

THE ATLANTA CITY DESIGN

Aspiring to the Beloved Community

What is the Atlanta City Design?

Atlanta is embarking on a bold process that goes beyond traditional city planning. Atlanta City Design is the intentional shaping of the City to reflect our shared values, meet our opportunities, and achieve our goals. Atlanta City Design is comprised of four parts:

Identity

Core Values
The first part of the Atlanta City Design outlines who we are as a city and then identifies five core values that describe Atlanta at its best.



Urgency

Strategic Actions
The second part details the change we see coming and the work required to leverage that change to our advantage.



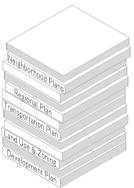
Design

Design Proposals
The third part translates all that work into a dimensional, tangible, and aspirational form for the city that can inspire us to follow through with the hard work of implementation.



Implementation

Detailed Plans
Following through on this aspiration is the next phase of the City Design. Over the next generation, we will operationalize its actions and ideas. This will require the work of the Department of City Planning, the Mayor and City Council as partners, other divisions of City Hall, and many external partners, including everyday citizens like you.



The Beloved Community



Far from a utopian fantasy, Dr. King saw the Beloved Community as a realistic and achievable goal.

It was his ultimate response to conflict and violence, urging us to call out injustice and discrimination while also ending the cycle of revenge. He described a moral direction for the Movement, suggesting that the Beloved Community would not succeed unless it was inclusive, compassionate, and nonviolent, and arguing that our only sensible path forward is to make our enemies into friends – “to live together as brothers (and sisters) in a community, and not continually live with bitterness and friction” (*Justice Without Violence*, 1957).

Dr. King's vision of the Beloved Community offered a hopeful path forward for communities broken apart by segregation and racial violence. Atlanta also suffered these struggles, of course, but it mostly avoided the infamous boycotts, violence, and fire-bombings that attracted negative attention to other Southern cities. Quite the contrary, as a direct result of its public commitment to civil rights, inclusion, and racial reconciliation, Atlanta has thrived culturally and economically since the 1960s, making it an imperfect, but worthy proving ground for the validation of Dr. King's Beloved Community.

This legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, which belongs to thousands of people and not solely to Dr. King, is also Atlanta's lasting, and most important contribution to the world. If we accept the challenges of living up to it, its tenets become

“The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the Beloved Community.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Birth of a New Nation*, 1957

more than our legacy. They become our solemn responsibility. They set the highest standard for the design of our future, and even while we may not always live up to them, they motivate us with obligation and opportunity to continue the work of the Movement. Ultimately, they hold us accountable to the promise that Dr. King described as the Beloved Community.

That promise is an Atlanta that confronts the same injustices of the 1960s, now re-tuned and amplified for a new era of urban revitalization. It's an Atlanta that deepens its commitment to civil and human rights at a time of national political polarization, rather than simply celebrating the memory of the Movement. And in its purest manifestation, it's an outcome for Atlanta inspired by Dr. King's 1964 lecture to the Nobel Academy – “our end is a community at peace with itself.”

With that as our goal, twenty years from now, we should be able to say that our city has grown not into a different kind of place, but into a better version of itself – an Atlanta ever more confident of its identity and committed to its voice for peace in the world.

Aspiration



Atlanta's symbol is the phoenix, which represents our rise from the ashes of the Civil War to become one of the leading cities in the world. Our resurgence is characterized and fueled by our steadfast commitment to equality, fairness, and economic opportunity for all our residents, workers, and visitors.

We can thank visionary leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ambassador Andrew Young for establishing the core value that this city can be a place for anyone to bring and build their dreams – a principle that is a part of our unique tapestry. We are also grateful for pioneers like Billy Payne who helped make Atlanta the global city it is today, and John Portman whose vision shaped our skyline and landscape.

Atlanta is ascendant by any measure. From our world-class airport—the world's busiest—to our rapidly expanding business community to our diverse neighborhoods, the City of Atlanta serves as the economic engine of the Southeast and is recognized as one of the most sustainable cities in the world.

