



Atlanta

401 WALTON WAY

Augusta, Georgia

Technical Assistance Panel | May 1–2, 2024



About

Urban Land Institute

Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

ULI Atlanta

With over 1,400 members throughout the Atlanta region (Georgia and Eastern Tennessee), ULI Atlanta is one of the largest and most active ULI District Councils worldwide. We bring together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs. We share knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, electronic media, events, and programs.

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Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

Urban Land Institute harnesses its members' technical expertise to help communities solve complex land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the region. Drawing from its seasoned professional membership base, ULI Atlanta offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and presenting it to the panel. TAP members spend two days developing an understanding of the problem, coming up with recommendations, and presenting those findings and recommendations to the sponsoring organization.

Cover photo: An aerial view of the study site at 401 Walton Way. (City of Augusta, Georgia)

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About

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Executive Summary

Near the heart of Augusta, Georgia, a six-acre site awaits a new use. Formerly the site for the City of Augusta Law Enforcement Center, 401 Walton Way has been cleared of all vertical structures, seeded with grass, and holds space for parking by visitors to the Sheriff's new administration building to the south. The six acres are surrounded by a mix of residential uses, parks and open space, and commercial uses, the latter of which are primarily west of the site across Gordon Highway.

Leadership across the City of Augusta (the City), including elected officials and

professional staff, are eager to see a new use at the site and are hopeful that development at the site will catalyze additional development in the surrounding area.

To better understand the development potential at the study site, the City turned to the Urban Land Institute Atlanta District Council (ULI Atlanta) for guidance through its technical assistance panel (TAP) program. ULI Atlanta convened a panel of real estate professionals with the expertise needed to assist the City with next steps at the site. The panel's recommendations are summarized here and explained in greater detail in the pages that follow.

Fiscal and Market Sustainability

The study site sits in the midst of several historically underserved neighborhoods. Residents are eager for a grocery store, dining options, activities, and entertainment.

The panel conducted an initial market analysis of a one-mile and three-mile radius of the site and found the market not yet strong enough to attract new retail or non-subsidized development. Retail success, in particular, hinges completely on the strength of the surrounding market, and the low buying power in the surrounding neighborhoods will be a challenge to attracting retailers to the site.

The public sector can take steps to incentivize development through zoning modifications and financial incentives. It can also take steps to support and improve the neighborhoods and residents living around the site, ultimately shifting the market and making the site more attractive to retailers and other development opportunities.

The panel was also careful to consider the fiscal sustainability of its recommendations for the site. Whether the site is used for commercial purposes or a public institutional use, the long-term viability and economic success of the enterprise should be considered from Day 1, ensuring that the site is additive to the City and not cause for future financial concern.



The study site is outlined by the green line. This image shows how the former criminal justice facility was positioned on the site.

Process Recommendations

City leaders, neighbors, and other stakeholders all have a variety of ideas for new uses at the site. Determining the best path forward, one that meets the City's goals and the community's needs, will be a challenge, yet there are several steps the City can take to support an effective process.

- City leadership must be unified.
- The City should define the approval and incentives process early (now).
- A community engagement strategy should be used to address the near-term and long-term use of the site.
- The goals for the site and surrounding area must be defined and prioritized.
- Partnerships will be important to further the City's capacity and support the defined uses at the site.

District Concept Recommendations

The study site is in the middle of a number of notable assets, including the riverfront and its amenities, downtown, open space (parks and cemeteries), residential neighborhoods, and commercial enterprises. To maximize the potential at the site and begin to improve the market conditions that will influence future development, the panel recommends the City approach the site as part of a larger district and use a district-wide strategy to address and improve district assets. Priority should

be placed on improving connections to and along the riverfront, improving the pedestrian connections across Gordon Highway, and improving the existing open spaces, namely city parks. An economic development strategy should encourage light industrial business development in the area and support workforce training, the latter of which should support greater resident earning potential leading to a stronger future market context. Other district recommendations include land banking vacant and blighted properties until the City has the capacity to address the sites and working with community development partners to tackle housing revitalization around the area.

401 Walton Way Recommendations

The panel's recommendations for the six-acre site included near-term activations that will provide community benefits and a long-term vision for the site as a hub for innovation.

Create an innovation hub and district vision.

Working in partnership with local institutions and business partners, the City could position the site as a center for collaboration and idea incubation. Innovation centers attract ideas, energy, and entrepreneurs and educational opportunities, business counseling services, and support services can help new business owners test and develop new ideas. The hub should be developed in collaboration with the

community and would benefit greatly from a champion who will see the idea through, preferably in concert with the business community and industrial sectors.

Leverage interim activation strategies.

While the innovation hub is a long-term strategy that will take years to develop, the City is encouraged to pursue interim strategies at the site that will engage the community with programming and help meet some of the more pressing needs of neighborhood residents. With a small investment, minimal infrastructure, and strong programming partners, a variety of ideas could activate the space. From soccer to a farmers market to mini-golf, there are a host of fun activities that would work well on the site and require little if anything beyond a grassy field.

Partnerships will be critical to this work and the City may need additional support in establishing and navigating the type of public-private partnership that may eventually be required to transform the study site.

The six acres at 401 Walton Way present an interesting development opportunity for the City of Augusta. With some careful planning and with the support of strong local and regional partners, the site can be transformed—into something engaging for the community today and something transformative for the neighborhood in the years to come.

