



SANDY SPRINGS

GEORGIA

PLAN FOR THE NORTH END



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

As Chair of the North End Revitalization Task Force, I take great pride in submitting this plan to the Sandy Springs City Council. In the past six months, the Task Force, consisting of volunteers from our community, worked hard to better understand why revitalization did not come to the North End in the past and what we could do—as a city government, as stakeholders in the North End, and as citizens—to revitalize this vitally important part of our city and do so in a way that creates a sense of place for its existing and future residents.

In our work, the Task Force:

- Engaged the citizens in two public sessions. First, in visioning session, then in a forum to evaluate the emerging vision for the North End.
- Took a deeper dive to learn more about the current situation in the North End, the obstacles to revitalization, and ways that we could work around these obstacles.
- Discussed and debated a vision for the North End. It is important to note that all of the significant ideas for this vision came from our citizens, who said in July that they wanted a walkable, diverse, mixed-income community with a variety of uses. They also said they wanted communities in the North End to be connected by trails to the Chattahoochee River and to other parts of the North End.
- Narrowed the list of “strategic initiatives,” major undertakings which can begin the process of revitalization, to six vitally important undertakings.
- Outlined the actions needed for each of these Strategic Initiatives.
- Described the roles that we feel the City of Sandy Springs should take in these initiatives, and the roles that others (landowners, developers, other governments, nonprofits and citizens) should play.

We did not have unanimous agreement on every part of this plan, but we did have a majority consensus. I am personally confident that this is the plan that the City has sought for years. It points us, I believe, to the ideas and practices, projects and partnerships that over time will make the North End one of Sandy Springs’ most diverse and desirable communities.

Sincerely yours,

Steve Soteres

CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR	2
CONTENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
MISSION OF THE NORTH END REVITALIZATION TASK FORCE.....	5
VISION FOR THE NORTH END REVITALIZATION AREA	6
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES	7
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: Plan developments that are centered in communities, are walkable with a mix of uses, are connected to the Greenline, and offer mixed-income housing including affordable, workforce and “lifetime” housing options.	8
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: Build “the Greenline” as a non-motorized way of moving through the North End.	15
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: Make Roswell Road walkable.	19
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4: Create connections throughout the North End.....	25
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5: Create access to the Chattahoochee and public lands.....	30
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: Build a community center for the North End.	36
RECOMMENDED STARTING POINT: The “catalyst project”	40
ROLES THE CITY SHOULD PLAY	42
TASK FORCE PROCESS	44
TASK FORCE MEMBERS	46
APPENDIX	47

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Plan for the North End is a vision and six interconnected Strategic Initiatives for revitalizing the four-square-mile North End Revitalization Area of Sandy Springs, which stretches from Dalrymple Road in the south to the Chattahoochee River in the north, from Georgia 400 to the west side of Roswell Road.

Among the ideas and projects envisioned by the Plan:

- Centered, walkable, mixed-income communities with multiple uses.
- A landscaped, lighted pedestrian and biking trail that connects the communities with one another and to the Chattahoochee River and its public lands. We propose calling this “the Greenline”.
- A walkable Roswell Road that no longer divides the North End but connects it to the new communities.
- A variety of housing types and prices that maintains the diversity the North End already has and invites others to move there.
- A community center that becomes one of the principal ways people in the North End come to know one another.

The Plan also recommends a starting point for revitalization: a “catalyst project” that can demonstrate how centered, mixed-income communities can work. The Task Force recommends that this project be located in the North River area.

As requested in the mission statement drafted by Mayor Paul, the Task Force recommended roles that the City of Sandy Springs could best play and roles it should expect others (landowners, developers, other governments, nonprofits and citizens) should play.

Among the most important roles that the City should play:

- Act as a partner with a private developer in the catalyst project. The North End has obstacles that have held back revitalization. By acting as partner, the City can help reduce these obstacles enabling implementation of development practices that can also work elsewhere in the North End.
- Act as planner and builder of infrastructure, but do so in partnership with private interests and others. By bringing others into plans, we may find it can significantly reduce the cost of trails, roads and community buildings.
- Act as convener and collaborator with other governments. In creating a walkable Roswell Road and connecting the North End with the Chattahoochee and its public lands, the City will have to engage other governments, from the Georgia Department of Transportation and the National Park Service, to the City of Roswell and Cobb County. The Task Force is confident that these other governments will recognize the benefits of a revitalized North End and will work with the City of Sandy Springs.

You will also find in this Plan the mission statement of the Task Force, a vision statement for the North End, a description of how the Task Force approached its work, and a list of its members.

MISSION OF THE NORTH END REVITALIZATION TASK FORCE

The mission of the North End Revitalization Task Force is to create a vision and plan for revitalizing Sandy Springs' North End that is achievable and sustainable, that benefits the city as a whole, and that creates a place for the families presently living in the neighborhoods. In doing its work, the Task Force will describe the role that the city should play in this plan, the roles that others—including businesses and landowners—will be asked to play, and will recommend a set of actions for the City Council to consider in 2019.

VISION FOR THE NORTH END REVITALIZATION AREA

It is 2043 and the four-square-mile area once known as the North End Revitalization Area is now a **thriving set of linked, walkable communities**.

A central feature of the North End is **the Greenline, a landscaped, lighted non-automotive trail** that is the primary way residents and visitors move from one community to the next in this part of the North End. The Greenline connects to the river, creating much greater **access to the Chattahoochee and its public lands**.

Another central feature are **the communities** themselves. Each of these mixed-use, mixed-income communities has a **distinct sense of place**. The communities are served by new streets and interparcel connections, and by shared parking facilities.

One thing that brings everyone together in the North End is its new **community center**, which offers activities from a variety of community organizations.

Roswell Road is now walkable, with safer crosswalks, slower speeds, bike lanes, and retail and restaurants serving the northern part of the city.

The North End has become a diverse **“lifetime community”** that has maintained its **historic mix of ages, incomes and backgrounds**. This means there are a variety of housing options, from apartments for young college graduates and condos for senior citizens to middle-class and luxury housing for families.

There are also, mixed in with the market-rate housing, apartments and homes for families of modest incomes.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: Plan developments that are centered in communities, are walkable with a mix of uses, are connected to the Greenline, and offer mixed-income housing including affordable, workforce and “lifetime” housing options.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: Build “the Greenline” as a non-motorized way of moving through the North End.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: Make Roswell Road walkable.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4: Create connections throughout the North End.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5: Create access to the Chattahoochee River and its public lands.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: Build a community center for the North End.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: Plan developments that are centered in communities, are walkable with a mix of uses, are connected to the Greenline, and offer mixed-income housing including affordable, workforce and “lifetime” housing options.

Why this is important to revitalization

At the heart of our vision for a revitalized North End is a new approach to development. This approach aims to bring more residents to the North End while making sure that existing residents have a place in what is built. It also aims to make the North End a place where people can live a lifetime—as single adults, as families, as seniors—thanks to a mix of housing types and financial options.

The key is to create a “sense of place” at various points (or nodes) in the North End. Having mixed-use developments that are walkable is one way of creating this “sense of place.” The best way of doing this, we believe, is through developments that are centered in communities, with appropriate scale and public amenities such as parks that encourage residents to know one another, and with new forms of mobility, such as walking and biking trails.

To do this, we recommend two early efforts: One, develop policies and plans for the North End that will create the centered, mixed-income, walkable communities with a mix of uses that we will spell out below. Two, begin with a “catalyst project,” an early example of how this new kind of development can take place. We urge that both of these efforts take place simultaneously because, in planning the catalyst project, the city will learn more about the plans and policies it will need to spread this style of development throughout the North End Revitalization Area.

It is important to note that we do not recommend any effort to require that landowners change their existing properties. If they are content with their existing land uses and these land uses comply with city standards, they should have the ability to continue their current business models. But as landowners or developers seek *new* uses for the land, we urge the city to have a plan and set of policies in place to guide development—again, as community based, mixed-income, walkable communities with a mix of uses that are served by new forms of mobility.

We are aware that one part of our vision is unfamiliar to many in Sandy Springs: the idea of mixed-income communities. But as we will explain below, mixed-income communities are growing in number and scale around the country, including in the Atlanta area, while creating healthy and diverse communities. And we see this ability to unite the wonderfully diverse citizens of Sandy Springs, while presenting homeownership options for those previously unable to qualify for a home in Sandy Springs, as a better alternative than the concentration of older multifamily rental housing currently in place. We are convinced that mixed income is better for working families, better for the affluent and middle-class families who will move to the North End seeking a sense of place, and better for the city as a whole.

Background

The ideas behind this Strategic Initiative came from the citizens during the North End Revitalization Task Force’s July 2018 visioning session. In that two-hour session, 270 citizens worked in small groups describing their vision for the North End. By the end, they had come up with nearly 350 ideas and images of the North End as it could be in 25 years’ time. Among the

most widely shared images were walkable communities with a mix of uses that offered affordable and workforce housing as well as middle-class and affluent housing, and “lifetime” housing options.