More than ever, people from all walks of life are deciding to call Atlanta home. Our population is expected to triple in 20 years, and Atlanta is in a unique position to plan for such growth in a smart and efficient matter.

A great design for the future will help Atlanta remain a global center for business, continue to draw the best and brightest talent, and secure our status as a center for culture and innovation. This is our moment to lead a once-in-a-lifetime process to envision the best Atlanta that we can become. We need our residents to be our essential partner in this process to ensure that we aspire for greatness.

This is why the Atlanta City Design project is such a unique initiative. The first of its kind in our city's history, this initiative will cultivate how Atlanta should look and feel now, as well as guide future decisions on the growth and development of the city. Years from now, Atlanta will be known as the first to the future. We hope you will be a part of that story.

Mayor Kasim Reed
City of Atlanta

Vision



The City of Atlanta's population peaked in 1970 at 496,973. As the region grew dramatically over the next decades, the City was shrinking. It fell to a population of 394,071 by 1990. Between 2000 and 2010, Atlanta's population grew by a trickle at 0.85 percent. That pattern has now changed. The Census indicates that Atlanta's population at the close of 2016 was 472,522: about 50,000 more people living here than in 2010. That's a 12 percent increase in population and a magnitude of growth not seen in the City of Atlanta in 50 years. Significantly, in 2016, the City's 2.05 percent annual growth rate exceeded the region's 1.60 percent growth rate.

There is no reason to believe this trend will not continue and accelerate. Between July 2015 and July 2017, the City of Atlanta permitted more than \$4 billion in construction, more than any 12 months in its history. The Atlanta region is projected to grow by 2.5 million people in the coming years. For Atlanta to be a more mobile, affordable, and livable city, it should capture an unprecedented amount of that growth.

One of the natural conditions in cities is change. Change usually comes into focus for residents when we perceive problems: the construction of a new building that alters our view, the opening of a new shopping center, a difficult left turn or a congested street. Over the past 18 months, we worked to create the Atlanta City Design. Our intention was to reveal the city's physical identity as a basis for the design of our future, and then propose ways to improve and accentuate Atlanta's authentic character in a form that could accommodate a much larger population.

Envisioning what that looks like—how Atlanta can become a better place to live and do business while tripling our population—is essential. The Atlanta City Design is the framework for inclusive growth that Atlanta has been missing. Our next steps will translate directly into our new mobility plan, zoning ordinance changes, conservation and preservation within the City of Atlanta, and other tools and the most prominent voice of the movement was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Other pivotal leaders included Ralph David Abernathy, Joseph Lowery, John Lewis, and Andrew Young. They together transformed our local story into a national movement.

Commissioner Tim Keane
Department of City Planning

Love



The Atlanta City Design is not a plan. Instead, it's a strategic realignment of plans, projects, policies, and priorities – many of which are already completed or underway. Its purpose is to draw those plans together, capture our imagination, mobilize us to action, and instill in us a sense of accountability to our future that will result in an Atlanta we love.

The Atlanta City Design is the intentional shaping of the city to reflect our shared values, meet our opportunities, and achieve our goals. Our hope is that this document will help all Atlantans discover their city, see its future in a new light, and fall in love with this place we call home.

Love is important in city design because with love comes empathy and respect for the people and places around us. Love leads us to make better decisions about how the city is put together – who is included, who benefits, and who we want to be a part of our day-to-day lives. We also know that only with love can our most ambitious aspirations be realized, because only love can commit us to the difficult negotiations, compromise, hard decisions, work, and investments required to follow our dreams.

To inspire this kind of love for Atlanta, we have embarked on a city-led design for our future – an aspiration that compels us to think, and then act, on the shaping of our remarkable city.

Lead Designer, The Atlanta City Design

Identity

Core Values

Asks us to consider what made us who we are.

Our History | A basic and honest understanding of how far we've come.