Introduction and Background

The City of Augusta, Georgia, is situated along the Savannah River across from South Carolina. For those visitors entering Augusta from South Carolina on State Road 78, also known as Gordon Highway, the former eight-story criminal justice center at 401 Walton Way, also known as the LEC (Law Enforcement Center) was one of the first recognizable buildings one passed.

The LEC, plagued from the start by water infiltration issues and other environmental challenges, was recently replaced by a new judicial center and sheriff's administration building. The LEC was demolished in 2016, and the six acres sit, awaiting new life.

To best understand the real estate, community, and economic development potential embodied in the 401 Walton Way study site, the City of Augusta turned to ULI Atlanta for assistance in charting a path forward for the site. To meet this challenge, ULI Atlanta convened a technical assistance panel comprised of real estate professionals with the expertise needed to identify the potential uses for the site, the benefits to the city and surrounding community, and the potential connections that can be made with and at the site to better serve the surrounding neighborhoods.

Following a careful review of the briefing documents provided by the City and a bus and walking tour of the site and important surrounding assets, the panel interviewed a wide range of community and business leaders, residents, representatives from nonprofit organizations, municipal staff, and

elected officials. Following these information-gathering sessions, the panel deliberated a variety of paths forward and ultimately arrived at a series of recommendations the City can consider in its future plans for and actions at the site.

Study Site Context

The study site sits adjacent to Gordon Highway and is bound by Watkins Street, 4th Street, and Walton Way. The combined six acres are clear of any structures, flat in topography, and marked only by a parking lot off Walton Way, which is currently used by the Sheriff's Department.

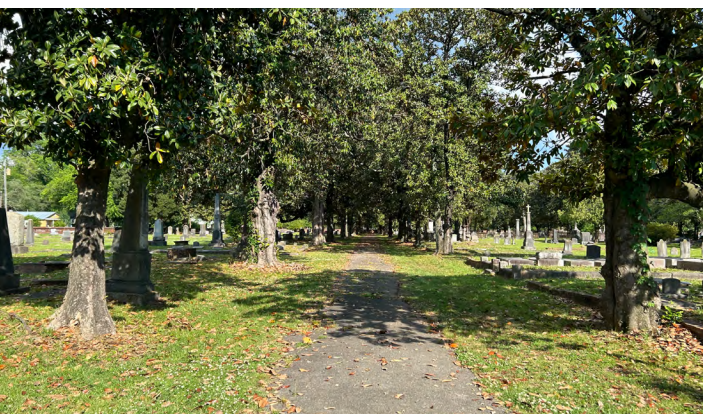
The neighborhoods that surround the study site have been historically underserved. The

TAP Questions

- How can the City best leverage this property to have a catalytic economic impact on the downtown/ East Augusta area?
- What type of partnership structures (public/private, joint venture, sale/ lease, City as developer, etc.) would best support the successful redevelopment of the site?
- What opportunities are possible for the site to serve as a gateway to the Augusta Riverwalk and to serve as anchor for complimentary developments?



The study site, outlined in red, sits alongside Gordon Highway and is in close proximity to downtown and the Savannah River beyond.



The panelists toured the surrounding areas, including the 5th Street bridge, the neighboring cemeteries, and the riverfront.

area median household income within one mile of the site is \$22,000, residents long for proximate grocery and food options, and the public facilities (represented by May Park and the Community Center) are in dire need of the budgeted upgrades and renovations.

The surrounding neighborhood is comprised of a mix of residential uses, small-scale commercial uses, and open space in the form of May Park and two cemeteries.

- A six-block radius of the site contains downtown Augusta, with its restaurants and retail, the riverfront, Riverwalk trail system, 5th Street pedestrian bridge, the James Brown Arena, the state fairgrounds, and Dyess Park.
- A two-mile radius of the site includes the City's thriving medical district, the Georgia Cyber Center, and the Olde Town, Laney Walker, and Bethlehem neighborhoods, each of which hold historical significance and are important African-American communities in Augusta.

The site is easy to access through an effective grid-based roadway system, and sidewalks are found throughout the neighborhood. Gordon Highway is used by a considerable number of automobile commuters, giving the site interesting visibility.

The panel conducted an analysis of the site's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which can be found on the following page.

What the Panel Heard

Stakeholders included 30+ municipal staff and officials, business leaders, community members, and more.

- Passion for and deep community history
- Concerns about a food desert
- Lack of affordable housing
- Pollution (past and present) concerns
- Traffic speeds and rail line crossings
- Crime and perceptions of crime
- Impacts of an unhoused population
- Challenges around public school quality
- City development processes are lengthy
- Potential or perceptions of water and environmental issues at the site
- High visibility and good roadway access
- Good access to downtown, cyber center, and Fort Eisenhower job centers
- Need more job opportunities in the area
- Would like restaurants and entertainment options
- Would like more retail, including home improvement big box options
- Need things for kids/teens to do
- Would like more housing, including deeply affordable to market-rate
- Need better connections to the river, downtown, and other open spaces

STRENGTHS

- Location
- Cleared and consolidated land
- Highly visible
- Good condition
- Publicly-owned
- Utilities are in place
- Proximity to May Park, downtown, historic neighborhood, Riverwalk, Sherriff's station, cemetery (green space)
- Street grid is good with great automotive access
- Straight path to North Augusta, Fort Eisenhower, and downtown
- Decent traffic counts
- Blank canvas
- Regional job market
- Strong and organized community leaders

WEAKNESSES

- High water table
- Environmental conditions / abatement are unknowns
- Perceptions of ongoing pollution in the area
- Lack of diversity in area demographics and low-income households
- Low density/rooftops
- Roadway speed and safety
- Crime perceptions and unknowns
- Low development activity in area

OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunity to address some of the community's social issues
- Proximity and ability to connect to job centers (medical center, fort, cyber center), downtown, Riverwalk
- Other city-owned and land bank properties that could connect into something larger
- Within federal opportunity zone (participation window is closing)
- Hub for medical education with the nearby medical and dental campuses
- Housing prices provide affordable options for buyers
- Socio-economic growth
- Workforce development in cyber and medical in particular

THREATS

- Challenging market conditions
- Competing interests for the site
- Competing public interests
- Community priorities may not align with civic leadership priorities
- Community wants not aligned with market realities
- Weak school district
- Fiscal and funding challenges
- Lack of public incentives
- Inexperience with P3 development
- Capital markets are not supportive
- Housing prices are not indicative of a strong market
- Displacement



Fiscal and Market Sustainability

Market Context

To better understand the development potential for the site and its related economic outlook, the panel conducted an initial market analysis. Potential retailers are looking for aggregate income, which is comprised of the number of households multiplied by their spending power. Added to this figure is the spending power of those working and/or visiting the area. The following information outlines the buying power found in the areas surrounding the study site.

Local market area, one-mile radius. Within a one-mile radius of the site, the panel found the trade area to be relatively low in household and population density. The incomes in this one-mile radius are also low relative to the broader metropolitan area.

Median household incomes within one mile of the study site hover around \$22,000 annually, and 87 percent of households within one mile earn less than \$50,000 annually.

The one-mile radius captures one-half of downtown Augusta, but there are few businesses or job opportunities in the blocks immediately surrounding the study site.

Local market area, three-mile radius.

Within a three-mile radius of the study site, the median household income is \$33,000 annually. By way of comparison, across the metropolitan area, the median household income is \$55,000.

Within this broader, three-mile geography, there has been very little new development activity in the last 20 years. The area is marked by high commercial vacancies and relatively low commercial rents.

Retail Forces

Retail success hinges on the strength of the trade area surrounding a store. National retailers—such as Publix, CVS, Five Guys, Wendys, Advance Auto Parts, and more—are very good at market analysis and will study the potential trade area in depth before considering a new location.



Overall Construction Summary

All-time annual average SF:

23,656

Delivered SF past 8 quarters:

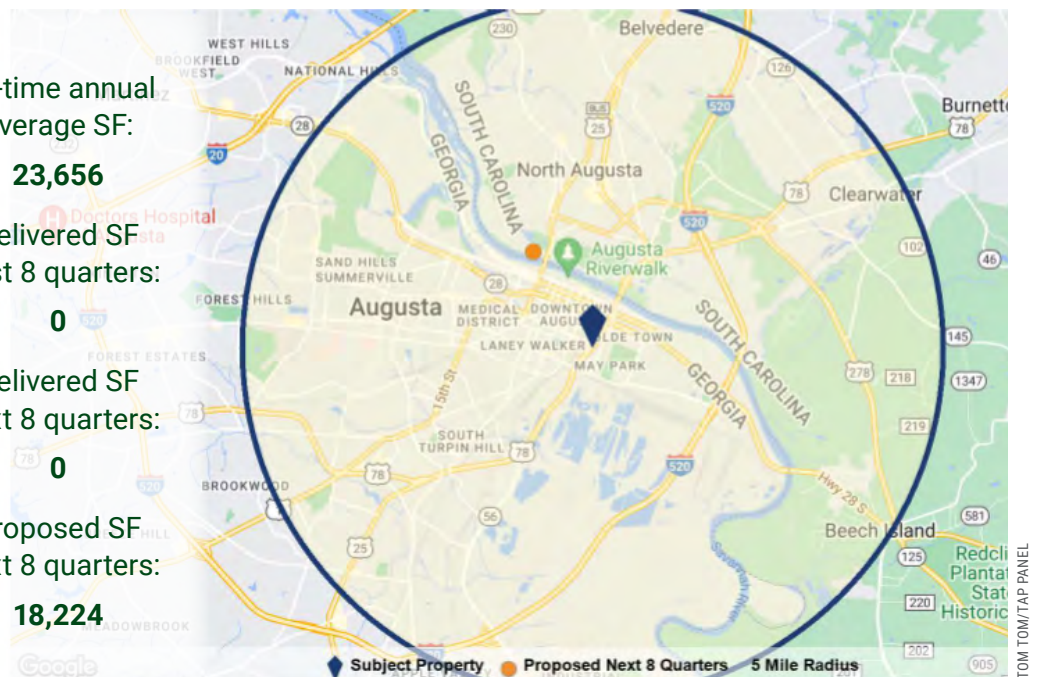
0

Delivered SF next 8 quarters:

0

Proposed SF next 8 quarters:

18,224



The Adjustable Spray Nozzle

a metaphor



With development and redevelopment it can be hard to get market forces to produce desired outcomes without some sort of pressure driving that outcome. Think of this like an adjustable spray nozzle.

With strong water pressure, a spray nozzle can be turned in any direction, creating a variety of spray projections for a variety of uses.

With weak water pressure, all of the nozzle options will produce the same dribble of water regardless of the option selected.

With no water pressure, no matter how hard the nozzle is squeezed and no matter the spray option, nothing will come out.

Moral:

It does not matter what you want if there is not something—market forces, demand, public investment, partnerships, incentives—providing pressure.

Public sector influences. Outside forces—elected officials, staff, developers, and planners—cannot direct that a certain type or brand of business enter a market or move a location, yet there are steps the public sector can take to help encourage the type of development it would like to see and begin to shift the underlying market dynamics, making a site more attractive over time to outside investment.

