Good Urbanism in Lifelong Communities

Lauren Welsh, ThreadATL
What we do....
**Mission:** ThreadATL promotes good urbanism in the city of Atlanta through engagement, education, and advocacy.

**Vision:** To create a city made up of inclusive and diverse neighborhoods, businesses, and people by using design to promote equitable access to public goods and services.
Congestion pricing in Atlanta? Weigh this option carefully, but with urgency

You've probably seen the news that New York City will likely adopt congestion pricing in order to bring fewer cars into Manhattan, and to aid public transit....

READ MORE →

Removal of Neighborhood Greenways from project list is a loss for Atlanta

Due to rising construction costs and lower-than-expected tax revenue, there was less money for Renew Atlanta Bond/ TSPLOST roadway improvements than
Elements of lifelong communities that are important to Atlanta...
- Lifelong communities = 8 to 80 Concept
- Lack of connected community design leads to loneliness
Design Elements of a Connected Community

- Welcoming public spaces where people gather
- Interesting/inspiring – arts and culture
- Public transportation, cycling, and walking all provide connections between people that a private vehicle cannot
- Diversity of housing
- Community assets/local business
- Small ideas
The danger...

Too many city streets look like this section of Huff Road.

- Bus stops with either no sidewalk or poor sidewalks.
- Signalized crosswalks too sparsely placed.
- High car speeds, and no bike lanes.
The danger...

Too many streets look like this section of Piedmont Road.

- Unsignalized crossings for pedestrians.
- Far too much width devoted to cars going one way.
- Studies show conversion of wide one-way streets improves safety.
Too many streets look like this one in Buckhead.

- Scaled to cars and not people.
- Crosswalks are barely visible.
- Sidewalks disappear.
- Some store entrances sit behind parking lots.
Many corridors designed to get cars to highway quickly.

Only bikeable and walkable for young, healthy people.

Would you walk your children through here? A grandparent?
Things Atlanta is doing to create connected communities...
Current State of Atlanta

- Zoning Rewrite
- MARTA TODs
- Complete Streets
- Drive-to Urbanism
- Department of Transportation
"If we're going to grow, we're going to have to develop in a way that more people can walk… A lot of this zoning in the 1960's and 70's imagined a future where everything would be monolithic and huge, and we would drive everywhere." -- Tim Keane
City of Atlanta Zoning Update

- Improve Urban Design
- Protect Neighborhood Character
- Expand Transportation Options
- Ensure Housing Diversity
- Support jobs and innovation
- Create user friendly regulations and processes
PHASE 1 QUICK FIXES
● Bicycle parking standards
● Deletion of unused zoning districts
● Independent driveways
● Non-conforming min facade heights
● Sidewalk requirements
● Storage pods in R-districts

PHASE 2 QUICK FIXES
● Accessory Dwellings Units (ADUs)
● Industrial Districts
● I-Mix Districts
● Loading Requirements
● Mixed Residential Commercial
● Residential Density Increase
● Missing Middle Zoning District
● Parking
MARTA TODs – what’s working, what’s not

At this Edgewood / Candler Park TOD, the $2.8 million in tax breaks are arguable going towards funding the parking deck.

Structured parking costs at least $25,000 per space to build in Atlanta.
Atlanta needs to build Complete Streets

Complete Streets are designed for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders. They’re designed for all ages and abilities.

Atlanta residents broadly supported Complete Streets redesigns, by approving the Renew Atlanta/TSPLOST referendum.

Slow build-out is putting Atlantans in danger.
## Walkable Development or Drive-to Urbanism?

### Current Rankings

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City of Atlanta’s first Department of Transportation

Focus on high level and comprehensive vision of mobility:
- Renew Atlanta
- TSPLOST
- The BeltLine
- Complete Streets

Key focus will be on multi-modal and alignment with Atlanta City Design.
Opportunities for advocacy and input...
Connect with neighborhoods

The Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system was created in 1974 by Mayor Maynard Jackson as a way for citizens to provide input in the city’s Comprehensive Development Plan.

Neighborhood representatives meet monthly to vote on planning matters and hear updates from various City of Atlanta departments.
Ask for good urbanism in your community

Great neighborhoods have a variety of public spaces. They have civic buildings, such as libraries, post offices, churches, community centers and assembly halls. They should also have a variety of connective streets, creating a density of intersections.
At community meetings, use examples of how good urbanism helps

Some developments on the Eastside Beltline are putting stores toward the path and not toward parking lots.

A 2012 study reported on by CityLab found that pedestrians & cyclist spend more per month on local biz than drivers.
Support local, independent, and small retail

- Work directly with CID, NPUs, City Council, Invest Atlanta to develop economic development policies
- Create culture and sense of place.
Rethink parking management

City of Atlanta has huge amounts of parking - both surface lots and parking decks yet no comprehensive management plan to determine what works best.

- Parking meters
- Multimodal parking
- Shared parking
- Permit parking
Support diversity of housing

- Good urban commercial development happens in old and new buildings.
- This is a new live/work building in Candler Park. There was an unused, empty lot here before, and now it’s becoming a people-place with no parking added.
Challenges:

*Suburban designs at city schools*
APS needs to work with City/Regional Planning

Here’s a street one block from an elementary school in the City of Atlanta.

It’s a state route that was recently repaved, but it appears no effort was made to slow car speeds or to make crossings safer for kids.

Notice the people waiting at the bus stop. Walking there must be a challenge.
ThreadATL’s Brandon Sheats recently spoke to local news about our opposition to replacing green space on campus with new parking.

APS is applying the same parking standards to an urban school that they would to a suburban school.
Challenges:

Overcoming car culture & “Everybody drives here” thinking
ATLANTANS WILL WALK

When pedestrian infrastructure is good, Atlantans will walk several blocks to destinations.

Here’s a blind couple walking from the Midtown Center for the Visually Impaired towards the North Avenue MARTA Station.

Notice how the sidewalk is nicely wide on this street, with buildings easy to enter for pedestrians. Design matters.
LIGHTING HELPS

A well-lit sidewalk is a safe sidewalk. If people feel unsafe on a street they will not use it or frequent local businesses.

Take a look at the lighting in Decatur at night. It’s not so bright that it feels antiseptic and cold, but not so dark that it feels unsafe.
Even with a local bias against transit in Atlanta among many, MARTA trains and buses are accommodating to people of all ages, and they will ride them.

Increasing the usefulness of MARTA to all will require increased frequency of service, and better routes for pedestrians for arriving at bus stops and rail stations.
ATLANTANS CAN CHANGE

The design proposes new streets that improve connectivity with the commercial district and adjacent neighborhoods, adjusts the block and lot structure to correct building frontage relationships and facilitate the creation of new housing types.

New development will complement the character, scale and density of the existing community while creating housing options for multiple generations.
Challenges:

*Educating folks on the “good” of good urbanism, like human-scale design*
Build human-scaled places

- Adjust zoning regulations to allow for non-traditional uses – office, fitness facilities, etc.
- Adding bike racks, benches, better wayfinding, street furniture, events – better and more welcoming public space (work with CIDs)
- Requiring property owners to pay a fee for vacant storefronts
- Financial incentives to attract specific types of retail
In Glenwood Park, this new building brings thousands of square feet of new office and retail space, across four floors, with *zero* new parking.
Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.

— Jane Jacobs —
Lauren Welsh, ThreadATL

Find us:
threadatl.org