

Atlanta BeltLine Partnership Employment Advisory Group Meeting Notes: 7/26/11

Participants:

- Beth McMillan, *Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.*
- Charles Edwards, *Atlanta Center for Self-Sufficiency*
- Dameon Daniels, *The Center for Working Families*
- David Jackson, *The Center for Working Families*
- Deborah Scott, *Georgia STAND-UP*
- Derrick Duckworth, *Atlanta BeltLine Chamber of Commerce*
- Elke Davidson, *Davidson Consulting*
- Gary Harris, *Center for Sustainable Communities*
- James Alexander, *Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.*
- Jon Effron, *Sanctuary Real Estate*
- Melissa Conrad, *MAC Consulting*
- Mike Carnathan, *Atlanta Regional Commission*
- Nathaniel Smith, *Partnership for Southern Equity*
- Otis Hillsman, *Atlanta Center for Self-Sufficiency*
- Rob Brawner, *Atlanta BeltLine Partnership*
- Steven Burgess, *Emory University*
- Valarie Wilson, *Atlanta BeltLine Partnership*
- Von Nkosi, *MXD Collaborative, Inc.*
- Warren Pincombe, *Atlanta Technical College*
- Willie Palmer, *Georgia Power*

The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership Employment Advisory Group met on July 16, 2011 at the Atlanta Technical College. The meeting was focused on updates and next steps from three of the five standing committees who had met in June: Data, Policy/Program and Marketing.

Data Committee

The first presentation was from the Data Committee. Rob Brawner presented. He identified the following issues that the Committee is pursuing:

1. **Confirming/revising ABI's job creation projections included in the 2005 BeltLine Redevelopment Plan:** The Redevelopment Plan for the Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District (TAD) approved in 2005 projected that 48,000 one-year construction jobs would be generated by private redevelopment triggered by the investment of TAD dollars; this number does not include jobs generated by the construction directly funded by TAD dollars. In addition, the report projected 30,000 additional jobs would be generated through economic activity in the TAD.

James Alexander reported to the Employment Advisory Group that Rick Pagent at Huntley and Associates performed the original analysis. The numbers for construction jobs were based on a 25-yr. time horizon, with projections based on an assumed 30% of total project costs being dedicated to labor (1 year jobs). The permanent jobs were projected based on national measures calculating the # of jobs generated per square feet of commercial space, also with a 25-year time horizon.

The advisory group identified challenges to measuring progress against these projections:

- The projections were calculated based on the geography of the Tax Allocation District. However, the data that we will use to measure performance is not aggregated or organized by TAD boundaries – but rather by census tracts, zip codes, etc.
- The projections do not include construction jobs created to build the Atlanta BeltLine
- The projections were made prior to the housing market collapse, subsequent limits on lending, and the overall recession.

For these reasons the advisory group concluded that we would need a revised set of projections and baseline to measure progress against. Such a revision would also be of benefit to Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.

2. **Measuring the number of *hirable* residents in BeltLine neighborhoods:** The data committee discussed the difference between the number of folks within working age (18-64) and the number of folks that are currently hirable (educational attainment, literacy, incarceration, drug-testing, etc.) – recognizing that measurements will need to account for this difference.

The advisory group suggested working with the Center for Working Families to strategize about how to approach this issue.

3. **Confirming the jurisdiction for data-collection:** The data committee discussed the various potential units of analysis: TAD boundaries, study group boundaries, access-to-transit catchment areas, etc. The group agreed to include census tracts that are at least 50% represented within a ½ and ¼ mile radius around the path of the BeltLine itself.
4. **Describing businesses around the BeltLine:** The data committee confirmed the critical importance of being able to describe the businesses around the BeltLine in terms of sector and establishment size. Mike Carnathan from the ARC volunteered to provide a presentation based on annually gathered data from the Department of Labor and the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) component of the Census (which he presented to the advisory group later in the meeting). The data committee discussed potential additional data sources to supplement these federal sources, including:

- *Grease-trap permits from the City Of Atlanta* which serve as a proxy for # of restaurants
- *“Turn-off” numbers from GA Power* which could help construct the number of vacant commercial buildings
- *Info USA and the National Establishment Time Survey* (Dunn and Bradstreet) which can help track the number of business deaths and starts

between 1990 and 2011. Someone would likely have to pay for these numbers.

The advisory group agreed that getting a clearer understanding of the types and sizes of businesses around the BeltLine would be critical to a) ensure we get proper representation when we survey/interview business about their needs and interests around local hiring and b) design interventions that respond to the needs and interests of BeltLine businesses in a relevant, nuanced way.

5. **Combining qualitative and quantitative data:** The data committee discussed the importance of doing field-work, collecting wind-shield data to fill in gaps in more traditional quantitative sources. The group discussed recruiting local students from relevant classes at Tech, Emory, GSU or AUC schools, as well as potentially using some of the BeltLine's 1,200 volunteers to assess business license data, do parking lot counts, etc.