- Municipal zoning can be used to guide development to a small degree by limiting a site to certain uses.
- Investments and incentives can help improve the market economics and financial performance of a site.
- Partnerships between the public and private sectors can also be used to strengthen the economic proposition of a development as the partnerships can often signal the commitment of the parties to the development's success.

Retail customer base considerations.

Retailers, both those currently in the market and those considering entering, work diligently to understand their customer base and turn to the following populations and demographics to better define the surrounding market

- People or households who live near the business—individuals and households—and the amount of money they are likely to spend on retail purchases (based on existing data).

- People who work at nearby businesses.
- Businesses that are located near the subject business location.
- People who drive by the business.
- People who make a point of traveling to the business location.

Fiscal Sustainability

Throughout its evaluations, the panel carefully considered the potential fiscal sustainability of any improvements to the site. The following questions helped frame the panel's deliberations.

If it is a commercial use:

- Is the use market-feasible?
- Will the use require a subsidy, abatement, or assistance to operate?
- Where will operating funding come from?
- Will the end-user be able to operate profitably?

If it is a public institutional use:

- What is the source of construction and development funding?
- What organization will manage ongoing operations?
- Where will operating funding come from?
- Is realistic that the source of operating funding will remain viable long-term?



Process Recommendations

The redevelopment of the study site will benefit from unified City leadership. The demolition of the former LEC building was a lengthy process and the community had front-row seats, witnessing the challenges city leaders faced in working through the issues and finding resolution. Now that the site is clear, the City is interested in identifying a path forward that will serve the immediate neighborhood while also benefiting the broader community, which can be a challenging balance to strike. Effective and unified leadership will be critical to any successful redevelopment and key to community and market acceptance.

Leadership must be unified. Elected leaders and municipal staff will need to work together to provide the best service, vision, and leadership for the community. Being able to speak with one voice when developers come knocking on the City's door will serve the community well and help assure the developer that the site is worth their investment.

ULI's UrbanPlan program, with a one-day workshop designed for public officials and municipal staff, can help bring the team together through a simulation of the development process in a no-stakes environment where everyone is positioned equally and no one person has the only correct answer. Urban Plan informs and creates space for leaders to explore the challenging conversations and development decisions the City is facing.

Define the incentives and approval processes. The City's development review and approval processes would benefit from a review and evaluation in order to identify potential efficiencies and reduce pre-development friction where possible. The City is encouraged to also clearly define the incentives it has to offer for development to ensure clarity for developers and businesses entering the market. This clarity will also assist in communications and interactions with the community as development at the site begins to take shape.

Employ a community engagement strategy. The community is eager for information and an opportunity to participate in shaping their neighborhood's future. The panel encourages the City to conduct robust community engagement, making sure to include young community members, through the following initial steps.

- Define stakeholder groups beyond those who regularly opt into City conversations. Recognize the range of voices and perspectives that should be involved.
- Solicit development input from all of the stakeholder groups, meeting them where they are, both physically and with proper information, and providing ample opportunity for feedback and new ideas.
- Build community consensus in a manner that makes good sense for the community and still satisfies the City's need to be fiscally sustainable. Not everyone will be happy with each decision, but consensus should remain the goal.

- Develop a shared vision in partnership with the community. The work at the site and around town is for the community; ensure that they are shaping the vision with the City rather than having City officials and staff determine it for them.

Define goals and prioritization. By exploring all of the stakeholder input and finding consensus, the City can then identify the potential options available to make the agreed-upon vision a reality. Community and City priorities will need to be weighed against all of the possible outcomes. With that evaluation complete, the City should be able to formulate an executable plan based on market realities and fiscal sustainability. That plan can then be shared broadly and frequently with the community, ensuring that the communication channels remain open and that the process is transparent.

Partnerships are critical. There is much work to be done, both at the study site and across many of the City's other real estate assets. By seeking and engaging partners in the work—whether that is other public-sector partners like Richmond County and the Georgia Department of Transportation, for-profit partners like Augusta National Golf Club, or private real estate developers—the City can amplify its impact, elevate the improvements, and stretch its capacity (both human resource and finance) further than it could by operating alone.



