BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE EASTSIDE TRAIL?  
- CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT 
OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AMENITY 
USE ALONG THE ATLANTA BELTLINE

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BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE EASTSIDE TRAIL? – CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AMENITY USE ALONG THE ATLANTA BELTLINE

By

ADINA MICHAL ARTZI

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
With Honors in

Urban and Regional Development

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Approved by:

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Abstract

The Atlanta BeltLine is a multi-faceted, large-in-scope recreational greenway changing the urban fabric of Atlanta, Georgia. With Atlanta’s long history of racist and exclusionary urban development, the BeltLine is an opportunity for current planning parties to recognize the city’s flawed past, and build an active and inclusionary future. The paper argues that to do this the Atlanta BeltLine Incorporated, and affiliated leadership, must better their community outreach tactics in order to gain accurate insight as to which community needs are and are not being met by the built design on the BeltLine. To understand how the BeltLine could engage in better equitable planning practices, twenty-seven BeltLine users on the Eastside Trail were interviewed. Though it is difficult to generalize from a small sample size, differences in symbolic attitudes toward the government and leadership in general were evident amongst white respondents and black respondents. The aim of this research is to provide a basis of information about use of and community feelings about the BeltLine in order to hopefully initiate discussions about equitable planning, in Atlanta and elsewhere.

Key Words: BeltLine, greenway, community outreach, equity, development, planning
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Dereka Rushbrook, for the much appreciated guidance, feedback and encouragement throughout this year-long endeavor. I quite simply could not have done it without you. I would also like to thank the Honors College for the opportunity to travel to Atlanta for a week of research. Lastly, thank you to my family and friends for listening to me speak about the BeltLine ad nauseam.
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Introduction

With people increasingly dwelling in urban areas, the demand for livable city spaces is rising, too. The development of greenways has become more prevalent in the United States over the past two decades in pursuit of achieving walkable, connected, and complete cities. Brought about by grassroots efforts and government backing alike, notable greenway projects incubated within this timeframe include Manhattan’s High Line, Detroit’s Dequindre Cut Greenway, and Atlanta’s BeltLine. This paper focuses on the Eastside Trail of Atlanta’s BeltLine.

Figure 1: Activity along the Eastside Trail. Photo courtesy of Adina Artzi, 2017

Atlanta, Georgia is home to The Coca-Cola Company, the 1996 Olympic Games, Mary Mac’s Tea Room, the world’s busiest airport, 32 colleges, The Home Depot, a burgeoning soccer culture, around-the-clock burgers at The Varsity, Outkast, King of Pops, and Delta Airlines headquarters-- to name a few (and in no particular order of significance). To add, Atlanta is diverse, car-centric, and segregated. Bearing the residual consequences of it’s urban history,
Atlanta is in the midst of a great transformation. The southern city is undergoing a pivotal transit-oriented-development called the Atlanta BeltLine, a 22-mile loop connecting 45 neighborhoods together. Originally proposed in 1999 in Georgia Tech student, Ryan Gravel’s, Masters of Architecture thesis, the BeltLine mirrored aspects of the “rails-to-trails” wave occurring in fellow cities (of which will be discussed at further lengths later in this paper).

The metamorphosis that took place between the BeltLine’s conception and its status today has been non-linear and bureaucratic. Many, including Gravel himself, have felt alienated by the processes and decisions made by Atlanta BeltLine, Incorporated (ABI), a subsidiary of Atlanta’s Economic Development Authority, Invest Atlanta. It is difficult, to say the least, to develop a project as evasive, multi-dimensional and large in scope as the BeltLine without either purposefully or accidentally pushing certain groups to the fringe of the development process. That said, it is easy to create a binary argument in which Atlanta City Officials and ABI are villainized. The purpose of this paper is to explore how and why individuals within communities adjacent to the BeltLine have not unanimously felt included in the project’s advancements. More specifically, this paper aims to illuminate varying feelings BeltLine goers along the Eastside Trail hold, analyzing their experience with the community outreach process (or lack thereof), and their response toward the built result of the greenway itself.

In order to contextualize the emergence of the BeltLine, and the proposed functions it serves for the city of Atlanta, it is first important to note the history of greenways in the United States. Because the concept of a greenway is multi-faceted, I will first offer a few definitions. The President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors asserted that a greenway’s purpose is to

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1 Ryan Austin Gravel, “Belt Line—Atlanta: Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy” (Georgia Institute of Technology, 1999), https://smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/7400.
“provide people with access to open spaces close to where they live, and to link together the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape threading through cities and countrysides like a giant circulation system.”  

This definition is rather anthropocentric, and focuses on the benefits of spatial connectivity within a region. In his book *Greenways for America*, urban planner Charles Little recognizes the complexity in succinctly labeling a greenway, so instead offers five ways in which greenways could be defined. One category described in Little’s typology is a “recreational greenway, featuring paths and trails of various kinds, often of relatively long distance, based on natural corridors as well as canals, abandoned rail-beds, and other public rights of way.” Little’s illustration not only touches upon use, but also pre-existing infrastructure (either built or natural), of which guides and facilitates new build. In the case of the Eastside Trail of the BeltLine, the segment is largely used for recreational purposes, and follows three miles of derelict Civil War-era railroads.

I chose to hone in on both the community and built development of the Eastside Trail for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Eastside Trail was the BeltLine’s first finished corridor (out of the Northside Trail, Southwest Connector Trail, and West End Trail). The three-mile stretch

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connects subareas four through six (in the Atlanta BeltLine Master Plan). Subarea six, the northernmost segment of the Eastside Trail, weaves together Midtown, Piedmont Park, and Virginia Highlands (moving southbound). Subarea six ends and five begins at the Ponce de Leon Avenue overpass, just north of the hip, mixed-use, refurbished Sears Factory-- Ponce City Market. Subarea five links together the historic Old Fourth Ward neighborhood, Inman Park, and Sweet Auburn (Dr. Martin Luther King’s childhood neighborhood). Subarea four begins at the Hulsey Rail Yard, in between DeKalb Avenue and Wylie Street. This is the newest and southernmost extension of the Eastside Trail, bisecting Cabbagetown to the left and Reynoldstown to the right. Because the Eastside Trail consists of longer-established segments (subarea five), and brand new segments (subarea four), I wanted to identify any potential juxtapositions between the different stages of implementation on surrounding communities.

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Secondly, the Eastside Trail was the corridor with which I was most previously familiar, having spent my Freshman year at Emory University in 2014. From what I knew, the Eastside BeltLine was, and still is, a convenient artery for Atlantans and tourists to discover historic and new attractions alike. What I wanted to find out was who was using this trail, how they were using it, how they generally felt about the BeltLine, and how they viewed their own relationship with its development. Were people feeling included in the development of the Eastside Trail? Did they even care to be included as a community stakeholder? What needs of theirs were and were not being met in the design of the BeltLine? These were just a few of the questions I asked random BeltLine-goers via survey.