Next, Mike Carnathan of ARC presented the data he'd gathered on demographic, income, employment, commuting and employer trends around the BeltLine (see 'Socio-Economic Trends Along the Atlanta BeltLine' presentation at <http://EmploymentGroup.BeltLine.org>).

The group had a spirited discussion about the data, raising the following points and asking ARC to gather the following additional data for our next meeting:

New Data

- **Comparison of the number of BeltLine residents who *could* be working to the number who are working.** The data presented quantified who is working. The group asked Mike to compare that to the number of residents in the 18-64 age bracket – thereby identifying who is not working as well. Challenges will include: is it possible to back out folks who are full-time students, as well as folks who might not be looking for jobs for other reasons from this number?
- **Educational attainment:** The group asked Mike to include information on the educational attainment of residents in the ½ and ¼ mile “donuts.” It was felt that this information would help us design a more effective workforce strategy, and perhaps make some informed projections about *under* as well as *unemployment*.
- **Jobs by educational attainment/income:** The group asked Mike to provide data describing who (by level of educational attainment and income) is working in different jobs. Again, the group hoped this would deepen our understanding of underemployment trends in the target area.
- **Quantification of jobs by type of job:** To understand how many total jobs are around the Atlanta BeltLine, and what those jobs are, the group asked Mike to quantify the number of jobs by industry.

- **Individual vs. household data:** The group asked if it were possible to look at the range of data points that Mike presented for *individuals* at the *household level* as well.
- **Tracking displacement:** The group debated whether it was possible to track those displaced from BeltLine neighborhoods as a result of gentrification. A group member suggested looking at *average income increases* in the identified census tracts over time as a measure of decreases in lower-income residents. However, this measure may be limited due to the fact that a) we have no way of ascertaining *why* lower-income residents may have left (pressure of increased property taxes? taking advantage of increasing home values to sell and move?) and b) whether the increase in income is due to *fewer lower-income households, an increase in income in these lower-income households, or an overall increase in higher-income households (new construction? purchase and rehab of vacant property?) impacting the average income in a particular census tract.*

Group members asked Mike to think about how to address these challenges. In addition, one participant suggested looking at the “*how long at address*” data point in the census as a way of addressing some of these issues.

Policy/Program Committee

Steven Burgess, the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership’s intern from Emory University, presented for this committee. Steve had performed an environmental scan to identify existing local, state or federal policies or funding streams that would require, encourage or incent local hiring (see ‘Hiring Incentives for Businesses’ presentation at <http://EmploymentGroup.BeltLine.org>).

Although he looked at a range of loan programs and tax credit policies, the only policy with an explicit focus on local hiring was the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) developed for the BeltLine TAD. This CBA covers projects directly funded by the TAD, as well as projects funded with other sources *which are managed by ABI*. The group had some debate about the “first-source jobs policy” component of the CBA, and got some history on its passage.

The group then had a spirited discussion that began with a look at the *measurement issues* related to this policy: who was tasked with measuring whether local hiring was occurring, and did they have the necessary capacity to carry out this task? Without a strong evaluation component, group members felt that the policy would have only limited impact. During this discussion, a range of issues were raised and discussed:

- **Who?:** James Alexander reported that currently ABI is tasked with evaluating local hiring efforts covered by the CBA, and that they are looking right now at projects being performed by ABI itself, as well as some being bid out through an RFP process. Eventually, the Atlanta Workforce Development Authority (AWDA) will take this effort over, hopefully within the next 6 months. James

reported that ABI was committed to working with AWDA to make sure progress was monitored appropriately.

- **City First Source Jobs Policy:** Currently the City has a First Source Jobs Policy that requires business receiving a range of city funds to “establish a goal” of providing 50% of all entry level jobs to be filled with low-income city residents found on a “First Source register,” including graduates of programs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act. The current administrator of the First Source register is the AWDA. At the time of passage, the policy created a First Source Jobs Advisory Committee to be responsible for “monitor(ing) the first source agreements, make recommendations to the Council and Mayor on related problems...and promoting the first source policy in the business community,” but the Committee may no longer be in existence. Group members suggested that AWDA’s Board may have taken over these tasks.

Deborah Scott recommended www.communitybenefits.org as a resource for best practices.

The advisory group wants to explore whether there has been any assessment of the effectiveness of this city-wide policy. This would help us understand a) who is responsible for monitoring, and b) help clarify issues with evaluation that we might work to prevent when developing the monitoring process for the BeltLine First Source jobs policy.

