



BELTLINING: GENTRIFICATION, BROKEN PROMISES, AND HOPE ON ATLANTA'S SOUTHSIDE

HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE AND
RESEARCH|ACTION COOPERATIVE

OCTOBER 2017



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
I. Introduction	5
Solutions	8
Methods	9
II. Atlanta History and Public Policy	11
The History of Broken Promises: The Atlanta Way	11
Profile: Alison Johnson, Housing Justice League member, report author	11
The Atlanta BeltLine	14
The BeltLine as Environmental Gentrification	16
Affordable Housing Policy	18
III. Cautionary Signs of Gentrification	22
Old Fourth Ward's Cautionary Tale	22
Wider Signs of Gentrification	23
Neighborhood Spotlight: Adair Park	24
IV. Residents' Hopes and Fears	28
Hope for "A BeltLine for Us All"	28
Pittsburgh's Sense of History	29
Peoplestown	30
What the BeltLine Promises	31
Profile: May Helen Johnson	32
Profile: Sohna Harneez	33
Profile: Rakia Reeves	34
Fears	36
Survey in Brief	41
V. Solution	45
What the City Can Do, for the BeltLine and Beyond	45
The County and State: Protect the Rights of Residents and Tenants	48
Residents Taking Action	49
VI. Endnotes	51
VII. Appendix	55
Appendix A: Quantitative Methods	55
Appendix B: Qualitative Methods	56
Appendix C: The BeltLine and Gentrification Types	57
Appendix D: Survey Questions	60
About the Authors	64

Maps and Graphs

Figure 1: Map of BeltLine Neighborhoods	7
Figure 2: Map of Property Values in BeltLine area, 2015 Sales	15
Figure 3: Old Fourth Ward Income Distribution, 2010 and 2015	22
Figure 4: Adair Park Income Distribution, 2010 and 2015	24
Figure 5: Gentrifying Neighborhoods Near the BeltLine	26
Figure 6: Number of Southside Census Tracts Facing Gentrification by Type	27
Figure 7: Survey Respondents by Race	41
Figure 8: Household Income of Survey Respondents	41
Figure 9: What Do Residents Value and Appreciate in Their Community?	42
Figure 10: How Satisfied are Residents with Aspects of Community?	43
Figure 11: How Often Do you Talk to Your Neighbors?	43
Figure 12: Method for Categorizing Southside Tracts near BeltLine	56
Figure 13: Map of BeltLine neighborhoods with BeltLine Planning Subareas	58
Figure 14: Gentrification Types of Census Tracts	59

Cover photo by James Diedrick

A mural by Australian artist Fintan Magee oversees a parking lot in Atlanta's gentrified Fourth Ward near the BeltLine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the residents of BeltLine communities who completed our survey and shared their stories for this report.

This report was a collaborative effort between the Housing Justice League (HJL) and Research|Action Cooperative (R|A) with considerable support from HJL volunteers, Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) Atlanta members, and the Local Data Design Lab at Georgia Tech.

HJL is a grassroots, member-led organization working to empower renters and homeowners to self-organize and defend their right to remain. We fight to preserve affordable housing, prevent gentrification, and build neighborhood power for an Atlanta-wide housing justice movement.

Research|Action Cooperative is a worker-owned firm of seasoned professionals who champion research and popular communication as vital and necessary to the project of social change. We pride ourselves on helping turn research into effective communication tools and action no matter the scale. Core to our mission is an awareness of the power relations in research across a range of social and economic inequalities.

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We would like to thank Professor Dan Immergluck for sharing his insight, data, and analysis. And thank you to all those who provided support with photographs, survey canvassing, transcription, analysis, editorial review, writing assistance, and proof-reading, including: Erin Saltmarsh, Brandy Blake, Aaron Thorpe, Richard Hunsinger, Sherise Brown, Timothy Franzen, Anthony Romano, Athri Ranganathan, Hannah Chappell-Dick, Joshua Barkan, Jeffrey Diedrick, Maggie Kane, Todd M. Michney, and the many others who consistently volunteer with HJL and helped out in various ways throughout the process.

This research was funded in part by the Fund for Southern Communities Economic Justice Initiative (FSC) and the NPU-V Community Investment Fund (CIF). We acknowledge, however, that the findings and recommendations presented in this report are those of HJL and Research|Action Cooperative, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the FSC and CIF.

Cite this report as Housing Justice League and Research|Action Cooperative. *BeltLining: Gentrification, Broken Promises, and Hope on Atlanta's Southside*, October 2017.



I. INTRODUCTION

The Atlanta BeltLine, which will ultimately be a 22-mile loop of green parks, trails, and streetcars circling inside city neighborhoods along discontinued rail beds, is a force for gentrification and displacement of long-time, low-income residents, many of them Black. But it does not have to be. Built upon a survey and participatory action research project largely in three historic Black neighborhoods on the Southside near the BeltLine, this report tracks the hopes of the residents for the development, how they are actually affected by it, and the forces of gentrification that, if left unimpeded, will damage the economic and racial diversity that long-term residents and newcomers alike say is a strength of the area.

Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. is a public private partnership launched in 2005, when the Atlanta City Council, Atlanta Public Schools, and Fulton County all empowered a new Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District to fund both parks and housing—only 5,600 units of it affordable—in neighboring areas. The hope of the BeltLine lies in its initial promises: to spur equitable development and to include a robust affordable housing strategy to prevent displacement.

But as Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. itself acknowledges, almost midway through the 25-year-long development period, fewer than 1,000 units of affordable housing have been built in the area, far short of the original goal, even as housing prices near the greenways are rising faster than in the city as a whole. This means the area is losing far more existing affordable housing than it is creating. And there are no rent regulations or alternative property tax policies to stop the surge.

After focusing largely on the east- and west-side neighborhoods, Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. has turned its attention to the Southside portions of its path—where many of the city’s historic Black neighborhoods lie.

Southside residents are fighting for their say in a project that will radically reshape their neighborhoods, but that is currently being directed by Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. They are fighting to improve and preserve what is best in their communities so they can stay in the areas they know and love. These neighborhoods—including Adair Park, Peoplestown, and Pittsburgh—have seen broken promises and divestment for decades. As Alison Johnson, a Peoplestown resident and Housing Justice League member who helped author this report, says, it is time to break this cycle:

Communities on the Southside deserve to be a part of the process to shape and determine the neighborhoods where we live. We want the kind of responsible, democratic city building that gives us the best quality of life, not that which is done by and for the wealthy.

The BeltLine development is nearly half done, and its legacy is still up in the air.

A sobering warning comes from the historically Black neighborhood of Old Fourth Ward, ground zero for early BeltLine development where ground was broken in 2008 but that has faced gentrification for decades. Since 1990, longtime Black residents were displaced, the area became majority white, and the area’s median income nearly doubled.¹

Recent research co-authored by Professor Dan Immergluck of Georgia Tech shows that the BeltLine itself is causing a significant rise in home values—across the city, but most importantly in low-income Black communities on the Southside where the

BeltLine development has not even broken ground yet. The research established that neighborhoods along the southwest segment of the BeltLine, which includes Adair Park, Pittsburgh, Mechanicsville, and Westview, saw median sale prices jump 68 percent from 2011 to 2015. In addition, the administration of the BeltLine has been beset by problems. The project's creator resigned from the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership board in September 2016 as the promises of affordable housing fell drastically short of stated goals and displacement pressures on longtime residents grew.²

These are communities where the residents already face economic challenges and now are paying a premium for housing in neighborhoods that still lack basic amenities and infrastructure, and where they now worry they will be priced out. Housing Justice League members felt it was time that the human side of this story was told.

Our surveys and interviews found:

- Residents in Southside areas value their relationships with their neighbors more than any other aspect of their community and overwhelmingly want to stay put;
- People value the green space and other amenities the BeltLine can bring, but also want family-owned businesses, affordable shops and restaurants, affordable groceries nearby, jobs, public transportation to work, and more affordable housing;
- Seniors have seen a drop-off in services, including bus transportation, and need access ramps to buildings;
- People have a strong sense of history, both the good and the bad. They look back to the solidarity and self-help created during Jim Crow while also remembering the waves of displacement and disenfranchisement that continued even after Jim Crow ended;
- Residents don't feel part of the development process and found Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. meetings overly focused on park issues and not on the other needs of existing residents;
- Residents have already seen displacement from gentrification generated by the project;
- Even higher income residents value the racial and economic diversity of their neighborhoods and don't want to lose it.

For decades the city has been guided by "The Atlanta Way," an alliance of first all-white and then of Black and white elites supporting a type of economic development that pursues growth at all costs while shutting down community-led resistance. The markers of this strategy remain on the streets and in the hearts of residents, as our interviews can attest.

Our investigation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey confirmed most neighborhoods along the BeltLine south of I-20 and East of Hill Street are gentrifying, putting pressure on still-affordable neighborhoods like Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, and Mechanicsville, and providing a cautionary tale of lower income Black residents being displaced. Signs of gentrification were: a bigger proportion of white residents in a neighborhood, the growth in proportion of college educated residents, and/or increasing median income. From 2010 to 2015, we found:

BeltLine Glossary

Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. A public private partnership launched in 2005 to create housing and green space along unused rail beds circling Atlanta.

Atlanta BeltLine Partnership Founded as a non-profit ally of Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., pursuing both corporate and foundation funds.

Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District

A time-limited public entity that channeled tax receipts from other city, county and public school tax streams into the BeltLine project, under Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. control.



- The median income increased at a higher rate in most southern neighborhoods than in the city as a whole. Median income actually decreased in Atlanta during that time;
- All neighborhoods between I-20 and the BeltLine corridor saw a drop in the non-white share of homeowners. That includes Adair Park, Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, Mechanicsville, and Grant Park;
- The college-educated share of householders increased more in many census tracts along the BeltLine than in the rest of Atlanta;
- There were fewer very low-income people earning below \$25,000 in every neighborhood along the BeltLine from Memorial Drive to Hill Street;³
- Quickly gentrifying areas of Westview, Adair Park, and all neighborhoods along the BeltLine between Memorial Drive and Hill Street are witnessing ongoing displacement of very low-income people.

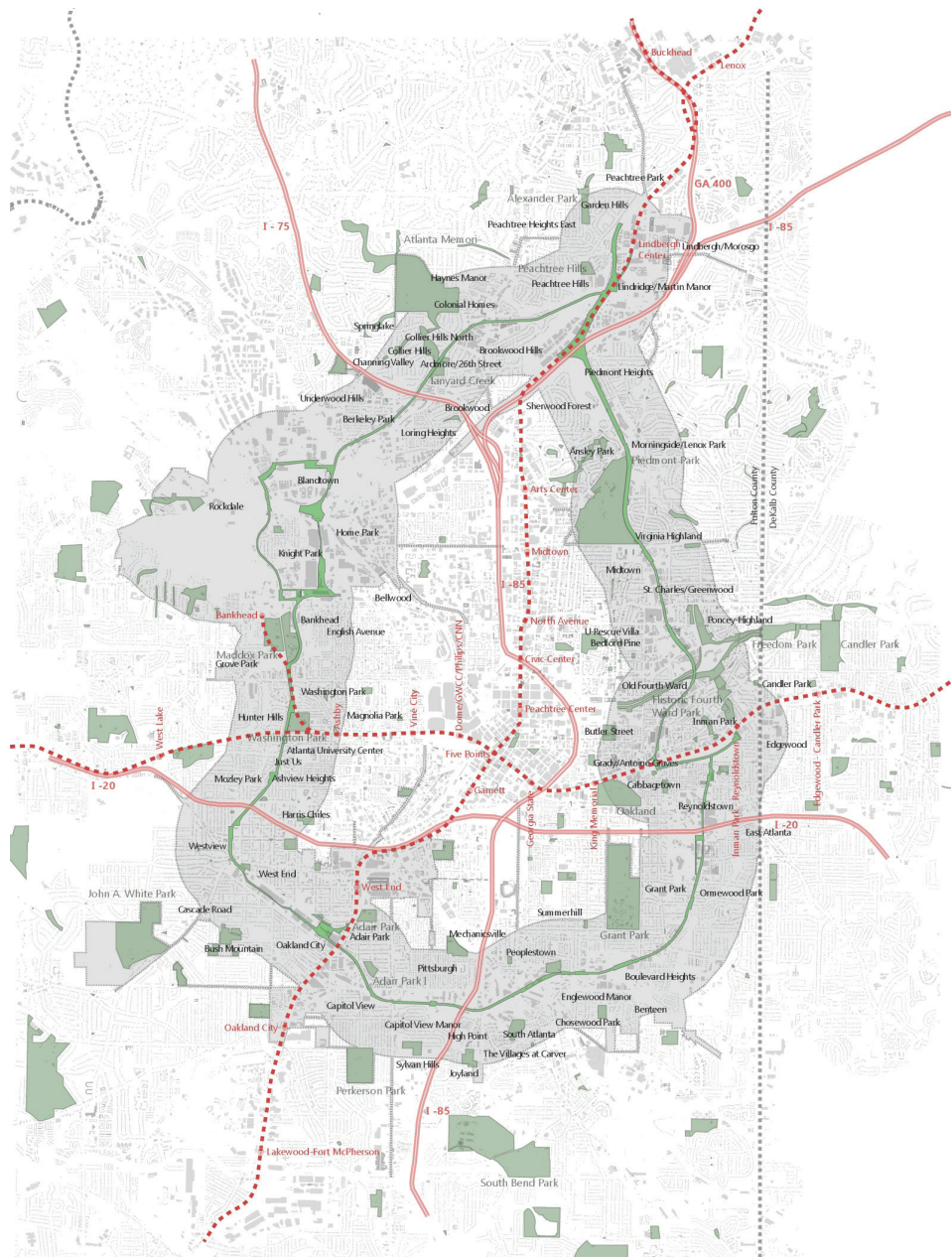


Figure 1:
Map of BeltLine
Neighborhoods



SOLUTIONS

There is another way forward. We developed these ideas during the summer of 2017 through a series of workshops involving Housing Justice League members, allies, Atlanta-area housing researchers and advocates, and residents of Southside communities. We continue to believe in collective action that joins policymakers, organizations, and everyday residents in alliance with those most threatened by displacement to ensure that Atlanta is a city for all. Suggestions emphasized the need for development, not displacement, as well as the need to respect the neighborhoods' history and culture. We advocate planning that appreciates and protects the supportive networks among neighbors and empowers people to contribute to the development of their own communities.

In addition, renters and low-income homeowners require legal protection and inclusion in the planning process. It is vital to acknowledge the long history of racism and displacement our communities have endured in order to enact public policies that work for residents.

We recommend the following.

We need to embrace new city and state laws that protect low-income homeowners and renters, not just near the BeltLine but throughout the city. This has been a long-time goal of the Housing Justice League and includes rent stabilization laws, eviction protection laws, and legal aid for tenants.

The City must reclaim vacant housing and secure property to create new housing.

We must embrace more democratic forms of controlling property to protect against gentrification, including non-profit land trusts, limited equity housing cooperatives, and expanded access to the Housing Trust Fund by community development corporations to build low-income housing.

The City must mandate inclusionary zoning within the BeltLine areas. That means requiring developers to include a certain proportion of affordable units within the new buildings. This is the most effective way we will meet the BeltLine's goal of 5,600 new units.

The City should mandate such zoning throughout Atlanta.

All levels of government must redirect public funding from programs with less positive social impact to affordable housing.

The City should use tax abatements to entice developers to build affordable housing.

The City should expand the power of Neighborhood Planning Units, citizen advisory boards launched in 1974 to advise the city council and mayor on planning in their areas.

Georgia should join other states in enacting property tax "circuit breakers" that cap how much property tax homeowners pay depending on their income. Many homeowners leave gentrifying areas because they can't afford the new, higher property taxes. This cap would protect them.

In the future, we must build the protection and creation of affordable housing into the center of planning and new development projects.

We also suggest ways long-timers and newcomers alike can be better neighbors and more active citizens. Gentrification is underway but we can move forward together and build more just and livable communities.

METHODS

The data collection and research completed for this report were conducted over a year-long Participatory Action Research Project collaboration between the Housing Justice League and Research|Action Cooperative and a large team of volunteers.

We conducted 143 individual surveys in 16 BeltLine communities and 31 interviews with residents of the communities of Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, and Adair Park. We evaluated current discussions in academic and policy literature. We drew on demographic and economic indicators compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 five-year estimates. In addition, we created a gentrification index using three indicators of gentrification and examined two indicators of displacement.

