

FRAMEWORK FOR EQUITABLE PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITY PLANNING: AN ATLANTA CASE STUDY

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Introduction

Throughout our studio, the team had the pleasure of learning from the diverse professional and academic backgrounds of our team members. With shared interest in exploring the foundational intersections of planning and community schools, we simultaneously drew from individual member's knowledge of teaching, data analysis, facilities management, economic development, affordable housing, community engagement, and the Atlanta context. It is through these perspectives that we developed strategies for analysis, recommendations, and proposals for next steps. We each look forward to continuing conversations with Atlanta Public School (APS) representatives and planners alike as we finish our degree programs and begin our professional planning careers.

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We owe a sincere sentiment of gratitude to our studio professor and wise sage, Michael Dobbins, Professor of the Practice in the School of City and Regional Planning. Due to Dobbins' pearls of wisdom, we were able to avoid several mis-steps in our approach. He pushed us to continuously consider the parts of the whole, but also to zoom out and anticipate change over time. We were very lucky to have such a seasoned practitioner in our court.

Executive Summary

In March 2019, the Atlanta Board of Education began updating the facilities master plan with the goal of optimizing usage and efficacy of properties. The board requested that our team of Master of City and Regional Planning Candidates from Georgia Institute of Technology complete a semester-long studio to complement Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and their team of consultants.

This studio seeks to bridge the divide of city planning and school facility planning efforts—a gap that undermines the development of community-centered schools. Even when these planning efforts have worked toward similar goals, they lack an integrated approach that meets student and community needs. The following report establishes decision-making frameworks and initial recommendations for four properties based on APS' stated priorities and goals.

A guiding principle for our process was equity. We understand that student outcomes are deeply connected to community conditions, as disparities in student achievement reflect the economic and social realities of their lives outside school. According to the Atlanta Public Schools' Challenge Index, an analysis of 2019 milestones, schools with a high concentration of students on free/reduced lunch or who are English Language Learners have lower than average test scores than schools with more economically privileged students. The report notes that the Index “explains about 91% of the variance in elementary school average test scores” (Atlanta Public Schools, 2019b). This clear achievement gap demonstrates the need for an increased focus on equity through APS' strategic and facilities planning processes.

Reflecting this priority, and in alignment with APS' goals, our team has evaluated potential uses for APS vacant properties that adhere to the following objectives: 1) prioritize the equitable distribution of resources and opportunity; 2) address the intrinsic connection between student and community success and 3) foster community engagement and buy-in for new initiatives.

Combining quantitative data projections with qualitative analyses of community assets and needs, we have created a decision-making framework that the District can utilize to inform its Comprehensive Facilities Plan. Our results highlight potential uses for four sites and illuminate the range of possibilities for other vacant properties beyond the subject properties. The selected example sites represent a range of community profiles and demonstrate how the framework can be applied to other properties. Our recommendations offer four distinct examples for reuse of APS properties that consider future school populations and address community needs. Specifically, we propose a cradle-to-career community center, an outdoor learning space, a middle school STEM/technical facility, and a health and physical wellness community center. To support implementation of these recommendations, we also identify potential partners and propose next steps.

Additional Resources



To explore site-specific data for properties through Atlanta Public Schools context, please visit our dashboard and website. These resources also include R code instructions.

pwp.gatech.edu/apsplanningstudio

Acknowledgements

This studio could not have been possible without the encouragement and assistance of several people who care deeply about these issues. We would like to extend a huge thank you to the APS board and staff who were incredibly helpful to us throughout this process by providing guidance, support, and vital information for this project. Specifically, we would like to thank Michelle Olympiadis (District 3) for being our initial point of contact and taking on this process in the first place. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Michelle, Erika Mitchell (District 5), and Leslie Grant (District 1) for coming to our studio space in November to further engage with us on our project. We thank the board as a whole for giving us time to present during their November 14th facilities retreat. In addition, we are grateful to all the APS staff who offered their time, data, and counsel throughout this process. We particularly want to extend a thank you to Larry Hoskins (APS Chief Operating Officer) for being a great advocate and connecting us to other staff members. There were three school principals who took time out of their busy schedules to meet with members of our team. We express our thanks to Kara Stimpson of Young Middle School, Jovan Miles of Thomasville Heights Elementary School, and Ernest Sessoms of Dunbar Elementary School who all provided us great insight into the needs of their schools and larger communities. Finally, we want to thank Sizemore Group for allowing us to exchange information with them.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

“DECISIONS THAT SCHOOL DISTRICTS MAKE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CLOSED BUILDINGS HAVE LASTING IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF THEIR CITIES, AS WELL AS THE FUTURE OF THEIR SCHOOL SYSTEMS.”

PEW CHARITABLE TRUST, 2013



Historically, school facility planning and community planning have been siloed from one another. Rejecting the harmful outcomes of this approach, our work considered the impact of school facility planning on communities and vice versa. APS planning documents (e.g. district, cluster, and school plans) highlighted the interconnectedness of school and community success. These documents also emphasized the equitable distribution of resources; the integration of trauma-sensitive, social-emotional learning in the classroom; and the creation of health clinics and wraparound services within individual schools. With the understanding that student performance is significantly impacted by life outside of school, we aimed to center community needs in our analysis and recommendations. Taken together, the history of Atlanta Public Schools and the larger city context should be considered in the development of facilities plans to sufficiently meet both school and community needs.

History of (In)equity in Atlanta Public Schools, 1869 – 1916

In 1869, the Atlanta City Council established the Atlanta Public School system. Three years later, the Atlanta Public School system established three grammar schools and two high schools that were “free and open to only the city’s White residents” (“Eternally Forgotten Atlanta Public Schools – Pt 1. Elementary Schools,” 2017).

One of the primary concerns among Black citizens at the time was the “alleviation of the inequitable distribution of educational facilities for White and Black children.” Though “the school-aged population in Atlanta was almost equally divided between Black and White children,” when the schools began operating, there were no public schools for Black students (Plank & Turner, 1987, p. 590-591).

As a result, Black members of the Republican Party fought and persuaded the Atlanta City Council to establish two schools for Black students. In contrast to the newly constructed White schools, however, the Black schools were formed in old, rented buildings and church basements. Additionally, Black students did not have secondary education opportunities, as the city did not create or operate non-White high schools. Despite protests by Black citizens for a more equitable distribution of public resources, the City Council and the Board of Education failed to provide Black students with the resources and spaces that they needed to receive a quality education. From the very beginning, Black families and students faced major structural obstacles that barred them from public

school resources.

As the number of Black voters surpassed that of White voters, the political system—the City Council, Board of Education, and voting process—adjusted to represent the White minority. The institutionalization of the Democratic White primary limited the electorate to White voters, and thereby ignored outright the Black majority (Plank & Turner, 1987). This meant that key pieces of legislation, which oftentimes affected White and Black schools, were decided by candidates selected by White voters. This practice permeated all White governmental decision-making bodies and reduced Black citizens’ electoral participation and power. During the period of 1892–1916, only three petitions for additional educational space were submitted by Black citizens; none were approved, all were rejected. (Plank & Turner, 1987).

Equal Representation and Teacher Pay, 1942 – 1954

In the early 1940s, two federal court cases had a large impact on the Atlanta Public Schools system. The first suit, filed in 1943, sought to equalize White and Black teachers’ salaries. Though White administrators on the Board of Education and City Council worked to block these reforms, considerable increases in salary were achieved as the case made its way through the court system. The second suit demanded the elimination of the White primary. This suit arose after a similar court case in Texas, *Smith vs. Arkwright*, declared Texas’ Democratic White primary unconstitutional. This legal precedent had an “immediate and far-reaching [effect]: in the 51 days following the decision, the Negro Voter’s League registered 18,000 new Black voters” (Martin, 1978, p. 50; Suber, 1975, p. 58). The positive

of these two suits “marked the inauguration of a new era in Atlanta school politics and city politics more generally” (Plank & Turner, 1987, p. 596). By restoring their political power, structural improvements in Atlanta’s Black schools became more quickly and effectively implemented.

In 1944, Board of Education proposed a bond issue in which 15% of revenues would be allocated toward improvements in Black schools. Though this allocation was “three times as large as previous measures”, the Urban League asked for double the percentage, from 15% to 30%. The Urban League also demanded the equalization of the quality and quantity of facilities between Black and White schools by identifying four main objectives:

“(1) The construction of two new high schools for Black students, including one vocational high school;

(2) The construction of four new elementary schools;

(3) The addition of 81 new classrooms to existing schools; and

(4) The provision of auditoriums, gymnasiums, cafeterias, libraries, and adequate sanitary facilities for all Black schools.”

Atlanta Board of Education, Minutes, March 13, 1945 (Plank & Turner, 1987, p. 597)

With the increase of Black political power over the course of future elections, the Board of Education accepted the demands and passed the bond issue, securing future revenues for the provision of additional school facilities for Black students. With this success, the Board effectively delivered on the promise of funding improvements in Black school facilities.

The Struggle for Integration, 1954 – 1973

The unanimous decision in the 1954 Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, to declare segregation in public schools unconstitutional, met strong resistance from White citizens and decision makers in the City of Atlanta and other large cities. Immediately following the ruling, the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP submitted a petition to the Atlanta School Board demanding “immediate desegregation of the city’s public schools” (Ecke, 1972, p. 324). Other groups submitted similar petitions with no response from city officials. In 1958, the NAACP filed a suit in federal court seeking the Board of Education’s fulfillment of the court ruling. The subsequent trial was quick to require “a prompt and reasonable start toward desegregation” by the Atlanta Board of Education (Huie, 1967, p. 39-40).

As a result of the court ruling, the Board of Education was required to implement desegregation within 18 months. After months of “extended deliberation and extraordinarily careful preparation”, the Atlanta public school system was “peacefully desegregated in September 1961” (Huie, 1967, p. 192, 289-292; Jenkins, 1973, p. 112; Martin, 1978, p. 152-153).

However, only nine Black students, out of 130 Black student applicants, were approved to integrate four White high schools. In September 1961, *Time Magazine* described this initial integration effort as the “smoothest token school integration ever seen in the Deep South.” Even so, White families began to leave the city and move to the suburbs with the intent to never send their children to integrated schools. As a result of Whites’ out-migration from the urban core, the schools that had been predominantly White in the 1950s to early-1960s were majority Black by the mid-1960s.

According to Alton Hornsby in his publication *Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954 –1973*, by the 1970s, the federal district court, the Atlanta Public School System, and community leaders believed that racially integrated schools in Atlanta were no longer possible because there “simply were not enough Whites” left “to go around” (1991).

The newly constructed Black schools that were created from the bond decisions of 1944 became underutilized as Black students became integrated into White schools and White students left the city center to create their own schools in the suburbs (Plank, 1987). The former Black-only high schools were either closed or repurposed into Black middle schools (Plank, 1987). As a result, the schools originally constructed as a means to improve Black school facilities and prevent racial integration became surplus buildings, some of which are owned by the Atlanta Public School system today. White flight also stripped vital funding for the maintenance and upkeep of school buildings and facilities for Black students in the city. These funding shortages resulted in school closures (Plank, 1987).

Redistricting, 2012 – 2014

Redistricting and school closures in Atlanta Public Schools are cited as the result of the underutilization of school facilities and the inefficiency that comes with it. In 2012, APS’ recommendations and strategic planning report explained that “traditional schools serve[d] 47,000 yet [APS has] seats for 60,000 students. Heating, cooling and lighting 13,000 empty seats consumes resources which could be put to better use elsewhere.” The APS Superintendent and Board of Education also framed the issue in terms of geographical density issues, noting that “the majority of empty seats are in the southern part of our district, while the

northern section of the district is experiencing overcrowding” (Atlanta Public Schools, 2012).

The final recommendation for redistricting as cited in the final APS report was “to eliminate approximately 5,500 out of 13,000 seat excess and generate substantial savings.” With these savings, the District asserted it would more readily provide services that offered direct support to students in the form of “counselors, assistant principals, special education resources, and paraprofessionals” (Atlanta Public Schools, 2012).

The redistricting process redrew the lines of high school districts resulting in 10 elementary school closures all located in the predominantly African American southern region of Atlanta. The closures resulted in significant changes for local families and students, as many students who had attended their neighborhood school were now forced leave their communities to attend a school farther away. Some students were redistricted into lower performing schools. For instance, the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood was carved out of the Grady cluster, meaning students from that community no longer feed into Grady, one of the City’s premier public high schools.

Conscious of how this process of redistricting--in the legacy of APS’ historical prioritization of White students and families--led to existing inequitable outcomes for families and students, APS Superintendent Maria Carstarphen and the Board of Education have made a deliberate effort to approach the District’s current facilities master planning process in a way that prioritizes equity in the Atlanta Public School system. As such, we also adhere to this equity-centered approach in our analyses and recommendations for APS’ vacant properties.



MARTHA ANN HOLMES AND ROSALYN WALTON ARRIVE FOR SCHOOL ON AUGUST 30, 1961, AND IN DOING SO OFFICIALLY INTEGRATE THE HIGH SCHOOL.