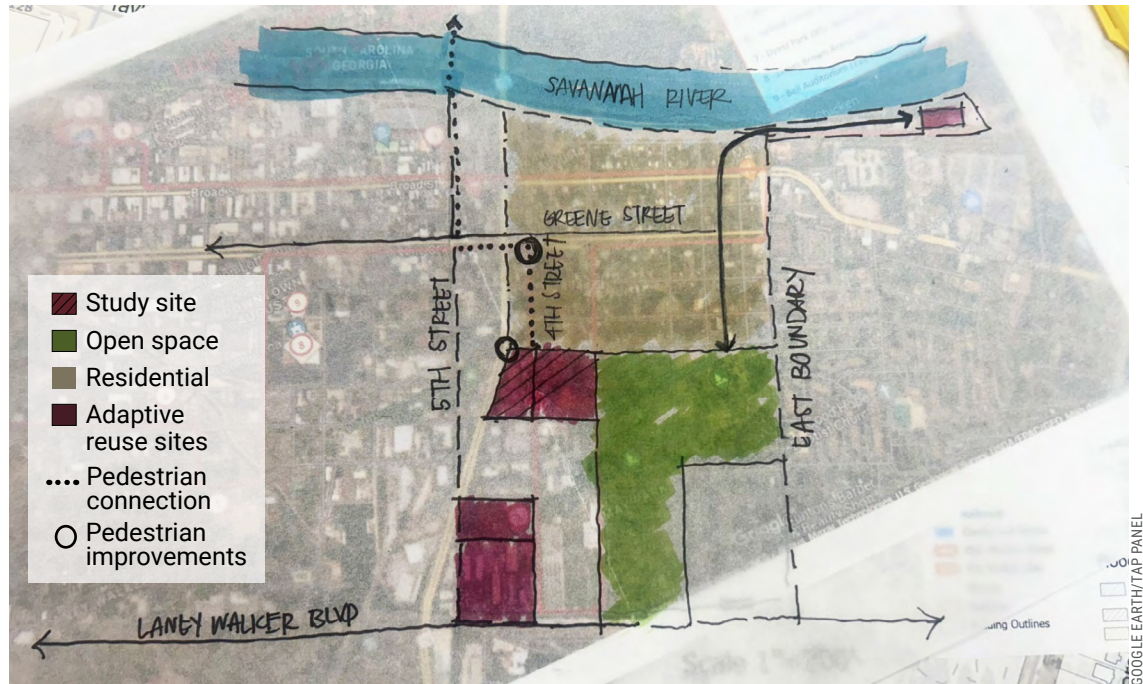
District Concept Recommendations

Incremental District Strategies

Through the tour of the study site and surrounding area, the panel identified a number of additional City assets that, while proximate to the site, remain unconnected and, in some cases, unimproved. In most cases, these surrounding assets have the potential to create the type of impact the City hopes to see at the study site, yet require far less in terms of intervention, investment, and market support.

Before launching into work at the study site directly, the panel recommends an incremental approach to improving the district around the site. Through this approach, it might be possible to create stronger market/private sector interest in the broader area and thus require less public sector intervention and support. The following steps support the improvement of the district.

- **Update the Riverwalk pedestrian and bicycle trail** system east to Boat House, and extend the trail west to the 5th Street Bridge and beyond to the Riverwalk Marina and Park.
- **Re-envision May Park** beyond the upcoming \$2.2 million refresh. This park is central to a number of neighborhoods and, when combined with the adjacent cemeteries, represents a significant green and open space for the City that could be used more actively.



Connections across the area, to the river, the open space, downtown, and the surrounding neighborhoods, are important to the near-term and long-range vision for the study site.

- **Program the neighboring cemeteries** by inviting the public to visit for history tours, wellness activities, and more. These are beautifully open green spaces with rich and interesting histories that should be amplified and repositioned as places to cherish as an Augustan.
- **Encourage light industrial business development** in the surrounding area and particularly in the neighborhood to the south. The existing brewery is a popular food and beverage asset that could attract additional similarly situated businesses (creating a brewery district or other fun food and beverage attraction).

These light industrial spaces can also become compelling and affordable makerspace and business incubator locations.

- **Invest in workforce training** to help lift up the residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the study site. Increasing the workforce participation and earning potential of the surrounding residents will have a positive impact on the market context that will influence future development. The former neighborhood school building could be a prime location for a workforce development operation.

- **Identify opportunities for public art** beyond the fantastic work just completed on the 5th Street Bridge. The murals along the bridge are a wonderful addition to the hardscape and do a good job of encouraging exploration. Consider leveraging those murals as a starting point, connecting to other public art installations along the Riverwalk, across downtown, or to other notable or historic locations across the City.
- **Land bank vacant and blighted properties** until the City has the capacity to make measurable improvements on the sites or until they attract market interest. Blighting property can be controversial, so the City will need to take care to move transparently and in communication with the surrounding community. Removing problem vacant buildings from the streetscape, particularly dangerous or derelict buildings, can help improve how residents, visitors, and developers view a street and perceive a neighborhood.
- **Work with community partners to revitalize housing.** The City is home to both community housing development organizations and community development corporations that are working every day to revitalize housing in the City's neighborhoods. By working with these organizations to strategize areas of improvement and deploy incentives or development tools to assist with those efforts in concert with the City's vision, a broader impact can be achieved.
- **Approach GDOT about pedestrian crossings** on Gordon Highway. Running along the western boundary of the site, the state-managed Gordon Highway has three lanes in each direction. It is a fast and wide thoroughfare to cross and is intimidating to pedestrians and bicyclists. Adding clear and safe crosswalks to the roadway will assist in bridging western businesses (restaurants and the brewery) with the residents to the east.



The murals along the 5th Street Bridge are wonderful examples of how public art, in this case created by local artists, can create a lively and engaging atmosphere, encouraging exploration of the pieces, understanding of the history of the place, and creating a sense of awe for the talent on display.

Case Study

Plant Riverside District Savannah, Georgia



TERRY ALLEN

The City of Augusta could look to nearby examples of successful riverfront developments such as the Plant Riverside District that anchors the northwest corner of Savannah's historic urban core. Situated on a 4.5 acre formerly industrial site spanning more than 4 city blocks, the historic Power Plant, constructed in phases between 1912 and 1953, is the development's centerpiece. The project has created a dynamic mixed-use district with a focus on dining, music, retail, education, and hospitality, woven into the city as an extension of the renowned Oglethorpe Plan, and home to the city's first and only monument to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Plant Riverside connects key rights-of-way from the oldest wards of the city to the riverfront, re-establishing public access that had been lost for over 100 years.

The historic district hosts approximately 14 million visitors annually. Plant Riverside includes over 670,000 square feet of new mixed-use space including the historic power plant and twelve new buildings, 1.5 acres of new parks, plazas and public spaces, and 1,100 linear feet of new public river walk; creating the most significant expansion of Savannah's urban core in modern history.

