

Record of Public Meeting on March 14, 2007

This public meeting took place on the evening of March 14, 2007, starting at 7 PM, in the cafeteria of the Kittredge Magnet School for High Achievers.

County Commissioners Jeff Rader and Kathleen Gannon led off the meeting by introducing and explaining the process and how it would work – six public meetings (of which this was the first), which would culminate in a master plan for the area of about 600 acres around the intersection of North Druid Hills Road and Briarcliff Road. Jeff Rader then introduced Alex Garvin, the planning consultant hired to work with the community and the stakeholders through the process.

Mr. Garvin made the following presentation, accompanied by PowerPoint slides. The presentation discussed the following:

- 1) Introduction of Mr. Garvin and his firm, Alex Garvin & Associates
- 2) Description of the planning process that will take place over the next six months, punctuated by six public meetings (with this the first)
- 3) Past work in the area on the Atlanta Beltline – illustrates two points
 - a) Planning is looking for opportunities – Beltline was driven by opportunities to make improvements in amount and quality of public parkland in Atlanta. This study will also be driven by opportunities.
 - b) Importance of improving the public realm.
- 4) Public realm
 - a) Definition
 - i) Network for movement – streets and sidewalks, street trees and public furniture
 - ii) Parks, squares, and public spaces
 - iii) Public buildings (e.g. schools, police stations, etc.)
 - b) Importance of the Public Realm
 - i) Safety
 - ii) Convenience
 - iii) Quality of Life
 - c) High-quality public realm can increase the value of surrounding private property
- 5) Public realm principles for DeKalb County study area
 - a) Good access and circulation network
 - b) Public realm to create a framework for private development
 - c) Green public realm
 - d) Attracting a critical mass

Mr. Garvin then displayed a slide showing magnets that he and his firm had identified in the study area, and asked the audience to point out any local magnets that he had missed. They pointed out the following:

- REI on NE Access
- Institutions on La Vista – churches, synagogues, schools
- Emory University
- CDC
- Public libraries (2)
- Intersection of La Vista Rd. and Briarcliff Rd.
- Sam’s Club
- Tennis Center
- Century Center – just above Williamsburg Plaza
- Decatur Waterworks
- I-85
- Elementary and middle and high schools

Other things they mentioned, which are not currently magnets, but which present opportunities to create magnets:

- Creek
- Wildlife reserve (park behind Kittredge)
- Parks

Mr. Garvin then asked the following questions of the audience. He urged them not to answer immediately, but to think them over, and said that the Livable Communities Coalition would be following up with a survey, and they could answer then.

Questions:

1. Should automobiles, bikes, and walkers be together, separate, or both in different places?
2. Should walking and active recreation be together, separate, or both in different places?
3. Should buildings all be in a similar style, or should a variety of styles be allowed?
4. Should the activity on sidewalks be affected by the buildings around them?
5. Should there be more green and trees, or are there enough?

Then, the audience asked questions [noted below].

Jeff Rader then introduced some of the local property owners who will be involved in the planning process, including Bill McGahan of Executive Park and Jeff Fuqua of The Sembler Company. Mr. Fuqua made some brief remarks, saying that he and his company were glad to participate in the planning process.

Afterwards, attendees stayed and spoke informally with Commissioners Rader and Gannon and Mr. Garvin.

Questions and Answers from Public Meeting

1 How much money will this study cost?

A: \$305,000 plus expenses.

2 Exactly what is the status of the Sembler project? Has he applied for any variances, any developments from the county? Are any contracts in force or on the table for purchase of the 70 acres from Tuggle or the 30 acres from the county? Just where is this development holding?

A: Decisions about the Sembler project will not be made until after this project has been completed. That project will receive the same review that it would without this planning project.

3 Some of us are here tonight as leaders of stakeholder groups in this area. All of our “constituents” could not be here but would like to provide input and answer questions. How can they get on your list?

A: Provide their contact information to the Livable Communities Coalition (embillis@LivableCommunitiesCoalition.org)

4 How shall neighborhood associations get connected with Livable Communities Coalition?

A: Provide their contact information to the Livable Communities Coalition (embillis@LivableCommunitiesCoalition.org)

5 While it’s all well and good to do this planning for shaping our neighborhood—and I applaud this effort, having lived in this area for 26 years—I would venture to say that the majority of folks are here tonight because of Sembler’s 100 acre development on this site. What impact will this study have on the proposed development and how much input will we have on it, when it will have a profound impact on our neighborhood?

A: This planning process will inform decisions that the county will need to make regarding any proposal to rezone and redevelop in this area.

6 What will happen to the *already* proposed and now in the site plans process, the intersections of Briarcliff and N. Druid Hills of turn lanes. Will this wait on the larger scope?

A: Hoping to delay the proposed alterations until after the planning process is complete.

7 Do you still need money?

A: We are still raising money to cover the costs of the process.

8 Does this mean a decision has already been made to develop the area including Kittredge and the Art School? Who contributed to the payment of the contract?

A: No decision has been made to develop the property controlled by the board of education. Commercial property owners in the area and community organizations of many types are being asked to contribute to the payment of the contract.

9 There are traffic and pedestrian activities on weekends (Saturday and Sunday) that of course differ significantly that the Monday-Friday activities. In some parts of this neighborhood (La Vista Road), pedestrian activity is significantly higher. Will you be here to see this on a weekend?

A: Yes, we will come down and look at it.

10 How about MARTA?

A: It's extremely hard to get MARTA to change its priorities. And I'm not sure you would want the level of density that would need to be in this area to justify a different kind of MARTA service.

