community about neighborhood history and important figures.[94] In the last year, the Foodwell Alliance, an urban farming nonprofit, hosted their annual Soil Festival at

[93] Inc. and Neighborhood Nexus Atlanta Beltline, "Investment Data Explorer," (2023). https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9f272c96706044daa0bfe06ba38513ca.
[94] Park Pride, "$2.5M of Capital Park Improvements Headed for Local Communities," news release, 2023, https://parkpride.org/2-5m-of-capital-park-improvements-headed-for-local-communities/.

the park, activating the space for a day with food, family fun, and refreshments all based around soil education.[95]

ABI should consider the improvements at Maddox Park a priority if they are truly interested in creating equity throughout the corridor. The first step is for the organization to reach back out to the community and rebuild trust in order to get meaningful engagement at future community design events. By going back to square one, ABI could get a better sense of what nearby residents want and whether that matches with the plans laid out in the Subarea Master Plan over ten years ago. This outreach could be done by partnering with organizations in the neighborhood, like church groups, local schools, or nearby sports teams. It could also look like hosting events in the park, perhaps a volunteer clean-up day, and discussing the future plans for the park there. ABI could learn a lot from Park Pride, or partner with them, to maximize engagement and build trust from the community.

A second piece of building equity into the design process for Maddox Park would be an emphasis on reckoning with history. The park's history is deep, as is the surrounding neighborhoods, and that history could inform the design of the park. Design elements like murals, educational signage, and even programming can give the community a deeper connection to the park, instilling a sense of pride for the park itself and for the neighborhood. Residents that have lived in the neighborhood would likely enjoy seeing the history, and it would give children or younger residents a chance to learn about where they live, creating a better sense of place. These elements could arise from historical research and community engagement, as sometimes the most knowledge of the past is within the community.

[95] "Soil Festival 2023," 2023, https://www.foodwellalliance.org/soil-festival-2023.

And Beyond

On a larger scale, the City of Atlanta is focused on providing equity throughout the park system. In 2021, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) released a new ten-year master plan titled "Activate ATL." This new plan, built through a community input process that included over 10,000 residents, puts equity front and center. DPR acknowledged that some portions of the city had been historically marginalized, and intentionally reached out to create an inclusive environment for those residents to provide feedback. A new data-driven mapping tool, available online for residents to explore, provides a way for DPR to "accurately identify disparities in current parks" and "pinpoint specific strategies to eliminate those disparities."[96] This tool, along with the master plan overall, should guide the City of Atlanta in improving parks that need it the most based on a number of factors, including need for park investment and biggest health impacts. Hopefully, DPR can use this guide and continue to partner with the BeltLine to activate parks in the most impactful areas, including Maddox Park.

Separately, as part of an overall Atlanta City Design process, the Atlanta Department of City Planning emphasized the importance of public awareness of the history of development in the city through a research effort called the Future Places Project (FPP). The project is "a campaign to engage the public about the City's significant properties (buildings, sites, districts, and landscapes), garner support for their preservation, and raise the conversation about historic preservation and its role within the City's development including future design and planning initiatives."[97] One of the reports to come out of this project details the history of parks in Atlanta,

[96] Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation, *Activate ATL: Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan* (2021).
[97] New South Associates, *Every Park Tells a Story: City of Atlanta Parks Historic Resource Survey*.

titled “Every Park Tells a Story.” The report looks at the long history of how parks in Atlanta developed, marking 1883 and the donation of Grant Park to the City as the “true beginning of the Atlanta’s park system.”[98] Looking deeper at the history of the parks in Atlanta can provide a better understanding of where investment needs to be made, where elements should be retained or restored, and where new elements could be added to enhance the public’s historical knowledge. A truly equitable park system, especially in a city with Atlanta’s checkered past, needs to acknowledge its history while pushing forward.