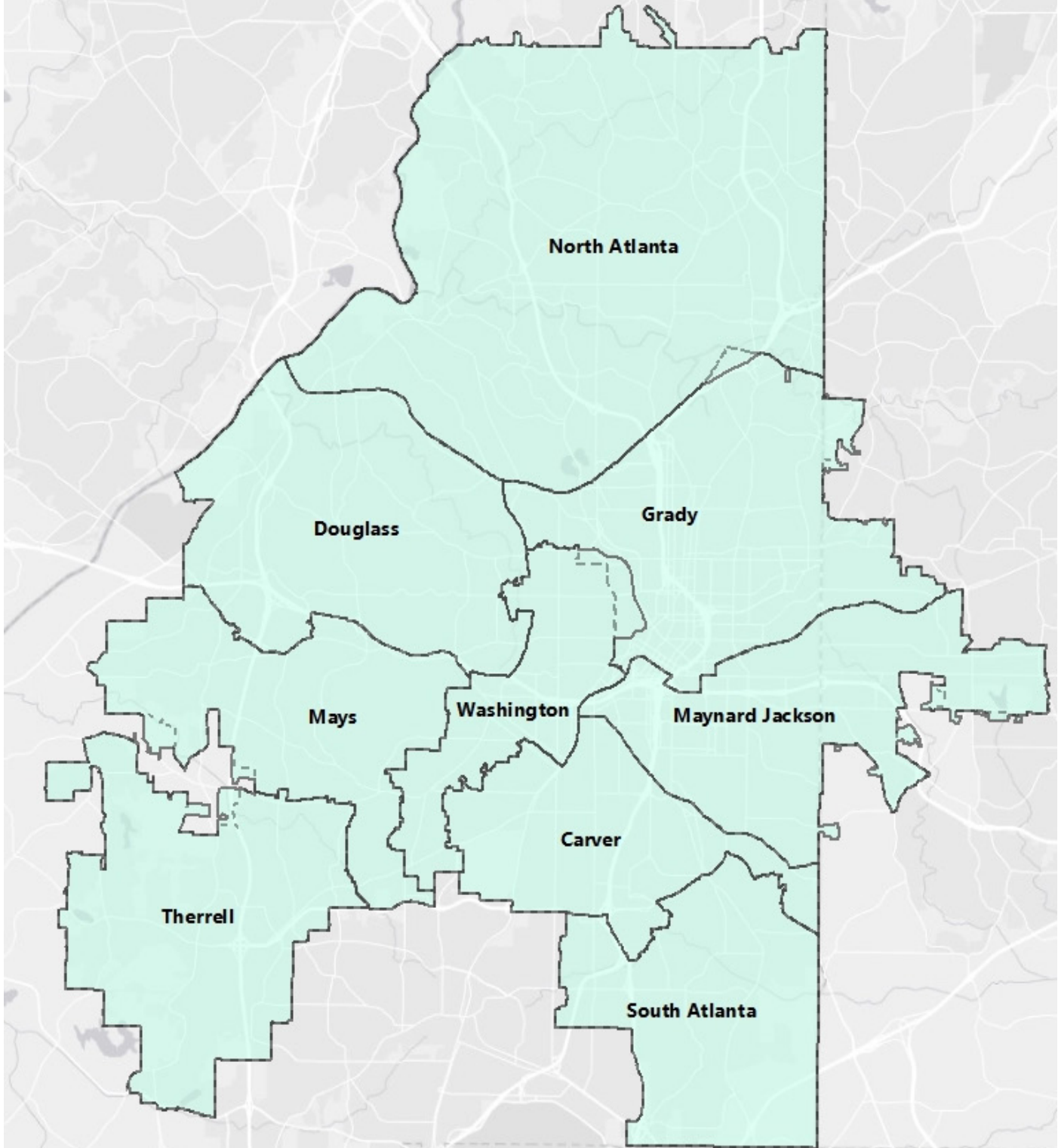


ARTHUR SIMMONS RECEIVES ENROLLMENT SUPPORT AT NORTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL THE DAY BEFORE HIS FIRST DAY OF CLASS.

PHOTOS BY BILL WILSON FROM THE AJC ARCHIVE AT THE GSU LIBRARY.

APS High School Cluster Boundaries, 2019 - 2020

-  2012-2013 Cluster Boundaries
-  2019-2020 Cluster Boundaries

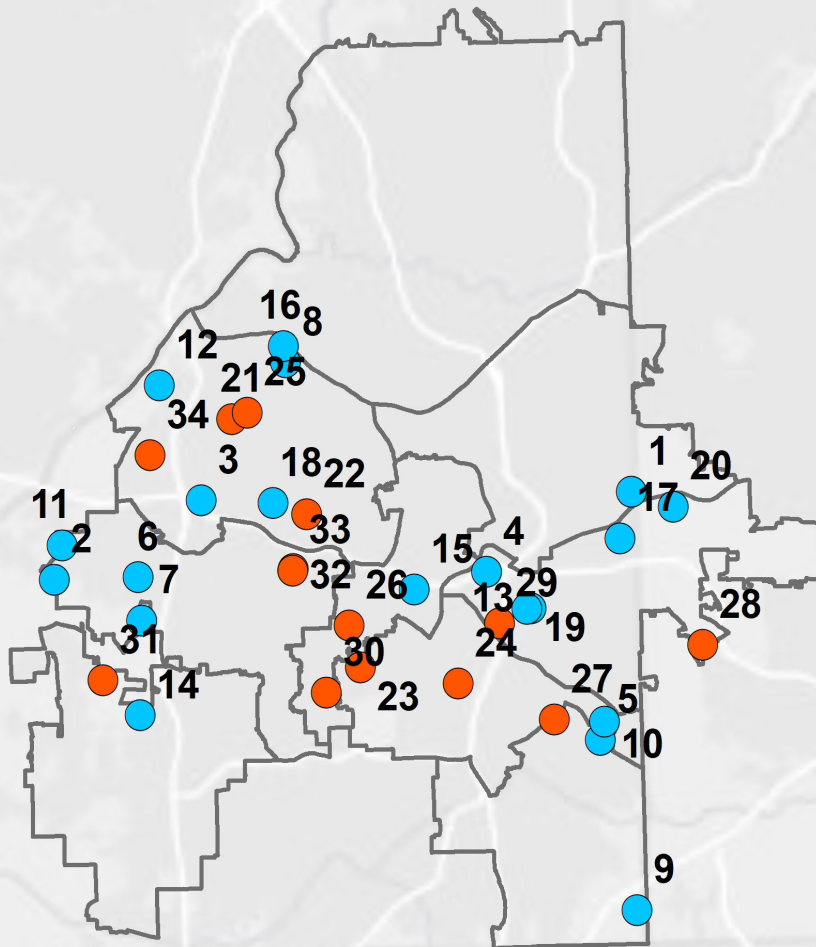


Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOLLOWS A CLUSTER MODEL. ACCORDING TO THE 2019-2020 APS CLUSTER MODEL & MAP OF SCHOOLS, THE SCHOOL DISTRICT "IS ORGANIZED INTO NINE HIGH SCHOOL CLUSTERS THAT CONSIST OF A HIGH SCHOOL FED BY MIDDLE AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. THE CLUSTER MODEL ENSURES CONTINUITY FOR STUDENTS FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE TWELVE" (ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2019).

APS Vacant Property Portfolio

- Vacant Buildings
- Vacant Land



THE MAP ABOVE DOCUMENTS EACH OF THE VACANT PROPERTIES HELD IN THE APS PORTFOLIO. THESE PROPERTIES WERE EACH ANALYZED IN OUR QUANTITATIVE PROCESS AS WE BEGAN TO IDENTIFY SELECT PROPERTIES TO SERVE AS CASE STUDIES FOR EQUITABLE FACILITIES PLANNING EFFORTS ACROSS A RANGE OF PROJECTION AND UTILIZATION SCENARIOS.

Legend for Vacant Properties:

- 1. Bass Field
- 2. Boulder Park Drive
- 3. Collier Heights ES
- 4. Cooper Street SW
- 5. Dobbs (old) ES
- 6. Fairburn Road- 10 acre
- 7. Fairburn Road- 55 acre
- 8. Finch

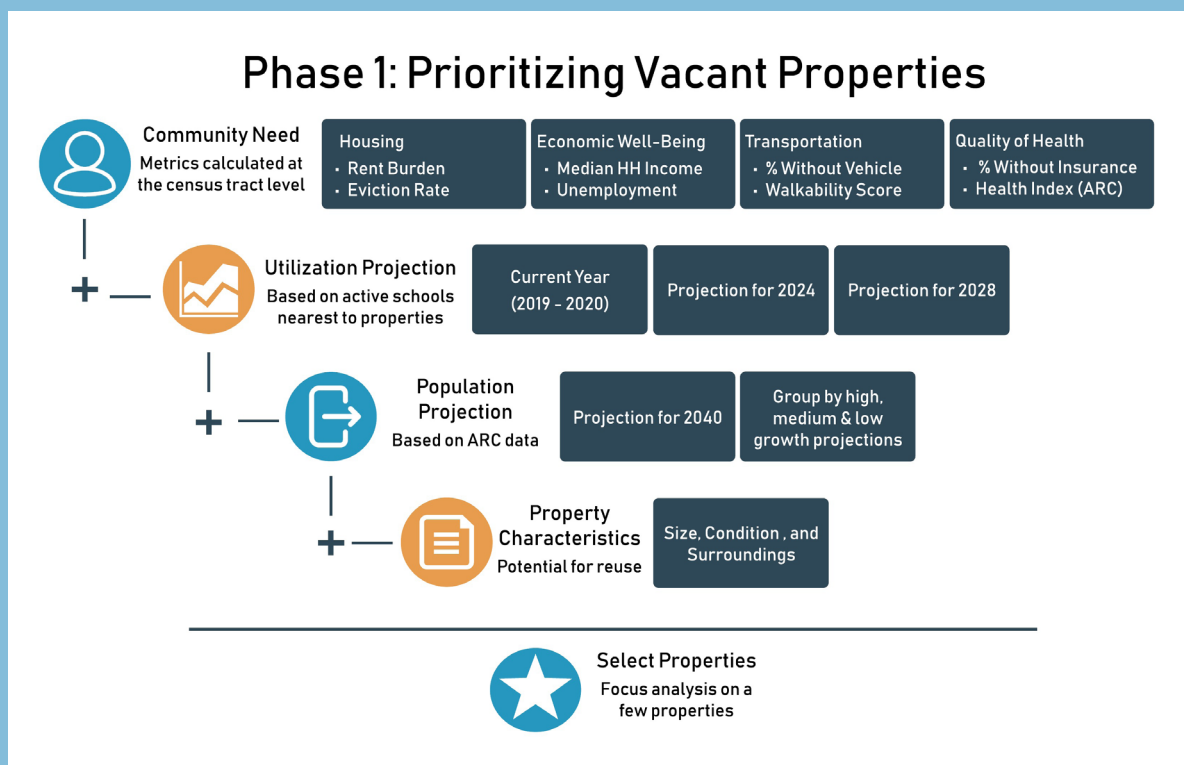
- 9. Forrest Canyon
- 10. Honor Farm
- 11. Le Conte Highway
- 12. Maynard Road Property
- 13. McGill (Martin Site)
- 14. Melvin Drive SW
- 15. Peoples Street SW
- 16. Pitts ES
- 17. Reynoldstown ES

- 19. Terry Street
- 20. Wesley Avenue
- 21. A.D. Williams
- 22. Anderson Park
- 23. Arkwright
- 24. Capitol View ES
- 25. Carey ES
- 26. Former Connally ES
- 27. Lakewood ES

ANALYSIS

OUR APPROACH

To assess future uses for APS’s vacant property, we developed an equity-centric decision-making framework. We aimed to ensure that our final deliverable included proposals applicable to a broad scope of school utilization and neighborhood population growth scenarios. The following sections detail our process of data collection and analysis and how we translated this information into our final recommendations. Our goal is that this process can be easily replicated in future APS facilities planning efforts. All of our data and methodologies are available on our website (see appendix for details on how to access it).



Prioritization of Resources

I. Community Needs Assessment

In developing a decision-making framework, our studio prioritized properties located within communities of high need to ensure our approach mirrored APS' strategic focus on enhancing equity. To determine community need, we collected and analyzed data across four main categories—housing, economics, transportation, and health. We created a rubric, scaled 1 to 5, that helped us identify which census tracts ranked above average need for each indicator. The census tracts with the most significant need were those that received the highest total score across all categories. (See appendix for data sources).

Housing - Given the connection between housing insecurity, transiency rates, and student academic performance, we evaluated housing needs using the following indicators: percentage of the population that is cost-burdened (meaning they spend 30% or more of their income on housing) and the percentage of residents who were evicted in 2018.

Economics - To evaluate community economic need, we analyzed census-level data on median household income and unemployment. We used the Atlanta median value for household income as a baseline to compare against.

Transportation - We wanted to assess site accessibility for each property. To isolate local transportation needs, we collected data on the percentage of workers without a vehicle. We also used the EPA walkability index to determine which neighborhoods were walkable and which required residents to have alternative transit options.

Health - In the health needs category, we measured the percentage of residents without health insurance and imported data from the Atlanta Regional Commission Health Index, which summarizes exposure to environmental hazards.