From [ULI.org](https://www.uli.org/), 2021 ULI Americas Awards for Excellence.

401 Walton Way Recommendations

An Innovation Hub and District Vision

The panel's recommendations for the study site centered around the creation of a district-wide vision that would be anchored by the redevelopment of 401 Walton Way. While a district-wide vision will take time to realize, it has the potential to create the kind of catalytic change over the long term that the City seeks.

Create an innovation hub. Across the country, innovation centers are being built to attract ideas, energy, and people with the drive to see a new business idea through. By offering educational opportunities, business counseling services, and other professional support services, an innovation hub in the city can offer new business owners the opportunity to test and develop new ideas in a space with low barriers to entry and a built-in support system. These facilities and campuses often become fantastic networking hubs as well, with entrepreneurs regularly interacting with service providers and one another, sharing ideas and finding ways to collaborate.

Working in partnership with local educational institutions and/or regional business partners, an innovation hub is one example of a community program that could be housed at the site. By using broad parameters to establish entrepreneurial participation, the site can become the place where new business ideas percolate, entrepreneurs access resources, and new enterprises can develop and grow.

Collaborate with the community.

Community collaboration, starting in the early days of the innovation hub planning, will be important to support community acceptance and enthusiasm for the venture. Creating opportunities to engage with, seek ideas from, and invite the community to participate meaningfully can help ensure that the surrounding neighbors understand and support the work at the hub—and feel welcome to build out their own business ideas there as well. Gentrification and displacement will be ongoing concerns and early planning and intervention can help push against those unwelcome forces.

Identify a champion. While the City may be tempted to take on the development of such a project, a venture of this kind is best led by

an organizational champion outside of City government. Educational institutions with strong business instruction make good partners as do economic development agencies with strong ties to the business community and industrial sectors.

Interim Activation Strategies

While the long-term plans take shape, the panel recommends the City pursue an interim or range of interim strategies for the study site. These interim actions will help cultivate community interest in and care for the site and will leverage the proximity of 401 Walton Way to May Park.

Program the site with partners. 401 Walton Way is a blank slate ready for a new



The wide open expanse of the site would be good for youth soccer games.

narrative. Its days as a justice center a long passed and its adjacency to May Park and the community center position it as a wonderful gathering place. With a small investment, minimal infrastructure, and strong programming partners, any of the following ideas could come to life on the site, each bringing a sense of energy, enthusiasm, and well-being to the area.

- Exercise in the park – be that youth soccer leagues or pick-up games for adults, the wide and flat expanse of the site is ripe for ball striking and running. Other exercise regimes—like boot camps, tai chi, yoga, and kickball—would also work well on the site as interim uses and require little if anything beyond a mowed grassy plain.
- Urban farm and/or farmer’s market – the area has a rich agricultural production history that continues today through

groups like Augusta Locally Grown. A partnership with that organization or others could bring a community garden, urban farm, or a regular farmer’s market to the site, which could help alleviate some of the angst some neighbors feel at the lack of a grocery store in the immediate vicinity. This fresh food pursuit could actually serve as a precursor to a grocery store moving to the neighborhood, essentially testing the market and building a case for the private-sector investment.

- Movie night or other entertainment – with a big screen and quality projector, neighbors could be invited to bring a picnic blanket or camp chair to the site for a fun movie night or community performance. These types of gatherings work well for neighbors of all ages and the scene it creates—lots of people lounging, picnicking, and enjoying the

festivities—can be quite compelling, drawing others to the site to see what the buzz is about.

- Mini-golf course – in partnership with Augusta National and with some grant funding, the City could create a family-oriented pop-up park featuring food, family programming, and mini-golf that shares the excitement of the Masters with the broader community. A little Astroturf, trees in containers, sun canopies, and picnic tables could welcome all ages to play. With an ice cream truck or food trucks visiting occasionally, little else would be needed. Area teens could be paid to help manage the course and hand out clubs and balls. This scenario could create good public relations for Augusta National and the broader golf community and provide a good, low-impact use of the site for the benefit of neighborhood kids.



Movies, mini-golf, and temporary market stands would provide engaging activities for the surrounding community and help activate the site.

Partnerships

The importance of partnerships bears repeating. There is great potential at the site, but the site will also eventually require the type of development attention and activation beyond what the City is prepared for or has the capacity to provide. Public-private partnerships (P3s) are used across the country to bring municipalities and other public sector organizations to the table with private development to jointly realize projects that are designed with a clear public benefit. The following organizations can share best practices in P3 formation, organization, and operation:

- [Purpose Built Communities](#)
- [US Department of Commerce](#)
- [Strong Cities, Strong Communities](#) (SC2 Initiative)
- [PATH Foundation](#)

The City is also encouraged to explore the possibilities of partnering with any of the following organizations, any of which could help to change the narrative of and activate the site:

- Faith-based organizations
- [Augusta Locally Grown](#)
- [Augusta Arsenal Soccer Club](#) and [Soccer in the Streets](#)
- [Augusta National Golf Club](#)
- [Community Change](#)
- [Focused Community Strategies](#)

In any potential development scenario, the

City is strongly encouraged to create a neighborhood advisory committee to liaison between neighborhood residents and municipal staff and leadership. Open and active lines of communication and collaboration will help support the

acceptance and embracing of the interim uses at the site and can build community ownership and stewardship in the success of the broader and longer-term vision for 401 Walton Way.

