

**Connectivity Studio Presentation
Central United Methodist Church
Wednesday, October 30, 2013**

Professor: Michael Dobbins, Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning

Transcribed by: Mackenzie Madden, Westside Communities Alliance

Event started with room introductions (more people came in throughout the time period), some represented groups included:

- Georgia State University
- Friendship Baptist Church
- Historic Westside Cultural Arts Council
- Westside TAD Advisory Board
- Mayor's Office
- HELP Inc.
- Atlanta University Center Consortium
- Central United Methodist Church
- City of Atlanta
- Lindsay St Baptist Church
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Trust for Public Land
- Atlanta Regional Commission
- APD
- Grace Midtown Church
- Tapestry Development
- Urban Environmental Solutions
- Gresham Smith

Environment/Health

- Study area starts at the headwaters of Proctor Creek
- Importance of the 2012 Federal Urban Waters Partnership designation
- Elevation and topography:
 - All city rainwater goes NW
 - 400ft difference between highest and lowest point
 - Large amounts of impervious surface coverage = rapidly flowing water followed by stagnation that creates flooding concerns
- Hydrologic analysis shows water accumulation in English Avenue/Vine City
- How does design affect health?
 - Examples: physical activity and fresh food access
- Health and quality of life index in NPUs in Atlanta

- Westside community residents (25%) without a car live over a mile from the grocery store
- Recommends a Health Impact Assessment like those done on other stadiums and on the BeltLine. Elected officials should push for this process which is comprehensive and broad.
- Green infrastructure demo projects: Boone Park East (Mims Park), Lindsay St. park, Urban Ecology Center concept
- Strategies: follow the example of Historic 4th Ward Park

Transportation:

- Walkability scores based on index show disinvestment in infrastructure.
 - English Avenue: 40
 - Vine City: 50
 - For comparison, Downtown and Auburn Avenue are at the top.
- Issue 1: East-West Connectivity
 - Extending Magnolia to Andrew Young
 - Leaving MLK intact
 - Green Lights Committee
 - Complete Streets
- Issue 2: Stadium parking overflow
 - Tailgating park
 - Permit parking and enforcement
 - Mixed-use structures
 - Shuttle services
 - Parking apps/community controlled parking lots
- Issue 3: Sidewalk Connectivity
 - Decrepit Conditions
 - Ongoing data collection and dedicated funding stream
- Issue 4: Access to transit
 - No bus route on Northside Drive
 - Transit Impact Development fees
 - Streetcar extensions to AUC
- Issue 5: Identifiability and Neighborhood Identity
 - Lay-out of one-way streets confuses navigation
 - Neighborhood gateways
 - Street Sign Toppers
 - Wayfinding maps
 - One-way to two-way street conversion

Land Use and Urban Design:

- Safety: NPU M and L have a lower safety index than any other NPUs (23rd and 25th respectively)
- Collaboration with APD, schools, and MARTA on car, foot, bikes, and segway.

- Lighting survey on dark spots
- Inconsistencies in zoning
- Locating BeltLine and PATH trails
- Massive size of the old dome site proves to be better suited for something besides parking
 - Retention pond
 - Projector screen for community game viewing
- Historical preservation

Housing and Community Development:

- Vacancy, Blight, Code Compliance
 - 30% of structures are vacant, and the City is experiencing a huge backlog of demolitions
- Acquisition and Rehabilitation: targeted investment
 - Using reality of no funding, find priority areas
 - Foreclose: land bank, employ city financial investments
- Preserve affordability for current residents
 - Freeze taxes
 - Lease-back or purchase options
 - Rehab owner-occupied/affordable units
 - Right of return
- Jobs: Workforce and Business Development
 - Where can people work? Industrial, commercial, and institutional
 - Vocational training funding and models
 - Strengthen existing corner stores, CDCs, and CIDs
 - Blank is doing work in this arena already
 - Encourage entrepreneurship
 - Anchors for community
 - Community resources
 - Identify overlapping, connect multiple organizations, connect different resources, design/develop/expand resource-building programs

GENERAL PRESENTATION QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE:

Audience Member: Looking at the educational institutions like Bellwood, the English Avenue School, and Kennedy, how can they still support education? How can we use interim uses? The community is set on keeping Kennedy as a public middle school. We need schools to attract jobs/residents. We need to use partnerships.

Mable Thomas: Working class people are treated ridiculously in Atlanta. In English Avenue/Vine City, we are not research subjects, we are human beings. We want to help scope projects before they are started. English Avenue and Vine City already have CBAs, look at those instead of creating new ones. English Avenue has architectural history. Put it in your presentation. We

need a resource center. We have reports. We will play the game of putting marks on paper, but we do this all the time and never find our ideas in the finished products. The only center you mentioned was Urban Ecology Center. Why didn't you incorporate the English Avenue school? People have a tie to it. The community feels perturbed. We love Georgia Tech as a partner, not a martyr. How can we not demand that if \$200 million is found so easily, why can't we get pre-development money? Don't pick and choose who you send things to. There needs to be a centralized GT process for community engagement.

Answer: We're trying to teach students, that's why we're doing this.

Where is your nexus? The stadium? What about a move towards AUC? In regards to MLK, the impact of moving it in front of Central UMC is not good, you're already impacting two churches, why more? I give commendation for the note of one-way to two-way conversions. Nobody knows what is happening to MLK.

Audience Member: Last part of Atlanta that is historically black and historically important and is on the verge of being destroyed by progress. Go to Washington Park to see the black history. Why are we afraid of "black districts"? We pride ourselves on cultural wonderfulness, why do we not support/embrace it? Stop trying to make a black neighborhood white. We're ignoring the potential for urban business to provide economic development. You don't see black people. You don't see black history. If I told you that 90% of Russell's employees and are black, you wouldn't believe me. Tourism is the easiest market to enter, why don't we capitalize on that?

HELP Inc.: Is there an implication study of gentrification on prices of homes?

Answer: There is a commitment to affordability.

Tony Torrence: Thank you for all the work. Why are asking or begging? We know what to do – we need to do it for ourselves. Stop asking the sleeping giants. Start in your own community. We welcome people who share a vision.

Audience: These are some what-if scenarios that aren't flushed out yet.

Answer: They will be in a week or two once we receive feedback.

Deborah Scott: Let's talk about the elephant in the room – the last church standing, that we are in right now.

Answer: We will incorporate CUMC ideas and study the pros/cons of possible MLK alternates.

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