



Northwest Community Alliance Meeting

Meals on Wheels – 1705 Commerce Drive, Atlanta GA

Wednesday, January 15th, 2013

7:00 pm

Minutes transcribed by Mackenzie Madden, Westside Communities Alliance

Welcome: Mike Koblentz

The NCA meets on the 3rd Wednesday of every other month.

Round-Table Introductions – **see Mike Koblentz for the sign-in list for this event*

Mike Dobbins (GT Professor of City and Regional Planning) displays work from his studio course outlining the cut-off of the neighborhoods as a result of the Atlanta Falcons Stadium.

Mike Koblentz: Andre Dickens is home-grown, familiar with grass-roots activism, former President of Underwood Hills, and won a hard-fought election into City Council.

Andre Dickens, City Council Post 3 At Large:

- Mike nurtured Dickens through the process of starting NCA during the hotel issue with Berkley Park which is now the Howell Mill District.
- Grew up on Southwest side of Atlanta, attended Mays high School and Georgia Tech.
- Currently lives in Underwood Hills.
- Major belief: **1 city for all people**
- Atlanta is a great city, airport, cities, businesses, weather, etc.
- Greatness is best embodied in our people when we work together
- We all believe that the city should be **well-run, efficient, and have effective services**
- We need to be **forward-looking** when approaching current challenges, options, and long –term planning
- Believes in being **transparent, honest, and fair**
- Has a commitment to being **innovative**
- There is value in being **collaborative** with nonprofits, and institutes of higher education
- We can use technology to our advantage and connect people to services
 - In this way, we can also engage people to solve problems
- We need to be **courageous** when it comes to addressing tough problems such as education, poverty, infrastructure
 - Saying things like “I don’t know” starts to sound like I don’t care
 - People want us to be courageous, take stands, and speak for those without a voice
- There are citywide relationships and concerns to focus on and the hope is that one day there will be no more grumbling



- We can find examples of best practices across the city, nation, and world. We need to use these examples to understand how things get done in the best possible way.

Dickens introduces staff his staff: Ali Carter, Constituent Services and Emil Runge, Chief of Staff

- To quote Jane Jacobs “Cities are messy, and complicated and that’s why we love them”.
- Access and inclusion are just as important as diversity. We should expect people to want to be at the table. We need to deliver on the promise to deliver for all. I love Westside but this is for the whole city. We need to further advocate for 21st century skill-building and opportunities at all levels. Skills and talents should lead to a living wage out of poverty. You’ll hear me ask local developers about local hiring for city funded projects. Innovation will drive large part of economy.
- Westside is currently a furniture hub – how can we brand/name that?
- We should look at industry clusters that we can grow in certain areas
- All parts of the districts are not the same. We work best when we work together. Tonight’s room is indicative of how to bridge gaps and bring people together.
- To be clear and move away from the utopian jargon, Atlanta has its issues.
 - *Traffic*: There are crippling points around here, like Howell Mill and Northside, we need to improve connectivity. Soon this area will be competing with trucks, is our infrastructure ready for that?
 - *Safety*: We are safer than we have been in a while. While crime is down, the perception of safety is not (civility is a challenge).
 - *Equity*: This \$1 billion chunk coming in – the question is who gets what and their needs met.
 - *Blight*: There should be a robust plan for vacant property, the code enforcement sticker needs to have more bite with a solid process behind it.
 - Just because the current path is comfortable, it doesn’t make it right.
- We are an envy of lots of places
 - Ranked #4
 - Broad entrepreneurial base
 - Rich history – buildings and streets named after civil rights heroes and national legends
- Our destiny is to build a shiny new city on a hill – everyone is responsible for making this city greater.
- People like who is in this room can work collaboratively to lift up solutions and create comprehensive solutions.
- In closing, Atlanta should be **one great city** that works for **all of us**.

Reach out to Andre!

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Questions:

Jim Snyder: What is “advisory”? We put recommendations in and the bodies do not respond and when they do it is not cogent. Can we redefine what it means? This way, people feel like they want to be on these boards and you get people to participate if they feel like they have reasonable power.