<h4>Appalachian Piedmont</h4> <p>Atlanta is characterized by the rolling foothills and forests of the Appalachian Mountains. The Piedmont region is a geological transition between the mountains of north Georgia and the broad Coastal Plain. Atlanta's central business district sits high along the sub-continental divide and at the headwaters of many of Georgia's great river systems.</p>	<h4>Native People</h4> <p>Native American tribes, including the Cherokee and Creek people, established the Chattahoochee River as both a dividing line and meeting ground. Their trails, which followed the natural contours of the land, are said to be the origin of many Atlanta streets, connecting points like today's Five Points and Buckhead Village.</p>	<h4>Railroads</h4> <p>The settlement that would later become Atlanta was founded in 1837 as a railroad junction at a logical crossing point of the sub-continental divide. It was called Terminus and not expected to become much of a city, but it quickly developed a thriving economy around businesses that could benefit from its many railroads.</p>	<h4>The Confederacy and Reconstruction</h4> <p>Atlanta took a reconstrucory position toward national reunification, inviting Northern companies to support rebuilding of the city and its railroads. Atlanta was further distinguished from other Southern cities by advances for African Americans, including the founding of several centers for higher education and expansion of business and civil liberties.</p>	<h4>Jim Crow and Streetcars</h4> <p>By the turn of the century, an extensive private electric streetcar system had been established in Atlanta. While most streetcar suburbs were legally or at least institutionally reserved for whites, increasing African American voting power led to significant changes, including breaking the west side color line, Washington Park in 1919.</p>	<h4>Modernization and Automobiles</h4> <p>National trends, like white flight, shifted regional demographics, with a slow exodus of white residents from Atlanta. Meanwhile, as use of streetcars and passenger trains came to an end, regional infrastructure of highways and our continuously-expanding airport primed metropolitan Atlanta to dominate national growth as a leader of the American Sunbelt.</p>	<h4>Black Mecca</h4> <p>Because the geography and benefits of suburban growth were mostly limited to white people, the proportion of African Americans within the City of Atlanta grew, and together with sympathetic whites, began to create a progressive environment that would open new political and economic opportunities.</p>	<h4>Civil Rights</h4> <p>Atlanta's history of racial negotiation provided a framework for change that resulted in notable peace during the turbulent social movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The most prominent voice of the movement was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Other pivotal leaders included Ralph David Abernathy, Joseph Lowery, John Lewis, and Andrew Young. They together transformed our local story into a national movement.</p>	<h4>A New Foundation</h4> <p>Downtown innovations like Peachtree Center, and the rise of prominent universities like Georgia Tech and global corporations like Coca-Cola, helped ensure Atlanta's role as the capital of the South. Voters cultivated their world class city, for example, by supporting rapid rail transit with Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA).</p>	<h4>Rebirth</h4> <p>Following national trends, the market demand began to shift toward walkable communities with transit and cultural anchors that the City of Atlanta, because of its investments and history, has in ample supply. What we do with this opportunity for Atlanta – and who we do it for – is the fundamental question for City Design.</p>
--	---	--	--	---	---	---	--	--	---

Our Best Selves | The core values that define us when we're at our best.

<h4>Equity</h4> <p>Atlanta's contribution to the world is the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, the promise of which describes a city built for everyone.</p>	<h4>Progress</h4> <p>Atlanta's diverse perspectives share a focus on our future, compelling us to do the work and make the decisions necessary to move the city forward.</p>	<h4>Ambition</h4> <p>Atlanta's driving motive, more often than not, is to make our voices heard and to advance our ideas in the world.</p>	<h4>Access</h4> <p>Atlanta's founding mark at the Zero Mile Post was only the first of many strategic connections that shaped the city and defined our way of life.</p>	<h4>Nature</h4> <p>Atlanta's defining natural feature is our forest, renowned for its expansive tree canopy and the verdant wildness that inhabits it.</p>
--	--	--	---	--

“Atlanta is the leading cultural and economic center of the Southeast precisely because of our legacy of inclusion.”
Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, 2017

“Behind closed doors they had what were legendary battles, I hear, but when the doors opened there was absolute unity. Not a crack could be found. They were locked together for the good of the community.”
Maynard Jackson, Mayor of Atlanta, 1974-1982/1990-1994

“But it's like this. The South's got something to say. That's all I got to say.”
Andre 3000, formerly Dre, Outkast. At winning Best New Rap Group at the Source Awards, 1995

“Atlanta's spirit is varied and alert because the city is not an enlargement of any one Southern product such as cotton. Atlanta was born with energy in her body. In her genes were transportation, movement, drive.”
Ralph McGill, *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 11, 1959

“He looked away from the building and out over the ocean of trees. ... They were Atlanta's greatest natural resources, those trees were. People loved to live beneath them.”
Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full*, 1998

Urgency

Strategic Actions

Challenges us to see the change coming our way.

