Open Space Acquisition and Management Opportunities in Metropolitan Atlanta

Prepared for Research Atlanta and The Arthur Blank Family Foundation
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Agenda

• Introduction
• Interview Findings
• Current Open Space Efforts
  – Metro Atlanta
  – Other Cities
• Options for Open Space Acquisition and Maintenance
• Recommendations
  – Metro-Wide
  – City of Atlanta
Introduction

- Great cities are distinguished by their public parks

Central Park, NYC

- People want parks and green space
  - Voters approved 72% of 240 local and state ballot measures nationwide for land conservation and parks in 1998 \(^1\)


Open Space Acquisition and Management Opportunities in Metropolitan Atlanta
Introduction

• Atlanta ranks near bottom of 25 U.S. cities in acreage of parkland per capita\(^{(1)}\)

• Study objectives:
  – Identify obstacles and opportunities to acquiring and maintaining open spaces in metro Atlanta
  – Recommend strategies and tactics for pursuit of increased open and green space in region

(1) Trust for Public Land and Urban Land Institute

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Interview Findings

- 38 Metro Atlanta community leaders & open space advocates interviewed

- Agreement on significant need for more accessible open space and parkland

- Key reason for providing open space
  - Positive impact on economic development
Interview Findings

• **Primary impediments**
  – Lack of effective/efficient leadership
  – High cost of land and maintenance

• **Regional governmental parks agency not supported** – “unworkable” - but:
  – Cross jurisdictional service consolidation desired
  – Willingness to volunteer & collaborate
Interview Findings

Most commonly cited open space needs:
- Large, centralized parks
- Nature preserves
- Active recreational areas
- Multi-use trails

Chattahoochee River interest
- Clean up
- Improve access
- Create centerpiece for region

New facilities/parks desired (>50% respondents) vs. Improve existing facilities (>33% respondents)

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Current Open Space Efforts
(Metro Atlanta)

- **All counties**
  - Georgia Greenspace Program
  - Comprehensive plans exist/in development

- **Strong program in Gwinnett County**
  - SPLOST funding
  - Private contractors used

- **Budget cut impacts on parks and recreation in DeKalb County & City of Atlanta**

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## Current Open Space Efforts

### (Other Cities)

### Introduction

### Interview Findings

### Current Open Space Efforts

- **Metro Atlanta**
- **Other Cities**

### Options for Acquisition

- **Metro Wide**
- **City of Atlanta**

### Recommendations

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### Comparison of Parks and Recreation Service Delivery in Comparable Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Minn.</th>
<th>Miami</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Denver</th>
<th>Phila.</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>National Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 City Population</td>
<td>2,896,000</td>
<td>383,000</td>
<td>362,000</td>
<td>529,000</td>
<td>563,000</td>
<td>555,000</td>
<td>1,518,000</td>
<td>416,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted Budget in Millions (”/2000)2</td>
<td>$371</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>$8.9</td>
<td>$63</td>
<td>$90</td>
<td>$57</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>$24.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Related Expenditures per Resident</td>
<td>$126</td>
<td>$144</td>
<td>$47</td>
<td>$101</td>
<td>$160</td>
<td>$103</td>
<td>$52</td>
<td>$88</td>
<td>$79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Open Space Per 1000 Residents</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Open Space as % of City Area</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Centers per 20,000 Residents</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Permanent Employees</td>
<td>2,162</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Employees Per Acre</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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- **Board of Commissioners**
- **Parks and Recreation Board**
- **Park and Recreation Citizens Advisory Committee**
- **Board of Park Commissioners**
- **Board of Directors**
- **No; approved but never established**
- **NA**

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**Source:** Mayor Franklin’s Park and Green Spaces Task Force Report, October, 2002

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1. Based on data from Parks Atlanta Rescue Coalition (PARC 9-1-1) and ULI and The Trust for Public Land *(Inside City Parks)*

2. Includes both operating and capital expenditures, but excludes stadiums, zoos, and museums

3. 2002 employment number

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Current Open Space Efforts
(Other Cities)

- Cities with strong parks and open space programs
  - History of strong governmental leadership
  - Constituent support