Response: Let’s take a look at the Eastside, where Wal-Mart is proposed at Glenwood. Ground zero locals are the ones who have the best knowledge and deserve the respect of an answer within a reasonable amount of time (30 days). I’ve thought about if the BZA (Board of Zoning Adjustments) goes against the NPU, you have a window within which they need to explain their decision-making process.

Melody Harclerode: For WaterWorks, I encourage you to be supportive to open it and make more greenspace available. It would be beneficial to add recreation. For education, how do you, Atlanta City Council and other individual members play a part to improve the gap?

Response:

- For WaterWorks, I’m all in. When I was in college it was open. We had functions over there and weddings in the buildings. Underwood Hills and Berkley Park are in favor and have reached out to us.
- As far as education, it is City Hall working with APS. There can be a liaison or something because decisions affect each other. If we close a housing complex that affects the school and then make other decisions about keeping a school open that affects housing and vice versa. If communication isn’t constant, dynamic, and active, you’re in a lag and you have an inability to plan for things.
- Infrastructure – sidewalks, bus routes etc. All these things are connected. Careful conversation is important. Ability to attract companies is based on education, do we have employable graduates? Will companies relocate/stay here? All of this affects public safety, like petty crime that occurs in summer and after-school. We have hired a recreation person.
- How do we repurpose old buildings? We should be able to make critical decisions about what is done locally. ER Carter could be a multipurpose community center.

Question: What other specific programs do you want to spend your time on?

Response:

- Centers of Innovation - things are coming our way (silicon valley-eque)
- Take Underground Atlanta. And put something like HYPEotamus in there for the creative class to go. Give them a little bit and they make the rest happen. There is opportunity there.
- 5 points MARTA station. We need to beautify it, there are great opportunities for retail/housing/mixed use etc. There is currently a lease on the property and the Flat Iron building next door, we must capitalize on momentum for economic development.
- Where blight exists, we can increase workforce development. Vocation should go back into schools. We don’t all have to reach success (comfortable existence) the same way. Through partnerships with ATC and AMC, we can do it.
- These are big things, not everything has to be done by Friday.



Question: Some questions you made are static. What can the city do about not just high-tech businesses, but creating incubators for service people and teaching them how to run a business? Major sectors are having issues because of retirement i.e. The telecommunications industry etc. Can we put vocational training equal to high-tech training and push entrepreneurial skill building beyond just high-tech?

Response: Not everyone sits in Midtown with a laptop for their job. My mother was a communications worker and I appreciate that fact. One way we can do that is through Invest Atlanta opportunities. We keep industrial retention. There is a lot of focus on attracting new business but we need to maintain those businesses that hire and develop people. I was happy to hear Eloisa Klementich tell me a story about a company that makes roof racks off of Moreland Dr. They were going to leave the city limits because South Fulton gives better incentives. This company has 125 employees. Business retention is critical, as is workshops for businesses, all of them can't afford to develop their own talents. We can all pull resources together. When people apply for business licenses, it would be helpful if they could receive competitive comparisons for their industry types. As we encroach upon businesses, how do we handle zoning? i.e. Pretty soon we are going to have 18 wheelers competing with miniature cars on Ellsworth Industrial Blvd.

Drewnell Thomas: As we are in Atlanta, home of Dr. King, and considering he did his work at Paschals, it's embarrassing that we can't make a decision with what to do with the building at MLK and the blight. How can you all help Clark Atlanta University do something? It has been languishing far too long.

Response: I passed by it the other day. It was the only hotel an African American could stay in until the 60s. Its current condition is shameful. Who owns it?

Question: What is the plan for the area when they are transportation and linkage issues?

Response (Michael Dobbins): The plan in its current form diverts traffic away from MLK and the stadium. GDOT says it's not workable because of single-double traffic on old MLK and new MLK. Changing it isn't convenient. Mayor Reed has said that MLK is a legacy boulevard but it is currently getting truncated. Magnolia St could penetrate where it currently sits and get to Andrew Young without too much work. It would just take some resource diversion into knitting it back into the community. \$30 million is going to community from Invest Atlanta and Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. They are interested in creating economic activity, for example: "If we put a bakery there and the dome commits to buying all bread from that space." There are opportunities for people to apply with their ideas and get grants.

Question: If Northside Drive continues to exist, it divides downtown and Westside and MLK will not come around no matter how much money is poured into it.