Between December 2016 and May 2017, Housing Justice League members interviewed 31 residents of Southside Atlanta communities: Peoplestown (18), Pittsburgh (six), Adair Park (three), Sylvan Hills (two), South Atlanta (one) and Summerhill (one). In interviews we asked residents to tell us more about their personal histories and experiences in Atlanta as well as more pointed questions about the BeltLine, for instance: "What are your hopes and fears for the Atlanta BeltLine?"

We focused on reaching the low-income residents in three key Southside neighborhoods: Both Peoplestown and Pittsburgh are at high risk for gentrification due to their proximity to both the BeltLine and the redevelopment of Turner Field, while Adair Park is currently gentrifying. Their voices and stories are usually left out of policy discussions, particularly when our communities are seen only as locations for future de-

Housing Justice League
volunteer researchers.

Photo by Jeffrey Diedrick



velopment. Seventy-five percent of interviewees were selected from Housing Justice League's network based on our target interview demographics, and 25 percent were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed at public events. To analyze these interviews for this report, we have gone through a process of inductive coding by theme. When a quotation from an interview is used, it represents a trend across at least a quarter of the interviews.

We interviewed 17 homeowners. Six of these homeowners live in family homes that have been paid off and are family assets, passed down over generations. Three of the Peoplestown residents live in Habitat for Humanity homes. Twelve are renters, three renting at market rate without subsidies, and nine living in low-cost multi-family units. The demographics of the 31 interviewees are as follows:

- One is white and the other 30 are Black;
- Five of those interviewed make between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, while the majority (26) make less than \$25,000 a year;
- Most, 18, were older—60 and above—many of whom had lived in Atlanta or their neighborhood all their lives, providing this report with a long arc of historical memory;
- Two were under 18, seven were in their 20s or 30s, and four were in their 40s, and 50s;
- Seven were men and 24 were women, of which four were female heads of household.

The backgrounds and interests of those with whom we spoke were diverse. Many interviewees are politically active and astute, which is unsurprising as more than half are members of Housing Justice League and have experience in community organizing, advocacy, and movement building. Along with organizers, we spoke to educators, public sector workers, service workers, retirees, college students, and the un- or underemployed. While about half of the interviewees were either born on the Southside of Atlanta or moved here when they were young, the other half moved later in life, from other parts of Georgia or from northern states such as New York and Ohio. A number of the elders were born in communities in rural Georgia or elsewhere in the rural South, following families, jobs, and other opportunities to Atlanta in young adulthood. While the backgrounds and housing circumstances of those interviewed represent a range among our target group, there were a number of common themes throughout interviews.

One of the most common themes was that of hope and a desire to remain in the neighborhoods we have fought for and labored over for generations. In this hope we hear echoes of the promise of what a BeltLine for us all could look like; one truly designed with the current community's needs and interests in mind, and with a more intentional democratic process. A full discussion of the methods, as well as a copy of the survey, can be found in the appendices.

II. ATLANTA HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY

HISTORY OF BROKEN PROMISES: THE ATLANTA WAY

Home to the corporate headquarters of Coca Cola, Home Depot, Porsche, and UPS, and with the busiest airport in the world, Atlanta is undoubtedly a city on the move. Yet Atlanta also has greater income inequality than any other major city in the country and saw the largest increase in inequality over the previous five years.⁴ Atlanta is one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the United States. Perceived as a “Black Mecca,” Black families look to it as a place to live that is neither the vehemently racist rural southern towns of the past nor the dense cities of the North or Midwest with their own forms of structural racism. This version of Atlanta is imagined as an example of the progressive New South, where people of all races work together harmoniously in “the city too busy to hate.”⁵

Alison Johnson, Housing Justice League member, report author

“My family started out in what is now a nearly forgotten neighborhood of Buttermilk Bottoms, a largely white neighborhood at the turn of the century. A fire in 1917 destroyed many of the houses and most of those that remained were the rental properties housing the Black families that worked in houses in the area. My great grandfather was a chef to a family that lived in Ansley Park, about three miles away from his house. He raised my father and my uncle when their mother married and moved with her husband up north to Detroit, looking for a better life during the great migration era.

By the 1960s the neighborhood was a working class Black neighborhood with a strong social and cultural life but also known for needing substantial improvements to the infrastructure and housing. I remember my father reminiscing about finding his grandfather standing outside of their rundown apartment with only the things he could gather when he came from work to find that their building had been condemned without warning and they were to leave the property immediately. My family moved a few blocks up, lived there for nearly five years, only to be told the exact same thing—they had to leave again. This time because of the construction of the highway. This history was not uncommon for Black Atlantans. Buttermilk Bottoms, completely razed in the 1970s, once home to 3,000 Black residents, is today the site of the Atlanta Civic Center and the accompanying businesses and parking lots.

When they left Buttermilk Bottoms, the only area they could afford was the neighborhood of Summerhill on the city's Southside. Yet with this move tragedy struck: only six months after leaving the only area my great grandfather knew as home he died. My father always equated his death to the stress of being forced to move and with each move his travels by foot to get to work got further and further.

Soon after the move to Summerhill, my parents met and married really young and began to rent a shotgun home. After about three years of renting, they were thrown out in the Leon Eplan era of “getting rid of the slums.”¹¹ They moved in with family members but just after moving learned that their relatives were also in the process of being displaced via eminent domain as the Fulton County Stadium was being built. Again they were forced to migrate out of the community to a nearby area where the homes were somewhat affordable, but the school system was failing and jobs were rare. Our family suffered a lot because of the instability of not having a secure home.

Fortunately, after moving to Kansas to support his family by obtaining his GED and a commercial driving license, my father moved back to Atlanta, settled in Peoplestown, and was employed by the City of Atlanta as a sanitation worker. Eventually he gained his rank within the City. Because of his hard work and dedication to his job, my parents were able to become first generation homeowners.

But, sadly, my father died early, and basic family survival became a struggle. Survival continues to be a generational issue for Black families in Atlanta, and it is made even more difficult with past histories and future threats of displacement. Today we still live in the Peoplestown area but are being threatened by the big squeeze of the BeltLine and Turner Field developments. Which leaves many of us wondering where we will go if price hikes drive us out yet again.”



Photo by Maggie Kane

This myth lives on despite the city's vast income inequality and extreme levels of poverty, problems created and exacerbated by the history of the "Atlanta Way."

The Atlanta Way is a top-down development approach led by business-oriented governing coalitions focused solely on "furthering the city's status as a national and global economic power."⁶ While at first white-led, Black leaders have embraced the model of growth at almost any cost since the 1970s.

These "growth" coalitions structure the development process intentionally to "demobilize and moderate" any community-led resistance to these projects.⁷ With growth as the sole priority, the conditions of poor Black communities have been not only historically ignored but exacerbated by the effects of disempowering approaches to development.

In the 1950s and 1960s, as many Atlanta neighborhoods were being developed, historian Ronald Bayor notes, "It was not unusual for white Atlantans to request from the mayor or other city official that highways be planned and built as racial barriers. And these requests were encouraged when the city's white leaders acknowledged the use of roads, as well as urban renewal, housing projects, and industrial developments, in this way."

The Atlanta Way shifted from a racial caste system to one tied to both race and class with the rise of Black leadership in the 1970s.⁸ In effect, Black and white elites agreed to set aside matters of racial strife in order to ensure that the city's business interests were protected and that the economic impact of the Civil Rights Movement—seen in boycotts and demonstrations in cities across the South—did not interfere with Atlanta's progress and prosperity.⁹

This approach has continued through to today and was most recently seen in the ways the city bypassed community concerns to push through Arthur Blank's Mercedes Benz Stadium and to hand over the redevelopment of Turner Field to Georgia State University and Carter Development without a fair contract with the community—a so-called "community benefits agreement"—in place.¹⁰

The 1960s laid the groundwork for Atlanta's rise as a modern city. Racial inequality persisted, even while the Civil Rights Movement was in full force and the end to formalized segregation began. Robert Jacob Brown summarizes the problems faced by low-income Black communities in these decades in "Respatializing Race":

*With growth as the set priority, the needs of poor Black communities were often ignored or exacerbated by urban development. Urban renewal efforts and highway construction in the 1950s and 1960s served as a white-washing effort that displaced undesired neighborhoods and low-income populations resulting in the city's population decreasing by 60,000 people during the 1960s (Lewyn 2003). Freeways cut through impoverished Black neighborhoods, dividing, displacing and disconnecting communities.*¹²

Given this history, it is even more troubling to see many of these broken promises continue today; the need for real, community voice and community-led change in city building is more important than ever.

Here are some of the unfulfilled political commitments since the 1960s that continue to shape the lives in Atlanta's low-income communities.

Public Transportation

In the 1960's the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority's (MARTA) promise was that it would offer high quality transportation, connecting communities to one another and people to their workplaces.

- Instead, many low-income people of color face more difficulty commuting, dissolution of their neighborhoods, and separation. The real progress developing MARTA in the late 1960s and early 1970s was hampered by a lack of commitment to serving Black neighborhoods and the decision by Clayton and Gwinnett County voters to reject funding for fear it could enable Black mobility.¹³

Renewal and Revitalization

Urban renewal projects in the 1960s promised to fix infrastructure problems and improve the quality of housing.

- Instead, low-income communities faced demolition, displacement, and the creation of unaffordable, tax-supported stadiums;

Urban renewal initiatives led to the demolition of hospitals, grocery stores, and entire communities in what James Baldwin famously called "negro removal."¹⁴

Rather than investing in Black working class communities, the state and the city have collaborated with private developers to fund the construction of the Georgia Dome, the Olympics Stadium, and the Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

The first Georgia Dome, built in 1992, was spearheaded by a group of investors with support from the board of the Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC). Its construction, which included the expansion of the GWCC, relied on the use of eminent domain to seize and raze 126 homes in the Lightning Community and relocate those families.

Before, during, and after the 1996 Olympics, the neighborhoods of Summerhill, Peopletown, and Mechanicsville were the most affected by the Olympic stadium and redevelopment projects.

The first Dome's legacy of benefits to the city and especially nearby neighborhoods is weak, and the plan for its replacement, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, was met with criticism and doubt from elected officials and the public. Recalling the public outcry during the negotiations over the 1992 Dome, policymakers and the Arthur Blank Foundation set up a community benefits committee ahead of time. Specific neighborhood leaders were handpicked to help outline the scope of the projects that would be funded through the process and at the last minute what was supposed to be a legal, binding "community benefits agreement" was turned into a "community benefits plan."

Affordable Housing

Atlanta was the first city where federal public housing opened (in September 1936). The housing projects around the city were once ample, although quality was a major problem.

- But the Clinton era sparked the destruction of public housing under the HOPE VI program. And since the early 1990s, there has been not only a quality problem but also a severe shortage. Throughout various moments in history, and in response to pressure from communities, leaders from Ivan Allen to Kasim Reed have promised funds for affordable housing and community-led housing development, only to change direction at the last minute or significantly reduce the amount of housing promised. This can be seen from Allen's promise to build 17,000 units in the 1960s to the BeltLine's failed promise to ensure affordability with their development.¹⁵

What flourished instead was development in the interest of business leaders that destroyed affordable housing. In the 1960s Mayor Allen chose Southeastern Atlanta for the location of a new county baseball stadium and, despite neighborhood resistance and outcry, the plans "disregarded Summerhill, Mechanicsville, and Peoplestown's interests"—demolishing local housing, inhibiting local development, magnifying traffic problems, and increasing noise pollution.¹⁶ The 17,000 affordable units Allen promised were never built. The district south of Georgia Avenue and north of Peoplestown was cleared. The area was first turned into a parking lot for the Fulton County stadium and then became the proposed site of the Olympic Stadium.¹⁷

In 1993 Atlanta received the first pilot grant under the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's new HOPE VI program—using it to replace the Techwood and Clark-Howell Homes with a mixed income development, Centennial Place.

From 2012 to 2014, 95 percent of rental units built in Atlanta were luxury units despite a dwindling number of affordable units and an increasing need.¹⁸

THE ATLANTA BELTLINE

The BeltLine project was supposed to be a break from the Atlanta Way. Georgia Tech planning student Ryan Gravel conceived of the BeltLine project in 1999 to reuse railroad tracks and industrial infrastructure that circled Atlanta, snaking through a number of residential and commercial districts. His aim was to address a host of problems throughout the city, including low urban density, suburban sprawl, limited green space, disinvestment in low-income communities, and a poor and underutilized public transportation system.¹⁹

The Atlanta BeltLine of today is a public-private partnership managed by the non-

profit Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (ABI), which manages all aspects of the project's design and implementation with government and private sector partners. The linked Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABP) is a board made up of mostly corporate executives and philanthropists who weigh in on decisions (they have one official seat on the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. board) and are responsible for fundraising from the private sector.²⁰

Many urban development projects and environmentally minded green planning projects are bound up with attention to low-income residents and affordable housing. However, when these projects rely largely on the private sector for their funding, they tend to benefit the moderate- and high-income earners and the commercial interests catering to them.

Daniel Immergluck and Tharunya Balan explain this process through an analysis of “environmental gentrification” projects like New York City’s Highline Park and the Atlanta BeltLine, which reuse and convert “underutilized or fallow infrastructure—whether rail lines, bridges, riverfronts, or roads—into large-scale parks or trail systems.”²¹ Describing this trend in urban development as seen in projects across North America, they write:

*Some of these are known as “rails-to-parks” initiatives, in part spurred by the well-known High Line in New York City, but this phenomenon often involves much more than simply park or trail development. It also entails the encouragement of real estate development – both residential and retail – near the parks and trails to increase “active living” and “walkable,” dense, urban neighborhoods surrounding the new green infrastructure. The new amenities – both public and private – are likely to draw higher-income households, and higher housing prices, with the potential to displace and/or exclude lower-income families from the surrounding neighborhoods over time.*²²

Figure 2:
Map of Property
Values in BeltLine
area, 2015 Sales



The BeltLine as Environmental Gentrification

The BeltLine is an example of “environmental gentrification,” argue Dan Immergluck and Tharunya Balan in “Sustainable for whom? Green Urban Development, Environmental Gentrification, and the Atlanta BeltLine.” This is when big players use the language of “greening” and “sustainability” to make the development leading to gentrification more politically palatable.

The Atlanta BeltLine is a transit-oriented development project designed to “adaptively reuse” an abandoned freight rail corridor, develop 33 miles of mixed-use trails, 22 miles of a light rail streetcar, more than 28,000 new housing units, and more.

Yet gentrification pressures have already built around this greening project. Housing values as measured by sales price rose between 17.9 percent and 26.6 percent more for homes within a half-mile of the BeltLine compared to elsewhere, the researchers found. The heavily Black area within a half-mile of the southwest segment of the BeltLine suffered the highest increases in median sale prices: 68 percent from 2011 to 2015. The southeast and northeastern segments rose 40 percent and the northwest area rose about 51 percent. The southwest segment, west of I-75/I-85 and south of I-20, includes Adair Park, Pittsburgh, and Mechanicsville.

These increases in median sales price were much greater than those more than a half-mile from the BeltLine. In those areas further afield, the authors found homes “increased at a substantially lower rate, just 17.7 percent over the four year period.”

Immergluck and Balan conclude that the green infrastructure is “likely to draw higher income households, and higher housing prices, with the potential to displace and/or exclude lower-income families from the surrounding neighborhoods over time,” leading the areas to become “increasingly affluent and less diverse, resulting in the environmental gentrification of the surrounding areas.”²³

Early on in the BeltLine’s planning phase, planners and advocates anticipated these consequences and emphasized the need for affordable housing. For that reason, the city ordinance launching the project promised the construction of 5,600 units of new affordable housing by 2030. It also required that 15 percent of the proceeds from the BeltLine Tax Allocation District bond be dedicated to affordable housing development through a trust fund.²⁴ The Tax Allocation District is the major funding mechanism for the BeltLine, accounting for nearly 40 percent of total funds.