With hopes of eventually engaging in longer dialogues about the Eastside Trail with BeltLine users, I travelled to Atlanta for a week of surveying this past November (2017). I felt that physically travelling to the Eastside Trail was important to collect meaningful qualitative data that accurately reflected users’ experiences. My first day “in the field,” I attended a ribbon-
cutting ceremony for the newest Eastside Trail extension. Mayor Kasim Reed, along with local representatives from Reynoldstown and Cabbagetown, gave an introduction and spoke pleasantries about the greenway’s progression. It was at this brief ceremony that I met my first five interviewees-- all clad in local silkscreened Atlanta brands, mounted on customized bicycles from Atlanta Bicycle Barn, willing and eager to share their knowledge about their home (Reynoldstown) and the greater fabric of Atlanta. The initial survey of one member unfurled into a two-hour conversation amongst the five friends, of which mostly revolved around the topic of gentrification, and how they, as black men, have experienced its pushes and pulls over many combined years of residency. Unlike other interviews I obtained, my interaction with these five men functioned almost as an unintentional focus group. It is important to point out the group setting, as it likely effected participants’ conversation and answers in some way. As daily users of the BeltLine, these individuals praised the greenway for its efficient bike routes as well as its role in attempting to lessen Atlantans’ car dependency. Additionally, the focus group noticed an increase in visibility and familiarity of community members’ faces-- a very Jane Jacobs “eyes on the street” observance. However, they quickly followed these praises with criticisms about the rapid increase of housing prices in Reynoldstown (including rental floors, mortgages, and neighborhood association membership fees), and spoke of the more-than-one-time occurrence of neighbors being evicted from their long-time homes. “A few of us put together a GoFundMe to help our neighbor and her grandsons stay put, but we felt helpless after the second time…”\footnote{Interview with Reynoldstown resident, November 3, 2017.} In other words, the BeltLine increased this group’s ability to better identify neighbors, but many of these neighbors are newer transplants who are able to keep up with Reynoldstown’s soaring property values. This particular conversation provided me with touchstone anecdotes that helped
guide the rest of my thesis process. The following six days proved more difficult to collect surveys.

The many fast paced joggers, bikers, and skateboarders were inaccessible when it came time to recruit interviewees. Furthermore, a great deal of those observed walking at an approachable speed had headphones in, yet another anticipated challenge of interacting with users. The majority of those stopped were neither willing to take the 20-minute survey on the spot, nor on their own time with the link and barcode I distributed on a half-sheet. Overall, twenty-seven usable surveys were obtained over the span of a week. Given my initial goal of thirty surveys, I was satisfied. Twenty-seven respondents’ experiences are by no means representative of all Eastside Trail users. However, gaining an in-depth understanding as to how some users may or may not contribute to the development, and relate to the result of the BeltLine was of paramount importance to me.

Between preliminary research and responses from BeltLine users, there were two recurring themes, or arguably discrepancies, of which beg to be addressed. The first is the lack of active, inviting and equitable community outreach tactics employed by ABI during the development of the Eastside Trail. The second, arguably a result of the ABI community outreach Framework, is the gap between certain community members’ expressed needs, and what the greenway currently provides. The purpose of this paper is not to diminish the positive contributions the BeltLine has made for many individuals along the Eastside Trail, but rather to uncover areas in which the process and execution of its development could have been more inclusive.
Recent History of Greenways in the United States

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the definition of a “greenway” is malleable, partly because of its newer status in the planning world, and partly because a greenway’s use or uses vary. There is not a great deal of unifying greenway theory. However, there is substantial literature about the many environmental, social and economic benefits of greenway introduction. Aside from codifying stages of greenway history in the United States, the following section will simultaneously address the advantages to greenways, and green space in general. For the purpose of simplicity, the history of American greenways can be condensed into four stages: the conservation stage, the recreational stage, the economic stage and the people’s stage.

The first concept of a greenway as a recreational medium in the United States arose in the late 1800’s when prolific landscape architect Frederick Olmsted designed urban linear parkway systems like Boston’s Emerald Necklace Conservancy and Louisville’s Olmsted Park Conservancy and Oakland’s Park and Piedmont Way. This is stage one, or what I would like to call “the conservation stage.” As indicated in the names of the latter two parks, a defining characteristic of an American greenway was (and continues to be) the idea of conserving land. However, the approach as to where, and how accessible, protected lands should be has evolved. Ahead of his time, Olmsted developed park systems during an era in which focus and funding was directed primarily toward conserving remote land. In the later twentieth century, the public became fixated on establishing natural areas within, or accessible from, urban centers.

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10 Jack Ahern, “Greenways in the USA,” 35.
Stage two, or the “recreational stage,” occurred between World War One and World War Two, during which greenways served as a medium for social mixing, communication and “city expression.” In the 1920’s American planner Benton MacKaye built upon Olmsted’s work by suggesting the use of greenways to set a pseudo-boundary around cities in effort to cap urban expansion. He alluded that by doing so, a city would become more compact, complete, walkable- and therefore, livable. However, the advent and growing popularity of the automobile during this era (and from this point onward) threatened prioritization of recreational and walkable spaces. In fact, in MacKaye’s book, *An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning*, he describes his ideal vision of “townless highways,” a plan that quells the overtaking of the automobile through the deliberate separation between automobile roads and pedestrian paths.

“Since playgrounds, a school, and other community facilities are provided in each superblock, no child need ever cross a traffic artery on its way to school or to the playground; indeed, the housewife who goes to market on foot is equally safe.”

Idealized and antiquated as the above quote may be, the desire for an uncoupled relationship between city life and car use is understood. “Townless highways” ironically inspired the idea of the Interstate Highway System (implemented in the 50’s) in addition to furthering the greenway system. Around the end of World War Two, Philadelphia city planner Edmund Bacon transformed the way inner-city neighborhoods connected by designing “garden footpaths,” enabling a new type of intimate and leisurely pedestrian flow. It was then in 1959

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11 Annaliese Bischoff, “The New Generation of Greenway Planning- More Sustainable Forms for the City” (University of Massachusetts, n.d.).
that William Whyte, famous urban planner and writer, coined the term “greenway” in reference to Edmund Bacon’s Philadelphia initiatives.\textsuperscript{15} It is believed that the term “greenway” derived from the words “parkway,” which typically referred to carriage paths and “greenbelt,” a term that had been used in England roughly twenty years prior to Whyte’s usage of “greenway.” The British greenbelt is commonly defined as protected land planned around urban centers to deter expansion and enable biodiversity.\textsuperscript{16} Unlike its British predecessors, greenways are not meant to be far-removed from urban settings, but are rather meant to enhance and facilitate city identity from within.

Ascribing a name for the final two greenway stages is a bit difficult, mostly because the economic emphasis placed on greenways throughout the 1960’s and 1980’s bleeds into the 1990’s and today. However, in addition to recognizing greenways’ economic benefits, 1990’s planning literature examined greenways as a built agent for community engagement, environmental justice and spatial equity. For these reasons, I will refer to the 1960’s through 1980’s as the “economic stage,” and the 1990’s onward as the “people’s stage.” The twenty-year span between the 60’s and 80’s saw everything from youthful counterculture grassroots movements, to the Vietnam War, to an ultimate rise in political and financial conservatism in response to high inflation. As a cry for economic stimulation, cities began investing in greenways to attract tourism and urban residential development.\textsuperscript{17} In 1987, President Reagan enacted the “President's Commission on Americans Outdoors,” in which a national network of

\textsuperscript{17} Annaliiese Bischoff, “The New Generation of Greenway Planning- More Sustainable Forms for the City” (University of Massachusetts, n.d.) 2.
greenways was heavily endorsed. According to figures from the Reagan era, Americans spent an estimated $300 billion a year on recreational activities alone, a third of which was specifically designated toward outdoor recreational activities. Given that promising number, the decades to follow instituted more greenway organizations and policy alike.

The emergence of the Atlanta BeltLine and its greenway contemporaries took place during the most recent, and still occurring, greenway planning epoch, “the people’s stage.” In the late 1990’s the University of Massachusetts conducted a nation-wide survey, sponsored by the Conservation Fund, in hopes of identifying which state legislatures were familiar with greenways, and in what ways they were advocating for greenway implementation. The study found that greenways were most known and common in the northeast of the United States. Researchers hypothesized this was the case because eastern states are densely populated and spatially smaller, both factors that typically increase demand for connectivity and a built recreational “outlet” for urban citizens. One nonprofit organization that became instrumental in advancing greenway development was the

![Figure 4: A chart of contemporary greenways in the United States. Data taken from City Parks Alliance, 2018](image)

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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC). The RTC has converted 31,000 miles of rail-trails and multi-use trails thus far.\textsuperscript{21} Such an effort inspired projects like Manhattan’s High Line and Gravel’s BeltLine, amongst others.

