

## **Atlanta's BeltLine Opportunity: Like No Other in America**

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When I first heard about the BeltLine, it seemed to me like one of the most bold urban transformation ideas happening anywhere in America.

It turns out my first impression was correct.

Just recently, I began my new role as President and CEO at Atlanta BeltLine Inc., the new organization charged with ensuring and coordinating overall implementation of this 25-year project. And I could not be more excited, not merely for myself, but for this community that – once again – is on the forefront of something special.

I am often asked why I moved from focusing nationally on affordable housing and community revitalization projects to more narrowly working on one project in one city. For the same reason so many people here have already become so passionate about the BeltLine. This project has it all. Besides significantly increasing Atlanta's green space, the BeltLine promises to:

- Provide a vital platform and organizing framework for Atlanta's current and future growth.
- Strengthen Atlanta's social fabric by connecting its people, neighborhoods and institutions.
- Stimulate job creation, affordable workforce housing and economic development activity—especially in under-served sections of Atlanta.
- Foster healthy lifestyles and a more pedestrian-friendly city.
- Broaden Atlanta's offerings as a destination city.

Undertakings of this kind don't happen just anywhere. Leave it to the city that cradled the Civil Rights movement, that operates the world's busiest airport, that hosted the Olympic Games to believe in an opportunity as big as the BeltLine.

Nor do visions of this scale happen easily. Any time you move from bold idea to visionary completion, it would probably be more newsworthy if challenging moments *didn't* occur. But those we face today (and we will face more) are surmountable. I look forward to working with the broad array of stakeholders — including those with strongly divergent views — on what should next happen.

There are “transformative investment” efforts under way in cities across the U.S. These are multi-dimensional efforts to remake the urban physical landscape to stimulate economic growth, improve fiscal vitality, advance social equity and promote environmental sustainability. What makes Atlanta's BeltLine vision more audacious than others is its sheer scope and magnitude.

Another great thing about the BeltLine is that just about everyone, like me, can place themselves in it. They can see one facet or another that, in the future, will make their city – their neighborhood – become a better, more livable place.

But the truth is that right now the BeltLine still seems very intangible to those who are not familiar with how much has already occurred. And, like most grand visions, there are skeptics. This is understandable. After all, we are going to have to create the blueprint, not follow one. What has happened so far resulted from some incredible planning and direction, significant but still early land acquisitions and a lot of political will and momentum generated by Mayor Franklin, Greg Giornelli, Ray Weeks, private donors and many others. These accomplishments alone, all significant, should be reassuring to everyone. But it will take still more broad-based community input — together with additional private funding, innovative planning and urban development expertise just now getting established — to achieve the many tangible benefits that urge us forward.

This much is already certain: Atlanta will continue to welcome waves of newcomers like me—bringing more growth and all of its challenges. Together, through the BeltLine, Atlanta is equal to meeting the task fully prepared – like no other in America.

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*Look for regular updates from Terri as well as from the BeltLine Partnership, together with frequently asked questions and answers about current BeltLine actions and activities, beginning this month.*