The law specified what is meant by affordable. An affordable home will not exceed 30 percent of the renter’s or buyer’s income. Renters also must not earn more than 60 percent of the Area Median Income. In the home buying program, an applicant’s income cannot exceed 115 percent of the of the area’s median income.²⁵

Despite this attempt to address affordability concerns, the district has seen significant gentrification, and the BeltLine has not even been able to meet the meager goals established at the start. One reason is that the real estate bubble bursting in 2007 meant that the property tax receipts backing any bonds did not go up as anticipated (and in fact pivoted sharply downward and then stagnated).²⁶

Complicating this issue even further is the history of the structure of the Tax Allocation District itself which was set up to draw from Atlanta Public School taxes. When the

BeltLine Tax Allocation District did not produce anticipated returns, the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. did not send the agreed upon payments in lieu of taxes to the schools, to a tune of \$162 million.²⁷

In response, the Atlanta Public Schools challenged the City of Atlanta and the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., sparking a long public battle. This battle was further complicated politically by the implications of connecting the BeltLine's funding to the public schools in the first place, itself raising questions of gentrification and displacement. As Georgia State history professor Alex Sayf Cummings wrote of the project:

Critics allege that the project . . . is making poor people of color pay for the amenities enjoyed by white homebuyers who are pushing them out of their neighborhoods and putting their own children in charter schools, a choice that further saps APS of students and funds.²⁸

The Tax Allocation District itself can spur gentrification because it feeds off of rising property values, as Konrad warned in 2010. Since “[t]he Beltline’s funding hinges on development raising property values in Tax Allocation Districts, there is a great danger that, with the incentive of higher tax revenue, gentrification is ignored or even encouraged by the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. and the city government.”²⁹

Yet this is not the only reason the affordable housing policies have been insufficient. Immergluck and Balan describe the additional problems in detail:

- “[N]o provisions [were] developed to help keep housing costs affordable for occupants of existing housing units;”
- “No initiatives were planned for limiting the impact of potential property tax increases on lower-income homeowners, and none were planned for limiting possible rent increases for renters along the Beltline;”
- “Moreover, the proceeds from Tax Allocation District bonds were the sole funding source identified to fund affordable housing. This is despite the fact that the project was a ‘public-private partnership,’ and relied on another nonprofit entity, the Atlanta Beltline Partnership, to raise money for the project from philanthropic and corporate sources.”³⁰

The researchers also describe the BeltLine project’s sorry affordable housing record:

- “From 2006 through 2014, the Beltline, through the Beltline Affordable Housing Trust Fund, directly subsidized only 256 units in the Beltline Tax Allocation District;”
- “Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. claimed another 729 subsidized affordable units that were financed by the City of Atlanta’s development authority, Invest Atlanta ... Some of these latter units were located in the larger ‘Beltline Planning Area,’ which includes areas within one-half mile of the Beltline trail path. So, optimistically, Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. produced fewer than 1,000 affordable housing units (with some of these units affordable only to households with incomes as high as 115 percent of the metropolitan median income).”³¹

Furthermore, while sold at a relatively affordable price, nothing stops the new affordable units from being flipped and sold at unaffordable levels. For instance, in November 2011, the BeltLine advertised the “Lofts at Reynoldstown Crossing.” The two bedroom, two bath lofts were sold to “qualified buyers making under \$68,000—the Atlanta area median income” after a drawing, which would “provide an equitable way to give access ... for people who might otherwise be unable to purchase in town property.”³² This original deal promised down payment assistance and affordable monthly payments. However, the affordability of these houses was short-lived. As the

Atlanta Journal-Constitution has reported, condos in that complex are now selling at \$340,000. "At that price, the condo is out of reach for three quarters of metro Atlanta, according to an analysis performed by real estate data company Zillow."³³ In its investigation, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, working with the Georgia News Lab, has found that:

*While forces beyond [Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.'s] control share the blame, the agency's actions created much of this problem.... [Atlanta BeltLine Inc.] kept units that it funded affordable for only a short time; decreased spending on affordable housing as the city entered its current housing crisis; and even passed up on millions of dollars of potential funds. The untapped funds were enough to more than double the project's affordable housing budget, the investigation found. Its mission of keeping Black families and middle and low-income residents from being pushed from their neighborhoods became an afterthought to building parks and trails....*³⁴

Although Mayor Kasim Reed's spokeswoman Anne Torres has emphasized that "the city has 'significant power' to combat gentrification including the use of building permits, tax incentives," etc., and despite the fact that the city intends to attract "the right kind of developers who will partner with the city to boost its workforce housing stock,"³⁵ little has been done around the BeltLine to combat gentrification. By 2013, "[Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.] had spent only \$5.3 million on affordable housing, an amount dwarfed by the nearly \$127 million it invested on parks and trails."³⁶

The lack of affordable housing has only attracted attention in the last year, including our decision to conduct this community-led research project. In our interviews with residents of Southside neighborhoods, the broken promises of the BeltLine came up again and again. As Columbus Ward of Peoplestown describes it:

But the BeltLine could help with creating some of the affordable homeownership and rental property if they followed the guideline that they set forth. . . . They're nowhere near [their goals] and the BeltLine is about halfway through its implementation and people couldn't put their hands on more than the 900 units that might be affordable to some people but definitely not affordable to those who live in poverty or in the bracket of 30 percent of the area median income for the city.

Youth center in
Peoplestown

Photo by
Jeffrey Diedrick



AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY

The Affordable Housing Challenge

Affordable housing is simply reasonably priced housing that is within the reach of the people who live in an area. It can be rental housing or owned. It has an official definition too. U.S. policymakers usually define housing as "affordable" if the rent or mortgage payment costs at or below 30 percent of the median household income in a given area (or Area Median Income). This calculation means that affordability changes from place to place depending on the wealth and housing available in a city or town.

Although the concept is easy to define, the practice of creating affordable housing for working class people is complex and involves public policy, economic markets, and the actions of everyday citizens. Left to its own devices, the housing market is much better at developing housing for higher-income residents, including single-family housing, expensive condominiums, and high-rent apartment buildings. Further, those developers who attempt to build affordable housing often see opposition from local groups who do not want low-income residents in their communities. For example, affordable housing developers in New York State faced local opposition to their projects 70 percent of the time.³⁷

In the city of Atlanta, 56 percent of residents are renters, about 57 percent of whom are Black. Almost half of all renters pay rents that are more expensive than the standard 30 percent of income measure of affordability.

- Twenty-two percent of Atlanta residents spend between 30 and 49 percent of their income on housing;
- Twenty-eight percent spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing.³⁸

What is Gentrification?

Gentrification is urban revitalization driven by profit that results in the displacement of historically marginalized working-class communities and communities of color. Typically, these communities have struggled with too few jobs, amenities, and services because of years of disinvestment. Gentrification is led by private developers, landlords, and businesses, and often happens in areas where land is inexpensive and the potential to turn a profit is high. While development is usually framed as coming from the actions of private businesses, government policy plays a key role in promoting gentrification by offering tax incentives, zoning, and infrastructure improvements.

As neighborhoods are developed and renovated, newer housing stock attracts higher-income residents as land value, rents, and property taxes all rise. This in turn can lead to widespread displacement of community members, often low-income people of color, who are priced out. Ironically, while development brings much needed amenities such as schools, commercial districts, and grocery stores, the low-income populations most in need of such services do not reap the eventual rewards of investment. In neighborhoods like New York's Harlem, Boston's North End, and Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward, the result of gentrification is the remaking of geographic neighborhoods at the expense of the people who can no longer afford to live there.

Further, Atlanta lost 5,309 low cost rental units between 2010 and 2014.³⁹ Clearly there is a need for more affordable housing. At the same time, the waiting list for public housing in Atlanta is over 32,000 people and is currently closed. In a 2015 planning document, the city projects that of the 15,700 new units built from 2015 to 2019, only 2,800 will be affordable to residents. City planners specifically mention the BeltLine project's lack of affordability:

*The [BeltLine Affordable Housing Study] estimates a demand for 10,400 affordable housing units in the Atlanta BeltLine area over the coming decade and notes that 'without targeted programs and initiatives to create additional affordable housing there will be significant unmet demand for affordable housing in the Atlanta BeltLine area.'*⁴⁰

The Census Bureau averages show that Southside residents by and large suffer from the burden of high housing costs, especially for renters. In Pittsburgh, estimated median gross rent was more than 50 percent of estimated household income in 2010 and in 2015, way beyond the 30 percent considered affordable. In Adair Park, estimated median gross rent did not fall below 50 percent until 2015, when it dipped to 48.1 percent.

In fact, of the 19 Southside census tracts largely or completely within the BeltLine Planning Area, only three showed a median gross rent that was less than 30 percent of median household income in 2010. Five years later, just one census tract was added to that list: that of Ormewood Park, which is rapidly gentrifying.⁴¹

These trends reveal the challenge for low-income residents. They are already struggling with high rents and mortgages and low wages in neighborhoods where land values, rents, and taxes continue to rise. Meanwhile, the affluent, who have less of a housing burden and more disposable income, move in and are catered to by new restaurants, grocery stores, and other amenities.

Public Policy

The government can take a range of actions to create more affordable housing through public policy.

- **Public Housing** is built and managed by government agencies for renters who fall below certain income thresholds. The Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) owns 13 public housing-assisted residential properties, such as the Juniper and Tenth Highrise in Midtown, including 11 open to seniors and two designated for small families;
- With **Project Based Subsidies**, the government offers developers tax breaks or other incentives to create units for lower-income residents. For example, Atlanta has designated certain areas “Urban Enterprise Zones.” Developers building within these zones receive a ten-year tax abatement in return for providing affordable housing units in 20 percent of a development;
- **Tenant-Based Subsidies** are given to individual households to offset higher rents. Under the federal Section 8 program of the 1937 Housing Act, qualified tenants find housing in the private market and only pay 30 percent of their income towards the rent. Housing Choice Vouchers pay the difference;
- **Rent control and rent stabilization** are used in some cities and states to regulate how much a landlord can charge a tenant. Georgia law bans the use of rental control in the state;
- **Tax “circuit breakers”** like those in New York State give low-income homeowners rebates on their local property taxes so they are not forced out when property values increase and they are unable to afford the higher taxes that result;
- **Land trusts** take property out of speculation by handing it over to a nonprofit trust;
- **Limited equity housing cooperatives** reduce speculation by capping the sale price of a unit at an affordable level with income caps on buyers.

These programs and strategies are underused, and the demand for affordable housing programs far surpasses their supply, especially in metro areas. Tenants and low-income homeowners simply do not have as much power as developers in shaping policy. In addition, there is a wide range in how programs actually define “affordability.”

You can see the range in how “affordability” is defined in programs operating in Atlanta:

- Federal Section 8 vouchers are typically reserved for “Extremely Low-Income” households, defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as earning 30 percent of the area’s median income or lower. Landlords are not required to accept these vouchers, and few do outside of low-income neighborhoods.⁴² Nationally, two million households use them, but that is only 25 percent of those eligible;⁴³

- Atlanta developers who receive Project Based Subsidies typically target “affordable” homes to households earning between 51 percent and 80 percent of the area’s median income;
- The City of Atlanta sets affordability in Urban Enterprise Zones at 60 percent of Area Median Income.⁴⁴

A huge gap remains in policies addressing households that make too much income to receive vouchers, but not enough to afford the “affordable housing” provided by developers. This would be true even if Section 8 vouchers and project subsidies provided enough affordable housing for both low-income and extremely low-income households.

As is, government programs suffer from low funding and poor implementation.⁴⁵ And public housing, while in high demand in Atlanta and nationally, continues to shrink at the rate of 10,000 units per year across the country.⁴⁶

Starting in the 1990s, a federal program called HOPE VI sought to repair and revitalize older public housing projects and transform them into mixed income developments with row homes and duplexes instead of high-rise apartment buildings. Although relatively well funded, the new projects resulted in fewer available units overall and many of the new developments have higher income requirements. Atlanta was an early adopter of the program when it demolished two housing projects and created Centennial Place, which mixed 40 percent public housing with market-rate and affordable units in one location.⁴⁷ This became a model for the program nationally.

Photo by
Dessa Lohrey



III. CAUTIONARY SIGNS OF GENTRIFICATION

OLD FOURTH WARD'S CAUTIONARY TALE

"We need more affordable housing choices. And the elected officials need to respect the interest of the people who put them in office!" So said a resident of Old Fourth Ward who completed our survey. She lives in Wheat Street Towers, one of the few remaining Housing and Urban Development-backed Section 8 senior housing complexes in Atlanta and the very last in Old Fourth Ward.

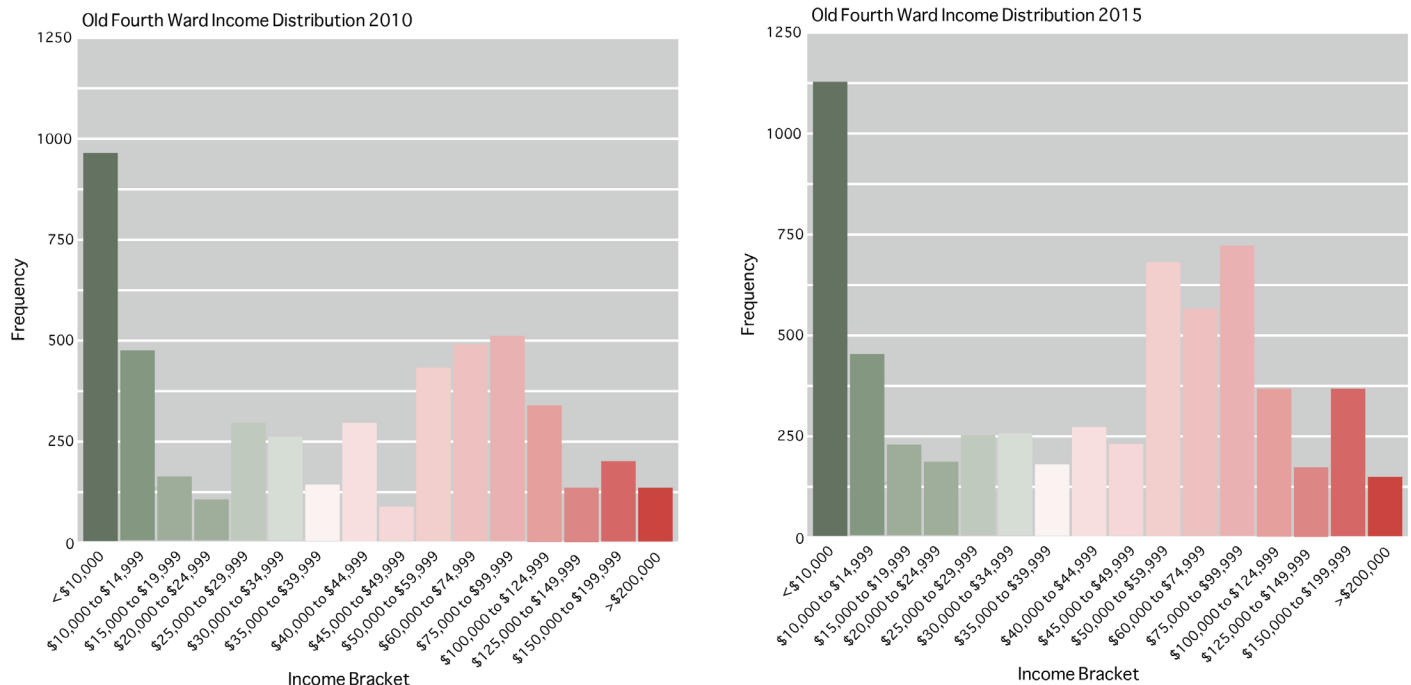
Old Fourth Ward, a historically vibrant Black neighborhood in the heart of Atlanta, is ground zero of the BeltLine development's hot market. The home of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famed Ebenezer Baptist Church, it once had a range of affordable housing options. And while the neighborhood was in need of improvements by the late 1990's, no one expected the changes that would come.

In a recent investigative piece on how the BeltLine broke its promises on housing affordability, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* detailed the issues in Old Fourth Ward, interviewing a 90-year old resident of the neighborhood who refuses to leave, despite the fact that she can barely afford the taxes:

Property taxes on the home of lifelong Old Fourth Ward resident Helene Mills, 90, have skyrocketed in recent years because of luxury construction along Atlanta's Beltline. The retired tax auditor and senior advocate said residents of the historically Black neighborhood worry they won't be able to stay. . . . Staying is a need. The new people on her street rarely speak to her and don't visit, but Mills remembers how neighbors banded together to keep the streets free of trash and revived derelict blocks by building new houses.

Figure 3: Old Fourth Ward Income Distribution

Notice the growth in better off residents in Old Fourth Ward in 2015 (the table on the right), compared to 2010 (the table on the left). At the same time, the number of the lowest income residents grew. Income brackets are in terms of nominal income.