Not only were greenways tools to invigorate the surrounding economy, they were also making use of obsolete infrastructure. Furthermore, native Atlantan and author of City on the Verge: Atlanta and the Fight for America’s Urban Future, Mark Pendergrast, credits the rails-to-trails model for the BeltLine’s ability to blend neighborhoods that were previously socially and spatially segregated. “Like New York’s High Line, it shows visitors the big picture, but unlike its shorter, elevated Manhattan cousin, Atlanta’s trail runs at ground level in and among the communities, connecting them in new way.”\textsuperscript{22} Though I agree with Pendergrast in that certain spatial aspects of the BeltLine successfully cater to connectedness and social mixing, I dissent in that the BeltLine may not be the most exemplary instance of community engagement during the planning process-- at least not along the Eastside Trail. This point is the crux of the paper’s second half and a point that must be talked about within context of the “people’s stage.” Nevertheless, this notion of connectedness Pendergrast celebrates provides a convenient segue into the economic, environmental, social benefits of greenway introduction. As previously described, sustainable development projects, like greenways, are sought after by city officials or private parties (or both) because there is an expectation that it will prove economically advantageous. For example, the BeltLine is funded through a tax allocation district (TAD) that will last until 2030, the projected year of completion.\textsuperscript{23} Essentially, the TAD channels revenue


from subsequent increases in property taxes toward the continuation of the BeltLine project in lieu of the proceeds being allocated to other city or county-related expenses. Alternatively, revenue collected can also pay off bonds that fund related real estate initiatives, surrounding parks and trails.\textsuperscript{24} If property values, and therefore taxes, increase, so too does the funding of public education. Put simply, an economic structure like TAD allows for a sort of circular flow of money, which in turn ensures that a sustainable development project can continue to stimulate the area around it. To add, out of those I interviewed, when asked “who benefits from the Eastside Trail of the BeltLine?” twenty-four of the twenty-seven mentioned either small business owners, and real estate agents.\textsuperscript{25}

Greenways also provide numerous environmental benefits. The theory of co-occurrence states that any recreational greenway is found along a natural or human-made corridor.\textsuperscript{26} One particular facet of the co-occurrence theory is the idea of connectivity—spatial connectivity, cultural connectivity and ecological connectivity. The general linear nature of a greenway is effective in the spread of plant species, and the natural propagation of indigenous animal species. The corridors greenways follow (according to the co-occurrence theory) not only “strengthen spatial cohesion of habitats,” but also ease animal migration patterns within an otherwise threatening

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{corridors.png}
\caption{Types of corridors. Image taken from Alterra Report, 2004}
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\textsuperscript{24} Dan Immergluck and Tharunya Balan, “Sustainable for Whom?” 546.
\textsuperscript{25} Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine users, November 3-8, 2017.
urban setting. The Eastside Trail of the BeltLine would be considered a “stepping stone corridor” in that the linear pathway guides species activity, but not all areas in between “refuge habitats” are hospitable (in the case of the BeltLine, hardscapes and business development).

Humans environmentally benefit from greenways, too. Recreational greenways, like the BeltLine, can decrease car-dependency for many. It is a well-established fact that car use leads to carbon dioxide emissions, which ultimately catalyzes climate change. Ever since 1991, when the first Transportation Equity Act came to be, the “integration of bicycle and pedestrian transportation into official federal policy” made greenways an all-the-more viable alternative to automobile-polluted highways (especially in a car-centric city like Atlanta).

People's physical proximity to any type green space, greenways included, has been cited to increase mental and physical health. Many planners study biophilia, the belief that humankind has an inherent connection to nature, to guide their practice. Research in biophilia has empirically proven that regular interaction with nature can restore mental states of fatigue or overwhelmedness. The cathartic effect nature can have on one’s cognitive state can also sharpen one’s alertness and ability to stay focused. Physically, human interaction with nature results in relaxation of muscles, lowering of cortisol in the blood stream, and lowering of blood pressure. The demand and general popularity of recreational greenways allows urban dwellers to reap the benefits of biophilic design, all while being environmentally mindful.

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28 See note 27 above.
31 See note 30 above.
Finally, urban greenways are spaces that can foster social mixing and community development. Described in the past as “green magnets,” recreational greenways force people out of their isolating cars, and in contact with other humans. As use of a greenways increases, so does the potential for facial recognition and communal bonds. Consequently, communities’ sense of safety and reduced crime rates are directly correlated to nearby greenway development. Though these facts present positive social benefits of greenways, it is important to identify ways in which greenways can also act as “green walls.” Often greenways connect multiple socioeconomically homogeneous neighborhoods, and can be viewed as a built boundary to those who live elsewhere. A prominent critique of the Eastside Trail is that it facilitates social mixing to an extent. It is important to discuss which populations may not gain any services from the Eastside Trail, and why that is.

**Atlanta's Urban Development History**

“Atlanta’s city planning has largely been reactive rather than proactive.”

A city’s historical roots influence today’s planning practices and urban culture. Atlanta’s urban development history is one heavily influenced by transportation trends, and one steeped in still-evident racial segregation. For contextual purposes, it is crucial to understand the history within which the modern BeltLine snugly fits. Throughout the paper, I only refer to a racial dichotomy between whites and blacks. I do this because the overwhelming majority of those

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32 Samuel James Keith, “Urban Greenway Use and Benefits in Diverse Cities-- A Tale of Two Trails” (Clemson University, 2016), 7.
34 Natalie Camrud, “Race, Class, and Gentrification Along the Atlanta BeltLine” (Scripps College, 2017), 8.
impacted by white-led policy were black, and because the historic city maps and legislation to which I refer only recognize the two races. Before 1847, Atlanta was named Terminus, as it was the terminating point of the Midwest railroad line. The once final destination town eventually became a mega-hub for railroads (hence the readily available rails made use of by the BeltLine). After the south lost the Civil War, ex-slaves from rural Georgia and surrounding states migrated to Atlanta, which increased the black population in the city from around 2,000 to 10,000. The approximately 2,000 black individuals living in Atlanta prior to the post-war influx of the black population were mostly slaves and some soldiers. At the time, there were only 22,000 people in Atlanta total. The congregation of ex-slaves after the Civil War led to the founding of black schools, including Atlanta University, and black hospitals. Despite the community and resource development taking place within Atlanta’s booming black population during this era, policies such as white-only primary elections and voter literacy requirements systemically alienated blacks. The rise of Atlanta’s Ku Klux Klan in 1868 further threatened the city’s budding black communities by means of violence and blatant intimidation tactics. Meanwhile, factories, stores, upscale hotels and theaters began popping up during the post-Civil War reconstruction. For whites, these establishments were places to demonstrate one’s sophistication. For excluded blacks, these places provided job opportunities. 1886 was a year in which materialism and industrialism swept the nation, Atlanta included. This era of economic growth was better known as the “Gilded Age.”

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36 Pendergrast, 63.
37 Pendergrast, 64.
38 Pendergrast, 66.
The “Gilded Age” was an era of a heavy-handed private sector regimes over the policies and planning of Atlanta. Coalitions made between prominent business owners and government officials placed the interests of few above the wellbeing of most. Among Atlanta’s influential “elite” were John Pemberton, the founder of Coca-Cola, and James English, former city mayor and owner of the Chattahoochee Brick Company.39 The combination of strong racist sentiments, the sheer wealth of whites, and their control over development in Atlanta during this time, pushed black populations to (mostly west-side) neighborhoods in floodplains, over contaminated land, and next to railroads and cemeteries. Heightened policing occurred in such neighborhoods, which oiled the Georgia convict-lease system, a racist mechanism that legalized slave labor of black prisoners.40

![Population dot map of Atlanta in 1924. The red line marks Ponce de Leon Avenue. Map image taken from “Planning Atlanta” City Planning Maps Collection, Georgia State University Library](image)

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39 Pendergrast, 67.
40 Pendergrast, 67.
The 1910’s and 1920’s brought about more pronounced residential segregation. Already-established neighborhoods (many of which are surrounding the Eastside Trail) such as Ansley Park, Inman Park, and Jackson Heights within Old Fourth Ward were becoming “exclusively white.” The Atlanta Real Estate Board officially established a city planning commission in 1922 in the wake of the 1917 Great Fire, which demolished a significant stretch of East Atlanta. The city planning commission proposed to build an “esplanade to separate the two races.”