Since July, the Task Force has searched for ways to make the citizens’ vision a reality. This led the Task Force to City plans like “Next Ten,” which foresaw the development of “nodes” in different parts of the North End. The term we have used for nodes is “centered communities.”

We also have become aware of a number of successful mixed-income developments in other parts of the Atlanta area. We believe the Pinewood Forest community in Fayetteville in particular represents the type of walkable, owner-occupied housing with a variety of price points that would work in Sandy Springs.

We have come to feel strongly that the starting point should be a “catalyst project” creating a sense of place, one with enough scale to show how mixed-income, walkable communities with a mix of uses can work. As you will see in Section 5 of this report, “Where to Begin,” we have suggestions about where such a project could be located and how the city could work with developers in a way that ensures that this initial project succeeds and becomes a template for projects to come.

Obstacles

The greatest obstacle is finding the right mix of policies, plans and financial incentives to begin private-sector revitalization. This is the reason we think the first step is to begin with a catalyst project created by a strong partnership between the City and a developer. In this project, policies and plans can be developed that can guide the revitalization of the entire North End.

During the planning for the catalyst project, many specific obstacles will arise. But we can anticipate several:

- Current Sandy Springs building code and policies (e.g. wood frame construction limitations, parcel interconnectivity, parking regulations) will likely be a barrier to the kind of mixed-income, mixed-use developments we envision. Current zoning ordinances will also be a barrier for these kinds of developments. Local regulations add a premium to the cost of redevelopment projects, as compared to other local jurisdictions.
- Land costs are currently too expensive to justify owner-occupied redevelopment without public partnerships or outside resources, especially on sites that have an existing (and financially sound) use. And there are very few raw land development sites in the North End. Redevelopment sites exponentially increase the costs of a project for the developer, as they must consider the current income-producing ability of the property when making an offer to purchase.
- Higher costs associated with topography on many parcels will also increase the costs of development and increase the challenge of creating affordable and profitable developments.

Recommended starting point: The “catalyst project”

The challenges we’ve listed above serve to make this point: We suggest starting with a catalyst project that can show others how walkable projects can work in the North End and can serve as a

template for future developments. Successful mixed-income projects create a sense of place and offer housing in a variety of price points, sizes and styles within the same community, such as Pinewood Forest in Fayetteville. To do this, the city must be committed to a partnership that will work through the obstacles and find good answers for revitalizing the North End.

The right kind of catalyst project, we feel, would focus in its earliest stages on green space and owner-occupied housing to create its sense of place and would produce excitement about the potential of the North End. A walkable connection to the Chattahoochee River would further enhance the sense of place. In time, the project should also include other components of the vision, including mixed-use and mixed-income “lifetime” housing that could attract everyone from millennials to downsizing seniors.

You’ll find more about our catalyst project recommendation—including a location we think could work for this project—later in this report.

DEVELOPMENT ACTION STEPS

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Identify the initial catalytic project location that can create a “sense of place” for North End revitalization	Appoint a North End Revitalization Zone Committee (NERZC) with industry and financial expertise to assist City staff in outreach to development community	City Council	Less than 3 months	
	Issue RFP for developers to master plan an area in North End that can support a catalyst project with scalable mixed-use and mixed-income housing	City of Sandy Springs	6 months	
	Begin discussions about a potential public-private partnership for a scalable mixed-use and mixed-income project, based on RFPs	City of Sandy Springs Development partner	1 year	
	Execute MOU outlining terms of public-private partnership	City of Sandy Springs Development partner	1-2 years	
	Begin construction	Development partner	2-5 years	

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Signal to market that the City is committed to revitalization in north Sandy Springs	Adopt a new “North End Revitalization District” that includes the areas of the North End that will be part of this revitalization effort	City Council	Less than 3 months	
	Fund a feasibility study of all the development nodes identified in the Next Ten Roswell Road Small area plan	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Engage national homebuilders to raise awareness and discuss opportunities in the North End that can support scalable mixed-use and mixed-income projects	City of Sandy Springs NERZC	Less than 6 months	
	Engage with national retail and office developers to raise awareness and discuss opportunities in North End that can support scalable mixed-use and mixed-income projects	City of Sandy Springs NERCZ	Less than 6 months	
	Address security perceptions by adding additional police patrols / code enforcement	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	
Address financing “gap” for private development for initial catalyst project	Consider multi-year funding for future land acquisition for a catalyst public-private project in the North End	City of Sandy Springs	1-3 years	\$1MM- \$1.5MM per acre
	Adopt fee waivers and other incentives an initial catalyst master planned project for projects within the “North End Revitalization District”	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Lobby the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to include eligible Sandy Springs census tracts in future applications for federal Opportunity Zone status	City of Sandy Springs Georgia Department of Community Affairs	3 months	

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
	Offer property tax abatement programs to offer tax savings for qualified economic development projects within the North End Revitalization District	Sandy Springs Development Authority	1 year	
	Explore opportunities for first-time homebuyer programs, including possible down-payment assistance programs, as in Marietta and City of Atlanta	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	
Identify City policies needed to provide flexibility for development projects in the North End	Concurrent with catalyst project, City assigns resource to complete comprehensive study of baseline data on public schools, housing, transportation and business in North End. Data to inform NERZC in making policy recommendations; provide annual report to City Council	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	
	Instruct NERZC committee to work with staff to address regulatory obstacles within the North End Revitalization District	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	
	Adopt a North End Revitalization Zone that could provide relief from certain regulations to incentivize initial investors in the catalyst project	City of Sandy Springs	6 months	
Encourage mixed-income housing options	Use policies and incentives to encourage mixed-income housing, including waiving impact and permit fees	City of Sandy Springs	Ongoing	
	Explore how the City can provide financial assistance for existing property owners to renovate properties in exchange for keeping housing affordable	City of Sandy Springs Community Development	Less than 6 months	
	Begin discussions with large national homebuilders about opportunities throughout North End that can support scalable mixed-income projects	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
	Educate developers on public-financing options that are available for mixed-income housing, such as state and federal Low Income Tax Credit (LITC) and aligned public research studies (ULI, Federal Reserve, etc).	City of Sandy Springs Ga Dept of Community Affairs	6 months	
	Explore incorporation of an Affordable Housing Impact Statement during the public zoning process to help with monitoring of mixed-income housing throughout Sandy Springs	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Assign City resource to engage with philanthropic community in providing creative solutions to preserving and expanding affordable housing	City of Sandy Springs Non-profit community	6 months	
	Upon the successful implementation of the catalyst project, reassess incentives and regulatory “abatements” to that could require mixed-income in future housing projects	City of Sandy Springs	5-10 years	
Ensure private development will be connected with any future parks	Prioritize parks projects within the Master Plan to focus in North End	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	
	Engage with Path 400 for a study and creation of a master plan of connected paths throughout the North End Revitalization District	City of Sandy Springs	Less than 6 months	

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: Build “the Greenline” as a non-motorized way of moving through the North End.

Why this is important to revitalization

It is important for the city to signal to landowners, developers, current residents of the North End and future residents that it is committed to revitalization—and that the North End will look and work differently in the future than it does today. The Greenline, a landscaped, lighted network of walking and biking trails connecting all parts of the Revitalization Area, would be that clear signal of change.

The Greenline would help create a unique “sense of place” for the developments that will follow. It would underscore the idea of the North End becoming Sandy Springs’ most walkable community. And it would take advantage of one of the North End’s issues, its hilliness. Because of topography, not every part of the North End Revitalization Area is suited for development. Through careful planning, we can convert the hilly areas into green space and connect them to housing and retail with the Greenline.

As technology evolves, new forms of personalized transportation, such as electric scooters and carts, could join pedestrians and cyclists on the Greenline. We also think there is great potential for the Greenline to connect with a larger system of trails, such as the regional PATH trails.

Background

There is nothing like the Greenline in Sandy Springs today, but there are many examples of landscaped trails elsewhere—trails that have transformed the neighborhoods they pass through. A partial list of urban trails built in the last 20 years: the High Line in New York, the 606 trail in Chicago, the Rail Park in Philadelphia, and, of course, the Beltline in Atlanta.

Obstacles

There are two primary obstacles to building a network of trails: land and money. That is, obtaining the rights of way and paying for trail construction and upkeep. (These are, of course, the same issues facing streets and roads.) A third issue would be regulation. As technology changes how people move about, it may cause the city to reconsider what forms of personal transportation should be permitted on the Greenline. For that reason, we think the trail should be built for walking and cycling, but city officials may want to keep an open mind about future transportation forms and their use of the Greenline.

Financial sources

The City will need to prioritize capital projects for the North End during its annual budget process. In addition, it will need to identify alternative funding sources.