The area was already changing before 2010, but better off white newcomers flowed in during the 2010 to 2015 time period we studied, especially in the western part of the neighborhood. At the same time, inequality increased over that five year period. In census tract 18, for instance, the estimated median income of Black-only households fell by three percent, while the estimated median income for white-only households rose by 16 percent. Though the average income increased in the area, these shifts suggest that increases were due to influxes of wealth from newcomers, not growing incomes of existing residents. Furthermore, the area shifted from just 4 percent white in 1990 to about 55 percent white today. Over the same period, median income nearly doubled.⁴⁸

WIDER SIGNS OF GENTRIFICATION

Old Fourth Ward is not the only neighborhood to experience dramatic gentrification between 2010 and 2015. There are cautionary signs of gentrification in communities neighboring Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, and Mechanicsville creeping south and west, including Adair Park. Our investigation of data from the American Community Survey confirmed most neighborhoods along the BeltLine south of I-20 and East of Hill Street are gentrifying. Signs of gentrification were a bigger proportion of white residents in a neighborhood, the growth in proportion of college educated residents, and rising median income over the five years we examined. From 2010 and 2015,

- The median-income increased at a higher rate in the southern neighborhoods than in Atlanta as a whole. Median income actually decreased in Atlanta during that time;
- The college-educated share of householders increased more in all census tracts along the BeltLine than in Atlanta as a whole;
- There were fewer people of color in Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and Chosewood Park in 2015 than in 2010;
- There were fewer very low-income people earning below \$25,000 in every neighborhood along the BeltLine from Memorial Drive to Hill Street;⁴⁹
- The quickly gentrifying areas are Westview, Adair Park, and all neighborhoods along the BeltLine between Memorial Drive and Hill Street. You see ongoing displacement of low-income people in all these areas and in West End.

Immergluck and Balan tracked the jump in property values near the BeltLine as a sign of gentrification: The majority Black area within a half-mile southwest of the BeltLine suffered the highest increases in median sale prices. That includes Peoplestown, Mechanicsville and Adair Park. An increase in property values means an increase in property taxes, forcing some lower income homeowners to sell to higher income people who can afford the taxes. Even the citywide policy lowering property taxes on people's primary residences—"homestead exemptions"—can't insulate them and does nothing for their renters.⁵⁰

We traced the income, educational, and racial shifts south of the BeltLine as markers of gentrification and found them in the communities neighboring Peoplestown, Mechanicsville, and Pittsburgh. In other cities, educated whites with modest incomes are often the first wave of gentrification. They are not as great a force in these parts of Atlanta, except in West End and Harris Chiles. Together, the neighborhoods extending from GA 29 to I-20 (called "BeltLine subarea one") saw the white population more than double

Photo by Dessa Lohrey



Neighborhood Spotlight: Adair Park

Adair Park, a Southside neighborhood situated between the Belt-Line, the MARTA public transit north-south line, and Metropolitan Parkway, has a history of first white flight, then gentrification, and the marginalizing effects of both. In the 1950s, under Jim Crow and at the onset of the urban sprawl that now characterizes Atlanta, Adair Park quickly transitioned from a working-class white neighborhood to a Black one. This was in spite of deliberate efforts by segregationists to keep Black Atlantans from moving in.⁵²



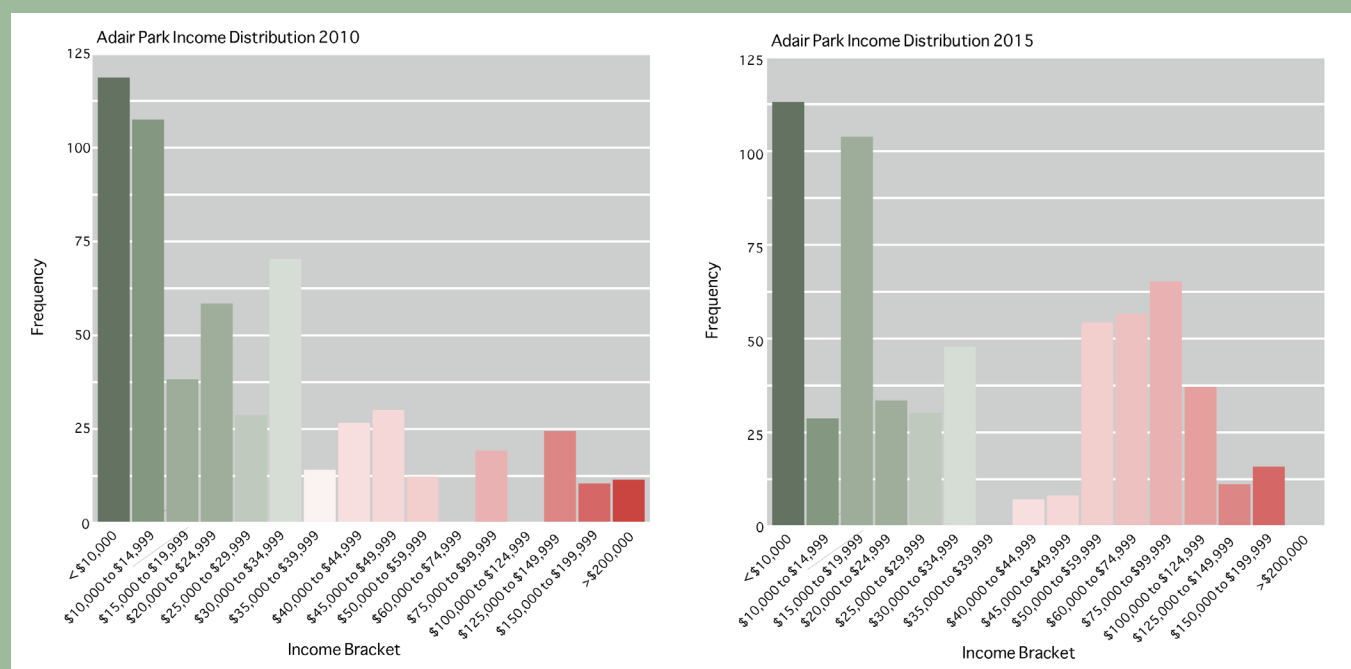
Photo by Jeffrey Diedrick

In Adair Park between 2010 and 2015, as the overall population and occupied housing units rose, the white share of householders increased 4.3 percentage points, from 16.4 percent to 20.7 percent. Another one of our markers of gentrification, the share of householders with a bachelor's degree, also rose by 8.8 points, from 17.7 percent to 26.5 percent. And the median household income went up by 29 percent, from \$20,339 to \$26,250.

Consider this is a time when median household income in Atlanta went down by 2.6 percent. Given the trends of stagnating pay for low-wage workers, Adair Park's steep increase in median income does not appear to be about rising incomes for residents, but rather, is likely due to more affluent residents moving in.

Figure 4: Adair Park Income Distribution, 2010 and 2015

In five years the estimated population earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 increased by about 150, while the estimated population earning less than \$20,000 fell by just 12. Brackets are in terms of nominal income.



A look at the changes to income distribution in Adair Park (Figure 4) supports this, showing that between 2010 and 2015 there were roughly the same number of households earning below \$20,000, while the estimated number of households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 increased substantially.

Adair Park residents we interviewed reflected on changes in the neighborhood. One Black resident observed that not only were the incomes of his neighbors changing but the racial demographics were changing as well. "There is more money moving in, of course. But we have also already seen, on our block alone, about five different white families and we just added another one on our block in the past four-to-five months."

Government data suggests the Black share of owner occupants dropped by eight percentage points over the five year period we looked at. Of the 20 surveys we collected while canvassing in Adair Park, seven, or 35 percent of respondents were white and 12, or 60 percent, were Black. Half were renters and half were owners:

- Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed said they want to remain in their neighborhood;
- Sixty percent indicated that they are worried about housing cost increases;
- Forty percent noted that an increase in costs would prompt them to move.

Nine of the twenty are considered very low-income or low-income, eight were moderate-income, and three were high-income. Of the nine very low-income or low-income people we surveyed, six, or 66 percent of households are housing cost-burdened, defined as spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Four of those six, or 44 percent spend between 50 and 80 percent of their income on rent, making them severely cost-burdened according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



A portion of the Beltline Trail in Adair Park.

Photo by Jeffrey Diedrick

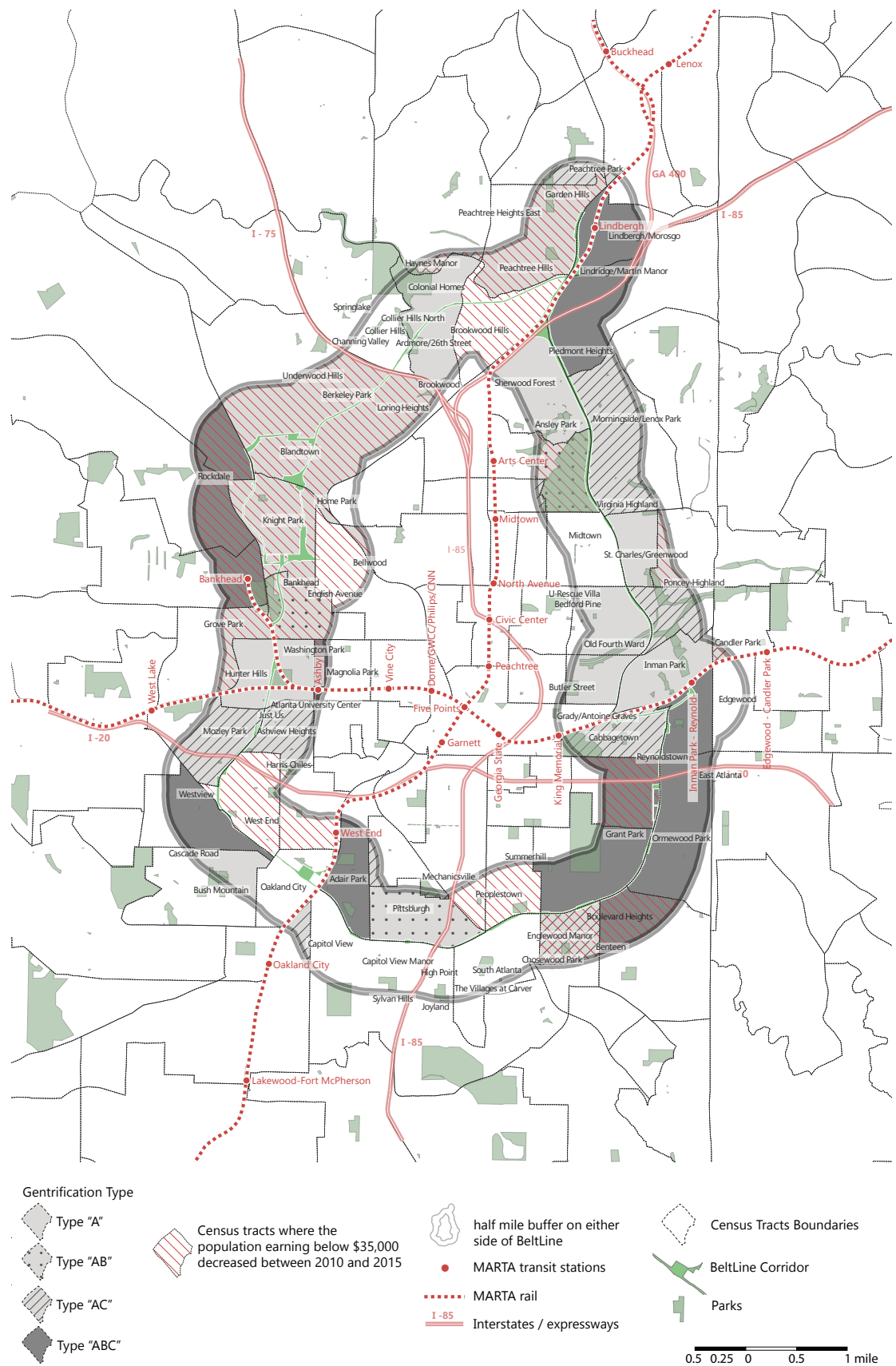


Figure 5: Gentrifying Neighborhoods Near the Beltline

This map shows the shape of gentrification in neighborhoods according to our index looking at changes in median income, white-only share of householders and the college-educated share of householders from 2010 and 2015. The numbers for each census tract were compared to those in the City of Atlanta, based on 5-year American Community Survey tables. "A" signals that median income grew more than in the city as a whole in those five years, "AB" signals that income surge plus the shares of white-only householders grew more than in the city as a whole. "AC" signals the income surge plus more growth in the college educated share of householders than in the city as a whole. Type ABC tracts saw greater than Atlanta average increases in all three indicators. See appendix A.

and average white median income increase by almost half, to \$65,000. The average Black median income in those areas was \$22,000 in 2015.

Adair Park and Westview, it would seem, are in the early stages of gentrification, since the very low-income population is declining but not the non-white share of householders or the population earning between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

In five years, the non-white share of population in Ormewood Park fell from 46 percent to 35 percent. Moving west along the BeltLine, the non-white share of population in Peoplestown⁵¹ fell from an estimated 90 percent to 83 percent, while the low-income population in parts of south Atlanta, mostly in BeltLine subareas one and two, increased substantially.

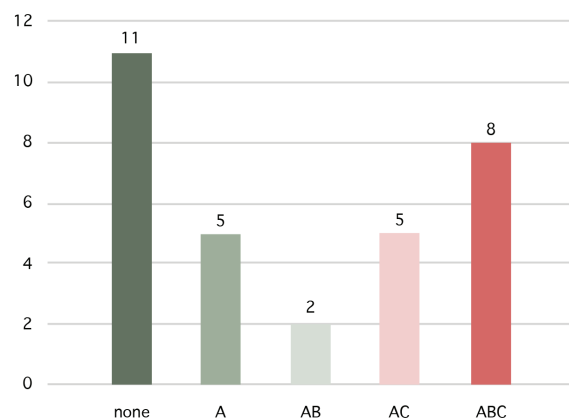
So even with the neighboring gentrifying pressures, at this point Pittsburgh and Mechanicsville especially appear to remain enclaves of affordable housing for low-income people of color. Unlike most neighborhoods, Mechanicsville experienced moderate growth in non-white owner-occupancy. Mechanicsville saw a substantial increase in the Black population too, perhaps indicating that as surrounding neighborhoods gentrify, displaced residents are finding affordable housing there, a little farther from the BeltLine and just south of Downtown Atlanta.

- In Mechanicsville and Pittsburgh, the population earning below \$25,000 grew by almost 30 percent;
- In Peoplestown, the population earning below \$25,000 grew by half;
- In Peoplestown, the Black poverty rate rose by 42 percent;
- In Pittsburgh and Mechanicsville, the Black poverty rate was cut in half;
- In Pittsburgh, the average rent dropped by six percent and in Peoplestown, it dropped by 10 percent.

Pittsburgh isn't entirely insulated from gentrification pressures even now. Its census tract abutting the BeltLine corridor on the south lost 10 percent of its population earning below \$25,000. This was during a period when gross rent in that area grew 36 percent. But in Pittsburgh's other census tract immediately to the north, that low-income population earning under \$25,000 grew by almost 30 percent. There, rent dropped by six percent.

These remaining sanctuaries for low-income residents are by no means secure. In the northern part of Pittsburgh, the college educated share of householders rose by five percentage points and median income rose by 10 percent. The white share of householders and owner occupants is also increasing in Mechanicsville. These neighborhoods are susceptible to gentrification. And while displacement has not yet threatened many of their residents, the people who are relocating there now may be compelled to move again soon.

Figure 6: Number of Southside Census Tracts Facing Gentrification by Type



"A" signals that median income grew more than in the city as a whole in those five years, "AB" signals that income surge plus the shares of white-only householders grew faster more than in the city as a whole. "AC" signals the income surge plus more growth in the college educated share of householders than in the city as a whole. Type ABC saw greater than Atlanta average increases in all three indicators. Includes tracts in Planning Subareas 1 to 4 and 10.

IV. RESIDENTS' HOPES AND FEARS

HOPE FOR "A BELTLINE FOR US ALL"

Our interviews with residents of communities in the southern section of the BeltLine sought to give voice to hopes and concerns about the changes underway. Even though Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. is reaching out to the community, not all voices are being heard or acted upon. Still the residents clearly said they want to be an integral part of the process. Although a public-private partnership, Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. is still publicly funded through a Tax Allocation District, so there is some leverage through which the people of Atlanta can hold it accountable.

Across interviews, we heard residents' hope for a "BeltLine for All" that respects what we love and value in our neighborhoods, including our histories and shared racial, class, and cultural ties. We heard a lot about the history of the area, and residents looked to the past for strategies that could build a strong future. Their hopes overlap with and also add to the original vision of the BeltLine: for affordable housing, good jobs, accessible stores, family-owned restaurants, parks, walking trails, green spaces, high quality transportation, and connections between neighborhoods. It is not that Southside residents do not want positive neighborhood change; it is just that they do not want changes decided on by those with the most interest in making a profit, since the results of these decisions have never been in their favor. As Alison Johnson, a report author and Peoplestown resident, says, she and others, "recognize that Atlanta's planning legacy has hurt us. We want these issues addressed," adding "we are excited about the promise of the BeltLine, welcome new residents, and are optimistic about the future."