11 Our section of DeKalb County is a section that many, many people *travel through* to get to school (Emory), work (CDC), etc. What can be done to ease traffic, not increase it?

A: That's what we are hoping to figure out with this study.

12 What is the March 20th vote?

A: SPLOST 3 for public education in DeKalb County.

13 Is DeKalb County government going to pay for the street and walking and bike areas? We are voting for an increase in sales tax this coming Tuesday to 8%. Will we be going up to 9%, or raise property taxes?

A: The vote on the 20th is to consider a continuation of the 1% sales tax for education, not to increase the tax. Some combination of county and developer funding will pay for the infrastructure improvements.

14 How will the report of the consultant be used to reach decisions by the County and the developer of the school property?

A: The county will use the plan to make decisions about rezoning and redevelopment in the area.

15 Can we get copies of the draft plans *prior* to these community-wide meetings?

A: Yes.

16 You are looking at destinations in this area. What are you doing in regards to the fact that 20,000 cars pass through this area to get to the expressway,

Lenox Mall, Phipps Plaza, and beyond, as well as in the other direction to Stone Mountain Freeway? How do you guarantee that any promises or concessions made by the developer don't disappear when they sell the property after the development is built? What does it take to get a park like Brook Run?

A: We hope to determine how to best accommodate traffic in this area. Getting a park of the size of Brook Run is unlikely, given the cost of land and developed nature of this area.

17 With all this effort that was required to achieve an "infill" ordinance, won't principles for the design of the public realm be major obstacles to implement?

A: We hope not.

18 I just renewed my one-year lease (Feb. 2007–Feb. 2008) at the park at Briarcliff. When is someone going to tell me that my apartment will be razed? Who will tell me? Who will pay my relocation expenses?

A: Your lease should not be impacted.

19 A community is made of schools, places of worship, parks, public areas, and also retail shopping. Why *relocate* Kittredge School, the Arts School, etc.? Why not *incorporate* the schools into the public realm process?

A: That is a possibility, but the school board has the most to say about that option.

20 Those outside the area have different priorities—how do we know if the info gathered is coming from stakeholders in the immediate area? (Example: Can like a shopping area to visit—but wouldn't want to live there. So okay with high traffic to get what they want.)

A: We will be working to ensure that information is being gathered from legitimate stakeholders.

21 Add to destination places within study area: intersection of Clairmont and Briarcliff Roads.

A: We will add that to the list.

22 Two to three people raised the issue of a recreational area as a destination, including a pool, trails, and park area. I don't think that got listed.

A: We will make sure that is on the list.

23 Since this is being spearheaded by the Livable Communities Coalition, who funds them?

A: The Coalition is funded by philanthropic and corporate foundations, corporations and associations, such as Woodruff Foundation, Coca-Cola, Georgia-Pacific, Georgia Power, Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association, Cooper Carry, Hedgewood Properties, Urban Land Institute.

24 Guiding principles:

- a. An open middle class market on the weekend—fruit/vegetables/clothing, not a flea market—lots of small businesses. Consider location on I-85 access road.
- b. An amphitheater for music—free to the public.

A: We will consider these among our options.

25 Please look at the already partially developed PATH plan in DeKalb County and see how this may factor into your planning.

A: We will look at that, and I should add that I worked with the PATH foundation on the Beltline. I think the work they have done in the Atlanta area is extraordinary.

26 I'm interested in an inclusion of trees in parking lots of shopping centers—N. DeKalb, NE Plaza, Toco Hills, Suburban Plaza.

27 The Waterworks area certainly is of interest—but I do *not* consider it part of this community. We *must* have a safe, walkable La Vista. This street is used

as a pedestrian route seven days a week—and on Saturdays. The thousands of Orthodox Jews in the neighborhood walk on La Vista. It is *dangerous* now.

28 How can the Georgia Native Plant Association be involved/help?

A: We hope that you can help us figure out how you can contribute.

29 Tonight you have identified neighbors (individuals and groups) and property owners as the “stakeholders” for this study. But you have mentioned developers—are they “stakeholders”? If so, how much money are they contributing to pay the consultant’s fees, and how much?

A: Owners of commercial property in the area are contributing the majority of the funding for the project, the amount being determined by acreage and how many will agree to participate. In addition, community organizations and associations are being asked to also contribute.

30 When will this all happen? What will be taken such as areas and stores?

A: The planning is beginning right now, but redevelopment will take place over many years. It has not been determined what will be redeveloped.

31 Will you share the email list with everyone so people can collaborate?

A: If people give us their permission to have their e-mail addresses shared, then we are glad to share those addresses, but we can only give out the addresses of people who give us that permission.

32 How do you deal with traffic on Briarcliff and N. Druid Hills?

A: We will be figuring that out in this study.

33 Will notes be taken at future meetings and be emailed?

A: Notes will be posted on a website.

34 What are you going to do about the traffic on North Druid Hills Rd.?

A: We don’t know yet.

35 What’s the current status of the schools?

A: The schools are not yet zoned for mixed-use. They are zoned for office or institutional use. The Park at Briarcliff apartments are zoned for multi-family residential.

36 Question about why development is coming here, when there is already intense development coming to the Clifton Corridor, and this will be twice as much as that.

A: We'll be looking at a variety of options, including adding transit, creating additional roads.

37 What will be done about the parks?

A: They will remain open space, but we don't want the parks to become a home for kudzu and hobos.

38 Alex Garvin: Want to make two points. First, people are asking how they know this will work. Well, it's organized by their elected officials, and they have to hold their elected officials responsible. Second, the plan will not just focus on capital improvements. Plan will also discuss how you pay for these improvements, and how you maintain and manage these improvements.