Response (Michael Dobbins): GDOT is following up with a URS Corporation taskforce to tackle some of the recommendations our last studio came up with.



Sheri Davis-Faulkner: Vacant properties. It still sounds like people are thinking of them as hedgefunds and private investors. We're talking about 50% + vacant properties. If there isn't a major plan on stabilizing it, how do we move away from current statistics? It seems like a very disconcerted effort. How do we thread the Atlanta University Center people back to community? Now it isn't like that, students have never been to the MARTA stations. How do we affect that? There is a relationship and we need to think deliberately about breaking down barriers.

Response: We need a campaign for retaining college educated people, we can offer classes about buying homes and staying in Atlanta. Our graduates go all sorts of places, but sometimes just to Dunwoody or Marietta. We need to get them into home ownership early. I'd like to see a day where we can line up construction companies, banks, etc. as a full-scale marketplace and we make a kind of LEGO set and that creates a kit to home-buying success.

Sheri Davis-Faulkner: What can we do about demolition?

Response: Each structure needs its own bond. The city has to pony up money and it comes out of the general fund or CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) money. It costs more than \$25,000 to demolish a structure.

Question: Tires. Why cant the city look at the fundamental issues of the economics of tires? Is it worth anything or do you always have to pay somebody? You need to truncate the line so people can get money on both ends (pick up and recycling).

Response: In Minnesota, there is a model for non-profits that creates jobs for people with low skills to churn up the tires (there is value in parts that can be made into playgrounds etc.). It gives low income people and ex-offenders a job at a livable wage (not minimum wage) and with healthcare career counseling.

Councilmember Yolanda Adrean: We don't talk enough about students downtown. I would like to see an education district downtown and wrap from AUC to Emory in a blanket of public safety so they stay. In Boston, students don't leave. We have fabulous university systems. I haven't heard anybody talk about what an asset those young people are. If people stay, you have granular growth.

Sheri Davis-Faulkner: The WCA is taking a multi-institutional approach to engagement. The three institutions form a triangle and house the majority of college educated students in Atlanta.

Terry Horgan: Water Works is on the National Historic Register and has fabulous views. Original 1892 photos show fence at waters edge. Over the years, there has been an issue with security. Yolanda has been working with Public Works to get traction to get the park back to its original form. There is a bowl that could be gardens, an amphitheater, a skate park, etc. BeltLine conversations have taken place regarding the Hemphill Avenue pumping station. In this economy it would be an inexpensive way for the city to boost its revenue and do all the things we've talked about tonight. Park Pride talked about zero energy parks. This is a high elevation park and has opportunities for solar and wind energy, there are lots of positive benefits. Best practice ideas can be taken from Pittsburgh's Highland Park - go online and see its features



and topography. The surrounding area can be trails. Watershed Management changed hands, and Yolanda talked to them about opening the lodge but bathrooms weren't up to code and it was shelved.

Councilmember Yolanda Adrean: The best ideas come from the community. Commissioner Macrina is committed to opening the lodge as the first phase. Historians are very interested in opening it. Watershed Management has lots of acres in Chastain Park, it was removed and the land is now available to the public. This was a baby step a few years ago. Fort Peachtree at Peachtree Creek and Chattahoochee River is 15-20 acres and closed by Commission Hunter around 9/11. Land is currently owned by Watershed Management. There is currently an MOU between Parks and Recreation and Watershed Management about refurbishing the pavilion. Residents got Home Depot to donate materials and people to come and pitch in to volunteer and beautify. Money is set aside to rehabilitate the building. A commitment and an MOU will stimulate the community. Opening up greenspace is Phase 2. Opening things within the fence is comfortable for them for security reasons. Commissioner George Dusenbury (Parks and Recreation) can't pay for Fort Peachtree until his budget changes on July 1. This part of town is under-parked. We need to talk to Macrina to speed up the process. Mr. Thomas and Mr. Lee in Watershed Management are the interested ones.



After the remarks from Councilman Dickens and Terry Horgan (Former President of Berkley Park Neighborhood Association), Mike Koblentz allowed all present members to share any thoughts/memories of the civil rights movement and what Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King Jr meant to them. It was a moving and touching moment shared by members of the community.

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