

Atlanta BeltLine Partnership Employment Advisory Group Meeting Notes – Sept. 20, 2010

Participants:

Beth McMillan, *Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.*
Liz Coyle, *BeltLine Network/Atlanta BeltLine Chamber of Commerce*
Valarie Wilson, *Atlanta BeltLine Partnership*
Rob Brawner, *Atlanta BeltLine Partnership*
Rodney Ellis, *Atlanta Technical College*
Harold Craig, *Atlanta Technical College*
Garry Harris, *Center for Sustainable Communities*
Von Nkosi, *City of Atlanta/Southface*
Elke Davidson, *Davidson Consulting*
Anadri Chisolm-Noel, *Emory University*
Willie Palmer, *Georgia Power*
Melissa Conrad, *Georgia Stand-Up*

Peter Roberts, *Goizueta Business School*
Ellen Williams, *Goizueta Business School*
Stu Lipkin, *Goizueta Business School*
Akhil Chhabra, *Goizueta Business School*
Toni Sargeant, *Goizueta Business School*
Rhea Posey, *Hosea Feed the Hungry*
Derrick Duckworth, *Morris & Raper Intown/Atlanta BeltLine Chamber of Commerce*
Lisa McCard, *Smart Growth Solutions, LLC*
Nicole Rollins, *Wachovia Wells Fargo*
Oluyemi Yikealo, *West End Merchants Coalition*
Faye Dresner, *Year-Up*
Kweku Forstall, *Year-Up*

Goals of the Meeting

The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership convened a group of critical stakeholders to develop a set of strategies to link residents of Atlanta BeltLine neighborhoods with existing and future jobs around the Atlanta BeltLine. The goals of this first meeting were to:

- Introduce group members and their institutional affiliation to each other;
- Discuss the goals of the initiative;
- Learn about other workforce/employment projects that might link to this effort (City of Atlanta Green Jobs, BeltLine Inc. CBA, etc.);
- Introduce the group to the Emory MBA Social Enterprise students who will be performing initial research for the project, discuss their proposed scope of work, and suggest additions and revisions.

Key Challenges to Training/Placing/Retaining Workers

The group began with introductions, and each participant – workforce developer or employer – identified the biggest challenges they face training, placing, hiring or retaining qualified workers. The challenges are listed below:

Workforce Developer

1. Workers are **over or under qualified** for available positions.
2. Many students in tech colleges need 6-12 months of **remedial work** (reading/math) before they can begin sector or job-specific training.
3. Hard to find enough **space for expanding Atlanta Technical College programs.**
4. Hard to find **qualified instructors for Atlanta Technical College programs** – difficult to pay a competitive wage.
5. Hard to find jobs that allow workers to move up from initial entry-level positions – **jobs with wage ladders.**
6. Hard to work with challenging populations

- **Ex-offender population key** – need to find mechanism for *addressing concerns of employers so they feel comfortable dropping barriers and/or erasing criminal history to maximize job placement opportunities.*
- **Formerly homeless/transitioning from homelessness.** Need significant services in addition to job training/placement. Need to educate employers
- 7. Need **support services for newly placed workers to increase retention.** Work doesn't end with placement.
- 8. **Traffic/transportation** is barrier. Limited transit, low car-ownership rates, unpredictable commute times.
 - Especially an issue for **construction workers** that need to be on the job early in the a.m.
- 9. Challenges are **location-specific** – Southwest Atlanta has 7 times higher unemployment than the city as a whole (**is the comparison at regional level? Melissa Conrad**)

Employers

1. Hard to find qualified entry-level workers.
 - GA Power especially has issues with finding **line-workers – installation and repair.**
2. Limited partnership between community groups/organizations and local employers. Difficult to create pipeline to jobs.
3. Limited and unreliable transportation.
4. Limited parking.
5. Limited/unaffordable child-care.

Project Background and Potentially Linked Initiatives

Rob Brawner gave an overview of the goals of the Atlanta BLP project (see attached document).

Von Nkosi, consultant to Southface Energy Institute, next gave an update on the City of Atlanta green workforce development effort. Atlanta has received \$1 million from the Dept. of Energy to create a plan to retrofit significant numbers of residential and commercial buildings throughout the city, with workforce development as part of the initiative. The City is taking the opportunity provided by the DOE dollars to ask the question more broadly, looking at workforce development efforts around green jobs writ large, including but not limited to energy retrofits. Southface Energy Institute has been engaged by the City to help with this effort. Von emphasized the importance of looking at low-income folks as both the *consumers* and *producers of green-building/retrofit/weatherization services.*

Von confirmed that the City is looking to target the retrofit activity south of I-20, and group members suggested that they look at focusing on Atlanta BeltLine neighborhoods as a pilot project. This focus could be both in terms of units *and* workforce recruitment and training.