[98] New South Associates, *Every Park Tells a Story: City of Atlanta Parks Historic Resource Survey*.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the BeltLine project provides opportunity for equitable park development across the city of Atlanta but has fallen short of the mark so far. For three parks, all in historically disinvested neighborhoods, the BeltLine solicited community feedback in hopes of providing what residents wanted out of their greenspace. However, the complicated planning process for the BeltLine and its parks tempered the positive effects of the community design process, leaving the residents with a park that only partially provided what they needed. At Historic Fourth Ward Park, the BeltLine provided a much-needed green infrastructure amenity but did not do all that much to engage with the history of the surrounding neighborhood. At DH Stanton Park, the BeltLine provided a portion of what the community wanted but did not succeed in creating the sprawling, neighborhood-anchoring park that the community desired. Finally, at Enota Park, the designs seem to reflect what the community wants out of the expansion, but the severely delayed timeline has left the neighborhood without a vital greenspace for far too long.

All this said, there is still a possibility the BeltLine can achieve its equity goals in regard to parks, but they will need to reckon with the history of the city and its development, adjust their community input process, and build true places for the marginalized communities throughout Atlanta. Development in Atlanta has been fraught with race and class division, and the BeltLine parks should at the very least acknowledge the past. The Atlanta Department of City Planning took a strong step forward with their park history document, providing a deeper understanding of

individual parks and the system as a whole. The BeltLine could learn from this document and work opportunities for the public to discover park history into their future designs.

A deeper look at the past provides opportunity for a better community input process as well. Examining and acknowledging past harms can rebuild trust within a community and lead to more buy-in from residents. While the BeltLine certainly did community input, a running theme throughout the parks examined here is that the community had chances to suggest elements they wanted in their parks primarily during the early master planning process. By the time the construction of those parks got underway, sometimes years or even a decade later, the community needs could have changed, but the designers hired to do the final designs more or less worked off the original master plans. Especially now that we are so far removed, it seems like reexamining those programming elements and soliciting input from the community again would be wise.

Finally, reconnecting to the past and offering opportunities for meaningful input helps to create a sense of place within these historically marginalized and disinvested communities. History creates a strong sense of community, learning about the people who came before with the people in the present, and passing that knowledge down to future generations. A stronger, more nimble community input process provides residents with a real stake in their parks, tying them to their neighborhood in a deeper way. When residents care about a park in their neighborhood, they are more likely to help maintain it, make sure it stays safe, and actually use the greenspace. That sense of place, a connection to their community, gives residents reason to fight to stay and not get pushed out by the tide of gentrification.

I think the BeltLine is the best thing to happen to Atlanta in the last fifty years. Better than the Olympics, better than new stadiums and professional sports teams, and certainly better than the sprawl the city is known for. The project is already shaping the city, pushing it towards a more sustainable, less car-dependent future. My issue with the project is not that it is happening, but rather that it is happening without enough regard for marginalized communities along its path. While certainly different actions could have been taken to ensure that marginalized residents would not be pried out, now is the time to reassess, take stock of what is working and what is not, and apply the lessons learned to move forward in a more equitable way.

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APPENDIX A:

Historic Fourth Ward Park
Design Documents and Images

Historic Fourth Ward Park Before Construction
Photo Courtesy of HDR, Inc.

NORTH AVENUE PARK - option 1

HDR

NORTH AVENUE PARK - option 2

HDR

NORTH AVENUE PARK - option 3

HFWP Concept Plans
Courtesy of HDR, Inc.

HFWP Phase I Site Plan
Courtesy of HDR, Inc.

HFWP Phase II Site Plan
Courtesy of Wood + Partners

HFWP After Construction
Photo Courtesy of HDR, Inc.