White policymakers used zoning tactics to create buffers between white and black neighborhoods. Ponce de Leon Avenue served as the unofficial geographic boundary between the two races. Black neighborhoods founded as a result of this instituted segregation included Sweet Auburn, the community in which Martin Luther King Jr. would later be raised. The country’s first ever public housing developments were segregated and implemented in Atlanta in 1936, just two years after the Federal Housing Administration was founded and declared racial discrimination to be illegal. The public housing projects were mainly designed to place and conceal financially disadvantaged black Atlantans in fringe neighborhoods. The city’s poor upkeep of public housing projects made for dilapidated and fragmented communities—structurally and inter-personally. Their existence was a tool used by city elites to group black individuals in the city center and the west side.

41 Pendergrast, 76.
42 Pendergrast, 76.
43 Pendergrast, 78.
In the 1940’s the Central Atlanta Improvement Association, later called Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), was organized in part to facilitate new automobile infrastructure within the city. To reiterate, the city had reactively “adjusted to accommodate the automobile.” The CAP’s establishment was an ulterior measure taken to halt urban white flight to the suburbs. While whites were moving to escape automobile congestion, black residents moved into previously “white” neighborhoods like Mozley Park and Adair Park to the west, as well as Grove Park to the south. CAP initiatives honed in on the opportunity to use development of inner-city highways as medium to displace black communities. Specifically, the CAP both proposed “Negro Expansion Areas” to quell the influx of urban black residents and widen Atlanta’s city limits to include the northern wealthy white suburb, Buckhead.

One notable plan put forth during this time was the Lochner Plan, an overarching transportation proposal, with a primary focus on an expressway system. Atlanta was at its peak of existence as a transportation hub, as it was already home to eight major railroad lines, sixteen federal highways and

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46 Pendergrast, 80.
nine airlines.\textsuperscript{47} The Lochner Plan pushed to build north-south expressways through inner-city areas that were “depreciated,” disproportionately displacing black communities. In the Lochner Plan itself, this was classified as “slum clearance” doctrine.\textsuperscript{48} The aim of the north-south expressway was to deliberately separate the downtown business district from black neighborhoods.

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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{A graph of Atlanta's white and black populations every census year since 1850. Graph image taken from Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2014}
\end{figure}

From the 1960’s onward there was a considerable decrease in Metro Atlanta’s white population and increase in its black population. To be specific, the white population decreased by about 60,000 people, while the black population increased by around 70,000 people.\textsuperscript{49} In the second half of the decade, black Atlantans voted against the conception of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) based on the fact that, despite the black majority, MARTA underserviced black areas, especially highly-populated public housing on the west...

\textsuperscript{47} Caroline Darnell, “Connector or Disconnector: Analyzing Impacts of the Interstate 75/85 Connector on Historic Neighborhoods in Atlanta, Georgia” (Clemson University, 2017), 70.
An exemplary instance of community-driven planning, the black vote successfully postponed MARTA’s approval and forced CAP to design a more inclusive transit system. MARTA eventually passed in 1971, with its westernmost stop at Bankhead Station. A power shift then took place when the black majority elected Mayor Maynard Jackson Jr. in 1974. Black business owners were awarded city contracts, and the Neighborhood Planning Unit system was created. In conjunction with on another, these changes gave a more diverse set of community stakeholders access to government officials and the possibility of influencing policy change.

The next major event in Atlanta’s development history was in 1996, the year Atlanta hosted the Centennial Summer Olympics. The Olympics is an example of a “hallmark” or a “mega-event,” events of large scope and short duration. From a sustainable planning perspective, mega-events are gluttonous and detrimental if not planned with long-term use in mind. “The experience of preparing for and hosting the Olympics has the potential to compress an entire generation of economic development into a five-year period. Many cities seem willing to assume the risks of such rapid growth in order to stage tourism-related events such as the Olympics. In doing so, cities often forget the community-related consequences of tourism.”

The commodification of urban space, in the case of Atlanta, launched a new urban renewal program that neglected to consider residents’ daily life during and post-Olympics. Low-income neighborhoods were particularly overlooked. Continuing the legacy of CAP-esque domination, the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) was comprised of prominent (white and black) business owners and elected public officials, each of whom had reputations for previously

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50 Pendergrast, 82.
51 Pendergrast, 82.
displacing low-income residents through other expressway development projects.\textsuperscript{53} The public-private partnership organization, Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA), was responsible for “rejuvenating” fifteen low-income neighborhoods near downtown, as these neighborhoods were going to be venue sites of Olympic events. Important to note is that out of the seventeen committee members of CODA, an unimpressive two were representatives from the affected neighborhoods themselves.\textsuperscript{54} Where diversity on the committee was lacking, community coalition and protest compensated. Residents in low-income neighborhoods feared that if not resisted, urban renewal plans would repeatedly allow the city to acquire their property by use of eminent domain, and would ultimately move them like chess pieces as they pleased. Because of community resistance, CODA neither received City Council approval nor external funding for the neighborhood revitalization program.\textsuperscript{55} Instead, CODA refocused its initiatives by investing in pedestrian-friendly streets through better lighting and art installations. Though both admirable enhancements to street safety and culture, the intention was nevertheless strictly tourist-minded. In fact, “in several locations the street improvements provided a starker contrast to the poor commercial and residential areas nearby.”\textsuperscript{56} Worth mentioning are a few subjectively positive development outcomes from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

The Historic Districts Development Corporation (HDDC) rehabilitated old houses for low-income families to move into during the displacement wave of the Olympics. The HDDC made it a point to restore homes in a way that honored the neighborhood’s history and stayed true to the neighborhood’s architecture. Additionally, large transformative projects like

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\textsuperscript{53} Harvey K. Newman, “Neighborhood Impacts,” 151.
\textsuperscript{54} Newman, 153.
\textsuperscript{55} Newman, 154.
\textsuperscript{56} Newman, 154.
\end{flushleft}
Centennial Olympic Park tapped into the benefits of tourism. Along the perimeter of the park, which is just north of downtown, lie the World of Coca-Cola, the College Football Hall of Fame, the Center for Human and Civil Rights, and the Atlanta Aquarium. Though the development of such tourist attractions halted the existence of long-standing neighborhoods, it would be unfair not to recognize the many jobs these places provide for locals to this day. In summary, it has been said that Atlanta “lost the Olympics,” by reactively shifting the makeup of the city to accommodate a single event with an expiration date.\(^5^7\)

Just three years after the Centennial Summer Olympics, Ryan Gravel’s Masters thesis was born. In the wake of the mega-event, private business owners still held power, thousands of low-income families were transplanted, and the development of efficient expressways continued to be of paramount focus. The grave inequality throughout the city combined with the numerous abandoned rail beds concocted a perfect storm for the conception of the BeltLine. If the BeltLine were to be of interest and significance to the diverse communities of Atlanta, it would have to be pitched as a built equalizer that prioritized human-first connectivity. Geography has history, and can have justice. Demonstrating an awareness of a city’s built past and how it has positioned certain community members today is the first step in pursuing equitable planning practices. The BeltLine may be just what is needed to achieve a more just Atlanta, but its fruition has not existed in a vacuum.