- 6/9 cities use Parks and Recreation Department structure
  - Underfunded
  - Rely on nonprofit foundation and volunteer services

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Current Open Space Efforts

(Other Cities)

- Innovative techniques may be emulated
  - Vertical space & brownfield utilization
  - Trails/greenways on old rail lines/roadways
  - Piggyback on rights-of-way
  - Developer impact fees and special assessments

Freeway Park, Seattle
(5 acres over I-5)

Cook County, IL Forest Preserve District (67K acres)

South Platte River Urban Restoration Project, Denver

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Options for Open Space Acquisition and Maintenance

- Incentives and/or protection through Land Use Regulations and Ordinances
  - Purchase of Development Rights, Transfer of Development Rights, Cluster Zoning, Civic Space Requirements, Open Space Incentives, Farmland and Environmental/Watershed Protection Programs, Conservation Subdivisions, District Overlay Codes

Land development codes requiring parks and open space are the single most effective and cost efficient mechanism for providing safe, accessible and sufficient public open space but must be written appropriately.

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# Options for Open Space Acquisition and Maintenance

## Dedicated Funding
- Bond issues, special interest sales tax, real estate taxes, state and federal grants

## Effective Administrative Practices
- Expand contracts into private sector
- Innovative funding sources & parcel identification
- Collaborations with variety of governmental entities

## Outside Partnerships
- Foundations, nonprofit land trust and conservation organizations, volunteer groups

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Recommendations

(Metro Wide)

- Support continued funding for Georgia Greenspace Program
- Acquire open space ahead of development
- Designate single person point of contact at each jurisdictional level for coordination of land acquisition and acceptance of donations

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Recommendations
(Metro Wide)

✓ Collaborate on regional basis to create metro-wide linked greenway system. Partner with:

- Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District
- Land trusts
- Other nonprofits
- Trees Atlanta

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Recommendations
(Metro Wide)

✓ Educate public on value of open space and incentives of easements/donations

✓ Replace antiquated zoning codes with effective open space regulations that include:
  – Off-site option for developers
  – Qualitative criteria for open space location and treatment
    • E.g. safety is maximized when parks adjacent to busy street(s)
  – Increased open space requirements for large properties
  – Creation of parks
  – Public access
  – Open space connectivity
  – Conservation subdivisions and transfer of development rights
Recommendations (Metro Wide)

✓ Amend local public works codes to incorporate requirements for:
  – Greenways and multi-use trails within utility ROW/easements
  – Strengthened stream bank buffers, setbacks and easement protection
  – Conversion of certain parking lot space to open space

✓ Identify dedicated funding source

✓ Encourage private property and business owners to initiate acquisition by utilizing funds from Tax Allocation and Community Improvement Districts
Recommendations
(Metro Wide)

✓ Use GADOT resources to implement trails and greenways

✓ Support/identify private, non-profit organization to facilitate communications between Metro area non-profits and jurisdictions

✓ Establish park endowments for maintenance and improvements
Recommendations
(Metro Wide)

- Adopt legislation for tax exempt status of non-profit organizations
- Identify organizations to work with Blank Foundation to propose specific open space project (inside I-285)
- Test recommendations with select projects
Recommendations
(City of Atlanta)

✓ Implement recommendations of Mayor Franklin’s Parks and Greenspace Task Force
  - Create Atlanta Parks District
  - Double acreage by 2012
  - Raise $400 mil over 10 years
  - Build large, centrally located “great park”

Options for Acquisition

- Metro Wide
- City of Atlanta

Current Open Space Efforts

- Metro Atlanta
- Other Cities

Interview Findings

Introduction

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Recommendations
(City of Atlanta)

✓ City of Atlanta Parks and Recreation Department should:

- Support Georgia Greenspace goal of minimum 20% open space
- Explore and test progressive budgeting and manpower allocation processes
- Test privatization of some parks maintenance activities

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Recommendations

(City of Atlanta)

City of Atlanta Department of Planning and Community Development should:

- Identify strategy for meeting Georgia Greenspace goal of minimum 20% open space
- Develop budgets for parcel maintenance and programming
- Designate single point of contact for land negotiations
Questions and Discussion
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