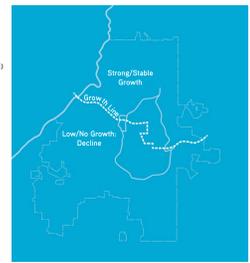
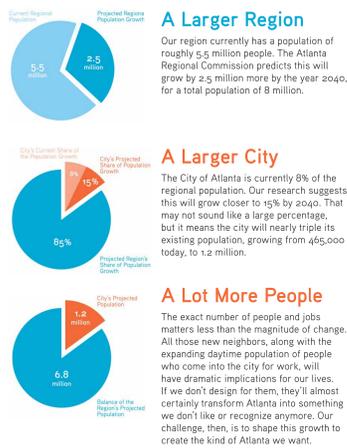
Our Change Ahead | An eyes-wide-open view of a very different future.

The First Premise

of the Atlanta City Design is that the city is going to change; that not changing is not an option; that our change will involve significant growth; and that if properly designed, growth can be a powerful tool for shaping the Atlanta we want to become.

The Second Premise

is that almost always, more people are better than fewer; that a diverse population is better than a homogenous one; and that the most strategic scenario for growth includes everyone.



Imbalance

Atlanta has been growing since the late 1990s, but not evenly across every community. In recent years, as growth has become a more powerful force, its benefits are increasingly inequitable. This imbalance is threatening our long-term vitality because it sharpens geographic, economic, and social divides. And when we see change benefiting some groups of people more than others, it is easy to fear that Atlanta - this home that we love - will get ruined in the process of change.

If we want to leverage change to our advantage, we need to take action.

And if we want Atlanta to grow into a better version of itself, we need to design those actions to support our core values.

Our Work Ahead | The effort required to manage change in our best interest.

1 Equity



Our challenge for Equity is the continuous, contentious, and often unappreciated work of ensuring that all the benefits of Nature, Access, Ambition, and Progress accrue fairly to everyone.

2 Progress



Our challenge for Progress is to protect people and places with meaning from the market forces that will otherwise overrun them.

3 Ambition



Our challenge for Ambition is to leverage the disruption of change to unlock new opportunities for people to do what they want with their lives.

4 Access



Our challenge for Access is to update our hub of transportation for a new generation while also building a sense of community and place.

5 Nature



Our challenge for Nature is to protect and expand the ecological value of our watersheds, forest, and habitat in the face of rapid urbanization.

Strategic Actions

- 1.1 Investment & Policy Priority
- 1.2 Civic Participation
- 1.3 Welcome

- 2.1 Housing Innovation & Affordability
- 2.2 Cost of Living
- 2.3 Preservation
- 2.4 Social Engagement

- 3.1 Business Innovation & Incubation
- 3.2 Development & Community Benefits
- 3.3 Adaptable Sites & Buildings
- 3.4 Arts & Culture
- 3.5 Public Life
- 3.6 Education

- 4.1 Transportation Priority
- 4.2 City Form & Structure
- 4.3 Growth Patterns
- 4.4 Transportation Investments, Operations & Maintenance
- 4.5 Citywide Orientation & Wayfinding

- 5.1 Ecosystem Rehabilitation
- 5.2 Conservation & Stewardship
- 5.3 Green Infrastructure
- 5.4 Health & Culture
- 5.4 Sustainable Design

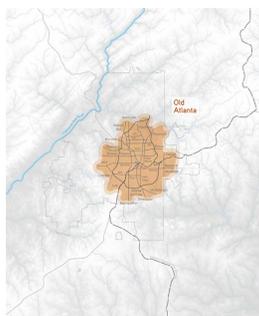
Design

Design Proposals

Compels us to grow into a better version of ourselves.