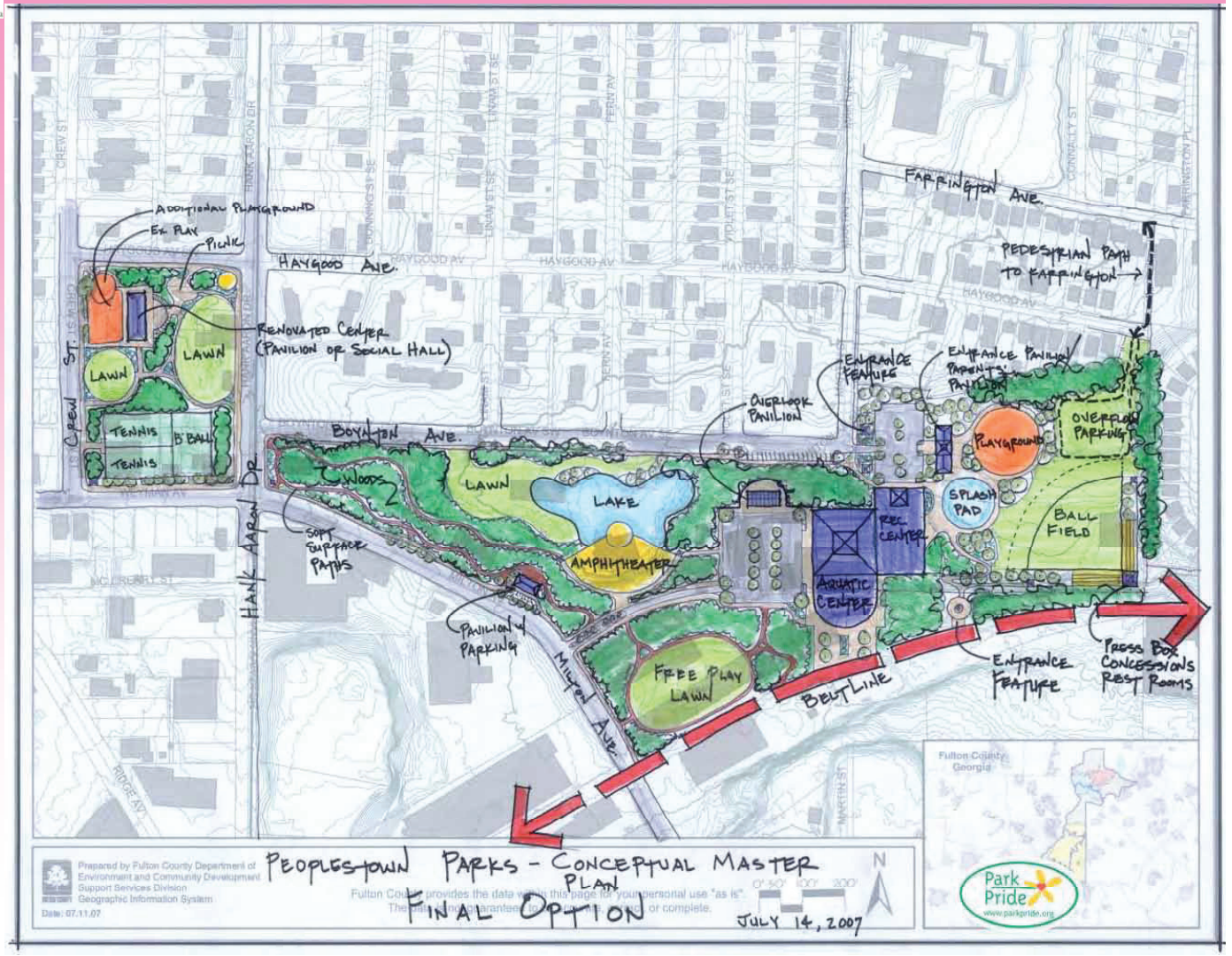
APPENDIX B:

DH Stanton Park
Design Documents and Images

park pride
more & better parks... all over Atlanta

JULY 2007

PEOPLESTOWN PARKS: FINAL CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN



Peoplestown Parks Conceptual Master Plan
Courtesy of Park Pride

DH Stanton Park Site Plan
from BeltLine Subarea 2 Master Plan
by TSW

DH Stanton Park Site Plan
Courtesy of Pond Co.







DH Stanton Park
Photos by Author

APPENDIX C:

Enota Park
Design Documents

ENOTA PARK CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

Park Pride

NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

JAN 2007

not to scale

Enota Park Conceptual Master Plan
Courtesy of Park Pride

Enota Park Conceptual Master Plan
Courtesy of Park Pride

Enota Park Conceptual Master Plan
Courtesy of TSW

Enota Park Master Plan
Courtesy of Pond Co.