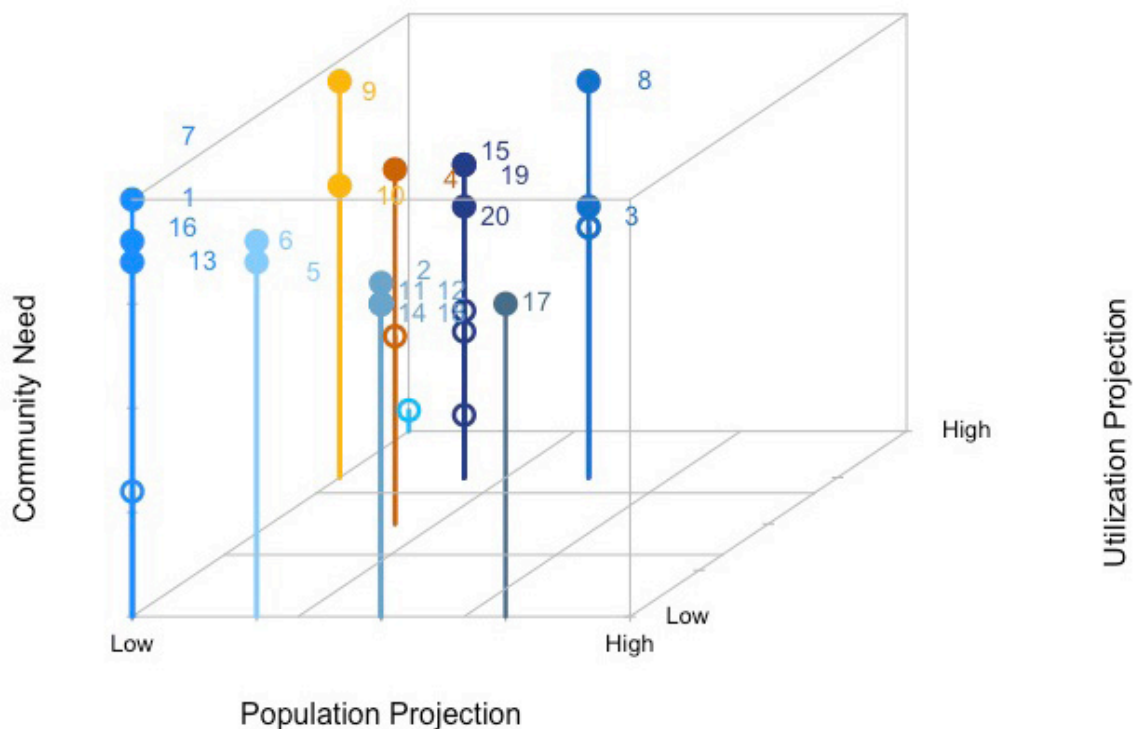
II. Population projections and school utilization assessments

After assessing community need, we evaluated projected population growth and future APS school utilization rates. We understood that as the city population increases, APS may need to use currently vacant properties to accommodate additional students. Recommendations for vacant facilities in higher growth areas must be flexible enough to include academic uses in line with near-term population projections. In contrast, properties in lower growth neighborhoods can be used for more permanent, non-traditional purposes that address the needs of both APS students and the surrounding community. Recognizing this distinction, we categorized properties into groups based on the projected population growth of their local communities. We referenced APS' 2024 Projected Population Map included in the May 2018 Board Facilities Retreat presentation to generate census tract-level growth profiles, ranging from very low to very high.

Next, we assessed the current utilization rate of the closest elementary, middle and high schools to each vacant property. For the purposes of our analysis, we considered anything over 80% a high utilization rate. APS provided internal school utilization data for this analysis.

We ultimately determined that properties in areas with high projected population growth and schools nearing or at capacity will likely have more immediate academic uses.

Our quantitative analysis of community need, projected population growth, and future school utilization rates helped us categorize properties into distinct need-growth profiles.



20 vacant properties were placed on three-dimensional graph to illustrate the results of our community need, population projection, and utilization projection analyses. The vertical axis scales community need -- properties with filled in circles have a high community need. The horizontal axis scales the projected population growth from low (left) to high (right). The axis along the width of the cube scales the projected utilization rate from low (foreground) to high (background). Each vertical line contains the properties with the same need-growth profile.

Based on the results outlined in this graph, we identified 10 properties that were all high need but fell across various population growth and utilization categories and were within different clusters. We recognized that we needed additional information to determine which subset of properties we would use to generate examples of potential recommendations. This led us to our next phase: a qualitative, property-centric analysis.

Phase 2: Identifying Uses for Chosen Properties



To supplement our data-centric findings, we conducted a qualitative assessment to gain additional insight into the context of the communities surrounding the 10 properties. To narrow down to a smaller set of properties, we briefly explored the surrounding community of each of the 10 properties, looking specifically for neighborhood resources and amenities like grocery stores, local non-profits, MARTA bus stops, etc. Using this intermediate step, we eliminated six sites that were proximate to existing revitalization projects or forthcoming APS investments (e.g., Tuskegee Airmen Global Academy) and selected four final properties for a deeper analysis. To create tailored recommendations for these four sites, we mapped the local community assets, evaluated each property's physical conditions, reviewed the individual cluster goals, and began community engagement. Each of these steps is described in more detail below.



Community Asset Mapping

To ensure that our recommendation capitalized on local resources, we gathered information on existing APS partnerships (for the schools proximate to each site), interviewed the principals of local schools and attended each of the District Facilities Master Plan Regional Community Conversations. This process provided us with additional context on existing local resources being leveraged to support children and parents in the neighborhoods closest to the four properties.

Physical Conditions - Understanding that our recommendations would be constrained by the physical features of each site, we visited each site and researched its environmental conditions, size, distance from the nearest APS school and future land use, according to zoning regulations (City of Atlanta, Department of Planning and Community Development, 2016; “Urban Ecology Framework,” 2018). This helped us maximize the feasibility of our recommendations and better understand how residents would access and engage with services offered at the sites.

Alignment with Cluster Goals- Due to APS’ cluster-specific framework, we sought to create recommendations that

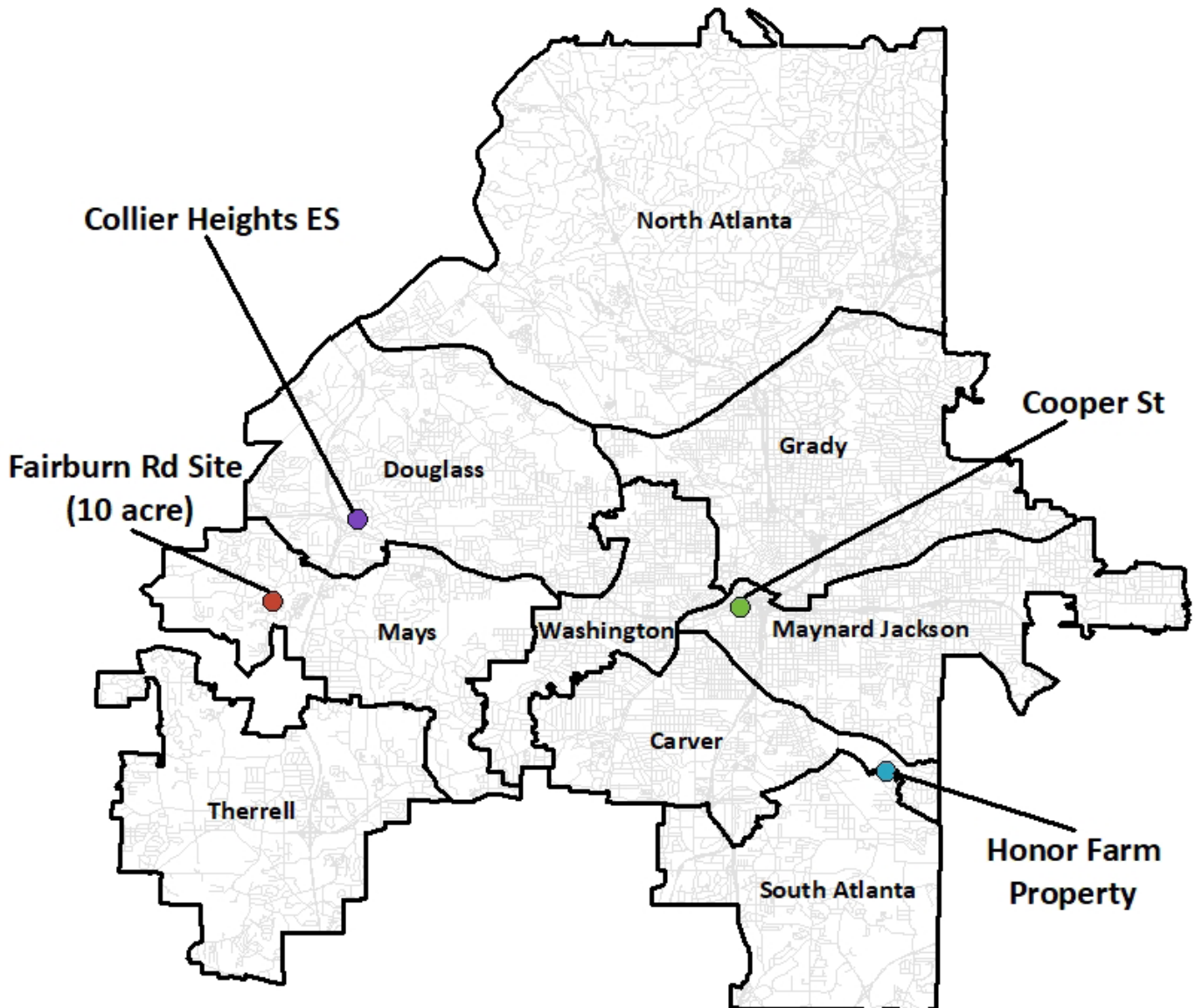
complemented the priorities of the local school community. We read through each of the cluster plans to understand what stakeholders identified as strengths and areas of improvement. We aimed to develop site recommendations that built from existing community strengths and provided solutions to current challenges.

Community Engagement - Though our project was limited to a semester, we were able to conduct a number of stakeholder interviews which informed our entire process – from how we structured our quantitative analysis through how we determined our specific recommendations. Unfortunately, we did not have time to conduct a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process. As such, soliciting student, principal, parent and community feedback should be the immediate next step to refine and test each recommendation. See the appendix for our full list of interviews and notes on community engagement.

This qualitative process culminated in the selection of four APS properties, the recommendations for which are expanded upon in the following section.



Selected Properties



Based on the combined results of our quantitative and qualitative analysis, we came up with bold but realistic recommendations for the four selected sites. While these proposals are quite distinct from each other, they all center on primarily public community facilities. Ranging from an outdoor space to a cradle-to-career community center, these site proposals can help students learn and grow consistent with APS' goals, and can also benefit the larger community. We also explore additional possibilities beyond our primary recommendations, the most notable being a potential large scale development on the Cooper St. site.

The sections below provide an overview of each existing site, followed by its needs and assets, the team's recommendation, and an explanation of how each project can be implemented. Our team recognizes that any of these proposals could not and should not be advanced without significant community input and deliberation. However, we are confident that they reflect a careful analysis of community needs and suggest realistic uses. The proposals are summarized below.

Fairburn Road Proposal Overview

Phase One Analysis: Quantitative



HIGH

Community Need



LOW

Population Projection



HIGH

Utilization Projection

Phase Two Analysis: Qualitative

ASSETS

- Concentration of multifamily, mixed income housing
- Accessible by MARTA bus routes
- Nearby senior and rec centers
- Engaged school principals

CHALLENGES

- Not walkable from nearby schools
- Educational attainment
- Lack of after school programming and summer enrichment activities

Proposal: Cradle to Career Education Center

Ultimate Goal: Skills enrichment opportunities from early childhood through older adulthood

Potential First Phase Ideas:

- Skills based adult training
- Incubation or entrepreneurship space
- Maker-space
- Supportive services for nontraditional middle school students

Rational:

28.9% of those older than 25 living within one mile of the property have some college experience but no degree.

Stakeholder interviews highlighted a gap in services for nontraditional middle school students - such as students who are parents or are older than their peers - who need additional wraparound support.



FAIRBURN

PROPERTY ADDRESS: 313 FAIRBURN RD, SW ATLANTA, GA 30331
SIZE: 10 ACRES
CURRENT ZONING: RG - 3: RESIDENTIAL GENERAL DISTRICT; (FOR THE PURPOSES OF OUR RECOMMENDED USE, MAY NEED A "SPECIAL USE PERMIT" TO OPERATE THE COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER)
CURRENT LAND USE: MEDIUM-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
APPRAISED VALUE: \$56,800
SOURCE: FULTON COUNTY BOARD OF ASSESSORS, 2019

Based on our analysis, the local community would benefit from a cradle-to-career community center with programming for residents across all ages. The interventions can be phased in overtime, beginning with services for adults and high school-aged children.

Property Selection Rationale - As outlined in the Analysis section, our site selection process prioritized vacant properties in high-need communities. The Fairburn property rose to the top as a potential development site because the cluster schools are projected to remain below full capacity. As a result, the property can be used for non-academic purposes aligned with the needs of APS students and neighborhood residents and reflective of the District's emphasis on equity as a strategic planning goal.

Community Need - The neighborhood containing the Fairburn property has a high need across three of the four indicator categories - housing, transportation, and economics. Almost 50% of residents are rent cost-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their income on housing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The median household income in the community is 40% lower than the City of Atlanta average, and nearly 25% of residents are unemployed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Utilization/Population - The cluster elementary, middle and high school utilization rates are all below the 80% APS high-capacity threshold (Atlanta Public Schools, 2018). The expected population growth is very low.