What the city's role can be; what others must do

The city's role should be to plan the Greenline's route, appearance and dimensions; identify ways of constructing and maintaining the trail; own the trail and regulate its use as public right of way; and build it in sections as it becomes practical to do so.

But it should not attempt to do everything. For one thing, we will need developers to donate land to the Greenway as they submit their plans for new construction—just as we expect neighborhood developers to participate in planning and building streets.

We also believe there is a role for citizens groups to take a hand in maintaining the trail, perhaps through a "Greenline Conservancy" that could help maintain the landscaping and upkeep.

GREENLINE ACTION STEPS

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Accelerate investment in trails, as adopted in City’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Plan (2014)	Identify alternative funding sources to accelerate design and construction of Tier II TSLOST projects, including possible “loan” from general fund	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	TSPLOST Tier II \$5.5M
Continue encouraging private development to consider non-motorized connections throughout North End	Require bike racks and other pedestrian infrastructure as part of building code	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	N/A
	Require parking maximums in City Zoning code for North End	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	N/A
	Engage planning firm to determine possible alignment / location for the Greenline	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Discuss Greenline options with property owners and residents to educate on its benefits	City of Sandy Springs	2 year	
Create pedestrian + bicycle connection on Roswell Road bridge	Currently in the design phase. It is a City of Roswell project, and they pushed it back until at least FY 2020. Encourage City of Roswell to participate in building of previously approved project	City of Sandy Springs City of Roswell	1 year	Sandy Springs funding already approved

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Implement shared parking solutions with MARTA/ATL Station and near Roswell Rd. and the River (shared parking or parking deck)	Work with MARTA/ATL for shared parking solution as part of a future transit or BRT station	City of Sandy Springs MARTA/ATL	2 – 5 years	TBD
	Explore opportunities for shared parking facility on any redevelopment that occurs within ½ mile of Chattahoochee River	City of Sandy Springs Private developers	2 – 5 years	
Explore circulator with protected lane, potentially shared with personal electric vehicles (bicycles, scooters, etc.)	Partner with PCID/Dunwoody to explore connection with employment centers	City of Sandy Springs PCIDs City of Dunwoody	2 – 5 years	
Explore alternative funding sources to accelerate City’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Plan (2014)	Inventory parcels and identify property owners for possible ROW donations or negotiated easements	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Approach property owners to educate them on benefits of ROW donations or negotiated easements, including possible tax benefits of conservation easement.	City of Sandy Springs	2 – 5 years	
Explore potential use of above-grade transportation solutions to lower ROW costs and to overcome topographic challenges		City of Sandy Springs	6 – 10 years	

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: Make Roswell Road walkable.

Why this is important to revitalization

Roswell Road is a critical part of the North End, one of its two major North-South corridors (with Georgia 400). We recommend that Roswell Road continue to serve as a major corridor while adapting it for the vision of the North End as a walkable community with mixed uses. At a minimum, this means “calming” traffic along its route through the North End, making it much easier to cross on foot, and better connecting its existing retail areas with new developments likely to be built east of Roswell Road. In short, we call this a “walkable Roswell Road.”

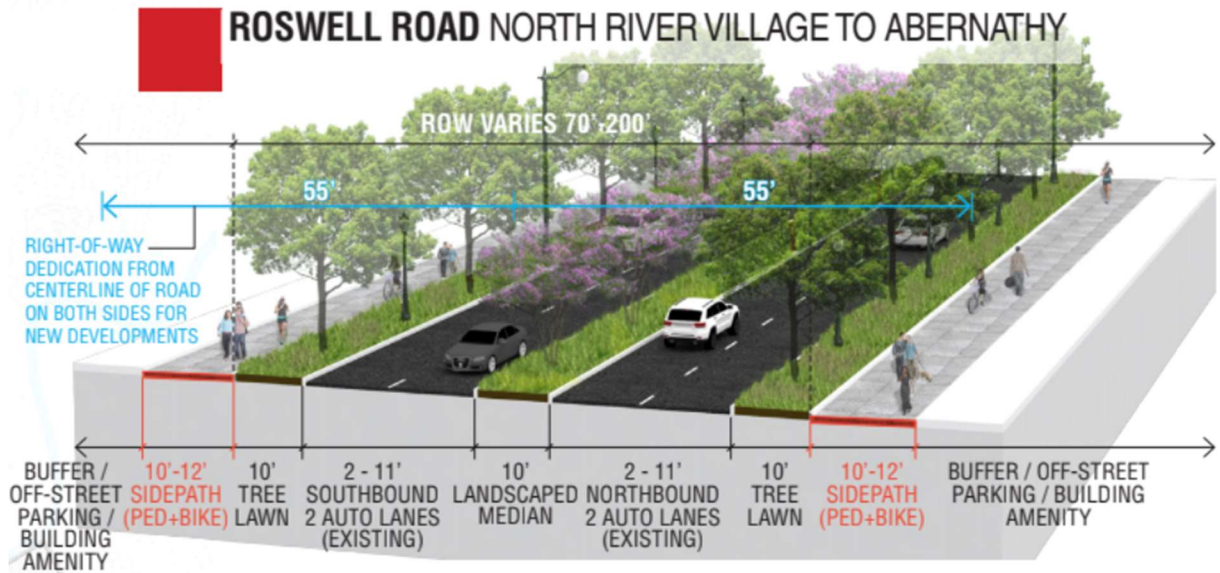
In the process of making Roswell Road safer and more pedestrian and alternative vehicle friendly, there is also an opportunity to create a protected lane for autonomous vehicles, people movers and personalized electric vehicles, such as scooters, electric bikes and golf carts. Providing these options could ease traffic while actually increasing the movement of people and could make Sandy Springs a leader in the changing world of transportation technologies.

Background

The City adopted in its 2017 Comprehensive Plan, The Next Ten, the concept of making Roswell Road into a “boulevard.” Part of The Next Ten laid out a Roswell Road Small Area Plan, which showed how the City could increase east-west connectivity while establishing bicycle, pedestrian and other alternative transportation modes along Roswell Road. It also explained why a boulevard design would enhance both revitalization and mobility.

With the area from Abernathy to North River/Chattahoochee having the most extensive tree canopy, this is the logical beginning point for the process of “boulevarding” the length of Roswell Road. It would give a warmer, parkway feel for those using it by any means of conveyance.

The Roswell Corridor Livable Communities Initiative as well as The Next Ten called for controlling the rights of way from 55 feet of centerline. This along with an inventory of existing rights of way would make sense to implement the already adopted priority of the City.



Obstacles

To the usual obstacles of land and money, add a third: ownership. Roswell Road is a state road, which means that the Georgia Department of Transportation must approve any major changes to it. And our neighbors to the north, the City of Roswell, will also have a say in how Roswell Road is changed. Others would have to be consulted about changes in the road, from the U.S. Department of Transportation to MARTA/ATL. There are, after all, many MARTA bus stops along Roswell Road. No doubt, the Atlanta Regional Commission would also have a voice.

Finally, there are the landowners along Roswell Road, who must be brought into a conversation about walkability and its benefits for their stores and businesses.

The good news: What we are proposing fits the current thinking about how urban roads should function, not simply as corridors for cars but as contributors to quality of life and community development. In short, we think others will be open to our efforts to make the Roswell Road corridor a walkable place.

People Mover



Autonomous Vehicle



Pedestrian Safety Island



Fully Protected Bike Lane



Financial sources

To make a change such as we are proposing would not be inexpensive. The concept of boulevarding and creating protected lanes for bicycles and other alternative transportation modes would be available for competitive grant funding from the Federal Government from several sources, including Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) and transit dollars, as well as accessibility dollars. In the next round of Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST), the City should choose to make this a funding priority. In the meantime, we should begin planning and engineering which may come out of the City's traditional Capital Improvements budget.

What the city's role can be; what others must do

At this point, the most important thing the city can do is engage others in planning for Roswell Road and complete the planning that it can do on its own (see Action Steps below).

WALKABLE ROSWELL ROAD ACTION STEPS

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Accelerate Next Ten plan to “boulevard” Roswell Road	Prioritize capital projects in North End (North River to Abernathy Rd) in annual budget process	City of Sandy Springs	1 – 5 years	
	Identify best locations for pedestrian crossings along Roswell Road	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Explore improved zoning district in North End with less onerous streetscape requirements for private development to encourage redevelopment	City of Sandy Springs	6 months	
	Understand Roswell Road ROW width needed within North End for protected bike lanes and future circulator or future tech	City of Sandy Springs GDOT	1 year	
	Consider public investment in streetscape along Roswell Road to signal City’s commitment to North End	City of Sandy Springs	2 – 5 years	
	Ensure Roswell Road improvements consider autonomous vehicle accommodations	City of Sandy Springs GDOT	Ongoing	

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Explore alternative funding sources to accelerate plan	Inventory parcels and identify property owners for possible ROW donations or negotiated easements	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Approach property owners to educate them on benefits of ROW donations or negotiated easements, including possible tax benefits of conservation easement.	City of Sandy Springs	2 – 5 years	
	Create public-private partnerships by using PILOTs (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) to fund streetscape and infrastructure on redeveloping parcels	City of Sandy Springs Sandy Springs Dev. Authority	1 year	
	Work with City Attorney to explore possible Tax Allocation District (TAD) district in the north end	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Engage with PATH Foundation and Sandy Springs Conservancy to produce inventory of existing parcels and possible interparcel connections	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	\$75,000
Create autonomous vehicle protected lane on Roswell and for circulator	Meet with representatives from automakers (e.g., Mercedes-Benz) to see what full requirements are for protected lanes to bring autonomous vehicles to Sandy Springs (and the North End) as quickly as possible. Sandy Springs could be a “first mover” in this effort if handled properly and quickly.	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
Create safe pedestrian islands	Identify where pedestrian safety islands could be created to allow for narrower crossing points, allowing for safe pedestrian and bicycle crossing of Roswell Road	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4: Create connections throughout the North End.