History of the Atlanta BeltLine: “A Proposed Solution to a “Centerless City””

Ryan Gravel’s original 1999 Masters thesis was focused on remedying Atlanta’s notorious transportation woes, proposing that a connected public transportation system was a means for a healthier, more inclusive city culture. Staggeringly long commute times and poor air quality today are a direct result of Atlanta’s history of segregating urban renewal projects and prioritization of the automobile. Atlanta has been labeled the eighth worst city for traffic congestion in the world. An average Atlantans drive around 34.2 miles a day, the fourth highest daily distance in the United States. Additionally, seventy-six percent of working Atlantans commute by personal car, whereas a meager twenty-six percent use public transportation. The original thesis called for a comprehensive streetcar plan dedicated to the wellbeing of Atlanta’s “urban ecology.” Guided by placement of Atlanta’s unused railroads, the plan included one stop in each of the incorporated forty-five neighborhoods, and a commute that would transport riders around the 22-mile loop in a matter of ninety minutes. Though transit-focused, Gravel recognized the larger scope of urban systems, emphasizing the need for rezoning and coding to ensure previously industrial grounds were safe for public use, as well as the need to promote people-scaled urban spaces to generate a sense of place. He saw the BeltLine as an opportunity

60 See note 59 above.
to cultivate a sense of place in a city that has been described as “centerless.” Gravel saw the BeltLine as an opportunity to right Atlanta’s planning wrongs. “Instead of dividing neighborhoods, the old railroad tracks could reconnect ‘home and destination, rich and poor, black and white.’ Perhaps the city’s problems could lead to its salvation.”

After graduation, Gravel and his two colleagues revisited the original thesis when discussing ways to improve the city’s public transportation system at their architectural firm, this time adding plans for bike trails and a linkage of parks. The revised plan garnered the attention of District Six’s councilwoman, Cathy Woolard, who was also the chair of Atlanta’s Transportation Committee. Woolard promptly assembled all transportation-related powers in the metro area, including MARTA, the Georgia Department of Transportation, City of Atlanta Department of Planning, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority. Woolard did not share the same priorities as these groups, and instead formed her own partnership with Gravel himself, with an eye to advancing his plan.

The two began to organize local community meetings within District Six (now one of the areas surrounding the Eastside Trail), eventually strengthening their grassroots efforts. In 2001, Alycen Whiddon, a former player in Atlanta’s Department of Planning, brought about the idea of funding the BeltLine through a tax allocation district, or TAD. In most states, TADs are known as tax increment funding, or TIF. Best implemented in derelict and abandoned regions, TADs reward business-inducing development by allocating any tax increments strictly toward funding the source development project. In other words, “the more taxes the improved district produced,

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64 Alex Garvin & Associates, 21.
65 Alex Garvin & Associates, 21.
66 Alex Garvin & Associates, 24.
67 Alex Garvin & Associates, 24.
the more money it would generate to pay for future improvements.” Also around this time, Woolard inserted the BeltLine into Atlanta’s official 2003 Comprehensive Development Plan, only adding to the project’s publicity and legitimacy. A year later, Woolard and Gravel developed Friends of the BeltLine, a nonprofit organization that took inspiration from a similar effort with the BeltLine’s Manhattan cousin, the High Line. What was originally meant for ongoing “on site” dialogue with community members, became a nonprofit organization that caught the eye of media outlets and public figures alike. As time progressed, Friends of the BeltLine and the overall leadership of the project drastically expanded, and with it came more funding and higher stakes.

In 2004, urban planner Alexander Garvin’s “Emerald Necklace” Study detailed a realistic system of connected trail and transit systems along the BeltLine. The same year then-Mayor Shirley Franklin launched a feasibility study to gauge the economic sustainability of the BeltLine’s TAD funding structure. The Tax Allocation District proved to be stable in the long-term. MARTA conducted its own study of various BeltLine-incorporated transit options. The results suggested that the BeltLine coincided with MARTA’s plans, and MARTA later advocated for it in its “Alternatives Analysis Study.” The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, followed by Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., were then established in 2005 and 2006, respectively. The former serves to merge and harness private and public support for the project, while the latter

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69 Peterson, 27.
70 Peterson, 27.
manages the actual implementation of the project day by day, specifically overseeing community
genagement strategies and acting as the liaison between the project’s leadership and the City of Atlanta. It was around 2006 that the BeltLine’s trajectory picked up speed and land acquisition began.

The BeltLine Partnership’s $60 million campaign, primarily gathered through private funding, along with federal backing the following year in 2007, allowed for the official groundbreaking of Atlanta’s Historic Fourth Ward Park, the first site along what is now the Eastside Trail. From 2009 to 2012, master plans were developed and sporadic community events were held along the new trail to familiarize community members with the project. Community initiatives of note were “Art on the BeltLine: Atlanta’s New Public Space,” lantern parades, and running clubs. These BeltLine gatherings all primarily took place along the Eastside Trail, one of the earliest activated phases. As pedestrian and cyclist use of the BeltLine increased over the years, Mayor Kasim Reed created the PATH Force Unit in 2013. The then-fifteen-person bicycle patrol team were employed to provide order and a sense of safety along the BeltLine. The PATH Force Unit was also piloted along the Eastside Trail. Regularly scheduled events and the creation of its own enforcement unit were just two demonstrations of the BeltLine’s progressing infrastructure.

Since its construction, the Atlanta BeltLine has become a prominent built feature within Atlanta’s urban fabric. About 1.3 million people utilized the Eastside Trail in 2015 alone.

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75 See note 74 above.
77 Pendergrast, 62.
79 Natalie Camrud, “Race, Class, and Gentrification Along the Atlanta BeltLine” (Scripps College, 2017).
*Travel and Leisure Magazine* included a section about the BeltLine in its 2015 article, “How to Master Your Next Trip to Atlanta,” highlighting destinations along the Eastside Trail like Ladybird Kitchen and the Inman Park King of Pops window.  

In 2016, *Condé Nast Traveler* specifically recommended the Eastside Trail of the BeltLine as an essential part of “The Perfect Weekend in Atlanta.” The local *Atlanta Magazine* ranked visiting the Eastside Trail as one of the “50 Best Things to Do in Atlanta” last year in 2017. National and local promotional articles claiming that the BeltLine is a major part of Atlanta’s urban culture seem to mirror users’ opinions as well. When asked “Do you feel as though the BeltLine is part of Atlanta’s identity as a city?” twenty-five interviewees responded with “yes,” and the remaining two respondents with “somewhat.” Whether or not users of the BeltLine like its contribution to the city’s identity is another question. For one, during personal interviews with Eastside Trail users, recent art installations, rental bike stations, and availability of the official Atlanta BeltLine smartphone app were just a few of the amenities praised. For all that the BeltLine is currently implementing, there are aspects of the project’s grassroots origins,

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83 Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine users, November 3-8, 2017.
like more intimate and active community outreach, that have seemed to dissipate with increasing scale.

Active community outreach is essential in every phase of an equitable urban development project. The process should be planner-instigated, but community-guided. The absence of active and inclusive community outreach tactics leads to unheard voices, unmet needs, and a built result that only reflects a subset of the population. It is imperative that the greenway, while arguably becoming more entrenched in Atlanta’s identity over time, not be a divisive element within the city. At its roots, the BeltLine is intended to physically connect forty-five diverse neighborhoods, and numerous communities within those forty-five neighborhoods. Active, genuine and continuous community outreach, especially in communities with historic distrust of government initiatives, is necessary to understand where the BeltLine is lacking. Gravel himself left the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership in 2016 because he felt conversations of equity and affordability were inadequate.84 If the greenway’s own founder was discouraged by a lack of inclusivity-centered dialogue, it makes one question how alienated communities without an immediate line to BeltLine planners feel. Shifting from the history of the project into its current reality, the point of the following section is to identify how at least twenty-seven Eastside Trail users feel about their relationship with the BeltLine, and how it could potentially improve.