Public Private Partnerships

From [Successful Public/Private Partnerships from Principles to Practices](#): Whereas markets in some regions have recovered completely, others are still struggling. But everywhere, public-private partnerships (PPPs) have become critical to enabling the transformations that are taking place in our urban environment in both primary and secondary markets, using new methods of financing from a variety of sources, including significant foreign investment.

At the same time, new challenges face a public sector with diminished resources. These challenges require a collaborative effort by the public and private sectors to effectively use the resources and skills of each to shape and carry out developments that respond to these challenges. Neither sector can accomplish this task alone; hence, PPPs in development, infrastructure, and public facilities are a continuing necessity.

PPPs were initially considered “creative alliances” formed between a government entity and private developers to achieve a common purpose. Over the past ten years and in the future, the need for these creative



alliances is expanding in three broad areas: (a) to facilitate the development of a real estate asset to achieve greater benefits for both the public and private sectors; (b) to develop and ensure the maintenance of critical infrastructure; and (c) to design, build, operate, and maintain public facilities, all in the service of the goal of building sustainable, healthy, and resilient communities.

For more information about public-private partnerships, see [Ten Principles for Successful Public/Private Partnerships](#) and [Successful Public/Private Partnerships from Principles to Practices](#).



Key Takeaways

The demolition of the highly visible justice center at 401 Walton Way has cleared a path for new development, new life, and a new narrative for the six-acre site.

As the City and the community consider the site and a myriad of potential uses, there is much that remains on the City's priority list that may, and the panel suggests should, take precedence over the Walton Way property. By establishing a district-wide vision, one that includes the study site but also extends to the river and neighboring assets (park, open space, and commercial enterprises), improvements in one area, when effectively connected, can help lift up other areas and create a more marketable and economically viable project site.

The long-term vision for an innovation hub at the site has real potential and should be explored by the City and its partners. This pursuit will further activate the site, perhaps building on the interim site activations, and create a nexus for new ideas, entrepreneurial ventures, and community engagement.

The investments in this neighborhood and those immediately surrounding it are long overdue. As eager as the City and its residents are to push development to the study site and see activity there, the market needs time and careful cultivating in order to best support and sustain economic activity at the site. The panel's recommendations, beginning with near-term activations executed with a long-term vision, should be the solid foundation the site needs.



It is time for a district-wide vision anchored by an innovation hub—starting tomorrow with short-term programming.



About the Panel



Jonathan Gelber, AICP

Panel Chair

Vice President,

Bleakly Advisory Group

Jonathan Gelber is a real estate, planning and market analysis consultant with the Bleakly Advisory Group in Atlanta. Since 2008, he has specialized in consulting for public and private clients in areas where real estate, public policy, and public finance overlap.

Recently he has had the pleasure of working on the several major urban revitalization projects, including the Atlanta's iconic BeltLine initiative, the long-term redevelopment of several aging regional malls, the reactivation of suburban town centers and transit-oriented development projects. He also works as a development advisor, helping cities and counties work with private-sector developers to execute complex mixed-use redevelopment projects with complicated public-private partnership structures.

Prior to joining Bleakly, Jonathan was a Senior Planner for the City of Atlanta's Department of Planning and Community Development where he was responsible for managing long-range planning studies, economic development, and special projects.

Before that he worked as an urban planner and consultant in Atlanta and Portland, and as a transportation and transit planner with the City of New York and the State of North Carolina.

He has a master's degree in real estate from Georgia State University, a master's degree in urban planning from Columbia University, and a BA in Art History from Reed College. He has now returned to Georgia State University to teach Applied Real Estate Market Analysis at GSU's graduate business school.

He is an active member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, the American Planning Association, the Georgia Planning Association, and the Urban Land Institute.

Audra Cunningham

Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer

T. Dallas Smith & Company

Audra is the Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer at T. Dallas Smith & Company. As the firm's first female senior executive, she is responsible for leading the expansion of the company's national tenant representation brokerage division, talent development and recruitment while overseeing the firm's administrative operations. Audra is a senior real estate executive who transitioned into tenant representation following a 23-year career in telecommunications including time with BellSouth and Earthlink. She performed in several senior management roles, including call center management, marketing, product management and national special projects. Audra began her career as a tenant rep broker in Atlanta during the heart of the 2008 recession. She was recruited to join JLL in Washington DC in 2010 where she built a client base of law firms, non-profits, government contractors and corporations. Subsequently, Audra was recruited by CBRE and Newmark Knight Frank where she represented clients between Atlanta and Washington DC. Prior to joining TDS&Co, Audra worked with Physician's Realty Trust (REIT), where she was responsible for leasing over three million square feet of medical office space throughout the Southeast.

Natalie Jones

Project Manager, BeltLine Business Solutions Office
Atlanta BeltLine

Natalie Jones is a dynamic leader at the forefront of fostering economic growth and community development in Atlanta. As the head of the Atlanta BeltLine's Business Solutions Office, Natalie drives the strategy for providing tailor-made services to businesses scaling across the expansive 22-mile BeltLine Planning Area. Before taking on her current role, Natalie led the development and execution of the BeltLine's workforce strategy, recognizing the critical link between workforce development and the city's overall economic success. Additionally, she managed the Business Façade pARTnership Grant program, harnessing the creative potential of local artists and makers to uplift businesses in equity target areas. Prior to her contributions to the BeltLine, Natalie made significant impacts as the manager of global programs at the Metro Atlanta Chamber. In this capacity, she played a crucial role in enhancing Atlanta's position as a global business hub. By providing specialized services to foreign-owned companies, integrating mergers and acquisitions into a regional foreign direct investment strategy, and fostering strategic partnerships with the Consular Corps and bi-national chambers of commerce, Natalie facilitated international business collaborations and bolstered Atlanta's standing on the world stage. Beyond her professional achievements, Natalie is deeply committed to her community. She has actively served on the boards of several organizations, including the Atlanta International Arbitration Society (AtIAS),

