

# North Downtown Master Plan FAQ

Updated February 9, 2021

## Q: What is the final product of the master planning process?

There will be one Final Master Plan booklet that will contain two related but distinct deliverables.

1. The **Redevelopment Plan** for the Bethel Site & College & Hoyt property including site density, neighborhood character, roadway locations, public park locations and other public infrastructure needs.
2. The **North Downtown Athens Transformation Plan** will include a vision for future development for the entire study area, which includes the Bethel site, AHA property at College & Hoyt and Denney Tower, land owned by ACCGov and Athens Downtown Development Authority, Athens Neighborhood Health Center, and the area surrounding.

## Q: What will be required from Athens Clarke-County Unified Government leadership to formalize the plans?

A Project Concept will be created based on the elements of the **Bethel Redevelopment Plan** that pertain to the horizontal construction of public infrastructure. A SPLOST User Group will recommend a Project Concept and present that to Mayor & Commission for **adoption**. A vote is anticipated at the ACCGov Commission meeting in March 2021.

The broader **North Downtown Athens Transformation Plan** will be considered for **acceptance**, meaning the plan has been acknowledged by Mayor & Commission and will be used as a guide for the area's future development. A vote for acceptance is anticipated at the ACCGov Commission meeting in March 2021.

The ACC Planning Commission, Mayor, & Commission has amended the Zoning Ordinance to include a **North Downtown Design Area** under the Commercial Downtown (C-D) zoning. The design area specifies site and building design standards and development controls, such as setbacks and frontage requirements. Examples of other existing C-D design areas include Downtown Historic District, Dougherty Street, and East/West Downtown. The Planning Commission approved the design area in December 2020 and by Mayor & Commission in February 2021.

## Q: Who is on the Master Planning Team?

Ownership: Columbia Residential, Jonathan Rose Companies, Athens Housing Authority

Master Planning Consultant: JHP Architecture

Civil Engineering Consultant: W&A Engineering

Landscape Design Consultant: DixHite & Partners

Sustainability Consultant: Thornton Thomasetti

**Q: What was the public engagement process?**

A combination of in-person and virtual events, resident and general public surveys, listening sessions, and interviews was used to collect feedback at each phase of master planning process starting in February 2020 and ending in March 2021 for the Master Plan. All public engagement documents are available on [www.ndathensplanning.com](http://www.ndathensplanning.com)

Continued public feedback will occur via the SPLOST User Group.

All design concepts presented to date are announced via newsletter and social media and posted on the master planning website ([ndathensplanning.com](http://ndathensplanning.com)), where anyone may leave comments and questions.

Additionally, the Steering Committee of the North Downtown Athens Redevelopment brought together a cross-section of community partners representing the North Downtown area, specific technical expertise, and diverse community interests. Steering Committee members helped provide strategic direction, vision, and oversight for the master planning initiative.

Members include:

Kelly Girtz – ACC Mayor

Brian Keith – JHP (Master Planning)

Ovita Thornton – ACC Dis. 9 Comm.

Jim Smith – AHA Board

Blaine Williams – ACC Manager

Smith Wilson – S&W Development, Inc.

Brad Griffin – ACC Planning Director

Contrena Little – Bethel Resident

Janet Lawrence – College & Hoyt Resident

Rick Parker – AHA CEO

Charlie Gluodenis – AHA

Valdon Daniel – AHA Board Chair

Dexter Fisher – CCSD Chief of Operations

Jennifer Lewis – UGA Center for Community

Jason Leonard – ADDA

Design and Preservation

The Master Planning team met with a group of Bethel residents regularly to review resident-specific issues and listen to direct feedback on the plans and planning process.

**Q: How is sustainability being considered in the Master Plan?**

The Master Plan has been designed to achieve LEED for Communities Silver certification. Certification would require coordination of the publicly funded SPLOST infrastructure and any vertical development activity. The master plan, which sets the vision for this area, outlines the requirements and score card to achieve this sustainability certification. For example, it requires that all buildings within the certification area to be active solar photovoltaic-ready design (a vertical developer responsibility) and 6% of parking spaces will be EV charging-ready (a SPLOST public infrastructure-controlled point item).

Additionally, the vertical development partners (Columbia Residential, Jonathan Rose Companies, and the Athens Housing Authority) have committed to achieving building-level green certification on each phase of the redevelopment. The Georgia DCA-approved certifications are EarthCraft, LEED, Enterprise Green Communities, or National Green Building Standard.

The Transformation Plan considers regional stormwater management, as North Downtown collects runoff from the greater downtown area to the south and east. A wetland park that manages this stormwater is planned near the corner of Hull St. and Hoyt St. Currently a ravine, the wetland park will serve as green infrastructure for the redevelopment area, prevent flooding conditions for the Athens Community Council on Aging, and create a beautiful public amenity. The landscape design proposes Green Streets along Strong St., Madison St., and Lumpkin St. to treat stormwater.

**Q: How is the project being funded?**

The overall North Downtown Athens Transformation Plan is not directly funded but rather a vision. The Redevelopment Plan area; however, is expected to transform over the coming 10 or so years.

**Horizontal (Infrastructure) Funding:**

**SPLOST**

On November 5th, 2019 Athens Clarke County citizens voted in support of SPLOST 2020, which dedicated \$39,000,000 to support the North Downtown Athens Affordable Housing Project (2020 SPLOST Project 02) defined as:

“the renovation or redevelopment of the approximately 12-acre site now including 190 apartment units, known as Bethel Midtown Village or Bethel Church Homes (“Bethel Village”), as part of a mixed-use/mixed income development and that may include adjacent tracts and uses, including, but not limited to, a community health facility.”