**The Push for Equitable Community Outreach Practices**

“*Bringing urban equity into the center of development means that no one should be penalized for where they live, the way they think or believe, or the way they look.*”85

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85 “Urban Equity in Development-Cities for Life” (WUF7, Medellín, Colombia, 2014).
Community Outreach → Community Involvement → Equitable Planning

Implementing the most inclusive and accessible community outreach tactics to increase community involvement can help develop public amenities like greenways that serve the most people possible. In this section, I first contextualize and contrast racialized responses to community outreach. I then analyze the Atlanta BeltLine’s own “Planning & Community Engagement Framework,” identifying potential shortcomings in its structure and implementation, namely the overuse of what I call “passive and prescriptive” community involvement. Lastly, I offer possible solutions for such shortcomings.

Before I go any further, I want to first define equity and differentiate it from equality. Often people get these two terms confused. In the context of urban development, United Nations-Habitat makes the distinction, “Equality is a key human rights principle,” whereas “Equity is an aspect or component of justice, which means that ‘equity’ is about fairness.”86 In other words, equality implies one’s inherent right to access the same goods and services necessary for quality of life. Equity means “leveling the playing field,” creating inclusion mechanisms that allow for fair access to goods and services.87

If one refers back to Charles Little’s definition of a recreational greenway, a greenway can be considered a service itself. By that logic, for the BeltLine to be an equitable agent, it must cater to the needs and circumstances of all surrounding stakeholders, especially catering to groups who have historically been viewed as an afterthought. A push for equity-minded development means a push for an active, accessible and inclusive community outreach framework. While I do not want to undermine the ability of communities to self-organize, I

86 “Urban Equity in Development-Cities for Life” (WUF7, Medellín, Colombia, 2014).
87 See note 86 above.
choose to deliberately use the term “community outreach” because making amends for the past’s racially skewed city development should be the responsibility of today’s city planners and officials. Strides toward equitable planning begin with initiating, listening and actively seeking input of those that have historically been overlooked.

Atlanta’s racist development history not only challenges today’s leaders to enact equitable outreach practices, it has also, over time, conditioned whites and blacks to have starkly different receptions of community outreach. To reiterate, this paper focuses on a white and black dichotomy consistent with Atlanta’s historic development literature, maps and demographic categories used. “Gendered and racialized identities function to constrain participation in the public sphere,” as does class. In the case of the Eastside Trail of the BeltLine, both wealth and whiteness are concentrated along this particular corridor-- important when contextualizing community participation during the BeltLine’s development. While conducting surveys along the Eastside Trail in November of 2017, twenty-two self-identified “East Atlanta” residents, all of whom have lived in the Atlanta Metropolitan region for at least one year, reported never having been contacted by city planners, local government officials or the Atlanta BeltLine Inc. for input about its developments. When the same twenty-two residents were asked if they felt they had a voice in the development of the Eastside Trail, fourteen replied with “I do not care,” three responded with “somewhat,” a different three said “not really,” and the remaining two said “definitely not.” As an aside, not a single participant of the total twenty-seven I interviewed reported “definitely” having a voice in the development of the Eastside Trail. Out of the fourteen

Atlanta residents who responded with “I do not care,” thirteen self-identified as “White,” and one “Black/ African American.”

Given my small sample size and location, I did not want to immediately racially dichotomize these responses. Perhaps those I surveyed were simply uninterested or did not have anything to say about the BeltLine’s development. However, three respondents who were both white and did not care about their involvement in the BeltLine’s development made similar remarks that stood out to me. “It is fine the way it is… I trust them,” “Nothing. I cannot wait to see what else they do,” and “They’ve got this under control… they don’t need my opinion” were all answers to the question “What do you wish the Eastside Trail had provided that is not currently present?” All three white respondents used the term “they,” presumably referring to the planners and decision-makers of the BeltLine. The three white respondents also touched upon the theme of trust, a justification that did not come up with the one black respondent who “did not care,” nor any respondents who indicated that their voice was “Somewhat,” “Not Really,” or Definitely Not” heard.

Statistically these findings do not hold significance, but they may offer a glimpse into a larger theme of the struggle for equitable urban planning practices and reception of community outreach: varying levels of trust amongst community members today are largely determined by a city’s past in spatial justice. In the case of Atlanta, as previously mentioned, those historically responsible for building the city’s infrastructure were largely white, wealthy business-owners. Those historically underrepresented and not afforded positions of decision-making power have been black. Based on interviews I conducted and past research, there appears to be considerable differences between whites’ and blacks’ attitudes toward community outreach, if and when community outreach takes place.
In a 2004 study conducted by Baruch College, researchers administered a quantitative survey to New York City citizens of different races that measured their satisfaction with urban services.\(^89\) Important to the context of this paper, results of the urban satisfaction study revealed that “residents’ responses were influenced more by symbolic attitudes than concrete objective experiences and that residents draw on general attitudes toward local government and community when assessing satisfaction.”\(^90\) To clarify, satisfaction with urban services and reception of community outreach are two different topics, but are linked in that one’s *symbolic attitude* toward the government could directly influence satisfaction levels and willingness to participate in community outreach, respectively. The results of the urban service satisfaction study revealed consistent lower satisfaction among black citizens and higher satisfaction among white citizens.

These quantitative findings comport with my own qualitative findings. In generalizable terms, white community members along the Eastside Trail have subconsciously taken for granted their representation at the decision-making level (top-down), and therefore do not feel a sense of urgency to participate at the citizen-level. Evident in interviews with self-identified whites was a pattern of trust and a lack of need to participate in the citizen-end of the community outreach process. I will go as far to assert that this pattern is intergenerational, residual privilege that accompanies being white. I believe this level of trust is at the core of a recurring attitude I could observe amongst white respondents: a blasé attitude. The responses of indifference toward participating in community outreach (if given the chance) amongst white participants seemed to have come from a place of unconcern and complacency.


\(^{90}\) See note 89 above.
On the other hand, during the formative interview I had with the five black males mentioned in the introduction of this paper, they articulated a clear, poignant distrust in the city’s past and current leaders, but would have been willing to participate in community outreach endeavors had they been approached with the opportunity. Though these five men cannot represent an entire race, their engaged attitudes were noticeably different than the common blasé attitudes among white Eastside Trail users. They spoke of their willingness to participate in future community discussions, and the past BeltLine events they have already attended. As residents of Reynoldstown, one of the two neighborhoods affected by the new Eastside Trail extension (subarea 4), these men explained to me that, unlike the historically white northeast neighborhoods, Reynoldstown was one of the first black neighborhoods in Atlanta. Founded by a former slave after the Civil War, Reynoldstown attracted other ex-slaves and slowly became a black community of railroad workers (Hulsey Rail Yard is just a few blocks north of Reynoldstown limits). Given the Eastside Trail extension into Reynoldstown officially opened in November of 2017, it is difficult to determine if and how much the Trail’s presence furthered already existing racial changes. Regardless, this Reynoldstown cohort directly attributed their weakened sense of place to the Trail’s existence, which in and of itself holds significant. One

91 Interview with Reynoldstown resident, November 3, 2017.
member of the group explicitly faulted the distant, meek community outreach tactics employed by Atlanta BeltLine officials. “You got to come at people in a different way. They think that they are letting us know about shit, but they’re not... because they are really too scared to be in my neighborhood to let us know about it. You can't change shit unless you get to the people deeply rooted in the neighborhood, then shit can get accomplished.”