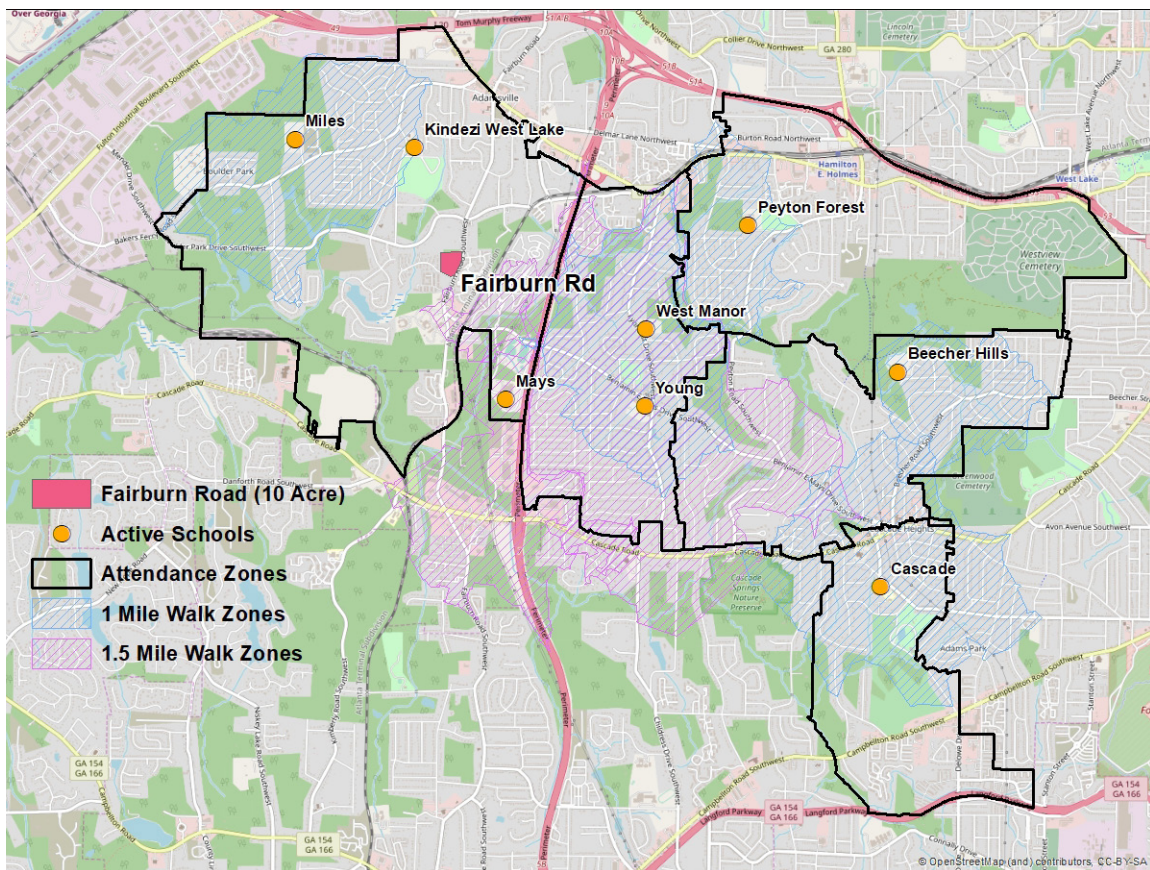
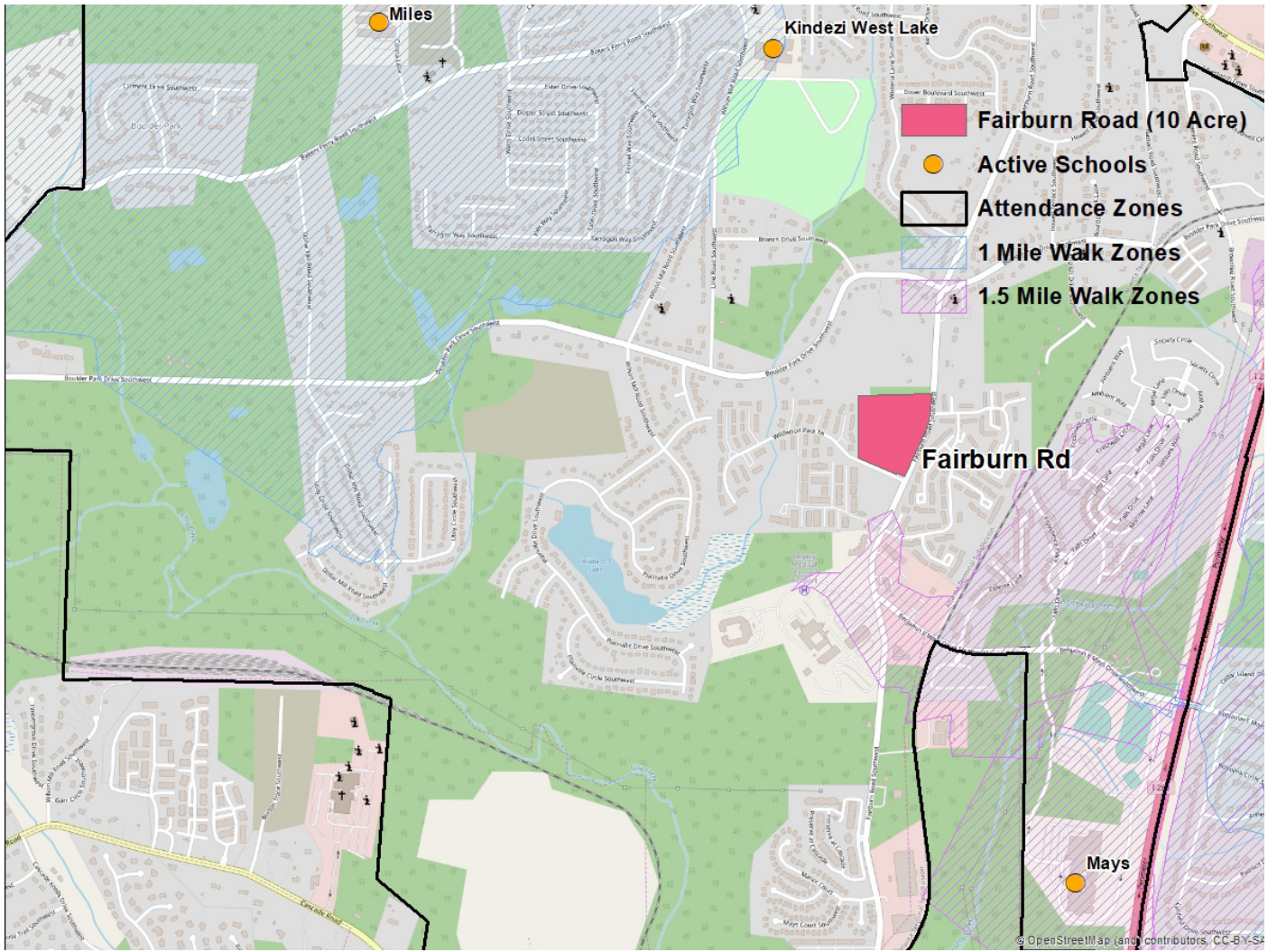
Current assets - The property is located near a concentration of multifamily housing, senior residences and townhomes. It is accessible by MARTA bus routes, and is ~2 miles from Cascade Promenade, a retail center with a grocery store, restaurants, and a diversity

of small businesses.

Recommendation - The community demonstrates a specific need for adult education programs and middle school support services. Because a wide age-range of residents would benefit from these interventions, we recommend a cradle-to-career community education center.

Justification - Ultimately, the center will serve different age groups—early childhood, middle school-aged, high school-aged, adults, and seniors—providing support services oriented toward the needs of each age demographic. However, we recommend that programming for each group be phased in overtime, beginning with educational programming for high school students and adults. Only 23.5% of residents 18 and older within 3 miles of the property have a high school diploma, and 28.9% of the population 25 and over within one mile of the site have some college experience but no degree (ESRI Community Analyst, 2019). Given these statistics, there is a clear need for adult education interventions. This center could be an asset for area residents who have career ambitions but have been unable to attain a degree that can be leveraged for employment opportunities. Because local universities already provide GED courses and gap credit courses, there is an opportunity for the adult programming to focus specifically on non-degree contingent career preparation. This could include training on skills like graphic design, coding, UX design, and other technical-based aptitudes.

To encourage high school students to begin career planning, we recommend that the center contain an incubation/makers-space where students can develop, test and refine new ideas and products. With new technology replacing traditional service industries, the next generation of workers will need to be able to innovate and adapt to stay valuable and successful in the labor



FAIRBURN

economy. While many interventions focus on technical or industry-specific training opportunities, investments in developing entrepreneurs is also important and may be more attractive to high school students interested in creative or self-driven career paths. Providing a resourced space where high school students can develop and refine their ideas, or create and test new products/technologies, can help provide them with a solid business foundation they can build upon during and after high school. Only 1/3rd of residents within 3 miles of the site have an associates degree or above (ESRI Community Analyst, 2019). An entrepreneurship program may encourage students to pursue higher education or provide them with a career path if they decide not to attend college.

Phasing - As noted, while all of these programmatic components would be useful for the cluster, APS could choose to operationalize any combination of these offerings and still have significant impact. We recommend that this proposal is phased in over-time beginning with the incubation + makerspace and adult education programs, as those are the interventions that will serve the most immediate community needs. After those two programs have been established, the center can expand to include child care and/or early childhood education programming and middle school interventions, based on needs identified by Young Middle School. Through conversation with Young Middle School principal Kara Stimpson, we also learned that there is an existing need for academic and behavioral support services for non-traditional middle school students. This center could support non-traditional middle school students (e.g., students who are older than their peers or have children) in addressing their unique circumstances outside a typical classroom setting. Lastly, it can phase in senior activities, such as community gardening, computer literacy skills and exercise classes as a supplement to the other local senior centers and residential facilities .

Potential Partnerships - APS should leverage existing resources to develop and operate the center's programs and services.

Below are potential partners that could run or facilitate each aspect of the cradle-to-career center:

Behavioral and Mental Health Support Services: Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Hillside Atlanta, Families First, Mercy Care

Incubation/Makerspace: Russell Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Invest Atlanta's Students2Startups, Georgia Future Business Leaders of America, The Gathering Spot

Career entry programs: General Assembly, New Horizons (Computer Learning Centers), LinkedIn, Fulton County Library

Senior services: Quality Living Services, Prime Time Seniors (City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation)

Additional Considerations - Because the property size is relatively large (~10 acres), it can provide additional services alongside the cradle-to-career community center. Potential add-on interventions include an ecological reserve. According to an assessment by the City of Atlanta Office of Resiliency, this site contains mature upland forest and soils along the southern edge and deepest core of the property. As such, the site could include a reserve for recovery and important species such as voles and gophers, which help turn the soil and spread seeds and dead organic material, providing the nutrients for new growth. The site is not considered a problem area for air pollution or heat island effect, indicating potential for an ecological usage. Our hope is that the materials used in the incubation space are recycled or disposed of properly to maintain the environmental integrity of the site.

Honor Farm Proposal Overview

Phase One Analysis: Quantitative



HIGH

Community Need



LOW

Population Projection



LOW

Utilization Projection

Phase Two Analysis: Qualitative

ASSETS

- Conditions of surrounding homes
- Rental Renovation
- Active neighborhood org and rec center
- Strong partners
- Proximity to grocery
- Sidewalks and undeveloped space

CHALLENGES

- Closure of the Boys and Girls Club
- High rates of violent crimes
- Poor school performance
- Few parks
- Healthy food access

Proposal: Outdoor Learning Environment

Ultimate Goal: Activate vacant public space to provide opportunities for trauma-informed care and play for students and the greater community

Potential First Phase Ideas:

- Create a story trail
- Construct a shared school and community garden
- Develop a volunteer program with adults to engage with children
- Include a diverse array of interactive, tactile natural elements

Rational:

The creation of an outdoor learning environment on the Honor Farm property provides a community asset for families and students in need of a healthy, safe recreational space to connect with nature.

One of the most significant outcomes of community feedback was the expressed desire to realize the potential of vacant spaces as well as the need to provide an outlet for families and children to connect with each other and nature while improving their community.



HONOR FARM

PROPERTY OVERVIEW: HONOR FARM
PROPERTY ADDRESS: 550 THOMASVILLE BOULEVARD
SIZE: 12 ACRES
CURRENT ZONING: R-4 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MINIMUM LOT SIZE 0.21 ACRES
CURRENT LAND USE: MEDIUM-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
APPRAISED VALUE: \$71,000
SOURCE: FULTON COUNTY BOARD OF ASSESSORS, 2019

The Honor Farm property is located in the Thomasville Heights neighborhood of south Atlanta, next to an existing park and active elementary school. Because of the property's large area and proximity to existing school and park facilities, transforming the property into an outdoor learning environment would benefit the community without requiring considerable financial investment.

Property Selection Rationale - Compared to the rest of Atlanta, the area around the Honor Farm property is growing relatively slowly, and the nearby schools are not projected to be over capacity in the near future. This property is therefore unlikely to be used for traditional academic purposes. Instead, the District could better serve the surrounding community by leveraging the Honor Farm property for alternative purposes. The following sections describe the community in more detail.