Finally, Beth McMillan from Atlanta BeltLine Inc. provided a brief overview of ABI's efforts around employment. She discussed their recent job training initiative which focused on both ABI infrastructure projects as well as a larger pool of employment opportunities. She stated that they had 100 applicants, but were only able to train 33 due to barriers such as failing drug tests, lack of basic reading and math skills, and previous criminal convictions. ABI, working with the Atlanta Development Authority, was able to place 85% of the 33 trained, and is currently focusing on monitoring and retention activities. In addition, Beth briefly described the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) put in place for contractors working on Atlanta BeltLine projects; the CBA mandates that a certain percentage of jobs be awarded to Atlanta BeltLine residents.

At the end of this section, the group had a brief discussion about the importance of, and challenges to, accurately measuring jobs created. The group identified the following issues:

- **Atlanta BeltLine vs. private sector jobs:** Atlanta BeltLine projects are easy to track, but how will we be able to identify jobs created due to secondary private sector economic activity?
- **Does the quality of job matter?:** Do we want to count *any* job, focus on full-time vs. part-time jobs, include short-term or only permanent jobs, or consider wage levels as we try to develop a method and mechanism for counting jobs created?

Emory MBA/Social Enterprise Research Project

Rob Brawner introduced the faculty and students from Emory's Goizeta Business School that will be performing the initial original research for this project. Rob stated that the City had performed an environmental scan of the literature and national best practice around workforce development, especially green workforce development. The students will be reviewing this effort, as well as performing interviews with key private sector employers around the Atlanta BeltLine. Their focus will be on investigating how businesses currently "source" talent to fill jobs, as well as identifying potential challenges for local business to create pipelines from

Atlanta BeltLine neighborhoods (see attached Emory scope). The group had a spirited discussion, and identified the following frameworks and issues for the students to investigate:

1. **Slow build-out:** The Atlanta BeltLine will be implemented over 25 years. Does it make sense to think about job creation, training and placement *sequenced over time*?
2. **Economic development “sub-regions:”** The Atlanta BeltLine contains many different types of places within which jobs will be created – locally-serving commercial nodes, anchor institutions (i.e. Piedmont Hospital/GA Power), light industrial, etc. How can we think about job creation, training and placement strategies tailored to these Atlanta BeltLine “sub-regions?”
3. **Population-based strategies:** The group identified several different populations of folks along the Atlanta BeltLine needing jobs– mid-career professionals, new graduates, folks transitioning from homelessness, folks with criminal backgrounds, etc. How can we think about job creation, training and placement strategies tailored to individual populations?
4. **Life-cycle issues:** There are many different potential stages in the process of getting a job, including *identification and recruitment of candidates, qualifying/vetting candidates, training, placement and support for retention*. How can we think about developing strategies for each node in this employment cycle?
5. **Current vs. potential future jobs:** How can we develop strategies that will respond to current jobs along the Atlanta BeltLine as well as potential jobs that will develop in the future? Can we access accurate data about trends and projections in job creation (from personal networks with existing businesses, academic sources, government sources, national business organizations by sector, etc.) and incorporate this into our training efforts? *How can we link this effort with economic development planning and policy at the city, regional and state levels?*
6. **Role of technology:** How can technology (web and or place-based “one-stop shop” for info on available jobs, training opportunities, application processes, etc.) help make access to jobs more efficient and effective? Could the newly-conceived Atlanta BeltLine Chamber of Commerce play a role in this?
7. **Planning for different points of access:** Some folks will come through workforce development programs (community college, ADA, nonprofit, etc.), while others will access jobs more directly. How do we create a system that incorporates the many points of access utilized by those seeking jobs on the Atlanta BeltLine?
8. **Increase employer participation:** Group members noticed that there was limited employer participation in the meeting. Although several have expressed interest but could not attend on this date, it’s clear we will have to provide incentives for Atlanta BeltLine employers to participate. Look to ease of recruitment, vetting of candidates,

outsourcing training activities, extended retention ratios, limited re-training, *healthier bottom-line*.

9. **Link to Atlanta BeltLine economic development planning:** Group members expressed interest in whether ABI has engaged in economic development planning, and how to link this effort to those goals and strategies if they exist or are being considered.
10. **Defining the physical boundaries of the study:** Group members asked Emory students how they were defining the boundaries of their study – businesses *on* the Atlanta BeltLine, in the Atlanta BeltLine TAD, existing within X miles of the Atlanta BeltLine, etc.

Next Steps

The group agreed to convene again during the first two weeks of December to hear the Emory students present on their research, and determine how to move the project forward.