This comment begs the question: what are ABI’s current community outreach tactics? Are they equitable and active? In short, I argue that the Atlanta BeltLine’s official “Planning & Community Engagement Framework” is not active enough, and therefore is not entirely equitable. There seems to be a disconnect between the language ABI uses to describe its Framework and the actual feelings certain community stakeholders have toward the reality of it. The “Planning & Community Engagement Framework” is comprised of three large subdivisions: Office of Director of Planning and Community Engagement, the ABI Board of Directors, and Community Meetings. It is only under the Community Meetings branch that direct communication with non-elected stakeholders is mentioned in the “BeltLine Citizen Participation Framework Legislation.” Specifically, it reads, “The Atlanta Development Authority, in conjunction with the Department of Planning and Community Development, shall adopt a ‘citizen engagement’ framework to ensure that neighborhood planning units, neighborhood groups, and other concerned organizations and individuals have the opportunity to have direct input on the BeltLine planning, design and implementation issues.”

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The existence of the Community Meetings’ citizen engagement Framework is necessary, and should be expected of the Atlanta BeltLine’s leadership. However, its existence does not hold merit if its design is neither serving its purpose nor providing all citizens the needed “opportunity to have direct input.” The neighborhood planning units (NPUs) referred to in the above excerpt are five regional “study areas.” With the continuous expansion of the BeltLine, the original four study areas are now at six: Southwest, Southeast, Northeast, Northside, Westside, as well as Midtown/ Downtown.95 Because this paper focuses on communities along the Eastside Trail, I only reviewed documents related to the Northeast and Southeast study groups. Along with open-to-the-public study group meetings scheduled on an “as appropriate” basis and led by an ABI-assigned City Planner, there are also formal Quarterly Briefings during which ABI leadership reports to the public on the BeltLine’s progress. Moreover, the Atlanta Development Authority ensures that ABI also holds community pop-up events, meet and greets, and “resident round tables.”96

I have two critiques of the Framework. The first critique is the sporadic occurrence of study group meetings and the locations in which they are held. Figure ten is a compilation of all Northeast and Southeast study group dates, times and locations available

95 See note 94 above.  
96 See note 94 above.
on the BetLine’s website. There is a possibility that the BetLine website has not recently updated all past and future study group meetings, in which case community members have another barrier for staying informed and involved. The time of meetings has not varied, a point of concern that weakens outreach efforts. If community members work between 6:30 and 8:00 pm, or have children to care for, this time slot poses some challenges. Difficulty in finding a community-friendly time to hold meetings is not specific to the Eastside Trail, but to most projects that include community involvement. In any case, providing live-streams, active chat rooms, or even holding the same meeting at two different times of the week, may all be strategies to increase chances of community turnout. As seen on the map, the only MARTA train station is located at the Inman Park/Reynoldstown stop, which is relatively far from four of the five listed study group meeting locations. However, to ABI’s credit, most online flyers for study groups do recommend nearby MARTA bus routes and stops. As an aside, when asked how often they utilized any MARTA services, zero respondents used MARTA on a daily basis, two respondents used...
MARTA on a weekly basis, two used MARTA on a monthly basis, fourteen used MARTA “on occasion,” and nine respondents “never” used MARTA. Though public transportation to and from study group meetings may not be utilized or a top concern for Eastside Trail users, the purpose of pointing out public transportation proximity and availability is to hold planning parties accountable for having a general cognizance for community members who do depend on public transportation.

While I recognize that in the original legislation the study groups are to meet “as appropriate,” there is no further clarification as to who determines what is “appropriate,” or what steps community members can take to petition for the ABI to organize a meeting should the community see the need. The issue here lies in the reality that many “concerned organizations and individuals” may want to have direct input, but do not know how, or lack the tools (transportation, internet, etc.) to provide such input. As an aside, fifteen of the twenty seven participants I interviewed had never received any materials or invitations (electronic, verbal or physical) to join study group sessions in their respective seven different neighborhoods. The poor visibility, presence, and activity of ABI organizers “on site” in various neighborhoods can be labeled as “passive” outreach. Perhaps there are neighborhoods in which community outreach is strong, but I did encounter interviewees that said this was the case. Interviewee anecdotes paint ABI organizers as removed and disingenuous, as unwilling to immerse themselves in communities, and with the immediate intention of increasing community buy-in for the latest project pitch. Aside from utilizing community churches’ physical space as study group locations, documentation of ABI leveraging already existing community groups for input is difficult to find, online or

97 Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine users, November 3-8, 2017.
elsewhere. ABI did, however, reach out to local nonprofits, like Trees Atlanta, to form coalitions that further the BeltLine’s Eastside Trail master plan and vision.\(^9\) Placing the bulk of responsibility and outreach effort onto community members leaves organizing parties’ equity-motivated measures in question.

When one-off study group meetings do occur, they appear to be more about informing the public and less about building a partnership with the public. The second critique is the use of prescriptive language in the Framework legislation, and what the study group meeting minutes reflect themselves. I choose the term “prescriptive” because ABI is merely allowing community members to join the conversation once the agenda is already set. Though it may seem miniscule and unimportant to note, the diction used sends a message that the BeltLine encourages “concerned organizations and individuals [to] have... direct input,” but not necessarily that the BeltLine will actively seek out all surrounding communities to allow for this. Community members are being talked to rather than being given an accessible platform upon which their opinions are heard and prioritized. The proof is in the meeting minutes of past study group gatherings. Typically, meetings begin with a presentation given by a ABI-involved planner about updates and progress along the Eastside Trail. Only after the presentation is concluded are questions from community members addressed. This While sessions about specific projects like the “North Avenue Plaza Construction” are necessary to create progress, if community members have never before participated in a study group, or have no concern for the specific topic presented, it seems as though there is little room left in the structure of the meeting to address other ideas or questions at large, which may ultimately force community members to table

thoughts until the next meeting. Alternatively, I speculate that the little time built into the meeting for open dialogue may ultimately deter community members from returning to another meeting, as they may feel discouraged and unheard. To ABI’s credit, on their website next to uploaded meeting minute documents, there is a link one can click to provide online feedback about any study group meeting. However, where the online comments and concerns are directed is not advertised, and neither is information about receiving follow-up on one’s submission. I have also struggled to find details on how community members can provide timely in-person or physically written feedback to ABI.

According to a “Self Assessment Toolkit for Partnerships” document published in 2001, thoughtful outreach tactics are especially crucial in areas “where people have lost faith in the political process and the ability of services to meet their needs. Partnerships can demonstrate to local communities that it is worthwhile to engage with public agencies because they can influence outcomes.”99 The public agency, in this case ABI, must make it known to communities that hearing from them is a priority to begin with. Possible solutions for improved equitable outreach tactics include more interpersonal notification of nearby study group meetings, outreach language that is more active and inviting, and varied but set meeting times.100 These suggested improvements fall in line with comments made by interviewees.

As mentioned by one of the Reynoldstown interviewees, implementing outreach tactics that utilize the knowledge and interconnectedness of established community members and groups could increase likelihood of attendance, community reception of ideas

and participation. This way, the BeltLine could veer away from a passive and removed “come if you can” outreach angle, and instead actively get to know the communities the greenway affects. Enlisting point community members themselves to assist a BeltLine representative helps cultivate a sense of trust for those who may otherwise be skeptical of the BeltLine’s motives or agenda, and can also lead to more organic and candid discussions about demands and needs the community would like to see the greenway meet.

Additionally, community-guided outreach partnerships could help tap into populations that do not use social media or the internet (older groups, groups that cannot afford phones or computers etc).