Why this is important to revitalization

As development proceeds in the North End Revitalization Area, we will need additional connections of all kinds: streets, sidewalks, parking, walking trails and so on. This is particularly important to the vision of the North End as Sandy Springs' most walkable community. And because of the area's past development, interparcel connection is not good. This makes it difficult for today's residents to walk even short distances for shopping, recreation or transit. If revitalization is to be successful, we must address these connection issues.

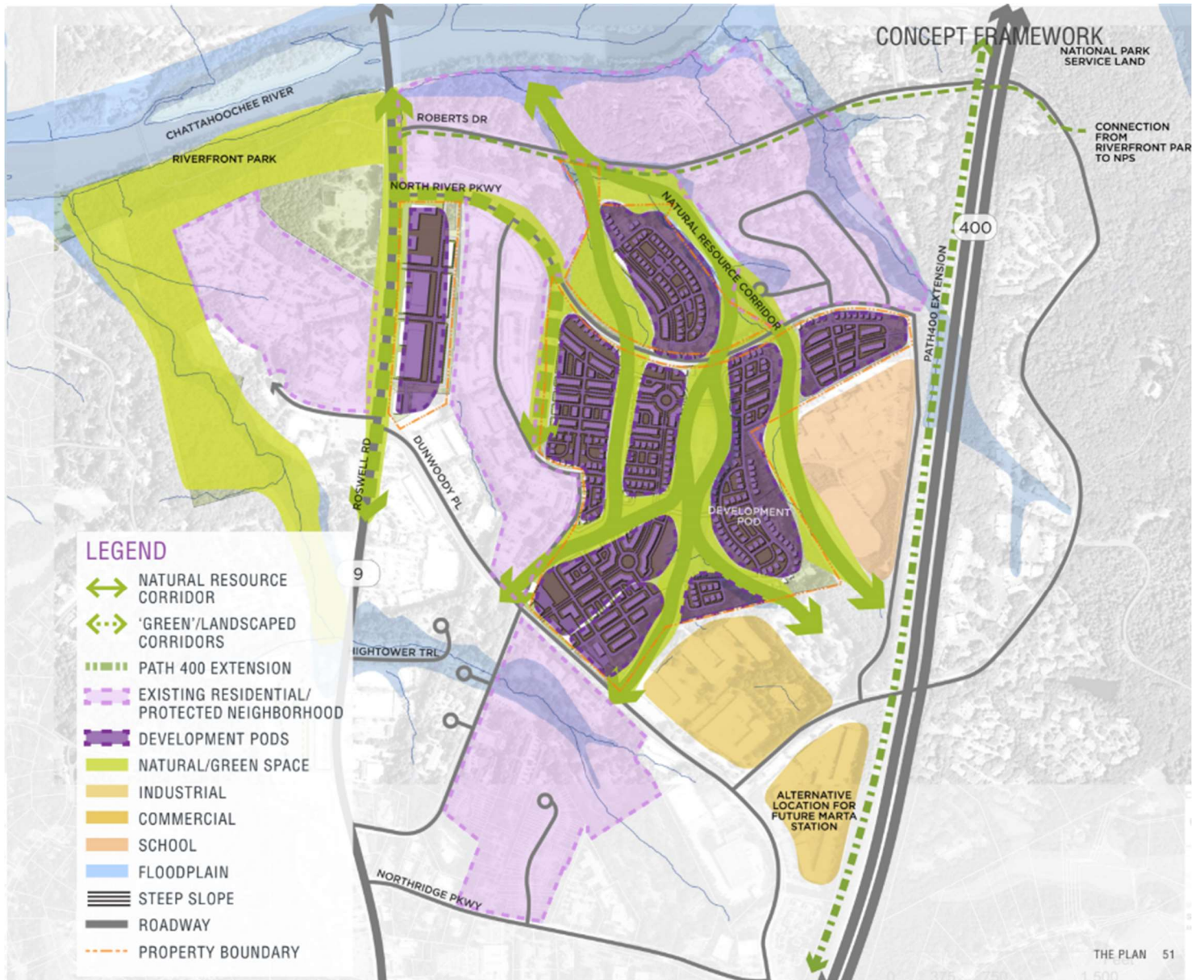
We also urge the city to think carefully about parking in new developments in the North End. As more people move to the Revitalization Area, we must make sure that land is used in its most productive way. Parking is usually seen as an unproductive use of land, so minimizing the parking needs will be important. This probably includes shared use of parking structures and providing alternatives to driving, so families that may have needed two cars in other neighborhoods can get by with one car in the North End.

Background

The Next Ten plan took notice of the need for additional connectivity in the North End. It described connections similar to the "Greenway" outlined in Strategic Initiative 2, while also calling for more east/west vehicular connections.

The Next Ten also outline the need we see for connectivity to the National Park Service lands along the Chattahoochee River (see Strategic Initiative 5). And with the planning taking place around the next MARTA/ATL station, MARTA, GDOT, and the City are already working on how we can have "last-mile" connections that make the station much more effective.

In other words, this initiative builds on the foundations laid by these efforts, plus the City's Bicycle Pedestrian Plan adopted in 2016 and the Roswell Road Small Area Plan, adopted in 2017.



Obstacles

As with any infrastructure development, land and money are the primary issues. We think, though, with careful planning—and an eye to multiple uses of land (such as utility rights of way that could also function as pedestrian and bike trails)—there are opportunities to reduce land acquisition costs. We are also aware that developers will be as eager to create greater connectivity as the city and residents will. So the opportunity for partnership in the development of connections is quite strong, we believe.

Financial sources

This work will be funded mainly through the City's General Fund Capital Improvements budget, but there are possibilities for some state and federal funding for alternative transportation. Also, some connections are required in redevelopment projects, as well as greenspace allowances within the existing zoning code.

What the city's role can be; what others must do

The city's role should be to plan the connections that will be needed for North End revitalization; identify ways of constructing and maintaining these streets, sidewalks and trails; set appropriate standards for parking; be sure that new developments have appropriate connections within and between them; and be prepared to build and maintain new streets, sidewalks and trails as needed.

But it should not attempt to do everything. For one thing, we will need developers to donate land for interparcel connections as they submit plans for new construction—just as we expect neighborhood developers to participate in planning and building streets.

And the City must work with regional agencies such as MARTA/ATL to build transit ridership. For the City, this means the planning of streets, sidewalks, and developments near transit stations and bus stops to can maximize transit ridership. For MARTA/ATL, this means building and maintaining facilities that bring the greatest number of people to its service

CONNECTIONS ACTION STEPS

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Use storm water facilities to enhance pedestrian connection and lower costs of redevelopment	Study possibility of shared storm water detention facility in North End	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
Create small parks as entry and landing points for the North End	Construct storm water detention facility in north end similar to March Creek BMP and O4W.	City of Sandy Springs	2 – 5 years	City and GA EPD City funded, developer refunded at time of development
Encourage interparcel pedestrian / non-motorized connections in areas where topographical challenges many limit ability to connect	Consider changes to zoning code to allow for non-vehicular interparcel access where topography makes vehicular access difficult	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
Ensure that future transit stations in North End are well connected to neighborhoods	Explore options for connections with MARTA/ATL, including possible pedestrian bridge over Roberts Drive for connection with future station	City of Sandy Springs MARTA/ATL	2 – 5 years	
	Prioritize eligible projects in North End in any future regional transportation plans and funding	City of Sandy Springs	2 – 5 years	

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Explore opportunities for using existing utility easements to enhance connections throughout the district	Engage with Georgia Power to hire consultant to identify easements	City of Sandy Springs Georgia Power	1 year	
Create early Greenline section and other connections by connecting Roswell Road and Colquitt on GA Power easement	Work with landowners (multifamily) to allow for construction of Greenline segment and with GA Power to address safety concerns. Auto Dealership is already allowing access at Roswell Road	City of Sandy Springs Georgia Power	1 years	City of Sandy Springs Non-Profit grant

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5: Create access to the Chattahoochee River and its public lands

Why this is important to revitalization

It is critical to revitalization that we take advantage of the North End's existing assets. One of its most important is its proximity to the Chattahoochee River and the public lands along its banks. By creating greater access to the river, we could greatly enhance the North End's quality of life for existing residents and those who might live there in the future. We believe greater access would also be important to residents of other Sandy Springs neighborhoods who might visit the North End.