What do residents in Southside communities hope will come with the BeltLine? And what do they value in their community now? Jo Ann Agourah of Peoplestown brings up walkability and new grocery stores:

I think the BeltLine would be great for the neighborhoods because, number one, you have the convenience of not having to get in your car and physically drive here and there. I've been noticing how things are popping up all over the city in the BeltLine area. They bought up apartments everywhere and you have the convenience of a grocery store and different restaurants.

Alison Johnson's mother, May Helen Johnson of Peoplestown, and others point to the multigenerational families and strong social support networks of the Black Southside, and also remember the legacy of self-build during Jim Crow when city

services weren't provided to Black neighborhoods. These legacies continue through the work of Community Development Corporations and other neighborhood-based institutions.⁵³ Residents value their communities, not only as their home, but as their final stop on a long migration journey and the strong sense of history the neighbor-

Photo by Jeffrey Diedrick



hoods provide. This is especially true for the elders, who have seen the neighborhoods through so many changes. May Helen Johnson highlights her belief in the importance of the histories of these neighborhoods, "... without the history, without the past, there is no present. People just need to know and understand what it's like to be displaced, move from place to place of no cause of yours. It's money and development." Despite the potential threat of yet another move, residents like Ms. Johnson see the future through a lens of hope based in large part on what we've been able to overcome.

Pittsburgh's Sense of History

Pittsburgh "is one of Atlanta's oldest neighborhoods and was established by African Americans in 1883 on 554 acres in the aftermath of the Civil War in a segregated city."⁵⁴ The people of Pittsburgh are proud of its historic contribution. As Moriba Kelsey writes in *Pittsburgh: A Sense of Community*:

Because Pittsburgh is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Atlanta formed after the Civil War and in times of racial segregation, the community has

historic significance. The Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (PCIA) in coordination with the Atlanta Urban Design Commission (AUDC) completed the steps necessary to apply for National Register of Historic Places status. The Pittsburgh Community received its designation in June 2006.⁵⁵



Photo by Jeffrey Diedrick

This sense of place and history is important to the residents. As Annette Samuels said, "I appreciate Pittsburgh's history. I'm proud knowing that amidst the struggles Pittsburgh's had, it has

produced people who have contributed back to the community." And James Bridges agrees, "It's history to me. As a little boy I spent much time here and it's a historical place and I like to see it, just continue."

Richard Byrd, quoted in Kelsey's book, grew up in Pittsburgh and explains that, in his youth, "[a]lmost all of the stores and businesses, including a funeral home, were owned and operated by African Americans. There were restaurants, shoe shops, drug stores, barber shops, beauty shops, etc. Therefore most of the money spent was turned over several times in the Pittsburgh Community and residents benefitted from it."⁵⁶

Self-sufficient, the residents sought what they needed as a community, but more importantly, they relied on each other. For example, a core of elderly residents have spent decades living next to one another, working together on neighborhood-level change, and seeing one another through the routines of daily living. Claretha Stafford is one of them and she says "Where I live I value unity. I'm a senior so I'm dealing with seniors and we unified. When I say

*"It's **history** to me. As a little boy I spent much time here and it's a historical place and I like to see it continue."*
— James Bridges

unified, I mean unified. If something happens to somebody, somebody knocks on your door and says, "this is what's going on," (Laughter). We get whatever we need from one another, no matter how little it seems to be or how big."

Ninety five percent of Pittsburgh residents who were surveyed want to stay in the neighborhood.

Peopletown

Peopletown, too, has a long history. "Developed as a streetcar suburb after the Atlanta Electric Railway built a line along Capitol Avenue in 1885,"⁵⁷ the neighborhood saw years of hardship, but came together to organize, thanks to establishments, such as Emmaus House, Atlanta Neighborhoods United for Fairness (A'NUFF), and the Peopletown Revitalization Corporation (PRC), and individuals. As one history remembers:

– Annette Samuels

Grace Barksdale and other residents overcame Atlanta's institutional racism in the 1920s and 1930s to obtain electricity, gas, and street paving. Henry Phipps participated in those struggles, and he and his wife led the fight for a school in the 1940s and 1950s. From the 1960s through the present [1999], Ethel Mae Matthews, Columbus Ward, Gene Fergeson, Duane Stuart, and others have fought nearly continuous battles

against the destructive effects of expressways, urban renewal, a stadium, Model Cities, expressway widening, and a second stadium.⁵⁸

Rakia Reeves, a long-time resident, explained how it feels to live in a town with such a strong history and supportive culture:

[Peopletown] is very family oriented. We have a lot of different organizations that promote and help our neighbors reach and gain resources. We have nice, low-income housing that is affordable for a lot of our residents, which we are very proud of. We want to make sure that remains... I want to make sure that when people from different race and class backgrounds are coming in, their way and their outlook is not enforced on us to the point where we have to adapt to what they think and feel.

Residents like Rakia Reeves express deep appreciation for local social and cultural institutions, and multigenerational families living close to one another. We also heard

Photo by Jeffrey Diedrick



about the importance of affordable housing, parks, and recreation facilities that friends and family frequent, and the willingness of neighbors to volunteer in the community and help one another.

It would be a huge loss to be displaced from those networks. Ninety five percent of Peoplestown residents who were surveyed want to stay in the neighborhood.

Shelby Blackwell of Peoplestown walks with her own children and other neighborhood children to school every day: "My biggest thing is making sure that the kids get safely to school and safely home from school. I enjoy walking with them in the morning time and just listening to them, and their ideas about life, about their surroundings."

Columbus Ward of Peoplestown and many others like him work to try to ensure that development is truly designed for and by neighborhood residents: "I'm definitely working toward making sure people are not displaced because of development."

WHAT THE BELTLINE PROMISES

Participating in the Planning

Longtime residents first of all discussed their desire to be a more integral part of the process. "I don't know what I could do but I'd like to be in meetings so I could see what I could do. If I could hear what's being offered then I'll know how I can support the efforts," said Ms. Stafford.

"I feel that if the BeltLine is going to connect the communities it should connect the communities in an equal manner. Not have this community feel above that community and that community feel below this community. Instead, they should all be together as one."

– Nikiria Sky

The Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. says that it wants the members of the community to be part of the process. According to the BeltLine website, "[t]he role of the ... community engagement team is to ensure that the community remains informed and actively engaged in the planning, design and implementation of the Atlanta BeltLine," also saying, "it is critical that public involvement continues to play a prominent role in shaping and defining the Atlanta BeltLine."

However, as scholar Parama Roy notes regarding the BeltLine, "it is evident that the middle class residents' wish became defined as the neighborhood's wish primarily because it was in sync with the local state's entrepreneurial agenda ..."⁶⁰

After all, the specific concerns of all residents have not been addressed—particularly concerning affordable housing, businesses, or local amenities.

Resident James Collins notes that the "BeltLine has been holding meetings in communities for design aspects [of the project]. But, it's definitely focused on the green space part of it." He hasn't seen conversations about "what type of businesses or homes" residents would like to see.

It should be a red flag for the leaders of the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. when they face a community meeting without many low-or moderate-income residents attending, or with mostly white residents in the audience.

Along with respecting the history and supportive community of the people already living there, what does a "BeltLine for All" look like? We heard practical needs in our interviews: not just for parks but jobs, affordable groceries, affordable housing, fair code enforcement and community-based businesses.

Profile: May Helen Johnson



Photo by Maggie Kane

When May Helen Johnson moved to Atlanta, she spent 19 years in Summerhill and then eventually settled in Peoplestown. For May Helen, Summerhill was a beautiful community and she describes it as an exemplary neighborhood of the past because it “had so much during that time—the grocery store, libraries, the hospital, church, post office, schools, and the ice cream parlor. We had just everything you need to stabilize your neighborhood. You really didn’t have to leave your neighborhood and everything you needed was right here.”

Long settled in Peoplestown, she feels fondness, appreciation, and hope for her neighborhood. Specifically, she values “the people in this community who have worked hard, strived, raised their kids and who still give input and have roots here.” It’s clear that May Helen knows her community well and has demonstrated dedication to neighborhood organizing from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics to now, holding a leadership role on the Peoplestown Revitalization Corporation and working at the Emmaus House.

May Helen is responsible for preserving and sharing the history of Peoplestown but also for realizing the vision of the community, and doesn’t want to see the BeltLine disrupt her neighborhood any further than what other development projects have already done.

With the stadium on one side and the BeltLine on the other it feels like we’re being compressed between these two giants and my thing is what are they gonna bring to the neighborhood, what are they gonna offer us? Are we gonna be able to stay in the neighborhood or are we gonna be able to rent, to buy, to play, to stay, to worship in the neighborhood?

May Helen needs her city council to come to the neighborhood and sit down with community residents to hear these concerns and understand what programs are needed. Promotion of and assistance with homeownership, financing options, and property improvements will keep elderly and lower-wage earning residents from being pushed out of Peoplestown and displaced further south from all they have worked for, all they have strived for. With city council and developer cooperation, she believes that Peoplestown can be a model neighborhood for democratic decision making and they could work with other BeltLine communities to achieve fair and just development.

around.” Such changes would help provide the residents with vital steps towards the inclusive and supportive community they seek.

Grocery Stores

James Bridges and others see the need for community resources that will make the area more self-sustaining: “Well, one thing this neighborhood needs is more parks and more stores. The stores are the main thing because we don’t have anywhere to get groceries, fresh vegetables and so forth.”

Others emphasized that local stores would need to be low-cost and healthy, not luxury amenities for the upper middle class and wealthy. As Vivian Williams of Summerhill put it, “I don’t like the idea that we don’t have grocery stores. You’re building plenty of apartments, high-rises, but the nearest grocery store is miles away. When I was coming up, there used to be a grocery store on the corner.”

The original Health Impact Assessment of the Atlanta BeltLine supports these claims, finding, “grocery stores were more likely to be located near white and higher-income residents with access to a car.” This has an impact, author Catherine Ross wrote, because “older adults, people of color, and low-income people experience adverse health effects from their reduced access to food markets and nutritious food, quality housing, transportation, and parks and trails.”⁶¹

Accommodations for the Elderly

A few of the seniors interviewed mentioned the need for accessibility in transportation, housing, retail, parks, and other public spaces: “The building I live in actually doesn’t have ramps. When we key in the doors don’t slide open as they should for seniors. We have people in wheelchairs, people on walkers, people on crutches, we need all kinds of spaces and services to be accessible.”

Tinnie Prather of Peoplestown commented on the difficulties seniors face in getting around: “We used to have a bus that came by the door. We don’t have that anymore, so I would like to see more transportation options so that we can get

Jobs

A number of people interviewed, such as Terry Mathis, hope the BeltLine will bring jobs for those who actually live in the neighborhood: "I am seeking paid employment to help me pay for the property I am currently renting," he said. "If I cannot work, I will not have a job, and I will not be able to afford where I'm staying!"

But the BeltLine is not currently designed to address either the scarcity of local jobs in Pittsburgh, Peoplestown, and Adair Park or the scarcity of public transportation that residents could take to jobs elsewhere.

Transportation planners and other critics warn the light rail may traverse the BeltLine without necessarily connecting with MARTA stops or commercial centers where service jobs are.⁶² Scholar Jacob Robert Brown already recognized this problem:

"We have values and aspirations that may not look like success to mainstream America, but when you are able to hold down a decent job, pay your mortgage, keep your children in school and feed them, we consider that successful as well."

– May Helen Johnson

Profile: Sohna Harneez

Sohna Harzeez is a young adult living in Pittsburgh. She purchased a home in Pittsburgh four years ago when she moved from Maryland to Atlanta yet she already feels like Pittsburgh is her home. Sohna loves Atlanta for its rich history and sense of familiarity. She says she values, "the feel of the city and the people...I know all my neighbors, from one end to the next...and I value that. I value being able to walk up and down the street and say hello, get a hello back."



Photo by Maggie Kane

It was Sohna's neighbor who originally helped her get involved in community organizing and volunteering in several community initiatives such as builders' groups, cleanups, porch parties and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day activities. Furthermore, Sohna has become a leader in formal organizations like the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association and the Pittsburgh Neighborhood Planning Unit and she aspires to be on the city council in the future. Sohna's purpose is to get her voice and her neighbors' voices heard so that development is equitable and representative of the diversity of her neighborhood. "Pittsburgh has a good mixture of families, single people, older couples that are retired, children, adults, and teenagers."

Sohna experienced gentrification before and she can see signs of it happening in Atlanta. "I feel like at first the BeltLine was a great thing, an amazing thing... and then as the process has been going on, I really feel like it is kind of becoming like a gentrification tool." But if the BeltLine development maintains its goal to connect communities, she hopes "...that same level of commitment and that same level of creativity and the same level of investment also happens for Southside communities."

Spatial mismatch occurs when low-income people live far away from their employment opportunities (Sanchez 1999). This dispersal of working class populations and employment opportunities impacts Black unemployment rates and income and is a partial explanation for employment differences between Blacks and Whites (Kain 2010, Holzer 1991).⁶³

Such spatial mismatch is common in the Southeast corridor.

More Supportive and Fair Code Enforcement

Longtime homeowners mentioned feeling that the city was using code enforcement to pressure them to fix up their house or move out. They expressed the need for a new, more supportive and fair way to facilitate housing and building repairs.

We're always worried about code enforcement coming around, making decisions: 'You need to repaint again.' 'Someone said there was tires in your yard.' 'Grass needs cutting.' 'Bushes need to be cut back.' 'The door's not up to par.' That bothers me, but yet, when I walk down the street, I can see some company's sign on a piece of property that has been sitting there for years and

Profile: Rakia Reeves

Photo by Maggie Kane

Rakia Reeves has lived in Peoplestown all her life, with her mother and father having lived in the neighborhood since she was born. She loves Atlanta for the many opportunities to get involved in grassroots collaborations and describes



Peoplestown as family oriented, where people and organizations work together to shape and enrich the neighborhood. Rakia went to school and earned a degree that allowed her to return to Peoplestown to work on social, cultural, and academic programs for youth and families. At the Emmaus House, a nonprofit organization that has shaped her personally, she describes her dedication to keep these programs going and delivering the types of services that the kids really need:

I am very dedicated to the quality of support and resources these kids need to be better in life. My organization does a lot of things for the social aspect within my community. We help with ID's, vouchers for food to eliminate the food burden that can often be difficult for families. We also have a parenting class focused on mindfulness, healthy food, emotional and social well-being. We do a community supper and allow anyone from the community to come in and get food on the first Monday of every month.

Rakia has been able to build strong and trusting relationships in Peoplestown and she's committed to staying and becoming a future leader for the community.

Because Rakia understands her community's needs and strengths, she wants the BeltLine to connect people and communities with a transit system that brings about social and retail-type connections that would lead to more jobs and more opportunities for people in the neighborhoods. She recognizes that it is important to keep areas of the neighborhood affordable and avoid pushing out residents, like her elderly parents who live on a fixed income, displacing them from the community they love and worked so hard to build. In addition to defending long-time residents of Peoplestown from displacement, she says that it is vitally important to maintain neighborhood character and values:

This is our neighborhood, we have been here, and we need to make sure it is focused around us and that our views and decisions are being interpreted into whatever decisions are being made about our community. So it is very important to me that our values and ways are not being shut out by someone else's and how they think things should be.

I've never see them dragged into court, nobody cares about them, they just continue to pick, pick, pick on the people who have the least in the neighborhood. Or, should I say, have the least money in the neighborhood.

Protecting Low- and Moderate-Income Renters

Many call for protecting and expanding affordable rental housing. They worry that development in the area will, as it has elsewhere on the BeltLine, focus on luxury accommodations rather than on affordable ones. James Collins of Peoplestown voiced this frustration: "We've also seen a lot more massive housing developments and apartments go up along the BeltLine and most of them seem to be luxury apartments priced for middle and upper middle class, so that's dismaying."

The worry is legitimate, as "[t]he [luxury and affordable] ends of the market are in-fact segmented from each other, but they compete for land and capital and so the proliferation of the luxury market may"—without accountability—"result in less on the affordable end."⁶⁴

Additionally, property tax hikes due to the development of luxury housing are likely to be passed on to renters, in part because protective homestead exemptions do not apply to renter-occupied units. So high-end developments will not only compete with affordable housing for real estate, but also make what remains less affordable. The city-wide data shows the problem: "From 2012 to 2014, according to the CoStar Group, 95 percent of rental units built in Atlanta were luxury units."⁶⁵

Rich Connections and Small, Community-Based Local Businesses

One of the visions of what development could offer the neighborhood

comes from the past: from the idea of more institutions and services available nearby and more densely located. Some longtime residents remembered the Black-owned businesses that served the Southside neighborhoods during segregation that managed to thrive despite the many other systemic issues and injustices of the era.