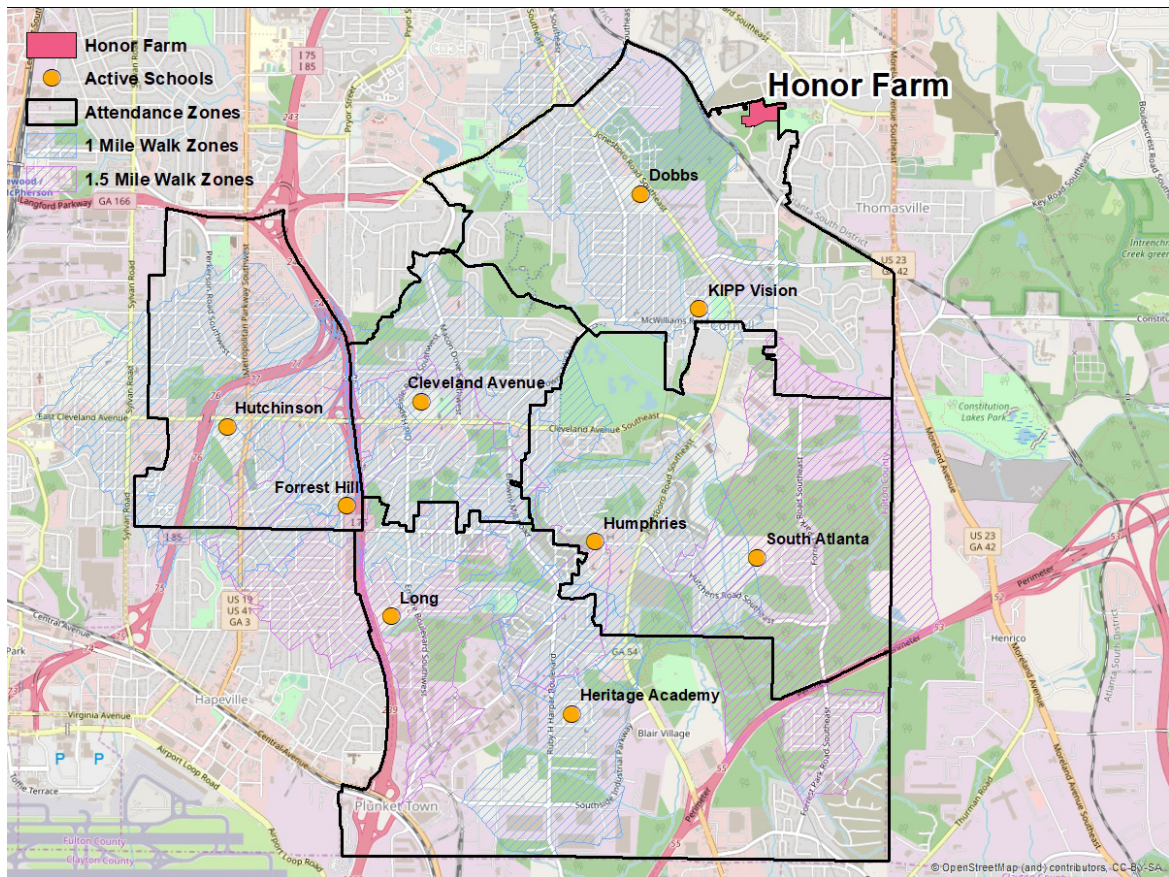
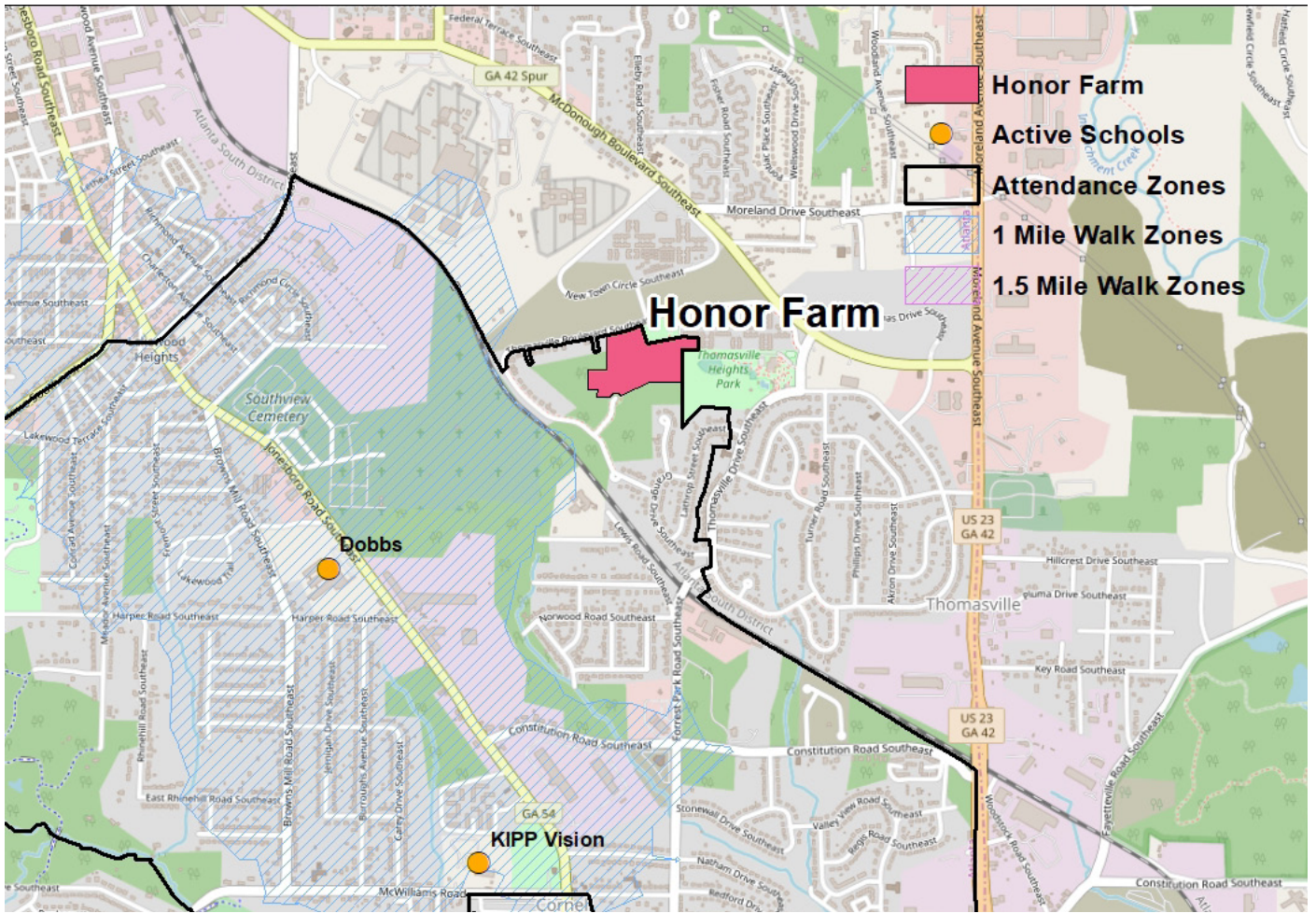
Community Need - The neighborhood containing the Honor Farm property has a high need across three of the four indicator categories - housing, economics, and transportation. According to the 1-year ACS for 2017, over 50% of renters in Thomasville Heights pay 30% or more of their income on rent, and 46.6% of housing units with a mortgage have monthly payments more than 30% of their incomes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The economic statistics of the community also reflect high need. The median household income in the community is 70% lower than the City of Atlanta average, and 27.3% of residents are unemployed. 60.9% of families in Thomasville Heights live below the poverty line. Among all households, 52.2% are female householders with no husband present. Of these households, 100% live below the poverty line. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Transportation remains an area of concern for residents of Thomasville Heights as well. MARTA bus routes offer no direct service from the neighborhood to nearby amenities and poor access to the larger Metro. Still, a significant percentage of households, 23.5%, use public transportation. Across households, 37.1% have no vehicle, worsening access to jobs and important amenities.

Utilization/Population - The cluster elementary, middle, and high school utilization rates are all below the 80% APS high-capacity threshold. The expected population growth is very low. The low projected utilization rate and low expected population growth for nearby schools and neighborhood, respectively, informed our efforts to determine a new use for the property.

Current Assets - Proximate to the property are sidewalks, a recreation center, and a local community space. An active neighborhood association, the Thomasville Heights Civic League, meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues affecting local residents. In addition, various partners are actively involved in the neighborhood. Purpose Built Schools serves as a partner to APS and operates Thomasville Elementary School. The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta is leading an effort known as THRIVE Thomasville Heights, a seven member, resident-led advisory committee that awards micro-grants to community-led projects. Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Association, with an office in Thomasville Heights Elementary School, offers families of students with legal support on eviction, accessing benefits, and negotiating other civil matters. Additional to these dedicated partners and active neighborhood efforts is the wealth of vacant green space within the community. Activating these spaces builds on the strengths of community engagement and partnership and offers an opportunity for improved public spaces.



HONOR FARM

The site's physical characteristics do not pose any major challenges to development. An ecological assessment based on the City of Atlanta's Urban Ecology Framework showed that the Honor Farm property has no wetlands or old growth forests and is therefore not ecologically challenged. In addition, its close proximity to an elementary school and park could allow for easy, continuous access between the three areas.

Honor Farm also lies within the South Atlanta attendance cluster, which has developed its own strategic plan to improve school performance and meet student needs. As part of this plan, the community highlighted the need for improved connections between students, families, and the overall community, including additional wraparound services. The plan also prioritized social and emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices, especially at the elementary school level. This goal was echoed by the principal of Thomasville Heights Elementary School, who described how the teachers and faculty have put this strategy into practice. Providing an outdoor learning environment for the students of nearby schools in this cluster aligns well with this plan, as described below.

Recommendation - The community has expressed a desire for additional social and emotional learning opportunities and additional wraparound services for students. An outdoor learning environment can help meet this need without requiring high-intensity, and costly, development of the property.

Justification - As described above, the community surrounding the Honor Farm property faces a range of challenges, including a high level of poverty and lack of affordable housing and transportation. However, the park next to the property already contains a large recreation center that could house services to address some of these needs. Constructing an additional facility in such close proximity would therefore be an unnecessary expense. We recommend that the property instead be used to address the community's desire for increased cohesion with the local schools and additional social and emotional learning opportunities for students. Because the community has struggled with violent crime, students would benefit from

a trauma-sensitive outdoor learning environment (OLE) that fits into the SEL practices already in place at nearby Thomasville Heights Elementary School.

The Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University has highlighted some of the benefits of providing children with natural play spaces and outdoor learning environments. These benefits include stress reduction, increased creativity, and improved academic performance (Effects of Outdoor Education Programs for Children in California, 2005; Kellert, 2005; Wells & Evans, 2003). Such outcomes align well with the cluster-specific and district goal of increasing opportunities for SEL as well as the recommendations for trauma-sensitive learning environments developed by Futures Without Violence (2016).

In addition to meeting community and school district needs, an OLE offers a cost-effective option for the development of vacant APS property. For example, the Natural Learning Initiative suggests repurposing old tires as planters or logs as benches (North Carolina State University, 2012). Implementing these low-cost solutions could also offer the opportunity to teach students about the importance of recycling and reusing materials. The principal of Thomasville Heights Elementary noted that such ecological learning opportunities are of interest to the students and teachers there, as they have recently started integrating a school garden with their science curriculum. Transforming the vacant property into an OLE would thus build on current initiatives at the nearby school while meeting needs identified by the surrounding community.

Partnerships - Existing Partners: Purpose Built Schools, the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, and the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation

Community Partners: Thomasville Heights Civic League and Forest Cove Tenants Association

Greenspace Partners: Park Pride, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, Play Atlanta, the Children and Nature Network, and Chris180.

For more information on how to leverage these partnerships, please visit our website.

Additional Considerations:

Our first and foremost consideration is ensuring that an Outdoor Learning Environment aligns with the goals and priorities of residents of Thomasville Heights. Meeting and building a relationship with the Thomasville Heights Civic League and the Forest Cove Tenants Association to get their feedback is the first consideration we recommend in the process of determining the best use for this property.

Our recommendation is to create an OLE for community members, youth, and children of Thomasville Heights. However, in making our recommendation, we consider the risk that these new places may be susceptible to crime. Overall crime in the neighborhood decreased between 2009 and 2018; however, property and violent crime remains above in-town levels. Reviewing research on the relationship between greenspace and crime, we learned that greenspace, defined as grass, plants, or tree canopy cover over a landscape, is associated with a lower risk of crime. However, parks, which are defined as “designated open spaces managed by a public agency” and considered a subset of greenspace, are associated with increased violent and property crime (Kimpton, Corcoran, & Wickes, 2017).

Considering this trend, it is important for APS to consider ways to be proactive in preventing crime in parks. According to Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces, parks and greenspace that are consistently utilized by community members and contain ongoing programming are effective in deterring crime (“What Role can Design Play in Creating Safer Parks?,” 2008). In creating this new space, it is recommended that APS make sure community members buy into the idea and are engaged in the effort to maintain the park space.

Another consideration is the costs associated with the upkeep of the greenspace. While ongoing investment in programming and maintenance could be costly overtime, APS could offset some of this cost by working with partners. In our research of Outdoor Learning Environments, the costs associated with the maintenance of properties range and depend on the amount of initial investment in the creation of the greenspace. For this reason, we recommend determining the maintenance budget at the front end of the planning process.



Towns-Collier Proposal Overview

Phase One Analysis: Quantitative

↑ **HIGH**
Community Need

↓ **LOW**
Population Projection

↓ **LOW**
Utilization Projection

Phase Two Analysis: Qualitative

ASSETS

- STEM Signature Program
- Historic neighborhood with cultural pride
- School options (including single-gender vs. traditional experiences)

CHALLENGES

- Location: not easily accessible to greater APS members
- Lack of family engagement
- Newly proposed teaching methods may be difficult for reinforcement at home

Proposal: Community Learning Center

Ultimate Goal: Create a community learning center at the former Towns Elementary School Facility

Potentential First Phase Ideas:

- Enable a STEM ecosystem approach
- Literacy program emphasis
- Career services for caregivers encouraging analysis of skilltransferability or stackable credentials

Rational:

8-13% average proficiency levels for cluster elementary schools (with the exception of Scott and Westside).

This center would focus on caregiver-child learning programs that enable the caregiver to support new instructional models.



TOWNS-COLLIER HEIGHTS

PROPERTY OVERVIEW: BOLTON ROAD/FORMER TOWNS ELEMENTARY SITE
PROPERTY ADDRESS: 760 BOLTON ROAD, NW ATLANTA, GA 30331; 3050 COLLIER DR., NW, ATLANTA 30318
SIZE: 8.9 ACRES/68,766 SQFT/BUILT 1963, RENOVATED 2000 (BOLTON RD.- VACANT BLDG.; 6.33 ACRES (COLLIER DR.- VACANT PROPERTY, DEMOLISHED 2010)
760 BOLTON - ZONING: R-4 (SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL)
FUTURE LAND USE: COMMUNITY FACILITY SURROUNDED BY SFR
3050 COLLIER DR - ZONING: R-3 (SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL)
FUTURE LAND USE: SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
APPRAISED VALUE: 760 BOLTON - LAND: \$79,100, BUILDING: \$1,103,300, TOTAL: \$1,182,400
3050 COLLIER - LAND/TOTAL: \$ 86,200
SOURCE: FULTON COUNTY BOARD OF ASSESSORS, 2019

Based on our analysis, local APS elementary-aged students in this geography would benefit from a Community Learning Center with STEM and literacy programming specific to elementary school students and their immediate caregivers. Given the cluster's emphasis on implementing Fountas and Pinnell and Lucy Coggins curriculum in every K-5 classroom, this Community Learning Center would greatly contribute to the development of a STEM and literacy eco-system in the community.

Property Selection Rationale - As outlined in the Analysis section, our site selection process prioritized vacant properties located in high-need communities. The former Towns Elementary property rose to the top as a potential development site because the cluster schools are projected to remain below full capacity and the existing building is in good condition, according to the Facility Condition Assessment report.