Our Conditions | A design reflection on our physical form.

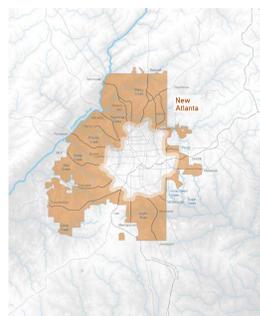
Old Atlanta



Old Atlanta was built on a hill, a ridgeline far from the Chattahoochee River. Most of Atlanta's Downtown, Midtown, and surrounding intown neighborhoods were built in ways that support a rich character and a diverse mix of people, businesses, cultural assets, and things to do.



New Atlanta



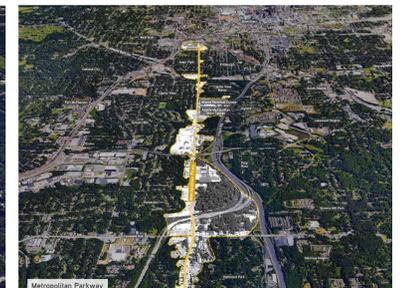
New Atlanta flows from the city's ridgeline like water along streets in every direction. It begins somewhere past the old industrial belt and continues far beyond the city limits. What these areas lack in connectivity and other urban amenities, they make up for in breathing room and nature. They are the lungs of Atlanta.



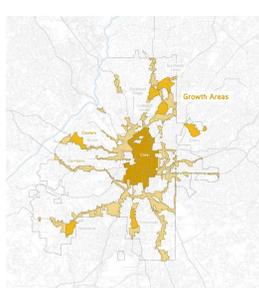
Our Approach | Basic assumptions about how we move forward.

Major Corridors

The future form of Atlanta is a more intentionally shaped version of what is already happening. Commercial, multi-family and institutional sites front the street and define the Growth Area. They provide a thin screen to the leafy, tranquil neighborhoods that comprise the Conservation Areas.



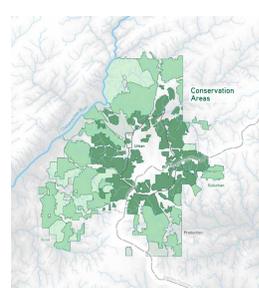
Growth Areas



Growth areas are vibrant and active. They are designed for the hustle and bustle of the city.



