Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on the Aerotropolis Atlanta Brownfield Redevelopment Project

The Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (CQGRD) will be conducting a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on redevelopment plans for the site of the former Hapeville Ford Assembly Plant in Hapeville, GA. The assembly plant is to be redeveloped as ‘Aerotropolis Atlanta’, with over 6.5 million square feet of office, hotel, shopping and airport parking facilities, as well as a solar energy component. The 122-acre site is bounded by I-75, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the new residential development of Asbury Park, and downtown Hapeville. The site was deemed a brownfield, and has undergone remediation for potential contaminants.

CQGRD has identified potential health impacts due to the redevelopment project. The project team seeks to work with Jacoby Development, community members, and local authorities to consider the project’s range of potential benefits and impacts on surrounding communities, and to offer a series of practical measures to maximize health benefits, potentially positioning the Aerotropolis as a catalyst for healthy, sustainable living.

Our objective is to conduct a comprehensive HIA on the brownfield remediation and redevelopment procedures with extensive stakeholder participation and technical assistance. The HIA will ensure the explicit consideration of the human health impacts of the proposed redevelopment project so that health costs are not unequally distributed and all health promoting impacts are considered. Secondarily, it will increase the capacity for HIA practice through activities with community and research partners, and develop a prototypical approach for measuring and improving outcomes when brownfield sites resulting from the abandonment of large-scale industrial sites are redeveloped and reused. Additionally, the team will conduct training and technical assistance for project partners.

This project is supported by a grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Who is CQGRD? The Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development is an applied research center at Georgia Tech’s College of Architecture, studying solutions that communities can implement in order to foster quality growth and development. Our vision is to help society achieve a sustainable, equitable, superior quality of life through sound planning, policy, and design. In pursuing this vision, we have identified two major focus areas: Megaregions and Health Impact Assessment.
About Health Impact Assessment

Health Impact Assessment is “a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population”. The final product of an HIA is a set of evidence-based recommendations intended to inform decision-makers and the general public about the health-related issues associated with the project. The recommendations provide practical solutions to magnify positive health impacts, and remove or minimize negative impacts.

Assessment methods follow six basic steps:

- **screening** to determine justification of the HIA as a demonstration project,
- **scoping** to outline the possible consequences, and identify the boundaries for appraisal,
- **appraisal** characterizing the nature and magnitude of both harmful and beneficial impacts,
- making **recommendations** for impact management,
- **dissemination** of the recommendations to all stakeholders, and
- **monitoring and evaluation** to determine the effectiveness of the HIA and identify process improvement opportunities.

Examples of CQGRD Work

City of Decatur, GA Community Transportation Plan and Rapid HIA: The City of Decatur, GA sought guidance in developing a Community Transportation Plan (CTP) to promote healthy communities and economic development using the principles of active living. CQGRD, with Sycamore Consulting, Inc. and Kimley Horn and Associates, used Health Impact Assessment to achieve Decatur’s vision.

CQGRD used innovative tools to integrate transportation planning with the health impact assessment: bicycle, pedestrian, and motor vehicle level of service analysis; street typology guidelines; a quality growth audit; and bicycle and pedestrian latent demand scoring. The CTP was completed in fall 2007 with broad support from city staff and residents. It provided clear guidance on project prioritization, design guidelines, and expected benefits.

Decatur is already using the plan to realize their goals – smoothing the implementation process and supporting their request for SPLOST funding. Decatur has also created a new Active Living Division within the Department of Community and Economic Development to combine health and quality of life gains with sustainability, transportation options, and a stronger sense of community.
Atlanta BeltLine Health Impact Assessment: With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Georgia Tech’s Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (CQGRD), with technical assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), began a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of the BeltLine in 2005. The goal of the BeltLine HIA is to make health a part of the decision-making process related to the BeltLine by predicting health consequences, informing decision makers and the public about health impacts, and providing realistic and achievable recommendations to prevent or mitigate negative health outcomes. To complete this task, the HIA team included researchers and practitioners with expertise in public health.

The final report titled “Atlanta BeltLine Health Impact Assessment” was completed in 2007. The report announced that the BeltLine would benefit the health of residents and users in many ways. It contained several important recommendations informing policy-makers on how to capitalize on these benefits in all aspects of the planning and implementation of the BeltLine, and to make sure that everyone could share in them. Recommendations included prioritization of certain projects, strategies for equitable access and development, preliminary analysis of environmental hazards, and ways to promote the heathful aspects of the BeltLine. Since its release, the HIA report has helped attract funding, stimulate inter-agency collaboration, enhance the federal environmental impact process, and build community support.

BeltLine HIA Park Access Analysis
What does a development project have to do with health? It takes more than doctor visits to stay healthy. You also need clean air and water, regular physical activity, nutritious food, quality time with friends and family, personal safety, and even economic security. The design of your building, neighborhood, or town can make it easier to have these things. Health and planning experts study places – and the plans, policies, and projects that create them – to find out how they influence the people who live, work, or visit there.

For example, you may feel more inclined to go for a walk if there are safe pleasant sidewalks and interesting places near your home, and less so if there are vacant areas or heavy traffic. The layout of streets, sidewalks, and parking can influence the amount of time you spend getting around, the amount of money your family spends on transportation, and even your exposure to air pollution. Small changes in site design can deter crime by creating a sense of ownership in public areas. A well-planned development can bring needed amenities and new civic spaces, making it easier to buy fresh food, do things with your family, and stay involved in your community. On the other hand, unmanaged growth can push out existing businesses and services, degrade community assets, and overwhelm infrastructure.

What Does the HIA Mean for Aerotropolis and the community? CQGRD hopes that public agencies, local business organizations, and community members will be actively involved throughout the HIA process. Ideally, the final recommendations will reflect the needs and wishes of the community, and will provide guidance for achieving them. There are several ways to be involved. Researchers will conduct community outreach, including public meetings or workshops. An advisory committee will ensure that all perspectives and areas of expertise are represented.

Researchers may also seek information about the character, history, current needs, and future goals of the surrounding community. This may include plans and visions that the community has produced, or their experiences related to health and development. Researchers will also make a few site visits, for example to conduct a sidewalk inventory.

This project should produce similar benefits as our previous HIA partners, such as Decatur and the Atlanta BeltLine communities. The HIA may identify opportunities to maximize the role of Aerotropolis as an asset to residents and local businesses, and strategies to mitigate potential burdens on infrastructure. The HIA can also serve as an innovative part of the area’s planning process, generating cost-neutral or cost-benefit positive strategies for a healthy, thriving community.

Contact Us: For more information about this project, contact Michelle Marcus, project director, at 404.385.5122 or michelle.marcus@coa.gatech.edu, or Jason Barringer at 404.385.5126 or jason.barringer@coa.gatech.edu. You can also find more information about HIA on our website - http://www.cqgrd.gatech.edu