Community Need - The neighborhood containing this property has a high need across housing, economics and transportation. Almost 48% of residents are rent cost-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their income on housing. The median household income in the community is 42% lower than the City of Atlanta average, and 28% of residents are unemployed. Lastly, the walkability score of 8 on a scale of 20, with 20 indicating the best walkability.

Utilization/Population - The overall cluster utilization rates are all below the 80% APS high-capacity threshold. The expected population growth is low.

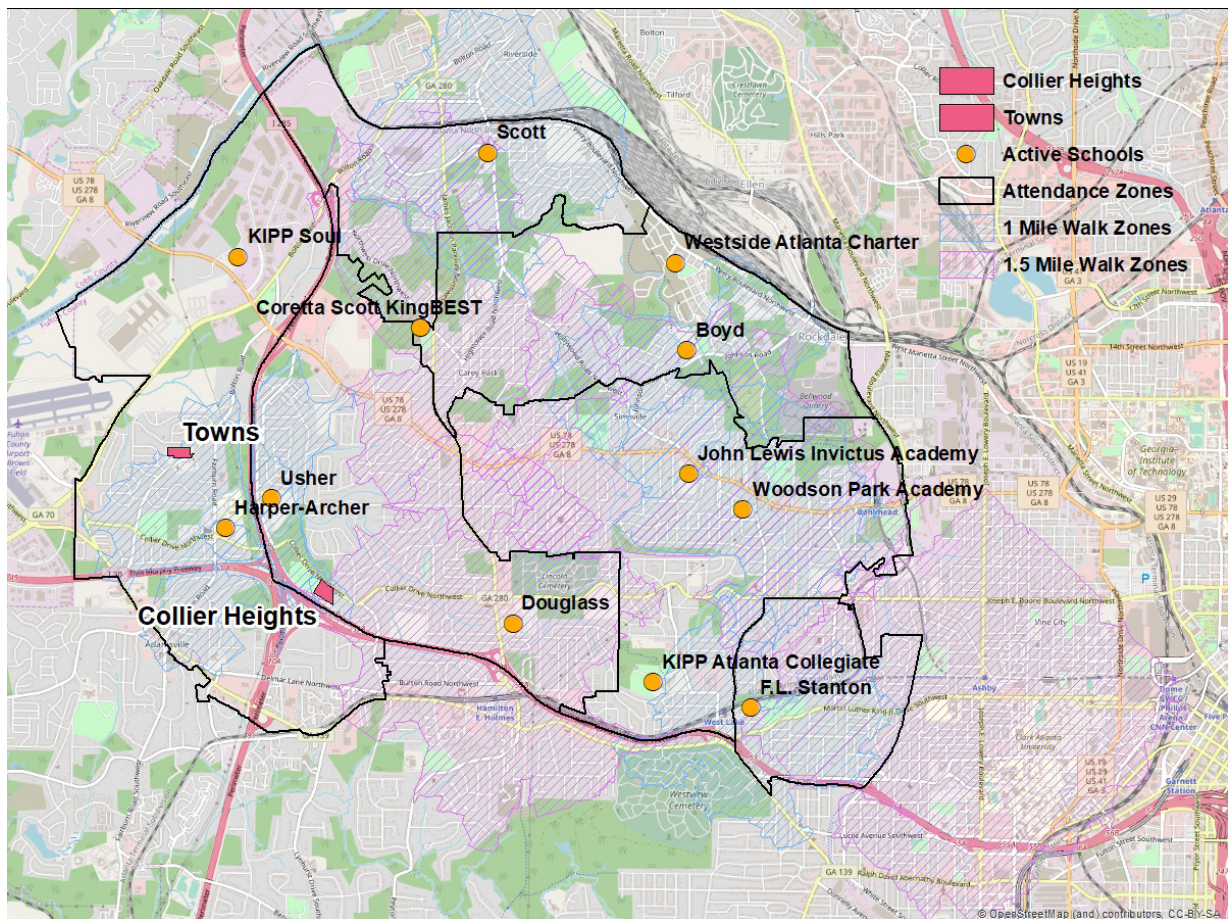
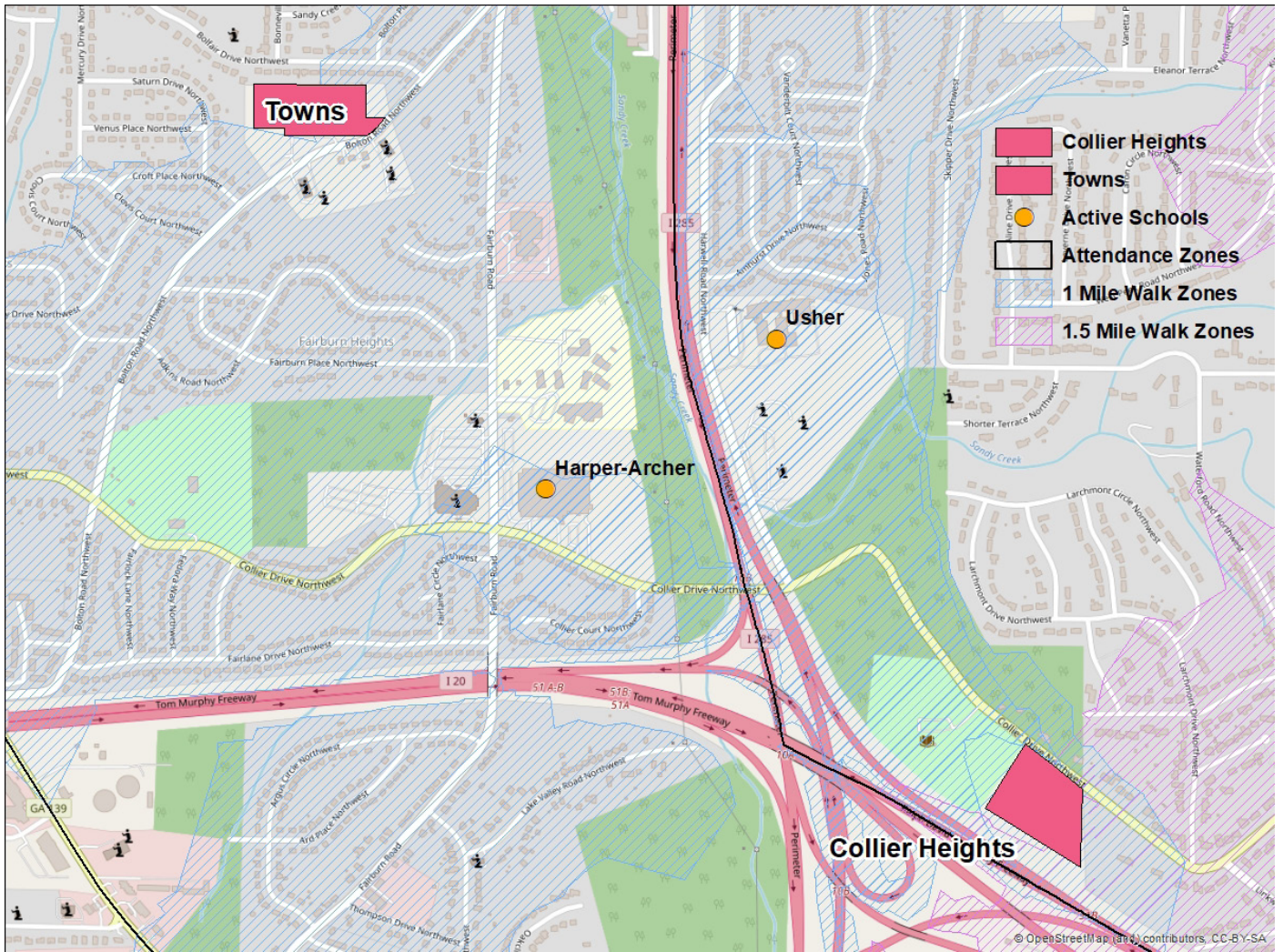
Current assets - The property is located one mile away from Harper-Archer Elementary School and 1.8

miles away from Usher Elementary School, with I-285 being a barrier between the site and Usher Elementary. However, Collier Heights Road goes under I-285 approximately .4 miles from Usher, providing fairly simple/not completely impeded access. The surrounding area contains several physical assets including: Imhotep Academy-private school, several community churches, and a county senior center.

Recommendation - The community demonstrates a specific need for a Community Learning Center to be placed in the former Towns Elementary School facility. The building has a strong facility condition index score, indicating a low investment cost to make this space readily usable. Evidence highlights that in this geographic area students' caregivers are elderly and/or non-native English speakers. Additionally, the economic analysis indicated that employment in the area consists mostly of distribution and service-sector jobs. Such jobs often require workers to accept overtime or take on a second job in order to earn a living wage. This creates a unique set of needs and challenges as the cluster seeks to implement new instructional methods.

In particular, the at-home language and generational challenges will inevitably make it difficult for caregivers to provide the home support required to enable successful implementation of the Fountas and Pinnell and Lucy Coggins curriculum referenced in the cluster plan. Implementing these new instructional methods requires dedicated at-home hours to practice new math methods and reading time.

As such, The Learning Center would provide a school-to-home bridge. This Community Learning Center would focus on caregiver-child learning



TOWNS-COLLIER HEIGHTS

programs that enable the caregiver to support new instructional methods in the home environment. The center would expand instructional time and provide add-on services that attract caregivers to the site. This center would create a stronger connection between home and school, building on the STEM Ecosystem concept currently popularized across the country.

Moreover, current jobs for these caregivers, (distribution centers and service-industry), do not enable strong economic mobility and require long working days/overtime to make ends meet. As such, this center should include a basic workforce development area that offers transferable skills. Skills transferability is vital to economic mobility and would enable access to potentially higher-paying jobs for the caregivers. Providing a center where caregivers can learn how to apply their skills to new, higher-paying jobs would incentivize them to engage with the center, where they would then have access to literacy-bridge activities in support of the Fountas and Pinnell and Lucy Coggins curriculum methods.

Justifications - APS has a ready-to-use facility in a geographic area of low-utilization. The center could serve different age groups- elementary students, career-prep services for parents and even serve as a spill-over location for activity programming for the local senior center, which is heavily utilized during school-time hours. The population in census tracts just outside of the cluster in Cobb County is increasing at a high rate. The population has become more polarized between elderly and young people, as there is not a significant proportion of middle-aged persons.

A high percentage of students in the community are living in a bilingual household and parents who are non-English speakers require unique engagement opportunities. There has been little change in overall population across the previous five years, but enrollment in ESOL programs has increased significantly in some tracts and we recognize that Hispanic/Latinx traditionally undercounted in census surveys. When studio members visited other schools in the cluster, near the target properties, Usher Elementary School had bilingual signs posted for drop-off zones. A large

percentage of caregivers are grandparents, suggesting potential technology and generational learning gaps.

North-west of the property, there are high-employment opportunities in local distribution centers; as such, families may be moving in between APS, Cobb and Fulton county schools, depending on the availability of affordable housing. Job growth has been in service and low-wage sectors such as admin/waste management, retail, transportation/warehousing. Share of workers 29 and younger has more than doubled between 2010 and 2017, suggesting that young people are staying in the area and working locally.

Phasing - While all of these programmatic components would be useful for the cluster, APS could choose to test the STEM Ecosystem method here and build capacity that could be applied district-wide.

More industry-specific partnerships that support workforce development in the local vicinity. Curriculum exists (See: GA DOE: Middle School Performance Standards "Georgia Career, Technical and Agricultural Education" GCTAE). The Henry County College and Career Readiness Facility has successfully implemented this type of industry-specific workforce development. (This center is an existing partnership with Georgia Power.)

Potential Partnerships - Math & Science: Code.org, a nonprofit that provides free computer science curriculum for teachers; Georgia Tech Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics, and Computing, (CEISM) (Existing APS partnership); STEM Learning Ecosystems: <https://stemecosystems.org/faqs/>

Literacy: Rollins Center at the Atlanta Speech School (existing Douglass cluster partnership);

Career entry /skills transferability programs: Metro Atlanta EXchange for Workforce Solutions;

Truancy & Other Wraparound Services: The At-Promise Youth & Community Centers (Atlanta Police Foundation)

Cooper Street Proposal Overview

Phase One Analysis: Quantitative



HIGH

Community Need



MID

Population Projection



HIGH

Utilization Projection

Phase Two Analysis: Qualitative

ASSETS

- Surrounded by newly built and naturally occurring affordable housing
- Nearby teen recreation center
- Abundance of public park space th

CHALLENGES

- Low vehicle accessibility
- Highways and railroad make other mobility difficult
- High instances of health disparities
- Lack of employment opportunities

Proposal: Health and Wellness Oriented Community Center

Ultimate Goal: provide access to resources that improve health and wellness outcomes in the community

Potentenal First Phase Ideas:

- Farmer's market activation, similar to Fresh MARTA Market
- Health clinic
- Instructional fitness classes
- Outdoor running/walking path surrounding the property

Rational:

A vast majority of Mechanicsville's land use is residential. The lack of land use mixes, vehicle accessibility, and walkability and bikeability, isolate many residents from necessary resources like access to fresh and healthy food, medical offices, and health and wellness services. Access to health and wellness resources continues to be one of the largest impediments in Mechanicsville.



COOPER STREET

PROPERTY OVERVIEW: COOPER STREET
PROPERTY ADDRESS: 405 COOPER ST, SW ATLANTA, GA 30312
SIZE: 2.2 ACRES
CURRENT ZONING: SPI-18 SA1 MECHANICSVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD SPECIAL PUBLIC INTEREST DISTRICT
CURRENT LAND USE : RG-3 GENERAL (MULTIFAMILY) RESIDENTIAL - FAR 0.696
APPRAISED VALUE: \$831,500 (LAND - 331,100 IMPROVEMENT - \$500,400)
SOURCE: FULTON COUNTY BOARD OF ASSESSORS, 2019

Based on our analysis, the local community would benefit from a health and wellness focused community center that services local students as well as the broader community.