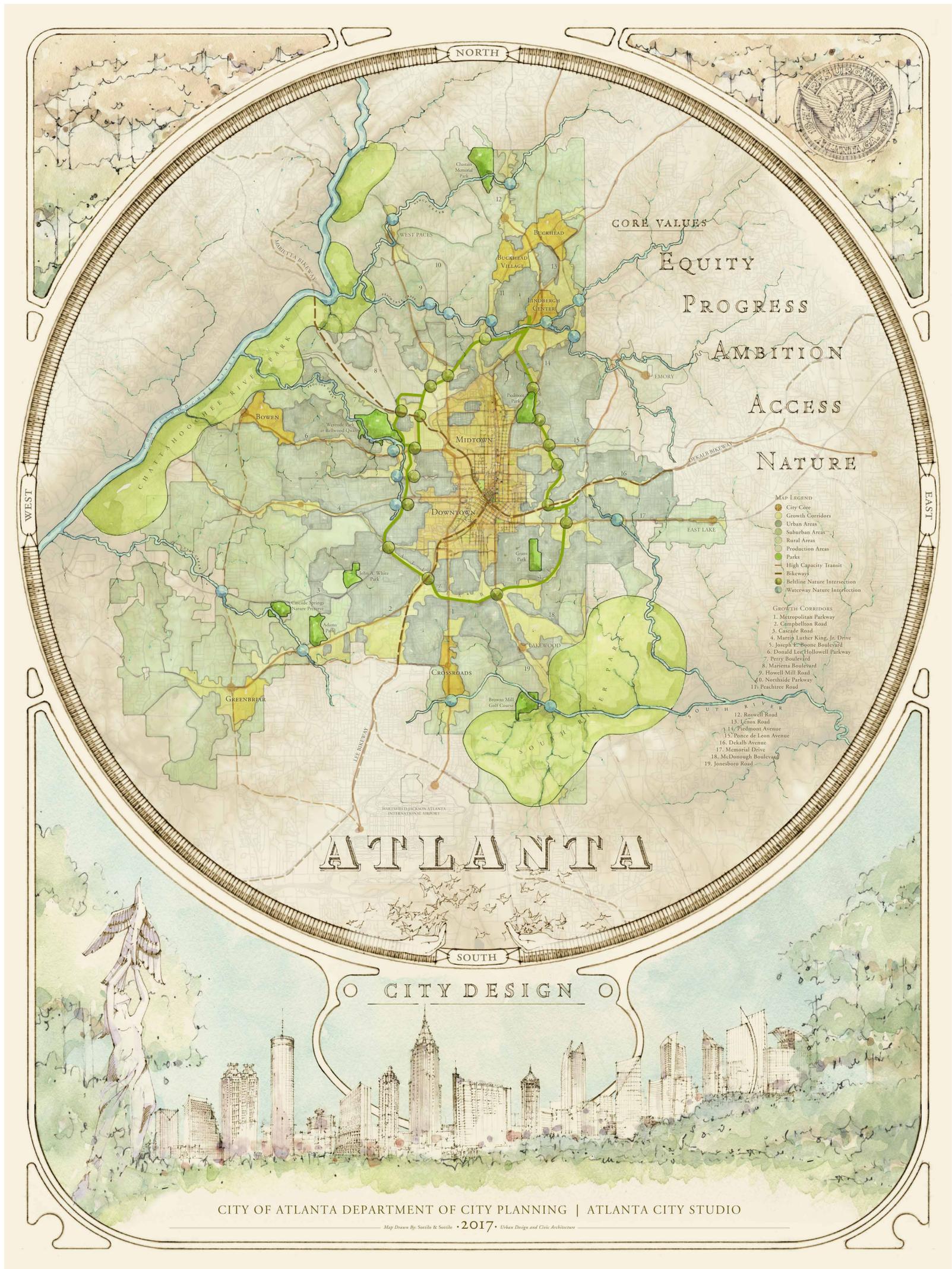
Conservation Areas



Conservation Areas are the more natural parts of the city that we want to protect from radical change.



Based on our conditions and the logic of our approach, our concluding task in this phase of City Design is to illustrate the Atlanta we want to live in.

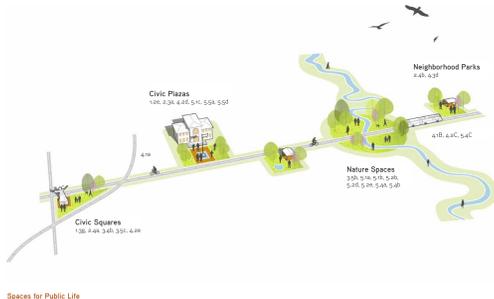
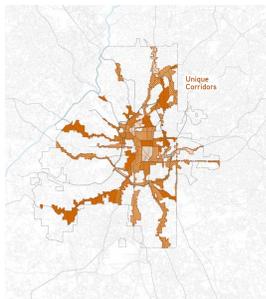


We're going to design for people.

Design Proposals

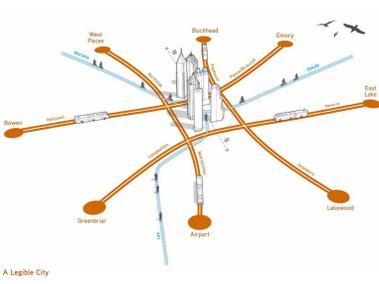
Design for Public Life

We're going to design significantly more and improved public space to support the life of our growing city. This is important because most new people who move here will not have private outdoor space of their own.



