

Atlanta BeltLine Partnership Employment Advisory Group Executive Committee Meeting Notes

Participants: David Jackson, The Center for Working Families, Inc.
Derrick Duckworth, BeltLine Chamber of Commerce
Charles Edwards, Atlanta Center for Self-Sufficiency
Alvetta Thomas, Atlanta Metro Technical College
Willie Palmer, Georgia Power
Burrell Billingslea, Fulton County Workforce Development (retired)
Rob Brawner, Atlanta BeltLine Partnership
Elke Davidson, Facilitator

Introduction

The Executive Committee for ABLP's Employment Advisory Group met on November 17, 2011. The meeting began with an overview of the Employment Advisory Groups work to date (see attached powerpoint). The group then approved the proposed scope for the Executive Committee, including the following:

- Strategic guidance – what are next key issues to address?
- Vetting proposed process and program recommendations
- Help provide links to beltline businesses
- When necessary, assist with fund development

Engaging BeltLine businesses: the Business Advisory Council

Over last year of planning work, the EAG has found it difficult to consistently engage BeltLine businesses, especially small and medium firms. The Committee agreed that it was critical to engage the BeltLine business community in the planning process without requiring on-going participation in large group or committee meetings. Charles Edwards emphasized the importance of *making the case about the value proposition of local hiring to BeltLine businesses*, arguing that without business buy-in, success will be out of our reach. Burrell Billingslea stated that it was critical that the work be framed as *an effort to provide BeltLine business with a key product – a trained and productive workforce*, as opposed to as a social service effort. The group indicated that a good first stab at engaging BeltLine businesses might start with corporations that have provided support to either Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. or the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, leveraging existing investment. **Rob Brawner committed to getting a list of donors (land and dollars), and vetting them to see which ones are located around the BeltLine.**

One strategy to efficiently solicit business input is the development of a *Business Advisory Council* (BAC). This Council would be made up of BeltLine businesses (to be determined), and could meet on an ad-hoc basis to vet and respond to specific proposals and recommendations. The group had a fairly detailed conversation about how to populate the BAC, and came up with the following recommendations:

- 1. Position the BAC as an ad-hoc Committee of the BeltLine Chamber of Commerce:**
Elke Davidson reported that she had had a conversation with Derrick Duckworth of the new BeltLine Chamber to assess his interest in positioning this Business Advisory Council as an ad-hoc Committee of the Chamber, and that his first reaction was positive. Linking the BAC to the Chamber could assist the Chamber in its current recruitment efforts, providing an example of how Chamber membership provides access to and influence over BeltLine planning initiatives; assist the EAG with its recruitment efforts by aligning us with a broader economic development effort; and ensure more efficient and non-duplicative communication with local businesses. After some discussion, the Executive Committee agreed with this approach. Holly Snow from Piedmont Hospital is leading the Chamber's recruitment efforts, and **Derrick and Rob Brawner committed to reaching out to her to integrate her work with BAC development.**
- 2. For the first round of recruitment, focus on anchor employers around the BeltLine:** Anchor employers have significant influence with other businesses, can serve as economic engines for smaller BeltLine businesses through their supply-chains (the Book of Lists?), and engage in large-scale hiring and training efforts. The group decided that the BAC should ultimately have a tripartite structure: 5 anchor employers, 5 medium-sized employers, and 5 small employers. They recommended working with the first 5 members to help determine how to recruit the next 10 with an eye towards sector diversity and building strategic partnerships. **Rob and Elke will develop a list of the top 5 anchor employers and coordinate with Holly Snow and Derrick Duckworth on convening a first meeting.**

Engaging BeltLine businesses: focus groups with local businesses

The group next heard about a series of focus groups the EAG is planning on having with a range of BeltLine businesses to get specific, real-time feedback on their hiring practices, hiring challenges, reactions to a range of potential incentives for local hiring, perspectives on specific sub-populations, perspectives on their current and future hiring needs, etc.

From a design perspective, we are looking for the focus groups to reflect the range of BeltLine businesses by size, sector, % of jobs around the BeltLine, and pilot project targets, including construction, health-care, health IT, environmental health (i.e. lead, asbestos, etc.) and bio-tech. We are currently working to get current data on BeltLine business from a range of sources, including ARC and the GA Dept. of Labor.

The group was asked to think about if and how their organizations could support this effort as the current EAG budget only allows for 3 focus groups and 6-9 are necessary to ensure the feedback is representative. The goal is to hold the focus groups in the first quarter of 2012.

The group also agreed that the Chamber was well positioned to help with the design of, recruitment for and execution of the focus groups.

Miscellaneous Issues

For the rest of the meeting, the group had a far-reaching discussion that touched on best-practices, recruitment strategies for the BAC and focus groups, and potential services to provide to BeltLine businesses. Key points included the following:

- **Consolidating access to and coordinating application for tax credits and other financial incentives for hiring specific populations can add significant value for BeltLine employers:** Derrick Duckworth described a staffing business he ran in the past that provided this service. His fee was structured as a percentage of the incentive received, and provided a revenue source for his business. David Jackson also stated that UPS has internal staff that provide this service as part of the company's HR function, and that he may be able to leverage TCWFI's relationship with UPS to get us some technical assistance on this issue. UPS has also already invested \$500,000 to ABLP, and may therefore look favorably on supporting this effort.
- **Because they represent significant public investment and serve as regional job centers, EAG should consider the role of airports as jobs centers as a best practice model:** Members pointed particularly at Denver and Seattle as examples. Paul Allen has apparently done some work around SEATEC, and the airport itself has an office of workforce development that focusing on local sourcing (both hires and procurement). David Jackson reminded the group that Annie E. Casey has done some investing in Seattle on this issue, and mentioned something called the White Center to investigate.

Some group members pointed out a limit to this comparison in that airports are *singular institutions* and provide scale and legitimacy to their workforce efforts. The EAG is focused on literally hundreds of employers, and it begs the question of how we can provide legitimacy to *our* efforts. Is the BeltLine brand strong enough? Can we lean on the anchor institutions that will make up the core of our BAC? Other?

- **The group should also look at the Jacobs Foundation and their work in San Diego around using commercial development as the centerpiece of a neighborhood revitalization effort with a significant workforce component.**
- **Other groups that could assist with recruitment and research include the Small Business Association and the local chapter of the Society of Human Resource Managers.** These sources should be investigated during the focus group recruitment process and the BAC formation process.