Property Selection Rationale - The Cooper St. property is located in an area with the highest community need scores. In addition, nearby schools have higher projected utilization rates than our other subject properties, adding some variety to our analysis. This property is located immediately south of Downtown and is within walking distance of Dunbar Elementary school. The site's central location gives it potential to serve the needs of APS students, as well as the broader community.

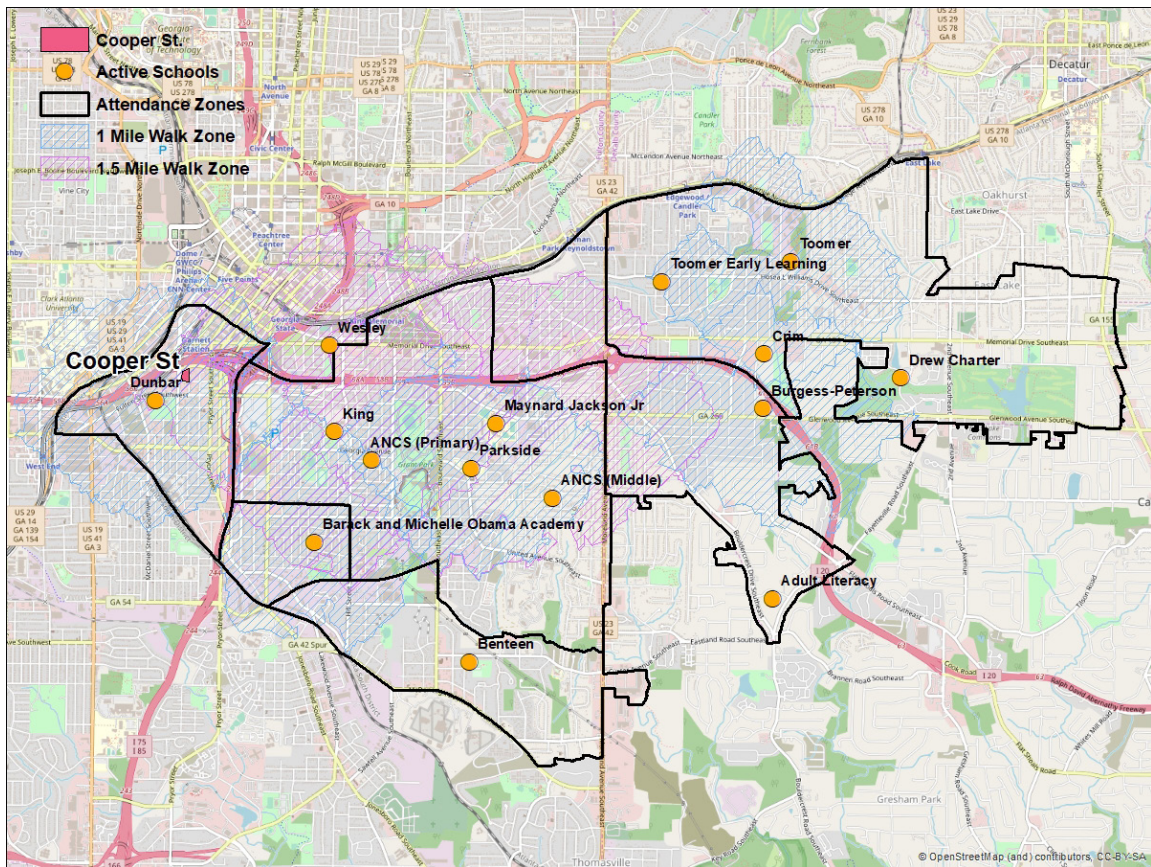
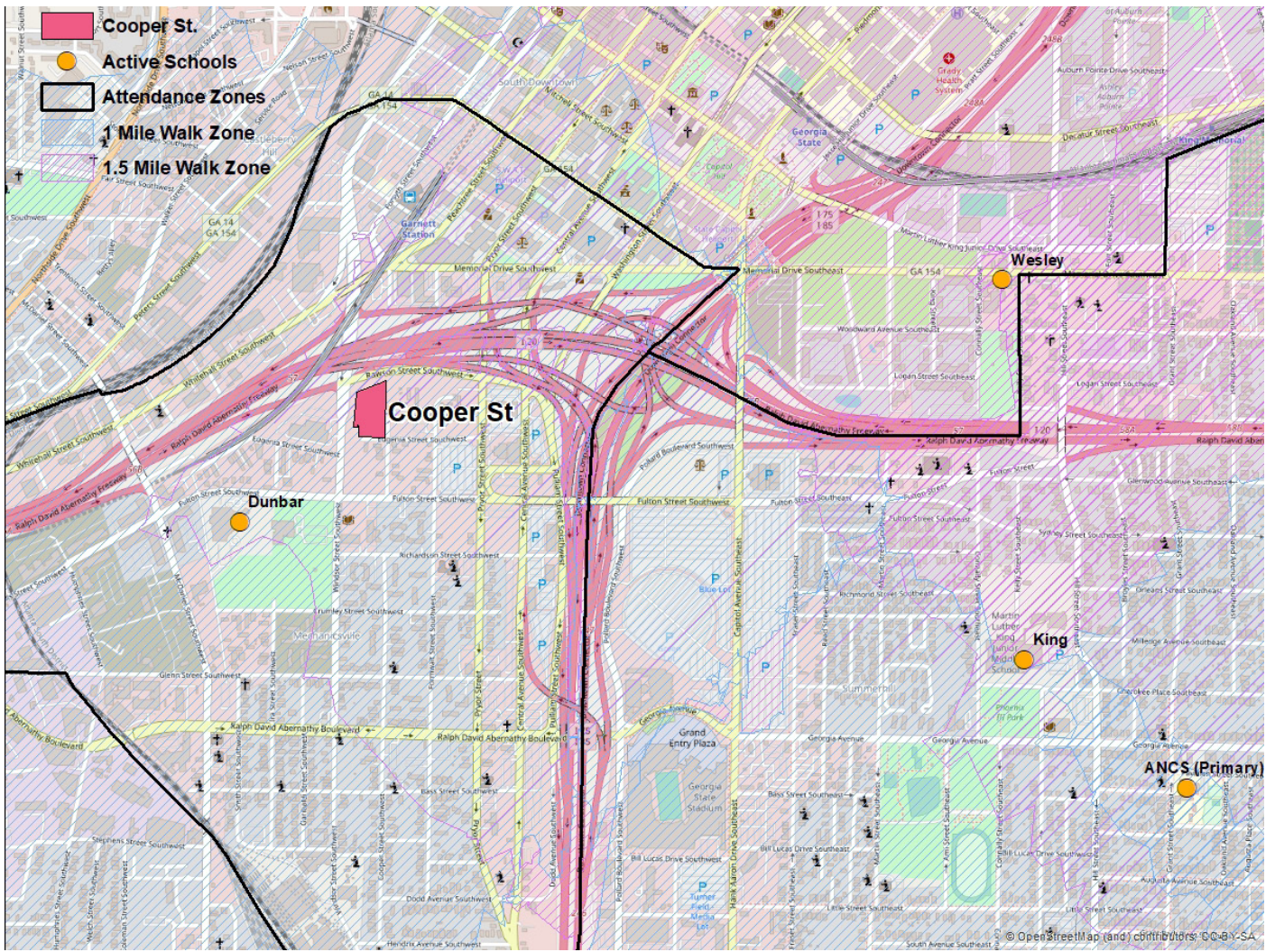
Community Need - The Mechanicsville neighborhood, which surrounds the Cooper Street property, has a high level of community need across all four indicator categories. The median household income in the surrounding area is almost 50% lower than the City of Atlanta's average and about 50% of its residents are rent cost-burdened. Only about 13% of the units are owner-occupied meaning there is a significantly higher renting population than the area at large.

Employment conditions are also a significant challenge. At about 18%, the local unemployment rate is twice as high as the city's. Many residents have limited employment opportunities, particularly because more than 80% of residents do not have a bachelor's degree. Since the neighborhood lacks sufficient job opportunities for these residents, the majority of residents work outside of Mechanicsville. Some work numerous counties away (Sessoms, personal interview). This is complicated by the fact that about 1 out of 5 workers do not have a car and the nearest MARTA station is on the other side of a large highway and is not a pleasant walk for most residents.

Furthermore, approximately 1 out of 3 residents do not have health insurance. Finally, many residents have physical and mental health related issues such as asthma and diabetes (Moorehouse School of Medicine, 2015). Air pollution is also a problem. While Atlanta scores relatively low on the health index scale, indicating high levels of exposure to dangerous toxins, Mechanicsville scores at the lowest level possible.

Utilization/Population - The closest elementary and middle schools are at utilization levels of 96% and 101%, respectively. The projected utilization rate for the nearest high school is slightly lower, at roughly 78%. Although the expected growth in enrollment is notably higher than it is for the closest schools of other three selected properties, it is still much lower than many other parts of the city. While this might mean that there is less potential for long term use than some of the other properties, selecting this property provides an example of what might fit into a higher growth area. Though sites with higher projected population and utilization rates may have to be retained for school purposes in the near future, the projected population still seems low enough to warrant such a proposal. Moreover, the small land area of the site makes it unlikely to be used for an actual school building.

Current Assets - The Cooper Street property is located 0.4 miles from the nearest elementary school, Dunbar Elementary. A trio of affordable housing developments, developed between 2009 and 2017 are located 0.5 miles from the site and 0.1 miles away from Dunbar Elementary. Other multifamily developments in the community provide a stock of naturally occurring affordable housing, however, every development other than the three aforementioned properties are Class C or Class F buildings. Class C buildings are typically older than 30 years, and need numerous repairs. Class F buildings



COOPER STREET

dings are inoperable and unlivable. Cooper Street is 0.5 miles away from the Garnett MARTA Station. The area is accessible by numerous MARTA bus routes, connecting other parts of the city. Route 49, which passes the property of interest, connects the area to downtown and various neighborhoods in southeast Atlanta with frequencies up to every 20 minutes. Lastly, a community library is directly adjacent to the Cooper Street property.

Improving students' physical and mental health is one of the priorities of the Development Cluster Plan from December 2018, and is supported by a community survey from the Morehouse School of Medicine. Community issues include: a high prevalence of Asthma and diabetes, lack of access to healthy foods, and high instances of adverse childhood experiences. These were all echoed by the principal of Dunbar Elementary School, Dr. Earnest Sessoms, who explained that many of his students live in sub-par living conditions and have experienced adverse childhood experiences, which can impair their personal and academic well-being. One of the priorities was to "develop a set of cluster-wide procedures and protocols that will support the social and emotional development of students." While this entails more than mental health services, schools have been considering the importance of mental health and well-being in broader terms.

Recommendation - The community demonstrates a need for mental and physical health services as well as access to healthy food. Students and adults in the community would benefit from a health and wellness focused community center. The proposed community center would have numerous components. The bulk of the first floor would be open to the public, and occupied by large studio style classrooms for health classes, a community kitchen that offers cooking classes and educational resources about health. A weekly outdoor farmer's market, or food truck activation, directly outside of the property would provide access to fresh, healthy food that is largely absent in the community. The second floor of the proposed building would be dedicated to offices that house medical practices, such as family physician offices, dentists, and specialty doctors. These medical offices provide an easily accessi-

ble service that students and families in the neighborhood would benefit from. Lastly, a walking/running track around the circumference of the property would provide another publicly accessible, health-focused amenity.

Justification - Physical and mental health issues are prevalent in the community surrounding the Cooper Street property. The proximity to Downtown creates an environment with poor air quality and increased chances of exposure to harmful toxins. The Morehouse survey revealed many residents in this area suffer from chronic health issues and see few outlets for improving these conditions due to a lack of affordable health care providers and healthy food. For the many residents who lack health insurance, the lack of healthcare services is even more pronounced. Many community residents also suffer from mental distress. The principal of Dunbar Elementary explained how poor living conditions, difficult family life, substance abuse, along with other adverse childhood experiences, accumulate to affect many members of the community, especially students. That is why we see a great need for this community center that provides healthcare and wellness services to the adults and students in the area and acts as an open space to shop, learn, interact, and heal with other community members.

Phasing - While all of these elements would benefit the area, APS could choose to deploy any one of these services and can do so incrementally. It is very likely that such a development would be implemented in phases due to limited funding and resources. For example, the activation of the farmer's market and infrastructure for a walking/running track do not require the capital or infrastructure, and associated costs, that a 2-acre development would. The importance of these services is to introduce access and opportunity to a community that lacks both. These two assets would could potentially be serviceable before the development process of the proposed community center begins. In this process it is important to think strategically about what can and should be prioritized. Planning, financing, constructing, and staffing a proposed community center would take years to fully implement, but less capital intensive assets that benefit the community can still be organized, activated, and delivered in the meantime.

COOPER STREET

Potential Partnerships - Mental and Physical Health and Medical Support Services: Archi, Emory Healthcare, Mercy, Hillside

Recreational Services: Atlanta Track Club, Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation, Atlanta United Foundation

Educational Services: Live Healthy and Thrive Youth Services, Parent 2 Parent of Georgia

Food Services: Atlanta Community Food Bank, Open Hand

Alternative Scenario - The Cooper Street property may also be an optimal site for Atlanta Public Schools to generate revenue. Its direct access and immediate vicinity to two interstate highways, I-20 and I-85, and walking distance from the Garnett MARTA Station, make it an attractive and accessible site for catalytic development. Under a long-term ground lease, Atlanta Public Schools could create revenue, while maintaining control of valuable land in Downtown Atlanta. The Cooper Street property is currently assessed at \$831,500, but an analysis of comparable land sales indicates that the property is worth closer to between \$1,000,000 and \$1,500,000.