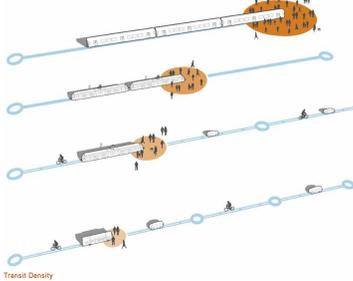
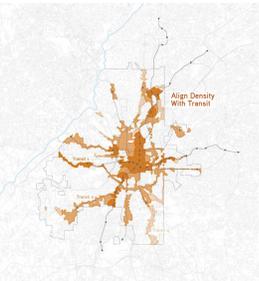
Design for Legibility

We're going to design the city to enhance our understanding of its physical form. Atlanta can seem like an illogical place. It's not. In fact, its high central Core and outflowing Corridors create a hub-and-spoke system that makes perfect sense.



Design for Density

We're going to design transit and growth together so that people can live without cars. This is important because the growth of our region means that traffic congestion is likely to increase.



Transit 1
is based on walkable distance to high capacity transit service like Metro's rail system. It allows for higher densities and better parking for the mode.

Transit 2
is based on walkable distance to other transit services with dedicated guideways like the Light Rail Rapid Bus. It allows for high densities where conditions permit and some significant transit parking.

Transit 3
is based on walkable distance to other transit services like the Atlanta Streetcar. It allows for medium densities where conditions permit and moderate parking from the mix of office, retail, and housing.

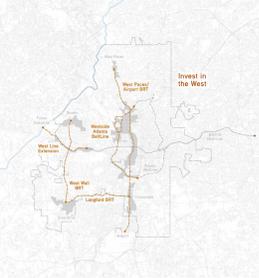
Transit 4
is based on the local bus network, which is a compromise for conditions in the Growth Area. It permits medium densities where conditions permit and moderate parking from the mix of office, retail, and housing.



The first phase of the Atlanta Streetcar opened in December 2015.

Design for Everyone

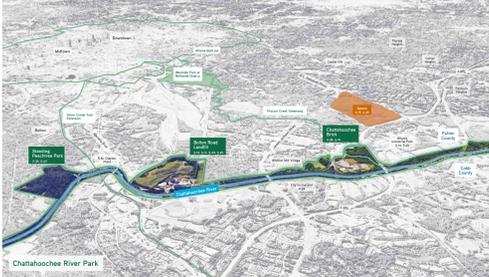
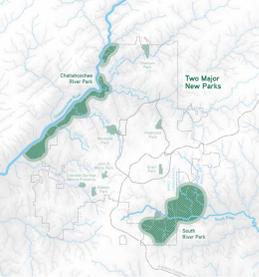
We're going to design alternative sites for growth to support communities that have historically been left behind. We're going to invest in areas of the city that offer lower-cost capacity for growth and business development.



We're going to design for nature.

Design for Wildness

We're going to design big, generational investments in new parks and other types of greenspace. Because with all the growth in the city, we'll never have another chance to do this.



Design for Retreat and Adventure

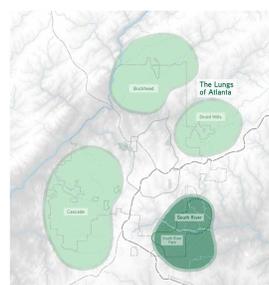
We're going to design escape routes into nature. We should all be able to easily get away from the hectic and built-up areas of the city.



Trails will put everyone within a reasonable distance to nature.

Design for Comfort

We're going to design the tree canopy that surrounds the Core of the city so that it continues to generate fresh air, shade, and other ecological services.

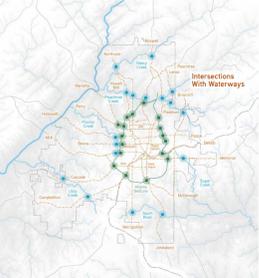


We'll protect the enduring and irreplaceable green lungs of Atlanta.

We're going to design for people in nature.

Design for Connections

We're going to design everyday interaction between the city's radial streets and nature's lateral and meandering flows.



This branch of the South River winds along eroded banks and muddy stream silt under Metropolitan Parkway.

Design for Lifestyles

We're going to design concentrations of growth outside of the Core with an intentional new emphasis on nature. Not everyone wants to live or work in central Atlanta and outlying centers offer opportunities for more casual lifestyles.