- **Sticks and carrots:** Nathaniel Smith raised the issue of looking at both incentives and requirements. He noted that many economic development strategies’ policies focus solely on incentives, but that to be responsible, the group should explore requirements as well. He mentioned the recent construction of the **Yale Hospital** and construction activity at the **Port of Oakland** as potential best practices to explore.
- **Expand the number of subsidies with first-source hiring requirements:** Participants noted that another strategy could be to *increase the number of public subsidies with a first-source hiring requirement*. Group members identified additional ADA subsidies beyond the TAD dollars as a potential target in this regard.
- **Link to Mayor Reed’s New Century Economic Plan:** Nathaniel Smith suggested that the EAG explore potential coordination with this plan.
- **Employer services:** Group members suggested that *aggregating existing incentives (i.e. loans, tax credits, etc.)* for local employers could be a viable, high-impact service. Given that our intern didn’t find any policies particularly focused on *local* hiring, EAG would need to be strategic about bending existing job creation policies to this end.

- **GA Department of Labor:** The Department of Labor will create and implement tailored training efforts for large hires or sector-wide initiatives. The EAG should explore this program, as well as a longer-term partnership with Department of Labor staff.

This portion of the discussion ended with the acknowledgement that without a strong set of policy tools (requirements, tax credits, loan programs, etc.) linked to local hiring, *the emphasis will need to be on the “holistic” arguments for local hiring (i.e. reduced commute time, employee retention, environmental impacts, commitment to larger “local” ethos, etc.)* as well as on *providing the best trained workers so that local hiring becomes a function of picking the best applicant.*

Marketing

Jon Effron reported out for the Marketing Committee, which met during June and discussed several key items, including the following:

1. **East Side Trail:** With the East Side Trail under construction, it will be critical to gather data on existing businesses now (size, sector, receipts, etc.) in order to assess whether the additional foot traffic generated by the trail has any economic impact.
2. **Commercial real estate brokers:** Committee members emphasized the importance of engaging commercial real estate brokers into the EAG work, as they have an on-the-ground knowledge of how local businesses are faring.
3. **BeltLine Chamber:** Committee members encouraged the newly-formed Chamber to make the argument that being a BeltLine business will be good for business. ABI/ABLP sponsored events: art walks, bike and running races and dining initiatives – serve as “money multipliers,” and will provide BeltLine business with exposure to new customers, and identifying with the brand will help lure new business as well. This affiliation, it is hoped, can be a side-door into further conversations about local hiring.

The Marketing Committee expressed their interest in surveying and/or interviewing local businesses to help refine their messages. Employer Services and Human Capital have expressed this interest in past meetings, and the BeltLine Chamber indicated they are looking at this as well. **It will be critical to coordinate all these efforts to not over-burden local businesses struggling to stay afloat in these difficult economic times.**

Finally, Rob Brawner presented a stream-lined version of the Power-Point he provided to the ABLP Board about the work of the EAG. This presentation is helpful in clarifying the vision for the EAG and the roles of the sub-committees, recruiting new members to the EAG large group and committees, as well as in fund-raising to support this effort

moving forward. The ‘Employment Group Overview 2011.07.26’ presentation can be found at <http://EmploymentGroup.BeltLine.org>.

Next Steps

The group identified several concrete next steps before the next large group meeting:

- **Update data and set up measurement framework:** Informed by the recommendations from the advisory group, the data committee will update the information presented at the meeting and continue to develop a framework for measuring employment/housing/demographic/commuting trends around the Atlanta BeltLine over time.
- **Create Employer Advisory Board:** Group members pointed to the lack of consistent involvement by BeltLine businesses, both large and small, and emphasized the importance of getting their buy-in. The group agreed to empower the Executive Committee to develop a framework for a BeltLine Employer Advisory Board so we can keep them engaged, get their input and feedback, but not require them to come to every meeting.
- **Lay the groundwork for surveying businesses around the Atlanta BeltLine:** There are multiple questions we need to ask BeltLine businesses. Working with the Atlanta BeltLine Chamber of Commerce, we need to determine how to organize resources to do these surveys. Who will do them? How do we identify the businesses? What will be the process for forming questions?
- **Convene human capital and employer services committees so they can develop the frameworks for their ongoing efforts.**
- **Items to investigate further:**
 - How is the City of Atlanta tracking the success of the existing first-source hiring policy and what can we learn from it? (AWDA or City’s Contract Compliance Office)
 - What aspects of the “decision-support tool” being developed by GA Tech for ABI are relevant to our efforts?
 - Where are the opportunities to better understand, align, and strengthen City, ADA, and ABI policies around first-source hiring? And how do these policies intersect with the work being done by the employment advisory group?
 - Is there data or other information being gathered for the Equitable Development Plan that can also be used to inform the employment advisory group’s efforts – and vice versa?
 - What, if any, coordination is possible with the regional and federal transit projects? For example, if BeltLine projects make it to the final project list for the regional sales tax and the tax is passed, will there be any first-source hiring considerations included?