As Mr. James Otis Outlaw described Pittsburgh in the early- to mid-twentieth century: “There were many full time and part time businesses in Pittsburgh. Just about anything you needed (service, foods or products) could be bought and sold in the neighborhood. In many ways McDaniel Street had so many businesses until it was like a strip mall from Rockwell Street to Arthur Street.”⁶⁶

Ponce area
development



Photo by James
Diedrick

May Helen Johnson looks back to the 1950s and 1960s in Summerhill, when moderate- and higher-income Black families hadn't yet left for the suburbs or other areas of the city, when they had “everything you need to stabilize your neighborhood.” (See profile on p. 32.)

Johnson uses this vision of the past, of a connected community with public resources within walking distance—library books for everyone so that those who “didn't have books at home could get a card and check them out, where housing was decent and affordable”—to imagine a future for the communities. Dorothy Prather of Pittsburgh echoes this sentiment:

I value the neighborhood because it was a nice place to grow up ... close neighbors and everybody watched out for each other and everyone, you know. We have never really been a rich neighborhood but it was nice, people valued what they had.

“A BeltLine for All”

Southside residents do want development, even a BeltLine, but hope it will be designed for them as well. One of the many positive comments people made about the promise of the BeltLine came from Ms. Gardner: “I didn't know too much about the BeltLine until my daughter-in-law took me to the old Sears building and...wow, I love it. I don't really know much about it and what's going on in the other neighborhoods. But I enjoyed going there, in that particular neighborhood.” But to this praise, Ms. Gardner adds a cautionary note: “There are changes I see in the neighborhood. Mostly I see that they're putting up new apartments, buildings. The BeltLine would be nice in other areas. But how is it going to affect low-income people?”

*“I want to see the BeltLine bring affordable housing and something for the senior citizens and single people and **grocery stores, drug stores and shops.**”*
— Cynthia Scott

For every promise of a “BeltLine for All,” we heard fears, worries and general confusion about what will come of it. Says Austen Johnson, “I'm not sure if it's here to help us or tear us apart and push us out.” That fear is echoed by many we talked to, and they tell a story of Black Atlantans who rightfully want to protect what they hold dear.

FEARS

Residents of BeltLine communities see value in the development but want positive, inclusive changes that keep the character and stability of neighborhoods intact. However, the reality of gentrification and green urbanism threatens to displace residents and destroy these communities.

While some residents of Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, and Adair Park are fearful that rising property taxes and rising rents will make it very difficult to remain in their supportive communities and ultimately price them out of their homes, others fear that negative shifts in culture, community, and resources will change their way of life.

Displacement

Residents are losing hope for the promise of affordable housing units in BeltLine communities and they have questions for developers: Where are the community resources? Why do we have to leave? Where will we go next? May Helen Johnson from Peoplestown says she “welcomes people to [Peoplestown]” but emphasizes that the existing residents “don’t want to be pushed out at the same time that newer people come in, you know? We have values and aspirations that may not look like success to mainstream America, but when you are able to hold down a decent job, pay your mortgage, keep your children in school and feed them, we consider that successful as well.”

“Peoplestown has nice, low-income housing that is affordable for a lot of our residents, which we are very proud of. We want to make sure that remains.”

– Rakia Reeves

We spoke with Nia Brown, a young adult born and raised in Peoplestown who currently lives in subsidized housing. She is excited about the possibilities the BeltLine brings but wishes low-income renters and homeowners were the focus of the project:

I just feel like, why should we have to move outside of our community so that they can make our community better? If you’re going to make our community better, make us an example of the community being better! Why should we have to move out for our community to be middle class? Make it middle class with us being here.

Cynthia Scott told us buyers are harassing homeowners with unsolicited letters and phone calls in the interest of buying low from current residents and selling high to middle- and upper-income new residents. Desmond Winfry says current residents deserve to know the truth about the value of their real estate and make educated decisions about whether to stay or sell:

When buyers flash the right amount of money in front of residents’ faces they are going to sell, even if the money is not the right amount for the value of the property.

Most discussions in Atlanta about the BeltLine, city planning and policymaking, and the future of the city are about adding inclusionary zoning laws that require that new buildings include affordable housing or that master plans include a certain number of new affordable units. While these discussions are important, and included in the solutions offered in this report, Ms. Brown and Mr. Winfry’s concerns highlight the equal importance of organizing and policymaking to protect and improve the low-cost housing that currently exists in these neighborhoods and to ensure development without displacement. They understandably fear what Jacob Robert Brown describes in “Respatializing Race,” that “instead of providing benefits to impoverished Black neighborhoods, the Beltline will displace these communities and replace them with



Photo by James Diedrick

upwardly mobile Whites. . . . Displaced Beltline residents would be forced to move to neighborhoods even further removed from economic opportunities."⁶⁷

This pattern would exacerbate historical patterns of racial and economic segregation that make it difficult for people to access jobs and transit, to drop their children off at daycare or school, or get to a good grocery store.⁶⁸ Not to mention, Alison Johnson adds, "our communities have not only been cut off from access to what we want and need; instead, we have been living next to polluted industrial sites, jails, waste processing centers, and highways."

Future BeltLine developments need to address these class-and-race-based design issues directly. New development needs to be designed to bring housing and resources that enable current residents to reach their potential. Rakia Reeves doesn't see this happening in her neighborhood:

I worry that the lower-income people in our community will be pushed out due to the fact that we are building things that don't necessarily cater to the people in our community. The development will probably look good to an outside eye but it will not benefit the residents who live here. We need things that allow them to manage life—manage their day to day life—provide for their kids. They don't have a way to pay for these tax increases and other increases.

Indeed businesses and lawmakers are glowing over an Atlanta with structures such as Ponce City Market, calling it "a residential and commercial project that embodies the city in renaissance." These interests are excited that "young professionals drawn by companies [are] moving back into the city."⁶⁹ While these changes might increase the city's tax base, they are not in the interest of low-income residents, the very people who have lived in Atlanta for generations, helping to pay for and build the Atlanta of today. Georgia State University Sociology Professor Deirdre Oakley explains that:

*"I would really be heartbroken if I was **displaced** because I don't know if I'm gonna find that in another community, I don't know if I'm gonna find the close knit family."*
— Jo Ann Augourh

city governments ultimately have a "vested interest" in gentrification. The reason is simple: higher property values lead to higher taxes, and higher taxes mean more revenue. More revenue allows city governments to spend more cash on its citizens. More spending can be good overall — it helps make projects like the Beltline and Atlanta Streetcar possible — but it can also accelerate gentrification.⁷⁰

Residents like Rakia Reeves are feeling this pressure. Worse, as the city continues to neglect the residents of these neighborhoods, those with increased medical needs, reduced mobility, and fixed incomes will suffer all the more as amenities weaken and housing costs rise above their income threshold. They have concerns and questions regarding the disappearance of grocery stores, shops, and services for seniors. Vivian Williams, a senior supported by the Housing Choice Voucher program who cares for her disabled son, needs affordable rent and affordable shopping close by:

The housings are so high that, I mean where you used to--if you rented a place it was like \$500 a month. Now it's \$2000 a month. Who can afford it? I can't! My income won't let me go that far...I would like to see something that's affordable and that we can walk to and enjoy. Grocery stores or little shops that we could shop at that weren't an arm and a leg. You're moving shops in here but they're things that people can't afford because they have to pay so much.

Adele Harris, like Vivian, relies on services in the community but sees resources for lower-income neighbors and seniors as out of reach. "I would like to change that they're taking all our stores out of the neighborhood and we gotta go other places. I mean, bring the stores back. [They] are showing a lack of concern for the seniors and the children in our neighborhoods, and people in general. The working class—showing a lack of concern for them. I don't want that to continue."

Photo by Dessa Lohrey



"It's dismaying to see a lot more massive housing developments go up along the BeltLine and most of them seem to be luxury apartments priced for middle and upper middle class."
— James Collins

Loss of Community Identity

The economic consequences of gentrification are troubling but are not the only sentiments resonating in these communities. Concerns about the ways in which forms of policing (through actual police contact but also more subtle forms like code enforcement) are used to push out low-income Black communities are widespread. "My kids are 11 and 12 and when they are outside at the park with their friends, the police have been called on them but they won't hurt a fly...The police shouldn't be called on them. We know

they are being targeted because of the new residents moving in and trying to take over our community," says Nikki Smith of Peoplestown.

Displacement threatens the social well-being of families and we see it causing rifts between communities increasingly divided by class and race. Peoplestown resident May Helen Johnson puts into context the idea of gentrification dismantling the ownership and strengthening of low-income Black communities:

Are we gonna be able to stay in the neighborhood or are we gonna be able to rent, to buy, to play, to stay, to worship in the neighborhood? Will other people look like me, will other people look like my family who have been here all of their life and I think really enjoyed the neighborhood, being a part of it? Building it up, making it stronger, again. It's all around us, gentrification.

The interviews reveal rich and long histories, in many cases of people overcoming and living through difficulties. The caring relationships founded in these experiences make up the social fabric of these Southside BeltLine communities. Sudden transformation of these communities can disrupt this solidarity, and residents notice this transformation is in motion. Nikiria Sky, a young Black woman living in Peopletown, comments on the racial divide:

Different people are trying to move into the community. People are moving out. A lot of white people are moving in, a lot of Black people are moving out because people are buying houses or trying to get them to move out of their house. And then their house is not bought at the price it is worth ... Typically Black people was living in this community, making it thrive and quote-unquote they bring the most crime but that is not true because all people bring crime, not just Black people.

Our survey confirmed people most appreciated “relationships with my neighbors” over all aspects of their community. Rakia Reeves talks of how important it is to preserve and respect the identities and values of neighborhoods that newcomers move into:

Photo by Dessa Lohrey



A lot of other races have started coming into the neighborhood and I am quite sure that the ways they were raised are different than the way we look at things ... Basically because this is our neighborhood, we have been here, and we need to make sure it is focused around us. That our views and decisions are being interpreted into whatever decisions are being made about our community.

Nikki Smith and Austen Johnson, both longtime residents of Peoplestown, worry about uprooting their families and what will become of their children's sense of history and even their safety and overall mental health. Nikki says, "if I was displaced, I would no longer be connected to the people in my community. Which is sad to me. My kids' school. The easy access to work. My kids would be disconnected to their way of living."

Austen says, "it would really be devastating for me not to have this community anymore. And I know it would devastate my kids because I really teach them where they come from. They've been here all their life...This is where they feel very safe. I mean they're surrounded by people they trust and they know."

Nicole Rivers has found affordable housing since moving to Peoplestown to raise three children, yet she too fears for her family's well-being:

Will I be able to have my kids grow up in the same home? When I first moved here I had no intention of moving anytime soon. I wanted stability for my kids. I would want to know what are we supposed to do? If we had to move, I would have to drive further to work and change my kid's schools, and I couldn't really afford that. My voucher doesn't really go anywhere except for in the Atlanta area.

"Do renters have rights? What are our rights to stay in our houses for four to five years, 10 years, longer even, to buy a house. Will I be able to have my kids grow up in the same home?"
– Nicole Rivers

*"I'm not sure if the BeltLine is here to help us or tear us apart and **push us out**."*
– Austen Johnson

"You're building plenty of apartments, high-rises, but the nearest grocery store is miles away."
– Vivian Williams

SURVEY IN BRIEF

We surveyed 143 representatives of households across 16 neighborhoods in the Belt-line Planning area, targeting low-to moderate-income households. Nearly half of all surveys are from our three Southside target neighborhoods of Peoplestown (24), Pittsburgh (21), and Adair Park (20).

While 22 percent of respondents live alone, 27 percent live with one other person. The majority of survey respondents identified as Black, 62 percent, followed by white, 29 percent. Five percent identified as multiracial, and four percent are Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islanders.

Across All Surveys

The majority of respondents had a household income of \$25,000 or below.. About 27 percent had income between \$15,000 and \$25,000 while 24 percent had income between \$5,000 and \$15,000. Households earning \$85,000 or higher comprised 20 percent of respondents.

Ninety percent of residents who were surveyed want to stay in their communities. However, a majority of survey respondents, 62 percent, are concerned about increasing housing costs. For example, one respondent from Grant Park stated, "I worry about affordable housing for seniors and people who have lived in these communities for a long time. The housing prices are going up too fast and affordable rent is hard to come by. We need to have protection for these individuals."

Despite the specter of rising housing costs, some respondents viewed the future developments coming with the BeltLine in a positive light. "We need more parks, stores, trails for walking, but without raising rents/mortgage costs," one Black respondent from Adair Park said.

The survey asked several questions to get a sense of how residents thought of their communities. When asked to select from a set of aspects they "value and appreciate in [their] community." Fifty-eight percent chose "relationships with my neighbors," 49 percent chose "green space," 48 percent chose "mass transit," 41 percent chose "near my work," and 33 percent chose "near family members."

The survey asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with various elements of their community. The top answers: 83 percent were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the convenience of their location, 59 percent were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the

Figure 7:
Respondents by Race

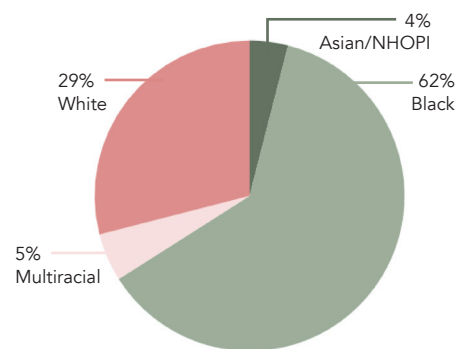


Figure 8:
Household Income of
Survey Respondents

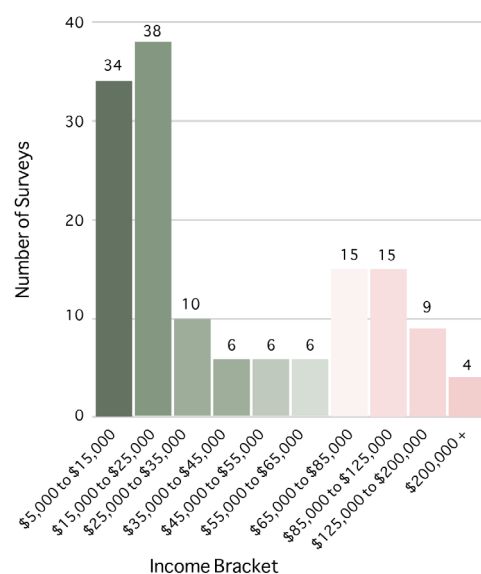
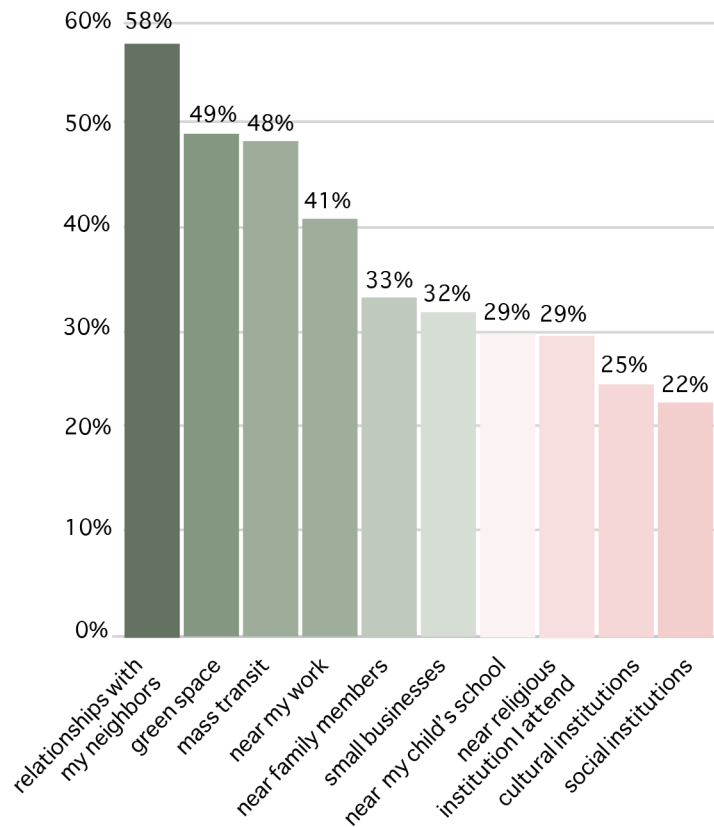


Figure 9: What Do Residents Value and Appreciate in Their Community?



affordability of their rent, and 52 percent were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their neighborhood amenities.