Creating access to the Chattahoochee would also be important for Strategic Initiative 2, which is about building the Greenline. The Greenline is a walking and biking trail that would tie together all the communities in the North End Revitalization Area. If the Greenline also connected to the river, as we suggest, it would not only give residents and visitors a way of moving around the North End but a major attraction to visit as well.

Background

The need for better access to the Chattahoochee River from Sandy Springs is well known and thoroughly documented by City studies. For example, the Roswell Road Small Area Plan at the North River Node discussed the idea of improving connections across the Chattahoochee at Roswell Road.

There are also opportunities, we believe, for connecting the North End to the river west of GA 400 and east of Roswell Road. This is because of the large land parcels there that are under single ownership and have comparatively flat terrain. Roberts Drive has been identified as a future connection in the city's trail plan so it could be an access point to the river.

By comparison, most of the parcels west of Roswell Road are in single-family neighborhoods with extreme grade changes, making access to the river difficult and rights of way expensive. There are, though, several properties immediately to the west of Roswell Road that have good access and could be leveraged as a pedestrian connection by creating a safe passage under the bridge.

The city's Comprehensive Plan discussed the need to better connect Sandy Springs to the River and listed some of the ways of doing so:

- Partner with the National Park Service to conduct a planning study that identifies opportunities for improving access to the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area from Sandy Springs, as well as trail and greenway connections along the river.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area via a trail or side path along Roberts Road, between the Island Ford Unit and Roswell Road, as well as opportunities to connect to the future bicycle/pedestrian bridge across the Chattahoochee River at State Route 9 / Roswell Road.
- Partner with the National Park Service to pursue federal funding (such as a Federal Lands Access Program grant) to support trail connections to and along the Chattahoochee River and a series of footbridges that could link Sandy Springs and Cobb County. These trails could also connect with to existing and future trails

There are multiple opportunities to work with landowners in the area, including Georgia Power, which owns a parcel between the private property office building at 9040 Roswell Rd and the Huntcliff Preserve property at 9090 River Run. The company may be persuaded to donate the land for use as a trail or park.



Property near 9040 Roswell Road



Properties West of GA 400

Another opportunity for connection to National Park property exists in the Morgan Falls area. The city's Comprehensive Plan talks about the need for better connectivity east and west in the Morgan Falls Area and discusses a trail that could connect Morgan Falls Park with Roswell Road—and, possibly, connect to future trails across Georgia 400 to Dunwoody.

The City should explore the idea of better connections with and across the river at Morgan Falls with Cobb County officials and the National Park Service and consider a feasibility study to determine the best connection points between the two jurisdictions. Having a new connection over the river at Morgan Falls would be a benefit for Cobb residents, as well as Sandy Springs citizens.

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MORGAN FALLS AREA



- Blue = Potential Ped/Bike Bridge to Cobb (final land point unknown)**
- Green = Athletic Fields Existing and Potential New Open Play Field Space**
- Red = Dedicated Future Greenway**
- Pink = Desired Future Greenway**
- Purple = Potential Passive Greenspace with Trails (Powers Cemetery is here)**

Obstacles

Any changes that affect the Chattahoochee must involve multiple governments working together. This includes state and federal agencies but also neighboring local governments in Cobb County and Roswell. This kind of collaboration is difficult and time-consuming, but necessary to ensure connections.

There are restrictions on construction near the river that must be worked through for access to the Chattahoochee to be successful. This may require some innovative engineering solutions, such as boardwalks.

Finally, these new connections to the river must be paid for. Sandy Springs has identified funding for some trail projects in the medium term, through TSPLOST Tier II (Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax). However, the City should identify alternative funding sources to accelerate design and construction of these projects, as well as other trail opportunities throughout the north end.

Financial sources

The City will need to prioritize capital projects for the North End during its annual budget process. In addition, we recommend the City identify alternative funding sources. With the recent competition of the City's Recreation and Parks Master Plan, there is an opportunity to engage citizens about alternative funding sources for trails and other recreational assets. Some funding ideas to consider:

- Parks Bond Referendum
 - City of Alpharetta (2016): \$25 million
 - City of Brookhaven (2018): \$40 million
- Revenue bonds, backed by hotel-motel tax collections. The City of Brookhaven raised \$15 million for the Peachtree Creek Greenway with revenue bonds.

What the city's role can be; what others must do

Planning and collaboration are the two roles the City of Sandy Springs can play right now: planning where the most promising access points could be, how they could be built, and how they could be paid for; and convening other governments and stakeholders on a conversation about the benefits of greater access.

As the revitalization of the North End takes place, as anticipated in Strategic Initiative 1, there may be additional opportunities for creating access to the Chattahoochee. When developments near the river are proposed, the city should look for ways of expanding public access.

CHATTAHOOCHEE ACCESS ACTION STEPS

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Accelerate investment in trails, as adopted in City’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trail Plan (2014)	Identify alternative funding sources to accelerate design and construction of Tier II TSLOST trail projects, including possible “loan” from general fund	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	TSPLOST Tier II \$5.5M
Explore opportunities for viable Chattahoochee River connections close to Roswell Road	Approach private landowners for long-term public-private opportunities to partner on park opportunities	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Execute feasibility study for Morgan Falls connection to Cobb County	City of Sandy Springs Cobb County	1 year	\$50,000
	Approach Cobb County and National Park Service to construct connection	City of Sandy Springs Cobb County	2 year	TBD

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Create pedestrian + bicycle connection on Roswell Road bridge	Currently in the design phase. It is a City of Roswell project, and they have pushed it back until at least FY 2020. Encourage City of Roswell to participate in building this project	City of Sandy Springs City of Roswell	1 year	Sandy Springs funding already approved
	Partner with property owner just west of Roswell Road at river for possible pedestrian access under the bridge	City of Sandy Springs Property owner	1 year from pedestrian bridge completion	TBD
	Approach Georgia Power to supplement property with donation of adjacent parcel	City of Sandy Springs Georgia Power	1 year from pedestrian bridge completion	

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: Build a community center for the North End.

Why this is important to revitalization

In Strategic Initiative 1, we recommend building mixed-income and “lifetime” communities in the North End. It is important to this approach that we find ways for neighbors to meet and learn about one another. One way this can happen is through a community center that offers a wide range of services and activities. The North End has no such community center today. We think building one in the North End would be an important addition to a diverse community.

Background

It is important to build a sense of community in the North End and a community center could be an excellent way of doing this. Done right, it could serve as a gathering place for residents of all ages and income levels and offer activities from a variety of community organizations. An example of this type center can be found at George Pierce Park in Gwinnett County.

Activities might include:

- Arts and cultural based programming, as outlined in the Recreation and Parks Master Plan
- Community education classes (possibility homeownership courses and personal finance classes provided by area nonprofits)
- Social and leisure activities such as crafts, bridge and wine-tasting classes
- Self-defense and CPR skills taught by public safety officers
- Skill-sharing classes taught by neighborhood residents. For example, crocheting, canning and gardening.
- Neighbor game nights

This community center concept would be to provide both an indoor and outdoor space that is appropriate for a wide range of uses. As owner, the City could implement partnerships with private operators or nonprofits for programs that could fill the center with activities. This may also offer ways of sharing operating revenues and costs with other entities.

In addition to a community center, there is a long-term desire in the community for a natatorium (or aquatic center). An example of this type of center can be found at the West Gwinnett Aquatic Center in Gwinnett County. The need was most recently spelled out in the City’s Recreation and Parks Master Plan (2018).

A natatorium could have multiple uses, such as:

- Local high school swim team practices and meets
- Regional high school swim meet facility
- Recreational uses including summer fun at the swimming pool
- Other athletic events such as triathlons



The preferred site for a community center should provide all of the needs of the center itself (adequate parcel size to accommodate the facility and parking), but it should also further revitalization in the North End. For that reason, we believe the ideal site would:

- Be in close proximity to the Chattahoochee River.
- Connect with the National Parks along the river and other park amenities via green space and paths.
- Be accessible by non-motorized transportation options, such as the Greenline.

The preferred site for a natatorium would share many of the same attributes as a community center. However, it need not be in close proximity to the Chattahoochee River.

Although a natatorium and community center could be part of a single site (potentially lowering land acquisition and construction costs), the city should also consider separate sites that would spread the benefits to different parts of the North End. We recommend that future land acquisition for any park sites should consider underutilized commercial properties within a half-mile of the Chattahoochee River, as an opportunity to redevelop these properties.