Atlanta Regional Commission's Millennial Advisory Panel, and the Atlanta BeltLine's AB67. Additionally, she remains an active member of the Junior League of Atlanta and dedicates her time as a mentor, supporting and guiding college-aged women in their personal and professional pursuits. Natalie holds a degree from Georgia State University and is a graduate of LEAD Atlanta, an intensive leadership development and community education program that nurtures the potential of young professionals throughout Metro Atlanta.

Wole Oyenuga

Co-Principal

Urban Oasis Development

Wole Oyenuga is Co-Principal of Urban Oasis Development and President of construction partner Sims Real Estate Group. Mr. Oyenuga has been intimately involved in all aspects of the Urban Development process including the acquisition, design, construction, and selling of residential real estate. He has over 2 decades of experience managing projects of various sizes and is also a licensed contractor in the state of Georgia. Wole has a keen interest in creating innovative, diverse, and mixed-income neighborhoods by using real estate development to solve many social and economic issues. He has pioneered some of the first net-zero ready housing in Georgia. He has also played a key role in creating replicable models of affordable, for-sale housing in the city of Atlanta. Currently, he is part of the team working on a 22-acre pedestrian-centered, catalytic mixed-use development in Southwest Atlanta. With over 25 years of

experience in real estate, construction, and business leadership, he brings a wealth of knowledge to the project which aims to create a community that deemphasizes personal vehicles and is simultaneously close to a public transportation hub. Wole Oyenuga has a BS in Mechanical Engineering/Business Management from Carnegie Mellon University and a MS in Manufacturing Systems Engineering with an emphasis on Product Design and Development from Stanford University. Wole is a 2017 graduate of the Urban Land Institute's prestigious Center for Leadership. He is also a graduate of the inaugural Westside Community Builder's program.

Sara Patenaude, PhD

Development Director

Decatur Housing Authority

Dr. Sara Patenaude has been an affordable housing researcher and advocate since 2012. In her current role as Development Director for the Decatur Housing Authority, Sara manages development projects and sources new development opportunities for low- and moderate-income families in the City of Decatur. Her previous experience includes developing and preserving affordable housing and Permanent Supportive Housing, creating comprehensive city and county housing strategies, and providing input into affordable housing needs for communities across the southeast. Sara has a PhD in Urban History and a Certificate in Planning and Economic Development from Georgia State University, where she studied affordable housing policy. Sara volunteers her time as Co-Chair of the

HouseATL Rental Housing Preservation Working Group, Vice President of Communication for the Atlanta Women's Affordable Housing Network, and Clerk of the Board of Trustees for the Friends School of Atlanta. She also serves as an advisor for community groups advocating for affordable housing and supporting our unhoused neighbors.

Laura Richter

Associate and Project Manager

TSW

Laura is an Associate and Project Manager in both the planning and architecture studios. Laura's projects focus on strengthening urban fabrics, connectivity, and detail-oriented architecture. She works with communities and developers to create solutions that enrich the environment while promoting active and healthy living. Since joining TSW in 2013, Laura has designed and managed a variety of building projects including: mixed-use, missing middle residential, commercial, public buildings, and historic renovations. She has also managed many planning efforts with both public and private development clients. Laura is a three-time Georgia Tech graduate. She graduated with Honors in the undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Architecture program, followed by obtaining Master of Architecture and Master of City and Regional Planning degrees in 2013. She is also a 2022 graduate of the Urban Land Institute Center for Leadership program for the local Atlanta Chapter.

Harvey Rudy

Partner

Greenstone Properties

Harvey Rudy currently oversees all aspects of the development process for Class A mixed-use, office, hotel, medical and other commercial real estate projects. Areas of responsibility include all areas of the entire development process including project vision, site selection, overall leasing and marketing efforts, debt and equity capital sourcing and structuring, as well as overall design / engineering team leadership and executive level project management. He has completed well over \$1.2b in project values representing over 4.1+ million square feet of Class A properties.”

Rainey Shane

Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer
SEAM, Inc.

Rainey Shane is the Chief Executive Officer of SEAM, Inc., a non-profit organization that specializes in embedding social equity in commercial real estate through the use of the Social Equity Assessment Method (SEAM) Standard and certification framework. Rainey co-founded SEAM, Inc. and played a crucial role in developing the standard and framework. SEAM is a standard that addresses the social impacts of commercial real estate projects, similar to the way LEED Certification tackles climate change. SEAM certification aims to minimize negative impacts while maximizing opportunities for positive impacts and sustainable outcomes that contribute to long-term systemic changes in diversity, equity, inclusion, human rights, and prosperity. Before her current role, Rainey was the Director of Social Sustainability for North America at JLL, where she led social sustainability consulting services. Her work focused on social impact strategy for commercial real estate and was instrumental in aligning commercial real estate projects with clients’ social sustainability goals. Prior to founding the SEAM non-profit and launching the JLL Social Sustainability practice, Rainey established and grew the Adaptive Reuse practice for Project and Development Services’ Southeast Central region for JLL. Her passion for adaptive reuse strongly influences her work within the social impact space as they are so closely related.