SPLOST funds were used to purchase the Bethel property and fund the master planning process. The balance of the funds will be used for public greenspace, art, infrastructure and development costs necessary for the Redevelopment Plan area.

**OTHER**

The vision for the Redevelopment Plan area is large and will require other sources of funds for horizontal infrastructure to achieve. For example, the current budget of required costs to have the mixed-income, mixed-use development come to fruition does not include burying the power lines along College Avenue; however, this is an element of the Master Plan. Other sources of funds may include other local or state funding, grants, etc.

**Vertical (Building) Funding:**

### **Tax Credit Award**

Each year, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs issues limited awards for 9% Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs) through a highly competitive application process. The application to build the first 120 units of housing was submitted in June 2020. The applicant was a single-purpose entity consisting of Columbia Residential, Jonathan Rose Companies and the Athens Housing Authority. The entity will utilize the LIHTC equity to develop and own the mixed-income vertical housing buildings and will ground lease the underlying land which will remain owned and controlled by the Athens Housing Authority.

### **Private Investment**

Affordable housing leverages the equity generated by Low Income Housing Tax Credits with a private 1<sup>st</sup> mortgage and other 'GAP' funding that can be in the form of HOME funds, Community Development Block Grants, or other public or private funding applied for and awarded in the form of grants and loans. These are critical components of affordable housing as the equity is, on average, 70% of the capital stack.

The following diagram illustrates the anticipated financing structure, or capital stack, of Phase I of the redevelopment.

### **Operating Subsidies**

Some of the affordable housing apartments that will be developed as part of this project will be supported by an operating subsidy which pays the landlord the difference between what the tenant pays and what it costs to operate the housing.

**Q: How affordable will the redevelopment be?**

HUD's definition of affordable is: "the household is paying no more than 30 percent of its income for housing costs including utilities." Affordability is measured using Area Median Income (AMI). For Athens-Clarke County, the 2020 AMI for a family of four is \$65,600. Tax credits provide development funding in exchange for maintaining rent-restricted units affordable to certain income levels (generally less than 60% AMI). For example, an Athens household of four making \$35,000 is who would qualify to rent an apartment restricted for 60% AMI. After being income qualified, their rent would be \$766 ( $\$35,000 \times 30\% / 12 = \$875$  gross rent - \$109 utility allowance).

The North Downtown Redevelopment provides deeper affordability for the lowest income households through a HUD Section 8 contract, which supports households making 50% AMI (\$32,800) or lower. HUD subsidizes the gap between what the resident can pay toward rent and utilities (calculated as 30% of their take home income) and the rents approved by HUD. This results in some tenants paying as low as \$0 in rent or less (funded from the property money for utilities). This crucial HUD contract will remain in the development such that the current Bethel residents' rental calculation will not change and their rent only changes if their income changes. The HUD contract will continue to support the new construction in that this critical operating subsidy for 183 units will be spread over several housing phases.

The Redevelopment Plan calls for between 715-875 housing units. Ultimate unit affordability mixes will depend on funding availability and structure in each project phase, but the rough goal is to provide 1/3 deeply affordable units (supported by the HUD contract to allow for the lowest of income earners to stay in the community), 1/3 workforce affordable units, and 1/3 'unrestricted' (often called market-rate) units.

All unit types will feature the same build quality and finishes regardless of affordability. Phase I will provide 80 affordable, rent-restricted units and 40 market-rate units.

**Q: How long will the units be affordable?**

In exchange for LIHTCs, developers make commitments to lease units to low income households, to charge affordable rents, and to maintain the property in good condition. The owners of the vertical developments must comply with these commitments for a 15-year Compliance Period and a 15-year Extended Use Period (30 years total).

The HUD Section 8 contract has been renewed through 2040, ensuring ongoing support for the most affordable units serving current Bethel residents.

Ultimately, with the land owned by the public via the Athens Housing Authority, Land Use Restrictions and Covenants may be placed on the property at their discretion to further define affordability requirements.

**Q: What are the plans for demolition and relocation?**

In addition to the planned housing, the Redevelopment Plan includes a new road network, infrastructure, and greenspaces. The redevelopment will be divided into at least four housing phases plus initial infrastructure work.

Phasing will be designed to minimize offsite relocation, making use of vacant onsite units as much as possible. During any relocation period, Bethel residents will continue to be on their HUD Section 8 contract and lease with Columbia Residential Property Management whether they are temporarily relocated offsite or onsite. HUD and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs must review and approve all relocation plans which must meet the standards in the federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act (URA). Each resident has a right to return to the newly constructed units at rents corresponding to their certified income. All relocation costs including moving supplies, movers, and utility connection fees will be paid for by the development.

The Final Master Plan booklet will feature an exhibit with an *estimated* relocation, demolition and phasing schedule. The earliest relocations could start in late summer 2021.

**Q: What is the project schedule?**

The design of the horizontal infrastructure is expected to begin in the March 2021 with the first phase of relocation and demolition starting in late summer/fall 2021. Installation of the infrastructure will also occur in phases, the first phase is expected to include the development of the wetland park at the corner of Hoyt and Hull and surrounding infrastructure to accommodate the first vertical phase of housing in the same Northwest quadrant of the Bethel site.

Construction could begin in late 2021 or early 2022. *It is a requirement of the Tax Credit vertical funding source that the first new apartment homes would open in 2023 at the latest.*

It is expected to take several years to develop each of the 4-5 phases of housing and non-residential uses across the Bethel and College & Hoyt sites.

**Q: Who is on the SPLOST User Group?**

LaTasha Sheats, Resident Advocate

Keoshawn Maddox, Bethel Resident

Valdon Daniel, Athens Housing Authority

Charlie Gluodenis, Athens Housing Authority

Hayley Banerjee, ACC-UG HCD

Brad Griffin, ACC-UG Planning