Obstacles

The greatest obstacle for a community center or a natatorium is funding for construction and operation. However, with the city's recent completion of its Recreation and Parks Master Plan, the timing is right for the city to begin to work with the community on the priorities of such recreational facilities. Land-acquisition costs, though high, are somewhat lower in the North End than in other parts of the city, which makes this area an opportunity for efficient use of public funds.

Financial sources

Land-acquisition and construction costs for construction of these facilities would likely need capital funding beyond an annual general fund allocation. Given the price of such projects, it may be beneficial to consider some type of bond financing where the costs could be spread over several years. If so, the city should consider authorizing a citywide parks bond referendum, asking voters to support the community center and natatorium as part of a larger investment in parks throughout Sandy Springs, as indicated in the 2018 Recreation and Parks Master Plan. Although recreation and parks projects throughout the city would be funded as part of a referendum, it would be important to North End revitalization to include a community center and natatorium for the North End in the list of projects.

While it is not likely to be a money-maker, it is worth noting that natatoriums and community centers could generate some revenue that would offset operational expenses. For a natatorium, that might include charging for team practices or meets. A community center may have spaces that could be rented for birthday celebrations and private meetings. A feasibility study would indicate a potential level of revenue offset.

Finally, we think there are possibilities for partnerships that could assist with operating costs. The public schools are an obvious partner, as having a swimming complex that high school teams could use would clearly benefit the schools. We may also find opportunities for partnerships at the community center or the natatorium with nonprofits such as the Metro Atlanta YMCA. Finally, there are opportunities for philanthropic gifts and even naming rights for these facilities.

What the city's role can be; what others must do

The City's role should be to confirm the feasibility of the planned facilities, to align these centers with the Recreation and Parks master plan, to secure land, and to identify and secure means of financing the design and construction of these community centers.

Local nonprofits and schools will need to indicate their uses for these facilities and their willingness to help support them financially.

COMMUNITY CENTER ACTION STEPS

Recommendation	Actions	Responsible Party	Timeline	Funding
Create a catalyst community center and natatorium project (s) in the North End	Fund a feasibility study for natatorium and community center	City of Sandy Springs	6 months	\$50,000
	Identify possible public funding sources such as annual capital budget, partnerships with nonprofits, possible parks bond referendum	City of Sandy Springs	6 months	
Determine how to leverage public resources with private and nonprofit funding	Explore feasibility of using New Market Tax Credit financing for community center within qualified census tracts and determine City steps needed	City of Sandy Springs	1 year	
	Design and construct community center in the North End, approx. size could be 30,000 – 40,000 sf, vertical construction cost \$250 / sf	City of Sandy Springs	1 – 3 years	Estimate \$10 - \$18 MM
	Design and construct natatorium in the North End, approx. size could be 30,000 – 40,000 sf, vertical construction cost \$450 / sf	City of Sandy Springs	1 – 3 years	Estimate \$17 - \$23 MM
	Solicit interested community partners to offer recreational programming opportunities for the community center based on the Recreational & Parks master plan	City of Sandy Springs	Ongoing	
	Survey public and private schools in Sandy Springs to determine interest in having a facility for swim team practice and swim meets	City of Sandy Springs	6 months	

RECOMMENDED STARTING POINT: The “catalyst project”

For revitalization to occur in the North End Revitalization Area, it will require a new kind of development with enough scale to demonstrate the area’s potential to developers, landowners, businesses and potential residents. We suggest beginning with a “catalyst project” that can show others how walkable, mixed-income projects with mixed uses can work in the North End. This catalyst project could serve as a template for future developments.

As we outlined in Strategic Initiative 1, successful mixed-income projects must create a “sense of place” as they offer housing in a variety of price points, sizes and styles. As we learned in our six months of studying the North End, there are obstacles to doing this, involving land costs, topography, regulatory issues and reputation. This is why we recommend a “catalyst project,” a development of sufficient scale to show how mixed-income developments with a mix of uses can work, and one that’s done with a close partnership with the City, so cost and regulatory issues can be addressed in a collaborative way. As these issues are addressed, this catalyst project could be a model for future developments in the North End—all of which could be walkable, mixed-income communities with mixed uses, tied together by the Greenline.

To repeat some of what is included in Strategic Initiative 1, the right kind of catalyst project, we feel, would focus in its earliest stages on green space and owner-occupied housing to create its sense of place and would produce excitement about the potential of the North End. A walkable connection to the Chattahoochee River would enhance this sense of place. In time, the project should also include other components of the vision, including mixed uses and mixed-income and “lifetime” housing that could attract everyone from millennials to downsizing seniors.

The City would need to identify parcels or a “node” with enough scale to create this initial project. The ideal location for such a project would have as many as possible of the following attributes:

- Easy access to Roswell Road
- Assemblage of a large, contiguous acreage under a minimum amount of owners (60 to 80 acres or more)
- Proximity to retail redevelopment opportunities on Roswell Road
- Proximity to the Chattahoochee River
- Proximity to Northridge with easy access to GA 400
- Proximity to future MARTA stations, offering the benefits of a transit-oriented development
- Potential to connect with green space and parks
- Proximity to established owner-occupied neighborhoods such as Huntcliff

Looking at these criteria, **we feel the best place of the North End to locate the catalyst project would be the North River area**, which was one of the revitalization “nodes” suggested in the City’s comprehensive plan, The Next Ten.

It is not likely that this catalyst project will be feasible for the private sector to undertake on its own, so it will need a partnership with the City and innovative funding sources. At the beginning, the partnership will require the City’s commitment to help solve critical components related to the development’s financial feasibility, infrastructure and green space, the City’s flexibility with

zoning ordinances and building codes. As a full partner in such a project, we believe, the City could offer this flexibility while still protecting the public-input process, as was successfully done in the City Springs project.

Once the catalyst project is successfully implemented, the City would be in a much better position to consider regulatory “abatements” throughout the North End, and to draft design guidelines and future policy requirements that could guide future market demand, including policies that would encourage renovation of existing housing stock in the North End.

ROLES THE CITY SHOULD PLAY

In writing this Plan, the North End Revitalization Task Force considered what role the City of Sandy Springs should play—and what it should ask others to do, including landowners, developers, nonprofits, other governments and the citizens themselves. You’ll find specific recommendations throughout the Plan, but we thought we should draw these ideas together in one section.

In general, we see an important role for the City but not an unlimited one. The City’s greatest role is to be convener, planner, partner, and participant in making the North End the exciting place it can be. But it should also have high expectations of others who will benefit from the North End’s revitalization, including future residents.

In Strategic Initiative 1, you can see our recommendations for the City to act as a partner with a developer in creating the “catalyst project” that can launch the revitalization process. By being a partner, we believe the City can learn a great deal about what makes walkable, mixed-income developments successful —lessons which can then apply to future developments in the North End. Two other key roles the City can play in the revitalization of the North End is to identify funding sources that private developers can use in building affordable, workforce housing, and to set policies and incentives rewarding developers who build this housing.

In Strategic Initiative 2, you see another important set of roles for the City, as planner and builder of infrastructure which will make the North End a highly desirable place to live, work and visit. This initiative is about the planning and building of the Greenline, the signature quality of life and mobility project for the North End. But you’ll also see the “planner and builder” roles in other initiatives, such as one about creating connections throughout the North End.

Here again, partnerships with landowners and developers will be critical. The Greenline and other connections will be expensive to build, and the City should not bear the entire cost. Landowners and developers can play a major role by donating land for these connections, which will benefit their projects. Another partnership idea: Once built, the Greenline could have a role for citizens in maintaining this landscaped trail, perhaps through the establishment of a nonprofit Greenline Conservancy that can help tend the trail.

Another vital role for the City is as convener and collaborator with other governments and nonprofits. As Strategic Initiative 3 explains, it is important to the North End that Roswell Road be made walkable. However, the City of Sandy Springs does not “own” Roswell Road; it is a state highway. So to accomplish this initiative, the City must engage others, from the Georgia Department of Transportation and neighboring cities like Roswell, to regional organizations like MARTA/ATL and the Atlanta Regional Commission.

There are other Strategic Initiatives that will require the City to act as convener and collaborator, including gaining access to the Chattahoochee River and the National Parks, and the building of a community center and natatorium, which would be greatly enhanced if schools and nonprofits like the Metro Atlanta YMCA participated in their construction and use.

These are not what most people think of as traditional roles for local governments. But Sandy Springs is not a traditional government. It is an innovator in service delivery and comfortable in

the ways of negotiation and collaboration. We are confident, then, that this government can play the roles of convener, planner, partner and participant in these initiatives—without insisting that it be sole owner.

TASK FORCE PROCESS

The North End Revitalization Task Force was appointed in 2018 by the Sandy Springs mayor and City Council and began its work in July. It is comprised of 14 volunteers, drawn from a variety of backgrounds including real estate finance and development, affordable housing, nonprofit management, community involvement, and philanthropy.

