

CITY OF ATLANTA ACQUIRES LAND FOR OAKLAND GATEWAY PARK

The City of Atlanta has acquired a block of land opposite Oakland Cemetery to be used as part of a gateway corridor to the capitol building envisioned along Memorial Drive. The .82-acre block, purchased Nov. 27 for \$1.7 million, is directly across from Oakland Cemetery's gate, bounded by Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, Oakland Avenue, Biggers Street and George Street. An anonymous gift of \$900,000 to the Historic Oakland Foundation matched the contribution from the city, bringing the total project cost for acquisition and initial development of the property to \$1.8 million. Funding for the purchase from Pryor Street Development, LLC and Oakland Investment Group, LLC came from Park Impact Fees, Quality of Life bonds and Eastside TAD bond funds.

"This acquisition is a perfect example of the city's working together with a land owner, a passionate organization like the Historic Oakland Foundation and a private donor to create a valuable park amenity for future generations to enjoy," said Ellen Wickersham, Atlanta Development Authority's senior manager of parks and greenspace acquisition.

Atlanta Development Authority is serving as the redevelopment agent for the City of Atlanta for the larger Memorial Drive Greenway Corridor Assemblage, a seven-block project. The Atlanta Housing Authority owns several additional contiguous blocks that have been set aside for the park as part of the demolition and redevelopment of Capitol Homes into Capitol Gateway. Because this most recent acquisition will support Historic Oakland Cemetery, it will be called Oakland Gateway Park. The remaining six blocks will compose Capitol Gateway Park, a linear greenspace connecting to the capitol.

Historic Oakland Cemetery, owned by the city and operated as a public park, draws more than 50,000 visitors each year. Many prominent figures in Atlanta's history are buried in the Victorian-style garden cemetery, among them six Georgia governors, 26 former Atlanta mayors, including Maynard Jackson, golfer Bobby Jones and author Margaret Mitchell. Historic Oakland Foundation, a non-profit conservancy organization, was formed in 1975 and works with the city to operate, maintain and enhance the cemetery.

"We are proud to have been able to join with the ADA to give the City this significant addition and enhancement to Historic Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta's oldest landmark in continuous use," said George Hart, chairman of Historic Oakland Foundation. "The new open space at Oakland's gate provides an opportunity to greatly improve the visibility, accessibility, utility and relevance of this valuable treasure and allows for the future possibility of developing a visitor's center or other amenities which cannot be constructed inside the cemetery. This acquisition will allow us to enhance the experience of visitors to Oakland for years to come."

Atlanta Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Commissioner Dianne Harnell Cohen also underlined the importance of this most recent parks purchase: "Not only is this a significant acquisition of greenspace for the city and for the Memorial Drive corridor, but it is exciting on its own as the new gateway to one of our greatest treasures:

the Oakland Cemetery. We hope in the future to see a new visitor's center on the site as well as additional enjoyable greenspace for the whole community.”

Through ADA's efforts, the city has also closed on two additional full blocks in the Capitol Gateway Park area. This vision of a grand gateway to the state capitol dates back to 1974, when it was included in a State of Georgia plan approved by Governor Jimmy Carter. It was endorsed again in 2001 as part of the City of Atlanta's Memorial Drive/Martin Luther King Jr. Drive Area revitalization study. Eventually, a plaza and park would extend across the interstate from the new, mixed-use Capitol Gateway development, connecting this historically disenfranchised area to downtown Atlanta. In fact, the bridge that spans the downtown connector was designed to be able to bear the weight of such development. The realization of this project would yield a landmark for the City of Atlanta more than 30 years in the making.