The survey also asked respondents how often they spoke to their neighbors, another measure of community strength. The majority of respondents, 53 percent, indicated that they spoke to their neighbors four or more times per week, and over two-thirds, 69 percent, spoke to their neighbors two or more times per week.

Frequent interactions with neighbors are particularly important for low-income residents earning \$25,000 or less. More than 58 percent re-

port talking with their neighbors four or more times per week, and 60 percent indicate that they value relationships with their neighbors.

Subsidy Recipients

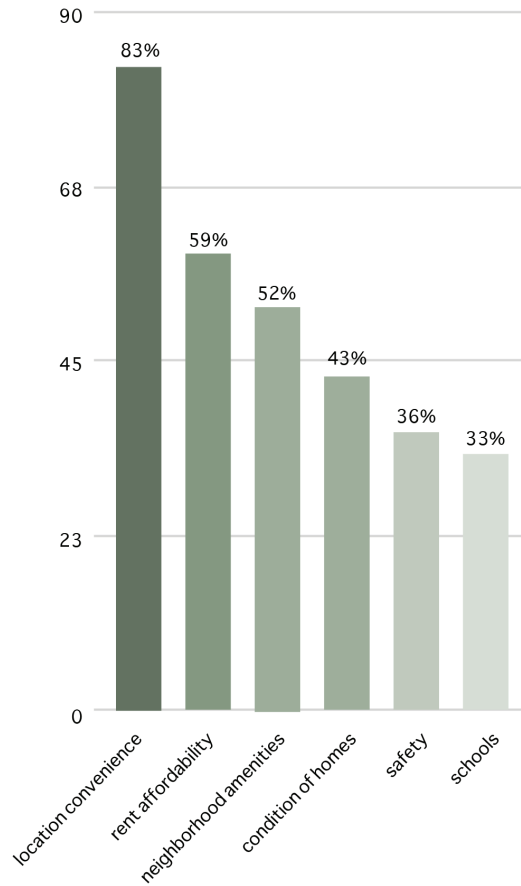
To capture the perspective of those requiring housing assistance, we surveyed 39 people who receive housing subsidies of some kind; 30 either live in Housing and Urban Development-backed section 8 or received Housing and Urban Development vouchers; four live in Habitat for Humanity homes; and five are supported by a local Community Development Corporation that follows the Housing and Urban Development recommendations for rent for low-income households.

The concerns of those receiving Housing and Urban Development subsidies are important to pull out as these renters, though somewhat protected from gentrification, remain vulnerable: Private landlords with Housing and Urban Development contracts are at this very moment deciding not to renew contracts as they see more to gain by selling or renting at market rate. Thus, the fear of an increase in housing costs due to profit-driven development could directly affect the low-income respondents who receive housing assistance.

The majority of survey respondents receiving subsidies are from Southside neighborhood—Peoplestown, Mechanicsville, and Pittsburgh—and eight are from the Trestle-tree complex in Grant Park. Thirty-eight of the respondents are Black and one is white. Thirty six are considered very low-income according to Housing and Urban Development thresholds and the other three are low-income.

Despite having subsidies to cover their rent—and with nearly half of the 39 respon-

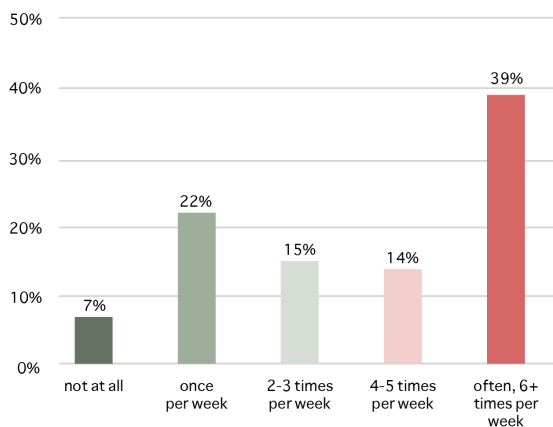
Figure 10: How Satisfied Residents Are with Aspects of Community



*"I value my community because my neighbors look out for me because I'm a **senior** homeowner and I'm by myself. We help each other out."*

– Cynthia Scott

Figure 11: How Often Do you Talk to Your Neighbors?



(Three percent did not respond.)

dents with rent between \$0 and \$200 a month—41 percent are cost-burdened, due to the high cost of utilities. Even with the protections of Housing and Urban Development and other subsidies, 54 percent of the respondents are worried about higher housing costs (rent, property taxes, etc.) and 41 percent are concerned about changing voice in local government. Overall, our survey respondents indicated that they value their relationships with their neighbors but in the subsidy group this was the top value—64 percent indicated it is important to them. Eighty-one percent of residents who were surveyed want to stay in their communities.

High-Income Respondents

To better understand income-based differences, we looked at the 25 survey respondents with moderate-or high-incomes.⁷¹ Higher-income respondents are distributed across 12 Belt-Line communities, with five each from Capitol View and Grant Park, four from Homewood Park, and three from Adair Park. Sixty percent are white, 12 percent Black, 12 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 16 percent multiracial. Only one respondent was burdened by housing costs. Twenty-four percent indicated that if housing prices rose they would be likely or very likely to move, compared with 44 percent for low-income residents with subsidies.

The survey question designed to gauge apprehension or enthusiasm about neighborhood changes as a result of the Beltline prompted nearly half of respondents to write in responses. These included responses generally representative of middle- and upper-class concerns, such as the need to address the homeless population and concerns about traffic. However, several of the comments also indicated a fear that the neighborhood would lose diversity and that gentrification would silence the voices of long-term neighborhood influencers, indicating more widespread support for anti-gentrification methods and neighborhood stabilization.

One high-income white respondent from Adair Park wrote, “I’m pretty privileged, so I think my voice is safe, but I am worried about the voices of my neighbors.” Another white resident from Grant Park was concerned about “no longer having a diverse neighborhood.”

Adair Park, Peoplestown, and Pittsburgh

Given our focus on Adair Park, Pittsburgh, and Peoplestown, we looked at some of the most significant trends from the surveys in these three neighborhoods. Eighty-five percent of the 65 respondents from these neighborhoods identified as Black and 12 percent identified as white. Sixty-eight percent self-identified as working adults; 65 percent are renters and 35 percent own their own home. Seventy-one percent said their relationships with neighbors are important to them, 45 percent value living close to MARTA and 48 percent value neighborhood green space. When asked about what they are worried about, 62 percent cited concerns about higher housing costs and 42 percent had concerns about changing voice in government. Fifty-four percent are worried that their housing costs will go up and 37 percent said they are likely or very likely to move out of the neighborhood if housing costs increase. Yet 93 percent of residents surveyed want to stay in their communities.

Despite these concerns, many respondents wrote that they love these communities, with one Black resident of Peoplestown stating “I know this community. We are proud working class people that have raised our families here and want to remain when the development comes because we deserve to enjoy it.”

V. SOLUTIONS

When Atlanta Housing Authority built Techwood Homes in 1936, it saw itself as in the forefront of struggling with the poor quality and unaffordable housing that (white) working people encountered. In the process, it paved over one of Atlanta's integrated neighborhoods and ended up with half the affordable units. In 1996, its Centennial Place offered a new model of publicly created mixed-income housing. Once again, the project was linked to the loss of too many affordable homes.

Atlanta needs to embrace innovation again. But this time, it needs to value the strengths of legacy Black communities and structure development so that displacement is not at the heart of it. We need to engage in democratic decision-making together so that the lives and voices of neighbors contribute to the direction taken by our city and communities. Atlanta can show the world what participatory planning looks like.

We have a window to reboot the direction of the BeltLine development midway through its mandate. What should we do? While we have some ideas related just to the BeltLine, much of what needs to happen affects the whole city and even the state.

Housing Justice League members have long advocated laws protecting renters and low-income homeowners, which we lay out below.⁷² We also support solutions for housing and development that go beyond the market, including housing cooperatives and community land trusts.

Below is a full list of recommendations for how we can collectively work to ensure that the BeltLine lives up to its promise of a more unified and accessible Atlanta. Some are adapted from Dan Immergluck's policy suggestions for the BeltLine, others come directly from our interviews and surveys with those most affected by the development of the area and the combined wisdom of tenant groups nationally.⁷³

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO, FOR THE BELTLINE AND BEYOND

Reclaim Vacant Housing and Secure Property for the Democratic Creation of New, Permanently Affordable Housing

- The City must buy or otherwise secure property itself to ensure that it develops as permanent, affordable rental housing. "Permanent" is defined as affordable on a 100-year time horizon;
- The City should support the formation of community land trusts, nonprofit trusts that are democratically controlled by those who live on the property and in the community. This helps protect the property from market speculation;
- The City should launch a land-bank program for abandoned properties to prioritize community ownership and control over their development. A land bank can be owned by the city or a community nonprofit and manage the renovation of those properties into affordable housing, without giveaways to for-profit developers;
- The City should be more aggressive in reclaiming and renovating currently vacant housing for sale or rental as long-term affordable housing that is protected from being flipped.

Preserve Existing Affordable Housing

- Public and private finances now funding the BeltLine should be put towards preserving and maintaining low-income rental housing that already exists in the BeltLine Planning Area;
- The City should identify every existing affordable rental housing development in-

cluding all project-based section 8 complexes, public housing units, tax credit mobile home parks, etc., and ensure that current contracts are extended. Also move towards making these permanently affordable by placing them in community-controlled community land trusts and fostering tenant ownership;

- The City should institute a “right to first refusal” policy that requires a seller to offer any existing affordable rental housing unit to existing tenants for purchase, before being sold or re-rented on the private market;
- The City should finance rehab programs for homeowners and programs for landlords to rehabilitate already existing affordable units if they make long-term commitments to affordability. It should explore new financing for this purpose, including Social Impact investment and public sources of funding;
- The City should take advantage of existing community development organizations to rehabilitate existing housing, acquire new buildings, and build new affordable housing;
- The government should give strong tax incentives to landlords that offer commitments to long-term affordability.

Longtime renter
Clemmie Jenkins at a
residents’ meeting

Photo by Maggie Kane



Build New Affordable Housing

- The City and the BeltLine should explore and develop new financing for new affordable housing;
 - The City should take advantage of existing community development organizations to build new affordable housing;
 - The City should fund the creation of more limited equity housing cooperatives as a way to protect affordable housing. These resident-owned buildings cap both the sale price of apartments and the income level of buyers, protecting them from the pressures of a gentrifying housing market.

Mandate that BeltLine developers include affordable units in their buildings; pass “Inclusionary Zoning” laws for the entire city as well

“Inclusionary zoning” mandates that developers include a certain proportion of affordable units within the new buildings. This tactic will be the most effective way to meet the BeltLine’s goal of 5,600 new units of affordable housing.

- New BeltLine mandates should prioritize the needs of households earning below 60 percent of the area median income but also create incentives to develop housing for households at 30 percent of median income and under. Increase incentives for lower income levels;
- Mandate inclusionary zoning for the whole city so developers cannot avoid its requirements by simply avoiding areas where the policy is in effect. Require affordability of units to include 50 percent of area median income and below, as well as 30 percent of the area median and below;
- Use inclusionary zoning to prioritize a percentage of affordable units and the land they are on to be owned and controlled by a non-profit and placed in a community land trust;

- The City must create and offer incentives to developers committed to developing housing for lower-income households. These could include expedited permitting, fee waivers etc.

Refocus Existing Housing-Assistance Programs on Low-Income Renters

Down-Payment Assistance programs primarily help families earning about 80 percent of area median income and people with means achieve home-ownership. These efforts also do little to adequately offer housing at the rate which it is required in the City. Actions that would focus these programs where they are most-needed would include:

- Allocate a portion of the \$40 million in the Affordable Housing Bond Program to develop rental housing in the BeltLine planning area that is affordable to households with incomes below 60 percent of Area Median Income;
- Redirect existing public funding from programs that have less-positive social impact (such as tax breaks for corporate development) to demonstrate that the City understands that affordable housing is an important, basic infrastructural need in Atlanta.

Expand Property Tax-Abatement Programs to Support Affordable Housing

- The City should issue more Project Based Subsidies, where developers receive incentives such as tax breaks to create affordable units for lower-income populations;
- Enact Urban Enterprise Zones where developers would receive a ten-year tax abatement in return for providing affordable housing units in 20 percent of a development;
- Give Tenant Based Subsidies to individual households to offset higher rents;
- Revise definitions of affordability in existing programs so that they are more realistic and inclusive. We cannot forget about the needs of the large group of households in the vulnerable middle, earning 31 percent to 50 percent of area median income.

Consider a Moratorium on Evictions and Foreclosures During Times of Crisis

This legal tactic was used in some areas to combat the human toll of the recession of 2008. Establish clear criteria as to what constitutes a "crisis."

Require Studies on the Impact of Displacement

Forced displacement of communities due to economic pressure accelerated by development has long-term effects on the mental health of residents displaced.

- The City should fund the research of the long-term human consequences of eviction and forced displacement;
- Developers should be required to conduct their own Displacement Impact Studies before starting so that the plan includes measures to mitigate and avoid harsh consequences of displacement.

Support Democratic, Community-Led Planning and Development

- Community Development Corporations across Atlanta are nonprofits that need to be supported and strengthened. Democratically run Community Development Corporations that work alongside a broad coalition of neighborhood residents should have priority in accessing affordable housing trust money allocated in a democratic, community-driven process;
- Expand the power of the city's Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU), a program of citizen advisory boards launched in 1974 to advise the mayor and city council on planning in their area. NPU's should oversee commercial and residential development of communities. Establish Development Oversight Committees or Boards

within the BeltLine planning area granting communities the power to decide how land along the trail may be developed;

- Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. must conduct outreach and community engagement to ensure that its meetings are truly accessible to low-income people. Promote meetings at Housing and Urban Development complexes, grocery stores, and other public areas;
- Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. should craft a small participatory planning initiative for one section of the development;
- Set strong standards for public engagement in land-use planning and development decision-making. Support community-based training for residents to participate in planning and development processes.

Limit Speculative Investment

Create penalties, including taxes and fees, for development or investment activities that focus on profit generation without benefit to existing residents. Funds generated from these taxes and fees should go to community land trusts and nonprofits to create or preserve affordable housing.

THE COUNTY AND STATE: PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF RESIDENTS AND TENANTS

Expand Legal Aid Programs to Serve Low-Income Renters

- Low-income renters are far more likely to be unjustly evicted or taken advantage of by noncompliant or absentee landlords. They deserve aid in fighting unfair-housing practices. Ensure that renters have the right to a fair judicial process and a lawyer;
- Give tenants the right to withhold rent, pay for repairs themselves and deduct from rent to combat landlords letting conditions deteriorate before flipping the unit and displacing the tenant;
- Institute the right of renters to organize renters' associations and to hold meetings within their buildings. Prevent interference by landlords, and penalize landlords who interfere with these rights.

Stabilize Rents for Low-Income Renters

- Rent Control is explicitly prohibited by Georgia State Law, but would be a substantial aid in addressing Atlanta's crisis of affordability. Repeal this law or waive it for Atlanta;
- Create Stabilization Vouchers for long-time residents of low-income communities to help them stay when gentrification poses a risk and help curb the tide of displacement.

Pass Eviction Protections

Atlanta has a much higher eviction rate than most major cities because it doesn't protect against evictions of renters. The brunt of these unjust evictions falls disproportionately on Black neighborhoods as development moves in.

- We need Just Cause Eviction laws that list exactly when it is legal to evict someone. These can be "for cause," for instance when someone doesn't pay rent, or for "no fault" reasons like gut rehabs.

Hold Landlords Accountable

- When landlords are absent and/or neglect their property, they should expect to be held accountable by state law for any impact that has on their occupant or renter. While the law technically protects tenants against neglected housing, enforcing the law is the real issue. Tenants rarely have the access to lawyers to sue, or the

wherewithal to produce the types of evidence required in court.

Pass “Circuit Breakers” so Homeowners Aren’t Forced Out Because of Rising Property Taxes

- Pass “circuit breakers” which limit the property taxes paid by low-income homeowners based on their income so they are not forced out of their neighborhoods because they can’t pay rising property taxes.⁷⁴

RESIDENTS TAKING ACTION

Low-Income Residents, Old and New

- Attend your Neighborhood Planning Unit and neighborhood association meetings. Stay tuned in to current plans to develop in your community. Understand that you have a place in the decision-making process of your community;
- Join local advocacy organizations that align with your own ideals of policy and action and fight through them to keep residents in your neighborhood, organize your neighbors, and win and defend the rights of low-income renters and homeowners;
- Hold your elected officials at the City and State levels accountable for protecting the rights of the communities they represent.
- Vote for policymakers with strong track records on affordable housing and fighting for community voices and concerns;
- Stay in your residence if you want to. Reach out to housing advocacy organizations for back up if you feel you are harassed or subject to unjust actions of a landlord, property-buyer, or the City.