In its six months of service, the Task Force held nine meetings, two of which were meetings with citizens. Here are the meetings and their themes:

July 11	Discussion of the Task Force mission and how we want to work
July 25	Citizen visioning session
Aug. 8	Understanding the current situation with the North End Revitalization Area
Aug. 22	An Emerging Vision: What could the North End Revitalization Area be?
Oct. 3	Understanding the obstacles to achieving the vision; make revisions
Oct. 18	Second meeting with the citizens: Critique the Emerging Vision
Nov. 1	Revise the vision and focus on six strategic initiatives
Nov. 14	Review first drafts of the six initiatives
Dec. 5	Review second drafts and consider alternatives; review other sections of the Task Force report; vote on the report

Between Aug. 22 and Oct. 3, the Task Force divided into work groups to look at different elements of the emerging vision, consider obstacles to achieving the vision, and offer some preliminary ideas about how to deal with the obstacles.

Task Force members were diligent about attending meetings and work group sessions, debating alternatives, and writing and critiquing the six Strategic Initiatives that are the heart of the plan. We estimate that the members collectively spent more than 500 hours in Task Force work.

Our planning process was built around three beliefs: You begin with a vision of what the North End Revitalization Area could be; You revise the vision as you learn more about the area's current situation and the obstacles facing revitalization; and the best vision ideas will come from the citizens. That's why our second meeting—and the first at which a vision was discussed—was the visioning session with the citizens on July 25, 2018.

The Visioning Session was held at Sherwood Event Hall in the North End. Working in small groups, 270 citizens offered nearly 350 ideas and images about what they thought the North End could be. During the report-outs that evening, and captured in the ideas that were written down, was a remarkably consistent view of the North End's potential: that the North End should be made up of mixed-use, walkable communities with a diversity of ages and incomes; that these communities should be tied together with walking and biking trails; that the North End should be better

connected to the Chattahoochee River and its public land. This became the Task Force’s vision and remains the vision of this plan.

At the second citizens meeting, on Oct. 18, 2018, the Task Force brought back 14 elements of the emerging vision and asked the citizens to critique these ideas, using dots signaling approval or concerns. We also asked citizens to explain their concerns, using sticky notes. This helped the group see which ideas resonated with citizens and which did not.

It was from this session that the Task Force decided to concentrate on six Strategic Initiatives— basically the most important sets of actions that the City and its partners could undertake to begin the process of revitalization in the North End and achieve the vision that the citizens offered in July.

Along the way, the Task Force learned more about the current situation in the North End Revitalization Area and why revitalization had not occurred there already. It learned about obstacles which could make revitalization difficult, such as the topography, and the Task Force became convinced of the need to begin with a “catalytic project,” one that could demonstrate the area’s potential.

Throughout, the Task Force took seriously its mission to create a place within the new North End for families who live there now. There were many debates about the best way of accomplishing this part of the mission, some of which continued until the Task Force’s last meeting on Dec. 6, 2018.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Jack Arnold, executive with Stream Realty Partners, a full-service real estate company

Carolyn Axt, former executive director of Leadership Sandy Springs

David Couchman, philanthropist

Melanie Noble-Couchman, philanthropist

Charles Crosby, executive with CORE Project Management, a construction management company, and board member of the Community Assistance Center

Jeff Garrison, partner at S.J. Collins Enterprises, a commercial real estate company

Colin Hubbard, executive at Shelton McNalley, a real estate firm, board member Sandy Springs Education Force and board member of Leadership Sandy Springs

Don Huffner, executive at Collier Enterprises, a commercial real estate firm

Patrick Jones, managing director, Walker & Dunlop Investment Sales, a real estate investment company

Richard Munger, partner/senior vice president of residential development, North American Properties

Meaghan Shannon-Vlkovic, vice president with the Southeast office of Enterprise Community Partners, which provides technical assistance about affordable housing

Ronda Smith, president of the Sandy Springs Council of Neighborhoods

Steve Soteres, Sandy Springs City Council member and vice president, Choate Construction

Gabriel Sterling, vice chair of the Sandy Springs Development Authority and former City Council member

APPENDIX

At its final meeting on Dec. 5, 2018, Task Force members voted on the overall plan and, individually, on the six Strategic Initiatives. Five of the initiatives received unanimous support; one, Strategic Initiative 1, received three no votes. The three members who voted no for Strategic Initiative 1 also voted no on the overall plan.

The Task Force agreed to make space in this report for David Couchman, Melanie Noble-Couchman and Meghan Shannon-Vlkovic to explain their concerns.

David Couchman

Not being able to reach a consensus with others on the Housing Affordability sub-group, Meaghan Vlkovic of Enterprise Community Partners, Melanie Noble-Couchman, and David Couchman created an alternative plan for submission on Dec. 5. An outline follows:

Plan developments that:

- Add new development of mixed-income, mixed-use housing on underutilized low-density land parcels.
- While recognizing the importance of preserving the housing inventory for the current workforce living in the North End.

This approach fulfills the mission of the Task Force:

- Create a vision and plan for revitalizing Sandy Springs' North End that is achievable and sustainable
- That benefits the city as a whole
- And creates a place for the families presently living in the neighborhoods.

The launch of North End revitalization with the building of a community center, access to the Chattahoochee River and other projects will immediately spark interest and rapid economic development.

Displacement of the apartments will impact the city: The apartments house 69% of the residents of the North End. As a result, the City should conduct an impact study to understand the potential effects of revitalization on the socioeconomic demographics and workforce dynamics. It needs to develop strategies to address anti-displacement and negative impact of gentrification prior to their becoming an issue.

Loss of these homes means there will be instability in the community:

- Shortage of workers for businesses
- Shortage of home-service worker (health aides, lawn, restaurant, cleaning, etc.)
- Increased traffic congestion as workers commute farther
- Reduction and disruption in public school enrollment
- And significant rebalance of socioeconomic and racial diversity (presently 68% non-white).

Many cities are realizing the value of “naturally occurring affordable housing” (NOAH) and the important benefits they serve. This needs to be an integral part of the City’s plan.

The current high demand for rental properties, reflected in the 94% occupancy rate, coupled with limited public resources to address affordability indicate we must prioritize preservation of this resource for the city’s families and workforce. Once these units are lost, they will not be replaced. Since 2005 Metro Atlanta has lost more than 10,000 units and is projected to lose another 4,000 by 2019.

New development is needed, in addition to the NOAH preservation. The North End has large tracts of low-density office space and underutilized shopping centers that are available for new mixed-income, mixed-use development to accommodate growth without impacting the families living in the North End.

Homeownership options: Combining new development while preserving apartments extends greater flexibility for homeownership for all. New developments with housing options at all incomes and the potential conversion of apartments to condominiums facilitate homeownership for first-time homebuyers.

This would give many residents an opportunity otherwise unattainable in Sandy Springs.

Preservation of existing while adding new mixed income housing brings more residents to the North End. Background: In the July and October community input meetings, concerns were expressed about:

- Gentrification (rising rents as well as displacement)
- Importance and desire to maintain diversity
- Need to both increase the affordability of rents as well as homeownership

Other cities are creating policies and strategies to address the above issues.

Other issues:

These following challenges are lessened if the existing “footprints” are used through preservation of NOAH stock.

- The City has no control of land.
- Land is costly to acquire.
- Land and construction costs are expensive.
- Topography and conservancy challenges exist on many parcels.
- Current Sandy Springs building code and policies are challenging.

Any reduction in apartments will lessen the “attractiveness” of MARTA to build a TOD regardless if it is heavy rail or BRT.

Public perception of negative impact of apartments on the community:

- Low performance in public schools,
- Higher than normal crime
- Depressed retail
- Subsidized rent for the unemployed

But facts do not support these perceptions and need to be addressed with community education.

How do we start? The City needs to proceed cautiously. It will affect:

- Literally thousands of people
- Culture, fabric and diversity of our community
- Workforce and business vitality

With community and stakeholder involvement:

1. Create a “housing needs forecast” for the city; as a part of this study conduct a feasibility analysis to fully understand:
 - The financial viability
 - Required return
 - And unintended consequences of resident displacement, to our schools, our traffic and our employers in the city.
2. Develop policies and plans for new development on the North End that will:
 - Create incentives to maximize the inclusion of mixed income in all developments.
 - Create centered, mixed-income, mixed-use walkable communities.
 - Mitigate the negative effects of resident displacement due to gentrification.
3. Develop strategies to incentivize existing multifamily property owners to renovate and improve their properties and ensure affordability.
4. Develop strategies to incentivize business owners, entrepreneurs and artists to relocate to the North End.

Melanie Noble-Couchman

I could not approve Strategic Initiative 1. This necessitated me not voting for the complete plan.

Following are the sections and excerpts which are italicized and underlined from Strategic Initiative 1, with comments as to why I did not support it.