There are two local models for private development using public or quasi-public land: the redevelopment of Turner Field and Summerhill by Georgia State University and Carter Development, and the development of the Coda Building in Tech Square by Portman Holdings and Next Tier HD using land owned by the Georgia Tech Foundation. These projects both involved public entities working with private developers to create developments that satisfy both organizations' goals.

A similar model would operate on Cooper Street as such: Atlanta Public Schools would hold a ground lease with a developer, who would own and operate the property. In a separate agreement, the developer would agree to rent the bottom floor or two floors to APS who would still operate (or designate an entity to operate) the space as a community health center as outlined above

(or theoretically as another community space if deemed preferable). While the building would largely operate however the developer desires (in accordance with zoning), the agreement would ensure that there is adequate and appropriate space for APS or its designee to operate the community center. The benefits to the community, however, would likely extend to more than the community center. The new building would potentially provide employment opportunities and other services to the area.

There is also potential to combine this parcel with neighboring parcels to create a larger, more catalytic development. Three adjacent acres of undeveloped land are owned by Fulton County. One scenario could be a land swap between the two public entities, with Fulton County swapping the Cooper Street adjacent land, with other land that APS owns. APS could potentially generate enough revenue to run the services in the community center. Depending on the terms of the ground lease, the building owner might have to pay property taxes on the site, which would generate more revenue for APS.

While we recognize that such a proposal would likely require a longer and more complex process, this site could be an ideal space for APS to turn a vacant public space into a revenue generating development that creates some community space and potentially even jobs for some local residents. Although this model might seem unconventional, there is no reason that such a project could not be erected in this space as long as the relevant parties work together and with the community to create a site that accommodates both purposes and does not have any significant negative impact on the residents of Mechanicsville.

CONCLUSIONS & KEY LEARNINGS

Our process was developed in such a way that it could be used in perpetuity for the purposes of school facility planning in APS. Our hope is that this data-informed approach, centered on equity, can illuminate creative possibilities for properties that meet the needs of students and communities. As the resource gap continues to widen and Atlanta continues to address its inequities, public schools have the potential to contribute to the solution. Decisions about how publicly-owned land is utilized can have a significant impact on how a community develops and thrives.

In centering community need in our approach, we state the importance of equitably allocating resources and adopting a community development strategy that provides necessary support to underserved areas. Although the four recommendations that came out of this process are well informed, we suggest thorough engagement with community stakeholders to confirm they are the best uses for the properties.

We understand that exogenous shocks could change the trajectory of these projections. The first section of our appendix provides a guide for understanding some of the potential changes that could impact Atlanta Public Schools, including population change, an economic downturn, an increase in privatized education, and more.



Next Steps

For all four properties, extending community engagement, exploring deeper partnerships and deciding on operators are important next steps.

First, we recommend that APS engage community residents to identify the most pressing needs and concerns of the community and school-aged children. During our analysis, we gleaned that local stakeholders, such as school principals, neighboring non-profits and parents, have a clear understanding of how public schools and wrap-around services (or the lack thereof) improve or impair the quality of life of local families.

Through community engagement and relationship building, APS can modify the proposed use of the space according to the new information that community engagement presents. For the larger projects that include new buildings or major renovations, we recommend conducting interviews with local leaders (principals, church leaders, NPU reps, etc.), as well as parents and students, to gather more information regarding needs and the feasibility of the recommendation.

After solidifying the proposed use for the property with community feedback, we recommend that APS identify and engage with key partners that align with the goals for the property. With a shared purpose, we anticipate that engagement with partners will allow the best ideas for implementation and improvement of the space to rise to the top.

Once stakeholder buy-in and partnerships are in place, APS should develop a capital and operational budget that residents, partners, and APS all agree to. APS will need to consider whether they will operate the property themselves or lease it to a partner. If acting as the operator and user of the property, APS will need to estimate costs for maintaining and managing the property. If leasing the property to a partner, APS may want to offer the space at no-cost or a low-cost lease in exchange for the partner's programming efforts in fulfilling community goals. Since the answers to these questions vary, APS and its partners will need to work together with the community to reach agreement on these issues.

Finally, if there is a property owned by the county or city that APS is interested in (such as the property surrounding Cooper Street), APS should engage with the public entity to talk about a potential partnership or land swap. At the end of the day, it is all public land and these entities serve the same residents. The more cooperation between APS and the city or county, the better.

Key Findings

A number of key learnings emerged from our mixed-methods planning process. Our initial data collection and analysis illuminated discrepancies in population projections across sources (i.e. City of Atlanta, Atlanta Regional Commission), demonstrating the importance of creating alternative growth scenarios and maintaining analytical flexibility. Relatedly, the nature of imperfect data drove our reliance on qualitative research as a necessary supplement. Our interviews with stakeholders, site visits and attendance at community meetings were invaluable contributions to our process and recommendations. In particular, we learned that community engagement is critical to strengthening ideas and evaluating their potential for success. Our communications with school principals emphasized the importance of establishing a local advocate who can ensure recommendations are responsive to community needs.

Given the limited duration of this project, we also developed the ability to strike a balance between a broad exploration of possibilities and a narrow assessment of site-specific recommendations. We found it was necessary to begin with a wide aperture and use our data analysis to reduce our scope to the few priorities we explored in more detail. Similarly, our process highlighted best practices for balancing the “traditional” and the “creative.” We entered the project with an understanding of APS’ priorities and over time learned each of the clusters’ strategies. Rather than producing recommendations that simply reflected this existing information, we found it valuable to infuse our areas of planning expertise and elements of creativity into our proposals. Based on the feedback we received after our presentation, the Board appreciated this blended approach.

We are excited to have completed this work and our hope is that APS can build on these learnings as it drives forward its strategic planning and facilities development process.

APPENDIX

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Community Engagement: Interviews

Our process and recommendations were largely informed by interviews with stakeholders. These interviews provided us with important context which we incorporated into our decision-making framework and final site proposals.

List of Stakeholder Interviews and Meeting Attendance:

August 30: APS Master Facilities Retreat

September 5: Sizemore Group + APS Meeting

September 12: Larry Hoskins (APS Chief Operating Officer) Call

September 20: Kavi Maddula (Program Manager of Capital Improvements) Call

September 25: Matt Underwood (APS Executive Director of Innovation) Call

September 26: John Franklin (Executive Director of Transportation at APS) Call

September 27: Dr. Katika Lovett (Assistant Superintendent of Student Services)

Call

October 2: Rachel Sprecher (Executive Director in the Office of Partnerships and Development) Call

October 4: Larry Hoskins Meeting

October 7: Travis Norvell (Director of Strategy Mgmt.) Call

October 23: Evan Smith (Purpose Built Communities) Meeting

October 25: Kara Stimpson (Principal of Young MS) Meeting

October 28: Sizemore Group Meeting

November 8: Ernest Sessoms (Principal of Dunbar Elementary School) Meeting

November 12: Jovan Miles (Principal at Thomasville Heights Elementary School)

Meeting

November 14: Presentation at APS Master Facilities Retreat

November 20: Meeting with APS Board Members Leslie Grant (District 1), Michelle Olympiadis (District 3), and Erika Mitchell (Seat 5) and Tamara Jones (Grady Cluster Go Team)

Additionally, we attended all of the public District Facilities Master Plan Regional Community Conversation meetings October 2, 16, 17, 23.

Community Engagement Lessons Learned

Up to the point of publishing this document, school principals had not been specifically engaged throughout the process. However, we discovered that principals have a deep understanding of community and student needs that can be leveraged when determining potential site uses.

Successful parent/community engagement requires early, long-term communication about public meetings; otherwise, turnout will be low.

There is a perception in many communities that APS presents final decisions to stakeholders rather than engaging them throughout the decision-making process.

Non-negotiable obligations like childcare are barriers to engagement with parents; providing childcare or digital streaming options/more digital forums could address some of those challenges.

Having clear, legible handouts at community meetings is one way to empower stakeholders and invite them into the conversation. This is particularly important when using maps and graphs to convey information.

Some stakeholders are ambivalent about the current strategic and facilities planning process because they feel their concerns were not addressed in previous planning processes (i.e. redistricting). It will be important for APS and consultants to recognize that this angst will be brought into the current facilities planning process and to provide opportunities to address stakeholders' broad concerns.

Planning for the Future

Scenario A: Increased Population Across the City, and Poverty Gap Increases

Current data analyses highlight the potential for significant population growth alongside growing inequalities, specifically:

The outer edges of the APS boundary have seen significant population growth.

Schools located in the West End, Capitol Hill, Fourth Ward and other Beltline-adjacent neighborhoods have increasing utilization rates.

Major commercial and economic developments across the city are expected to continue to attract growth, increasing city population size, and likely APS' enrollment rate: The Gulch, Aerotropolis, Turner Field Redevelopment, etc.

As development projects are implemented, gentrification and displacement are likely to remain as pressing challenges, particularly in the context of vast economic inequalities.

Resources for further exploration:

Population growth has implications for future land use across transportation, education and housing:

“Accommodating Atlanta’s Future Growth: Rethinking Land Use to Make Better Transportation Decisions”

APS’ population may grow due to in-migration from residents of coastal cities:

“UGA study: Global warming could grow Atlanta's population”

Poverty increases in the city could lead to additional reliance on the non-profit sector for service provision, and thus, the need for APS to expand its partnerships:

“All Eyes on Equity: How nonprofits are mobilizing to solve Atlanta’s structural inequities”

APS’ population demographic may shift away from being majority-Black as historically Black neighborhoods are gentrified and original residents are displaced outside of city boundaries:

“Atlanta’s gentrification wave washes over historic Old Fourth Ward”

“Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and cultural displacement in American cities”

Scenario B: Major Economic Downturn Leads to Population Levelling

Data suggests that a recession may influence APS’ enrollment rates and facilities resources:

A recession may impact fertility rates, which would reduce the overall school-aged population. However, during an economic downturn, fewer families can afford private schools which could increase APS enrollment.

As a result of continued budget cuts to colleges and universities and pressure to reduce costs to students, Colleges and Universities throughout the city may merge, freeing up their underutilized land and properties for other public uses. These properties could fit into APS' strategic and facilities goals and potentially open up opportunities for APS and the university system to partner.

Resources for further exploration:

Public schools become more popular, and as a result, more land is needed for public schools. This results in a need for additional housing for teachers:

“Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Maintain Excellent Teachers.”

“To Attract Teachers, Pricey School Districts are Becoming their Landlords.”

Colleges and Universities merge:

“Regents Approve Two More University Consolidations”

“A Look at Trends in College and University Consolidations since 2016”

Scenario C: Online Learning Increases Dramatically, Leading to Major Changes in Public Education Delivery

What could this scenario mean for the Atlanta Public School System?

More online education could mean fewer facilities are needed, which could lead to consolidation or restructuring of properties.

If access to online learning platforms were made universal, a shift of this nature could possibly give more opportunities to underprivileged students.

APS would have to consider how or whether the role of public school education changes in a future like this. Schools provide necessary socialization, meals, and social services that would otherwise go unmet if education transitioned to online learning.

Resources for further exploration:

Future of online classes might change the overall structure of classroom/ could also make traditional school facilities less needed

“Should All Schools Be Virtual?”

“Imagining the Future: How Innovative School Districts Are Looking Ahead”

“School Facilities and Technology Integration”

Online classes have the potential to expand opportunity and bridge inequities but must be employed judiciously

“Opinion: Online Homework Tools Trade ‘Busy Work’ for Feedback to Help End Inequities in School”

“A Look Inside Online Learning Settings in High Schools”

“NEA Policy Statement on Digital Learning”

Data Sources Guide

Population			
Indicator	Data Source	Methodology	Notes
Utilization	Internal APS data	Locate the APS elementary, middle and high schools proximate to the property and use rubric to categorize utilization rate - with anything over 80% considered "high" or "very high"	
10-Year Projections	ARC data captured in May 2018 Board Facilities Retreat presentation	Categorize properties into growth categories based on map (slide 24)	Population data is not finalized and projections differ across sources - so will need to be updated as new projections emerge
Community Need			
Indicator	Data Source	Methodology	Notes
<i>Housing</i>			
Percent cost-burdened	American Community Survey - Table B25106	Use the advanced search tool on American Fact Finder to locate Table B25106 and download the results for each census tract within the APS school zone boundary	Cost-burdened households are those that spend 30% or more of their income on housing
Eviction Rate	Eviction Lab	Download census level data from Eviction Lab	
<i>Economics</i>			
Median Household Income	American Community Survey	Used Social Explorer's report generator tool to locate the Social Explorer Table A14006 and download results for each census tract within the APS school zone boundary	Median Household Income as a percent of City of Atlanta (\$51,701) average was used to calculate the raw data

Unemployment	Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)	Used the Georgia Labor Market Explorer to locate the LAUS unadjusted employment data for each census tract within the APS school zone boundary	Data should be updated frequently to understand current conditions as monthly statistics are reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics
<i>Transportation</i>			
Vehicle Access	American Community Survey - Table B25044	Used the advanced search tool on American Fact Finder to locate Table B25044 and download the results for each census tract within the APS school zone boundary	Data will show vehicle access by renter and owner occupied households
Walkability	EPA Walkability Index	Filtered national data to extract relevant census tracts	Values range from 1 (low walkability) to 20 (high walkability)
<i>Health</i>			
Health Insurance Coverage	U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year estimates for 2013-2017	Identify the values by census tract using the spreadsheet found on the ARC .	Values range from 0% to 100% from 0% uninsured to 100% uninsured
Environmental Health	ARC Health Index	ARC scores 0-100 (with 0 being the worst)	Transformed to 1-5 scale inverted with 5 being biggest need
<p>Note: "When we analyzed the Cooper Street property, some data points came from one census tract that included the Cooper Street APS property, while other data came from the larger Mechanicsville Statistical area (or a combination of two tracts that was largely coterminous with this boundary). The larger scale was preferable when possible because the subject property, located on the eastern border of one tract, is adjacent to an area experiencing large transformation."</p>			

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