Aaron Thorpe of the Housing Justice League at a residents’ meeting.

Photo by Maggie Kane



Moderate to High-Income Residents

- Understand the socioeconomic reality of your surroundings. For newer residents, you are welcome in these neighborhoods, but understand that you are entering a community with an existing culture and sense of identity, and that the people there deserve your respect;
- Join your local neighborhood association and attend Neighborhood Planning Unit meetings.
- Donate your time and effort to groups within your community that organize around the rights of that community;
- Donate to or start a community fund (if one does not exist) to help low-income renters and homeowners;
- Instead of calling the City about a code violation, give money or volunteer to help or find a program to help your neighbor solve the problem;
- Vote-in elected officials who are committed to affordable housing and community voices or concerns.

What about the future?

How should other city initiatives structure themselves so that displacement is not at the heart of development? Georgia Tech Professor Dan Immergluck and his coauthor Prof. Tharunya Balan have a

suggestion: put affordable housing at the heart of the projects:

Planners who seek to avoid large-scale gentrification, or at least seek to further 'development without displacement' and to maintain some minimum level of economic diversity in the nearby areas, must recognize that housing affordability should be an early-stage, central component of planning for such projects. It is not enough to plan for trickle-down affordable housing development down the road after the project gets up a head of steam. By then, land values will have increased substantially, making the preservation and creation of affordable housing very expensive, and possibly cost-prohibitive.

We need to think about Development not Displacement. Renters and low-income homeowners must receive more legal protections. We must envision the future by first acknowledging the long history of racism and displacement our communities have endured. In the process, we must respect the neighborhood's history and culture. It is vital to appreciate and protect the supportive networks among neighbors. All of this is more likely if we empower democratic mechanisms for people to contribute to the development of their own communities. We can move forward together and build more just and livable communities. We can heed the warning call of already gentrifying communities to do better for the people living there now. And build a BeltLine for All.

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VII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: QUANTITATIVE METHODS

We compiled data on demographic and economic indicators from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey's (ACS) five-year estimates, 2006-2010 and 2011-2015. The tables we used include: median household income in the past 12 months, demographic characteristics for occupied housing units, occupancy characteristics, receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (food stamps) in the past 12 months, poverty status in the past 12 months for households, race, gini index of income inequality, household type (including living alone), employment status, sex by age, median age by sex, employment characteristics of families, and median income in the past 12 months.

Gentrification Index

We pulled out three markers of gentrification and displacement in an area:

- A drop in the share of the residents who were people of color;
- A drop in the share of residents who are not college-educated;
- increased median income

By examining these changes side-by-side, we sought to identify impending displacement of low-income people of color. An increase in median income, out of context, could indicate that the quality of life for a neighborhood's residents improved. But if significant demographic changes happen all at once, it is clear that those residents were not lifted out of poverty, but displaced by new, more affluent householders. (See Figure 12.)

We then created an index using our indicators. We compared the changes in median income, white-only share of householders and college-educated share of householders in each census tract to changes in the City of Atlanta as a whole;

- Type A signals a five-year increase in median income that surpassed the Atlanta change. It would stand alone if the racial make-up of the area didn't change at the same time;
- An increase in the share of residents who were white was categorized as Type B. We marked areas where both median income increased and the share of white residents increased as Type AB;
- C marks that the share of college educated residents grew. So Type AC suggests both median income and the share of college educated grew in an area, without a racial shift;
- When all three changes occurred, at once, we used all three letters, as Type ABC

Once tracts were categorized, changes in the number of non-white only households and the population earning below \$35,000 were examined across census tracts to compare the type of gentrification occurring in each tract with indicators of displacement. Some tracts appear to be gentrifying rapidly without significant evidence of displacement, while others suggest a link between increases in the share of educated and better off residents and the declining population of low-income people. Median income was adjusted for inflation using the U.S. Consumer Price Index for the year of data collection. Median income statistics are presented in 2015 dollars.

Indicator	Atlanta MSA Estimate
Income Change	-2.58%
White share of householders change	1.7
Share of householders with bachelor's degree change	4
Gentrification Types	Surpasses Atlanta MSA thresholds for:
-	None
A	Income Change > -2.58%
AB	Income Change > -2.58%
AB	White share of householders change > 1.7
AC	Income Change > -2.58%
AC	Share of householders with bachelor's degree change > 4
ABC	Income Change > -2.58%
ABC	White share of householders change > 1.7
ABC	Share of householders with bachelor's degree change > 4

Figure 12: Method for Categorizing Southside Tracts near BeltLine

Limitations

Most annual and five-year differences at the census tract level do not display statistical significance given American Community Survey margins of error. Due to the large margins of error, we did not attempt to make causal inferences. Differences between group means of American Community Survey estimates by gentrification index generally do not display statistical significance. American Community Survey reports shares of total for demographic indicators at the household level. While five-year differences in some population estimates aggregated by gentrification level display high significance levels, five-year differences in means of shares of population do not. Statistical inferences cannot be made using these mean share of total estimates.

Due to non-correspondence between census tract and neighborhood boundaries, our estimates for select neighborhoods are aggregates of data from multiple census tracts. Subarea and gentrification type aggregates and group means are weighted by total number of occupied housing units per tract.

APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE METHODS

Participatory Action Research

In our research design we followed “critical Participatory Action Research practices” as defined by Maria Torres of the City University of New York. This research addresses issues of democracy and social justice, challenges traditional concepts of expertise, and repositions those traditionally marginalized as fully participating researchers, collaborating in designing research questions, methods, interpretation, and final results.⁷⁵ Our initial Participatory Action Research project examined the basic trends of the BeltLine in order to decide which communities to focus the research on.

Once a core group of Research|Action researchers and two Housing Justice League members had decided on a mixed methods research design, we began to train six Housing Justice League members in semi-structured interviewing and qualitative survey techniques so they would be in conversation with their own community. We then moved to interview and survey collection over the course of six months and then worked together, with a new group of Housing Justice League ally volunteers, to conduct and talk through the results of the surveys and interviews. Finally, we began the process of collective writing and editing, which took another three months. Therefore, the scope of the research, the selection of who to survey and interview, the framing of how data were presented, and their form were all developed in close collaboration with members of Housing Justice League.

Interviews

Between December 2016 and May 2017 we conducted 31 10-to-30-minute semi-structured interviews with low to moderate-income residents from Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, Adair Park and a few additional Southside neighborhoods. A common interview script was used which built from open-ended questions to more specific questions. Interview candidates were selected with help from the Housing Justice League and their members in order to ensure depth and breadth across housing circumstances in our target group.

Surveys

To find survey subjects we shared the survey with neighborhood association leaders and asked them to share it with their membership. Further, we posted it on social media, and planned three major canvassing events at which we collected nearly three quarters of the total surveys. Nearly all of the surveys from Peoplestown (24), Pittsburgh (21), and Adair Park (20) were collected from blocks randomly selected before canvassing. However, we also did more targeted canvassing in low-income blocks in Mozley Park (13), which is in the process of gentrifying and at Trestletree Village section 8 Housing Complex in Grant Park (eight). We specifically selected Trestletree because it is a BeltLine-supported Atlanta Housing Authority property. Trestletree is the last remaining affordable complex in Grant Park, a neighborhood where, between 2000 and 2010, median household income doubled and the white percent of the total population went up by 10 percent.⁷⁶ Most other neighborhoods within the survey area had fewer than five respondents.

APPENDIX C: THE BELTLINE AND GENTRIFICATION TYPES

There are 31 tracts along the BeltLine characterized as BeltLine planning subareas one, two, three, four, and 10, which together cover the neighborhoods south of I-20 and those between I-20 and Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway. Of these 31 tracts, 20 are gentrifying according to our index. Five are type A, showing only an increase in median income. Two are type AB, showing both median income change and an increasing share of residents who are white. Five are type AC, indicating both median income change and an increasing share of college educated residents. Eight are type ABC, where all indicators are in play. Of those final eight, five saw a drop in the non-white population. On average, Black owner-occupancy in the Type ABC tracts fell eight percentage points. This suggests that gentrification in these neighborhoods is driving displacement and leaving homeowners of color worse off.

The Beltline's subarea two or the "Heritage Communities of South Atlanta" is of particular interest to us because it includes the neighborhoods where we focused our interviews and surveys—Adair Park, Peoplestown, and Pittsburgh, as well as Mechanicsville, Sylvan Hills, and others. In addition, along with subareas one and ten, this is the Southwest corridor of the BeltLine that has recently seen trail development along the western edge and where the land values went up by 68 percent between 2010 and 2015, with nearly 27 percent of the rise attributable to the BeltLine alone.⁷⁷

In BeltLine Subareas two and three, all neighborhoods saw a drop in owner occupancy by householders of color, except for one.⁷⁸ The white-only share of owner-occupied households rose by more than 10 percentage points in the tracts that comprise Grant Park, Boulevard Heights, Benteen Park, Peoplestown, South Atlanta, Capitol View, Oakland City and West End. This trend of declining populations of color does not appear as strong among renter-occupied homes, indicating that property owners may be being priced out even before rents become unaffordable.

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Figure 13:
BeltLine tracts in
Subareas 1, 2, 3, 4
and 10 and their
Gentrification Types

The only Southside census tracts overlapping or adjacent to the BeltLine that did not see a higher white share of population increase than the City of Atlanta were 61, 62, and 64 (Bush Mountain, Oakland City, and Chosewood Park). That is not to say that these neighborhoods were not gentrifying in other ways. Chosewood Park saw the college-educated share of population increase more than that of the City of Atlanta and its median income increased at a higher rate as well. Indeed, real median income increased by 23.8 percent in Chosewood park, while it decreased in the City of Atlanta. Of all Southside census tracts overlapping or adjacent to the BeltLine, only tract 62 did not surpass the City of Atlanta in one of these three measures.

Census Tract	Neighborhood	Sub-area	Gentrification Type
Census Tract 205, Dekalb County	Edgewood	4	-
Census Tract 7, Fulton County	Bankhead/Howell Station	10	A
Census Tract 23, Fulton County	Bankhead	10	AB
Census Tract 24, Fulton County	Hunter Hills/Washington Park	10	A
Census Tract 30, Fulton County	Inman Park	4	A
Census Tract 31, Fulton County	Reynoldstown	4	ABC
Census Tract 32, Fulton County	Cabbagetown	4	AC
Census Tract 39, Fulton County	Just Us/Ashview Heights	10	AC
Census Tract 40, Fulton County	Mozley Park	1	AC
Census Tract 41, Fulton County	West End/Harris Chiles	1	-
Census Tract 42, Fulton County	West End/Harris Chiles	1	-
Census Tract 50, Fulton County	Grant Park	3	ABC
Census Tract 52, Fulton County	Ormewood Park	3	ABC
Census Tract 53, Fulton County	Grant Park	2	ABC
Census Tract 55.01, Fulton County	Peoplestown	2	-
Census Tract 55.02, Fulton County	South Atlanta	2	-
Census Tract 58, Fulton County	Adair Park	1	ABC
Census Tract 60, Fulton County	Westview	1	ABC
Census Tract 61, Fulton County	Bush Mountain/Oakland City/Cascade Ave	1	A
Census Tract 62, Fulton County	Oakland City	1	-
Census Tract 63, Fulton County	Pittsburgh	2	AB
Census Tract 64, Fulton County	Chosewood Park/Englewood Manor	2	AC
Census Tract 65, Fulton County	Capitol View	2	-

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Figure 14:
Gentrification Types by
Census Tract

Census Tract 66.01, Fulton County	Capitol View/ Sylvan Hills	1	AC
Census Tract 67, Fulton County	Pittsburgh	2	-
Census Tract 69, Fulton County	Benteen Park/ Boulevard Heights	3	ABC
Census Tract 84, Fulton County	Bankhead	10	A
Census Tract 85, Fulton County	Bankhead/ Grove Park	10	ABC
Census Tract 118, Fulton County	English Ave	10	-
Census Tract 119, Fulton County	Downtown/ Sweet Auburn	4	-
Census Tract 120, Fulton County	Mechanicsville	2	-

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Full Name
2. Address (or street and cross street)
3. Neighborhood:
4. Race/Ethnicity
 - American Indian and Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Latino/a
 - Two or more Races (write in races)
 - Other (please specify)
5. What is your total annual household income? (Choose one)
 - Under \$15,000
 - \$15,000 - \$25,000
 - \$25,000 - \$35,000
 - \$35,000 - \$45,000
 - \$45,000 - \$55,000
 - \$55,000 - \$65,000
 - \$65,000 - \$85,000
 - \$85,000 - \$125,000
 - \$125,000 - \$200,000
 - \$200,000 or above
6. Do you rent or own a home?
 - rent
 - own
 - Other (please specify)

7. How many live in the home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 or more

8. How long have you lived in this home?

- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-25 years
- more than 25 years

9. How long have you lived in the neighborhood?

- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-25 years
- more than 25 years

10. How many bedrooms?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

11. How many bathrooms?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

12. How much is rent or mortgage payment (including property tax and insurance escrow) monthly?

13. How many times (months) during the last year have you struggled to pay your rent or mortgage?

14. How much are average monthly utility (including electric, gas, water) costs?

- included in rent
- \$25 - \$100
- \$100 - \$175
- \$175 - \$250
- \$250 - \$325
- \$325 - \$400
- \$400 - \$475
- \$475 or above

15. Are you worried that your rent or property taxes will go up in the next two years?

- yes
- no

16. How likely is it that you will move out of the neighborhood if housing costs increased within the next two years?

- very unlikely
- unlikely
- likely
- very likely

17. Have your monthly rent or property taxes gone up since 2012?

- yes
- no

18. By how much?

- \$25 - \$75
- \$75 - \$125
- \$125 - \$175
- \$175 - \$225
- \$225 - \$275
- \$275 - \$325
- \$325 - \$375
- \$375 - \$425
- \$425 - \$475
- Other (please specify)

19. Have you noticed any changes in your neighborhood that you attribute to the BeltLine?

- "better" (to you) public services (public safety, trash coll, etc.)
- "better" (to you) retail or commercial services
- "better" (to you) schools
- "worse" (to you) public services
- "worse" (to you) retail or commercial services
- "worse" (to you) schools
- Other (define as "better" or "worse"): _____

20. Which, if any, of the following do you worry about concerning possible neighborhood changes over the next 0-5 years? Choose all that apply:

- Higher housing costs (rent, property taxes, etc.)
- Changing neighborhood businesses
- Changing public services
- Changing schools
- Changing "voice" or "input" into neighborhood governance/ NPU/etc.
- Other (please specify)

21. What group(s) best describes the neighbors in your building/on your block? Choose all that apply:

- Students
- Working Adults
- Families
- Seniors
- Other (Please indicate _____)

22. With which group do you identify?

- Students
- Working Adults
- Families
- Seniors
- Other (Please indicate: _____)

23. How comfortable are you living near your neighbors?

- not comfortable
- moderately comfortable
- very comfortable

24. How often do you speak with your neighbors?

- Not at all
- Once a week
- 2 – 3 times a week
- 4 – 5 times a week
- Often, 6 + times a week
- Other (please specify)

25. What do you value and appreciate in your community?

- near family members
- near religious institution I attend
- near my work
- near school of my children
- relationships with my neighbors
- small businesses
- social institutions
- cultural institutions
- mass transit
- green space

26. How would you rate your satisfaction with each of the following items where you live?

very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied, extremely satisfied

- Affordability of rent
- Neighborhood amenities (parks, activities, stores)
- Physical condition of the homes
- Convenience of location
- Public schools
- Safety

27. Do you want to stay in the community?

- Yes
- No

28. Why or why not?

29. Additional Comments about the BeltLine, Gentrification and/or your Neighborhood:

ABOUT

Housing Justice League is a grassroots, member-led organization that builds power in low- to moderate-income, metro-Atlanta neighborhoods highly affected by the housing crisis. Its organizing focuses on strengthening tenant associations at low-income complexes and building the broader housing justice movement. www.housingjusticeleague.org

Research|Action Cooperative is a worker-owned firm of seasoned professionals who champion research and popular communication as vital and necessary to the project of social change. www.researchaction.net