Why this is important to revitalization:

1st paragraph:

“existing residents have a place in what is built” There are no provisions to accomplish this objective. Policies, strategies and incentives should be created before the project begins; relocation with dignity of residents within the area so their children can remain in school and they retain their jobs. <https://housing.arlingtonva.us/get-help/rental-services/relocation/>

3rd paragraph:

“develop plans/policies simultaneously with catalyst project” Why not before? Needs to be created first to discourage gentrification and loss of thousands of affordable rental units. <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/how-cities-preserved-affordable-housing-in-2017>; and http://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/city-considers-charging-fee-for-demolition-to-help-pay-for-affordable-housing_20180312075020233/1031448594

5th paragraph:

“previously unable to qualify for a home” What is entry price for homeownership and quantity of “affordable ownership” options? Georgia Dream Down Payment Program for teachers, first responders and health care professionals requires maximum purchase price \$250,000. https://www.dca.ga.gov/sites/default/files/georgia_dream_brochure_-_english_nov._2018.pdf.

“better alternative than concentration of older multi-family housing” Better alternative for whom? Currently rented at 94% occupancy. A nonprofit owner can transition these into mixed-income. If razed, we will lose our workers, mostly lower middle-income families and find it difficult to replace them. Denver is an example: <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/councilor-thinks-denvers-100m-short-on-affordable-housing-impact>

Background on this idea:

1st paragraph:

“offered both affordable and “lifetime” housing options The residents asked for both affordable rental and affordable homeownership; this plan permanently removes apartments and lower wage earners from the city. <https://www.reporternewspapers.net/2018/07/26/sandy-springs-residents-brainstorm-north-end-redevelopment-ideas/>

3rd paragraph:

“Pinewood Forest”; *“owner-occupied”* This is the plan’s example: a low-density, single-family development in Fayette County that is heavily subsidized and not proven. If we build this type of housing, we will lose the density. The current density of 10-12 units per acre makes a MARTA/ATL TOD attractive at Option 2 (contiguous to the proposed

North River location). MARTA Option 1, according to MARTA, can only be a “Commuter Station”, bringing no economic development.

4th paragraph:

“Creating a Sense of Place with enough scale” Building a large park, a community center, along with mixed-use development in old strip centers can achieve a “sense of place” with home ownership and revitalized retail without reducing affordable housing.

Recommended starting point:

1st paragraph:

“start with a catalyst project that can show others how a mixed income, walkable project...can work in the North End and serve as a template for future developments.” Creating a large, catalyst project with low density and plans for replication in the North End and elsewhere will deplete the affordable, workforce housing throughout the city, increasing traffic, pricing out our workers, depleting our public schools and leaving employers without workers.

2nd paragraph:

“Green space and owner-occupied housing...creates excitement about the potential of the North End” Is this green space for public access? Forward-thinking cities are creating this same excitement by being innovative and using underutilized office and shopping centers for owner-occupied housing. Austin, Tx Strategic Housing Plan <https://www.austintexas.gov/page/reports-publications>

3rd paragraph:

“Assemblage of...60 to 80 acres or more” Removes up to 1,200 bedrooms in 1,000 apartments, 94% occupied. Building only ownership, not including affordable rental and not allowing current residents to return doesn’t fulfill the mission.

New construction needs policy and strategy for including affordability i.e. inclusionary zoning, incentives for AMI, etc., but will not address the scale needed to house our workforce without a preservation strategy.

“best place for catalyst project would be North River area” Building a large park, a community center, etc., will be a catalyst without displacing the residents in the apartments.

4th paragraph:

“City to solve critical components related to the development’s financial feasibility” What does this mean? This plan calls for public funds, resources, zoning and ordinance concessions as subsidies to lower the cost (currently \$1 – 1.5 million/acre) to make for-profit development profitable while displacing thousands of workers. The developers are looking for the city to cover this gap. Is this how public money should be used?

5th paragraph:

“Upon successful completion of the catalyst project...”

- *“reduce abatements”* Reduce, not eliminate? How long will the city be subsidizing for-profit development in the North End? Does this mean the replications of this plan will need subsidies too?
- *“including policies to encourage renovation of existing housing stock”* Doing this at the conclusion of the catalyst project (5-10 years according to the plan’s schedule) is too late. Renovation and preservation of the apartments must be addressed before the project begins, or they are lost forever.

City loses control and massive displacement will occur in properties unrelated to the catalyst project, but within the Revitalization Area for example gentrification of the Gateway Project at Wieuca,
<https://patch.com/georgia/sandysprings/residents-know-of-displacement-for-luxury-development-mostly-through-wordofmouth>

In summary, this plan doesn’t reflect the mission, community input, direction from the mayor or pertinent best practices.

Meaghan Shannon-Vlkovic

The plan elevates smart-growth strategies for the North End of Sandy Springs, but presents significant concerns impacting families that prevented my full approval. I voted in favor of five of the six Strategic Initiatives, with the primary opposition focused on Strategic Initiative 1 due to gaps in the strategy.

Concerns:

Strategic Initiative 1, which focuses on planning developments that are centered in communities, are mixed-use and walkable, are connected to the Greenline, and offer mixed-income housing including affordable and “lifetime” housing options:

1. Does not recognize protecting and preserving existing housing and units as a priority or as an approach to neighborhood revitalization. Preservation of naturally affordable housing, which Sandy Springs has in the North End, should be a priority within the strategy. According to the information we received, 69% of the families living in the North End are in multifamily properties.
2. Does not recognize anti-displacement policies aligned within this strategy and the overall revitalization plan. At the recent Atlanta Regional Housing Forum, we were reminded that “gentrification is revitalization without anti-displacement policies”. All the strategies recommended in the North End plan will attract market interest, and the City of Sandy Springs will need to get ahead of this unintended consequence by adopting anti-displacement policies and tools to ensure the protection and preservation of families and affordable-housing options.
3. Does not recognize the importance of aligning the catalytic developments in with the potential MARTA/ATL transit expansion locations, creating equitable Transit Oriented Development (TOD) as community-centered approaches for the North End families.
4. Lacked resident input on the Task Force. Given there was no representation of the North End’s 69% renter demographic on the Task Force, it is my interpretation that the obligation and responsibility to protect the interests of these families was expected of the Task Force. In the end, there were no protections included to preserve existing homes or affordability as investment occurs.

Learning from others:

The challenges to create and preserve affordable homes in Sandy Springs are not uncommon, and cities across the country are introducing policies and tools to support the system. Lessons and practices from other cities can help support new and innovative approaches to equitable development strategies. One example is the Nashville TN Equitable Development Plan: Promising Practices to Maximize Affordability and Minimize Displacement.

https://www.nashville.gov/Portals/0/SiteContent/Planning/docs/NashvilleNext/ResourceTeams/Housing_Gentrification_EquitableDevelopment.pdf

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is the regional planning agency serving the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. They have found:

- “Anti-displacement strategies can help communities manage neighborhood change resulting from new investment in housing, businesses, and infrastructure representative of increased market demand. “
- “Doing so can help mitigate the impacts of such change on lower-income households in particular, helping to distribute the benefits of new investment among all members of a community.”

An example tool for anti-displacement is the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in Boston, which created a Managing Neighborhood Change Anti-Displacement Strategies Tool Kit to support its 101 cities. Similar to MAPC, the North End plan presents an opportunity for the City of Sandy Springs to work with the Atlanta Regional Commission on similar preservation and anti-displacement strategies. (<https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/managing-neighborhood-change-anti-displacement-strategies-toolkit/>)

A recent report on Preserving Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing in Metro Atlanta (NOAH) shares recommendations and interventions by policy makers, foundations, developers and nonprofits. Building relationships with sellers and brokers is one of the initial recommendations identified in the NOAH report.

(<https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/download?fid=9645&nid=7096>)

An example of a city taking this approach is Seattle. The City of Seattle incorporated working with owners/sellers into its Preservation, Equity and Anti-Displacement programs and tools , where the City Council passed an Notice of Sale Ordinance requiring that all properties five or more units report to the City’s Office of Housing their “intent to sell”.

(<http://www.seattle.gov/hala/about/preservation-equity-and-anti-displacement>)

Approved in 2015, the “notice of intent to sell” provides the City with information about the sale of properties with rents affordable to low-income tenants in order to support preservation of these properties. The City, in partnership with the Seattle Housing Authority and community partners, can use the notification information to evaluate properties and deploy a range of property preservation tools, including incentives and acquisition.

Summary:

The Task Force’s mission stated we were to “create a vision and plan for revitalizing Sandy Springs’ North End that is achievable and sustainable, that benefits the city as a whole, and that creates a place for families presently living in the neighborhoods.” To mitigate displacement of present families, preservation and anti-displacement policies will be necessary. In addition, a market study to support a housing plan that leverages market conditions, while preserving affordability and homes of current residents needs to be completed to inform an equitable development strategy.