**Concerns and Potential Solutions:**

If such outreach solutions were implemented, the final result of the Eastside Trail may have looked slightly different. Though I can only speak in hypothetical terms, based on what was articulated by my small sample size of interviewees, the Eastside Trail could better meet the needs of community members if certain improvements were made. When asked what needs were not being met, recurring answers amongst respondents had to do with the lack of sitting areas along the Trail, lack of public restrooms, lack of public transportation and general feelings of unsafety. Four respondents over the age of fifty emphasized the difficulty in finding resting spots along the Trail. One of these respondents said “there is constant movement with bikers and pedestrians, so I find it important to have places of sort of refuge from all the action when I want a breather.” Another interviewee, between the ages of twenty and thirty, noted that the

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101 Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine user, November 5, 2017.
scarcely placed seating areas made it hard for friends to “just be and socialize, without feeling like the only space we can sit is in a microbrewery or in Ponce [City Market].”\textsuperscript{102} Perhaps the linear nature of the greenway simply does not lend itself to natural congregation spaces, and strictly facilitates movement and flow. However, even placing movable and stackable timber bleachers along the trail, perhaps below the Freedom Parkway underpass (next to the Historic Fourth Ward Skate Park), could be a temporary pilot project worth trying. A similar guerilla seating method was successful in Carlsberg, a neighborhood with a strong placemaking initiative in Copenhagen, Denmark.\textsuperscript{103}

The few bathrooms along the Eastside Trail itself may be deliberate. There are public restrooms in Historic Fourth Ward Park and Piedmont Park, both of which were there before the Eastside Trail was developed. I cannot find explicit explanations in Eastside Trail master plans or meeting minutes, but sparsely placed public bathrooms may be an effort to deter homeless individuals from lingering around the Eastside Trail. Alternatively, it may be that there are not enough restrooms because it is challenging and pricey to install necessary plumbing and sewage. A third possibility is that by not providing many bathrooms, the BeltLine intentionally funnels

\textsuperscript{102} Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine user, November 5, 2017.
\textsuperscript{103} Rigitze Hess, “Strategies of Urban Livability” (Copenhagen, Denmark, June 2017).
users into commercial offshoot areas that do readily have bathrooms. A similar situation exists on Manhattan’s elevated recreational greenway, the High Line. There are only two bathrooms along the one and half mile stretch, with one located in the High Line gift shop, and the other located below the High Line itself in the Diller- von Furstenberg building, attached to the Whitney Museum on Gansevoort Street. A pilot project worth testing to alleviate users’ restroom concerns, and one that was suggested numerous times by interviewees themselves, is the placement of grounded, lockable bathroom trailers. The cost of ongoing upkeep for the bathroom trailers and custodial staff would need to be considered, though. Many festival venues and beach boardwalks offer similar amenities.

Lack of public transportation and feelings of safety were two of the other common critiques made during interviews. Given that Gravel’s original proposal of the BeltLine was transit-focused, prioritization of public transportation is still of paramount importance to the overall project. Unfortunately, development of the forty-five-stop light rail system is complicated, slow, and the most expensive aspect of the BeltLine. Purchasing rights of way takes time and ample funds. In 2016, a T-SPLOST, or transportation special purpose local option

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105 Natalie Camrud, “Race, Class, and Gentrification Along the Atlanta BeltLine” (Scripps College, 2017), 28.
sales tax, was proposed and passed, allocating $66 million to the BeltLine over a span of five years. The T-SPLON, in conjunction with the approved MARTA halfpenny sales tax, which is to provide $2.5 billion to all city-wide public transit over forty years, have been pivotal in securing the BeltLine’s projected light rail completion date in 2030.106 So, in the meantime, how can planning parties of the Eastside Trail meet current transportation needs of users? For one, an interviewee practically begged “for more access points along the Trail. Parking is a nightmare in the few access point lots.”107 This comment is worth unpacking. While it is a valid suggestion, the comment also reveals the reality that users of the Eastside Trail still primarily view the BeltLine as a destination, rather than the means to get to a destination. When asked what form of transportation one took to get to the Eastside Trail, 59% of the twenty-seven I interviewed indicated that they drove a “personal car.”108 Resources like the Relay/Social Bicycles bike-share stations lining the Eastside Trail and surrounding neighborhoods appear to be well received and utilized, but by whom? Though the rental bike stations require a corresponding smartphone app, and bicycles themselves are not considered public transportation, the BeltLine has at least provided an eco-friendly alternative to personal car use. Relay Bike Share’s December 2017 rider data report showed that a total of 1,043 bikes were checked out at the seven stations immediately along the Eastside Trail. Of those 1,043 users, 309 individuals had either a monthly, annual or work-related bike pass, while 734 users paid for the rental bike with a “pay as you go” hourly option.109 These statistics may give insight as to who is using the rental bike services. Perhaps the “pay as you go” majority are mostly tourists exploring the Eastside Trail per the suggestion of well known travel publications. The 309 individuals with some form of long-term

106 Camrud, 29.
107 Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine user, November 7, 2017.
108 Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine users, November 3-8, 2017.
bike pass are more likely locals and commuters. Based on this one-month snapshot of rental bike use along the Eastside Trail, and the knowledge that a third of the twenty-seven interviewed had never used any public transportation systems currently offered in Atlanta, the public transportation conversation must continue. The decoupling of Atlantans and their attachment to cars may take require a larger-scale, collective mental model shift. Constructing a recreational, car-free greenway with a light-rail system seems like a good starting point, though.

Lastly, out of the twenty-seven interviewees, seven individuals mentioned feeling unsafe along the Eastside Trail in some way. To further categorize these safety needs, there were four requests for the greenway to be better lit at night, two requests for a stronger PATH Force Unit presence, and two requests for more frequently placed emergency call-boxes.\textsuperscript{110} Note that one individual had a couple of concerns related to safety. It is also worth pointing out that all seven of the respondents whose safety needs have not been met by the Eastside Trail are white. Again, due to the small sample size of my study, it is difficult to make generalizations about the correlation between race and perceived sense of safety. Nevertheless, no black individuals that I interviewed, on any segment on the Eastside Trail, expressed the need for improved safety measures. In fact, a member of the Reynoldstown cohort stated, “White folks say that they back the BeltLine, but when the Trail becomes \textit{too} connected, that’s when they have a problem.”\textsuperscript{111} Whether or not this assertion holds true is hard to determine, but should be among the many points of discussion during the outreach process.

\textsuperscript{110} Interview with Eastside Trail BeltLine users, November 3-8, 2017.
\textsuperscript{111} Interview with Reynoldstown resident, November 3, 2017.
Conclusion

Prior research about greenways, the history of Atlanta and the history of the BeltLine, combined with personal research focused on community outreach tactics and users’ responses to the current reality of the BeltLine’s design has led me to conclude that Atlanta’s urban development history has prevailing influence on Atlantans’ relationship with the BeltLine’s development today. The BeltLine was one of many recreational greenways born in the most recent era of greenway history, the people’s stage. Following the rails-to-trails model, the BeltLine is guided by the placement of Atlanta’s derelict railroads. These very railroads, along with roadways like Ponce de Leon Avenue, served as built facilitators of racial segregation throughout Atlanta’s history. From post-Civil War era to the establishment of Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) and the enactment of the Lochner Plan during the 1940s, to the 1996 Summer Olympics, Atlanta’s development as a city has been branded by the historic power grip whites held and the strategic marginalization of black communities. Gravel’s original transit-oriented thesis, and later mission for Friends of the BeltLine, aimed to recognize built flaws of the past, identify current consequences plaguing Atlanta today because of such flaws, and work onremedying them through smart and inclusive urban design.

While I believe ABI is genuinely striving to implement equitable planning practices, gathered ABI materials and user anecdotes seem to emphasize that they have not yet reached that goal. Community members interviewed in Reynoldstown, Inman Park, Historic Fourth Ward Park, and next to Ponce City Market expressed various opinions about wanting to be involved in the BeltLine’s development. These responses revealed a possible racial binary in community outreach reception, wherein white respondents expressed trust in BeltLine decision makers and black respondents did not, but wanted to be engaged in the community outreach process if
provided the explicit opportunity. Making deliberate efforts to actively seek and listen to communities, especially those historically pushed to the side of decision-making processes, could drastically increase community members’ desire to participate in the BeltLine’s development, and increase the number of needs met in the built design of the greenway. Hopefully, the identification of weak areas in ABI’s community outreach tactics and the account of community members’ feelings toward the Eastside Trail itself can aid in larger conversation needing to be had about developing greenways as equitable urban features.
Bibliography


