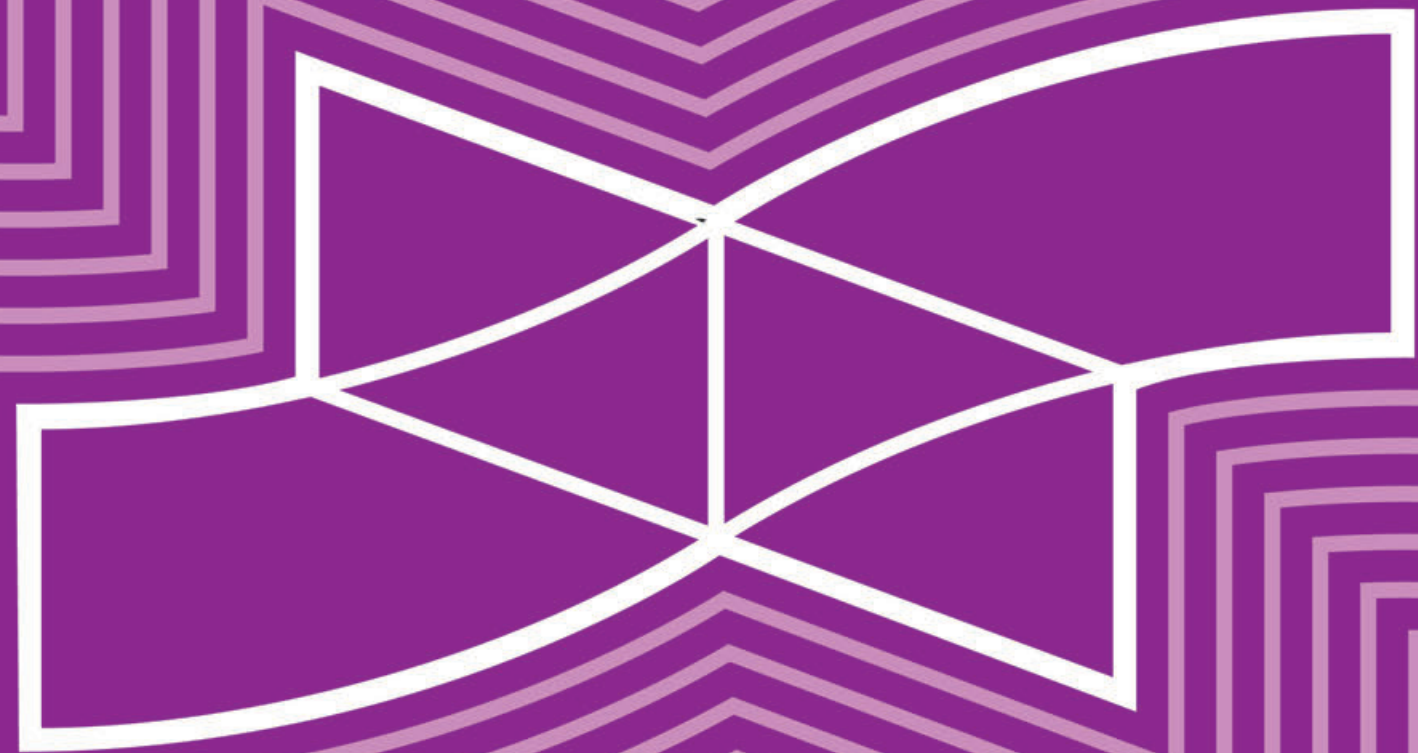


ATLANTA'S FREEDOM PARK MASTER PLAN **BACKGROUND**

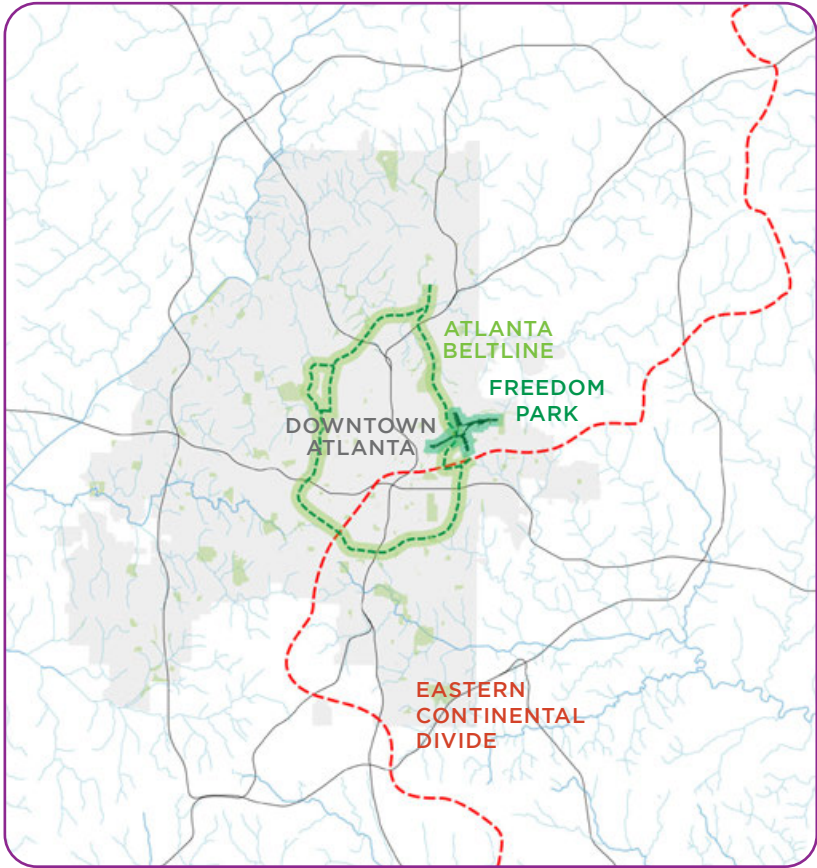


A PEOPLE'S PLAN FOR FREEDOM PARK

Project Background

Born from protest and civil disobedience, Freedom Park is founded in civic discourse, citizen empowerment, community engagement, and the responsibilities of 'freedom' to a local, national and international audience. Since its founding almost 30 years ago, however, the park's neighborhoods and global context have evolved. New expectations from diverse, multigenerational constituencies have brought about increased scrutiny to the criteria that defines its successful performance as a park.

The master plan ushers in a new era of Freedom Park's evolution from a former infrastructural "scar tissue" filled with lawns, trees and trails, into a more potent "connective tissue" that engenders unique cultural dialogues, civic activism, environmental stewardship and simply a richer park experience. The plan leverages the park's unique history, context and association with some of the nation's great leaders in social justice and welfare by re-defining traditional master planning narratives and focusing on the prioritization of civic discourse. Through this lens, the plan utilizes a framework guided by the public input, reinforcing the common ground that defines Atlanta's Freedom Park.



FREEDOM PARK OVERVIEW

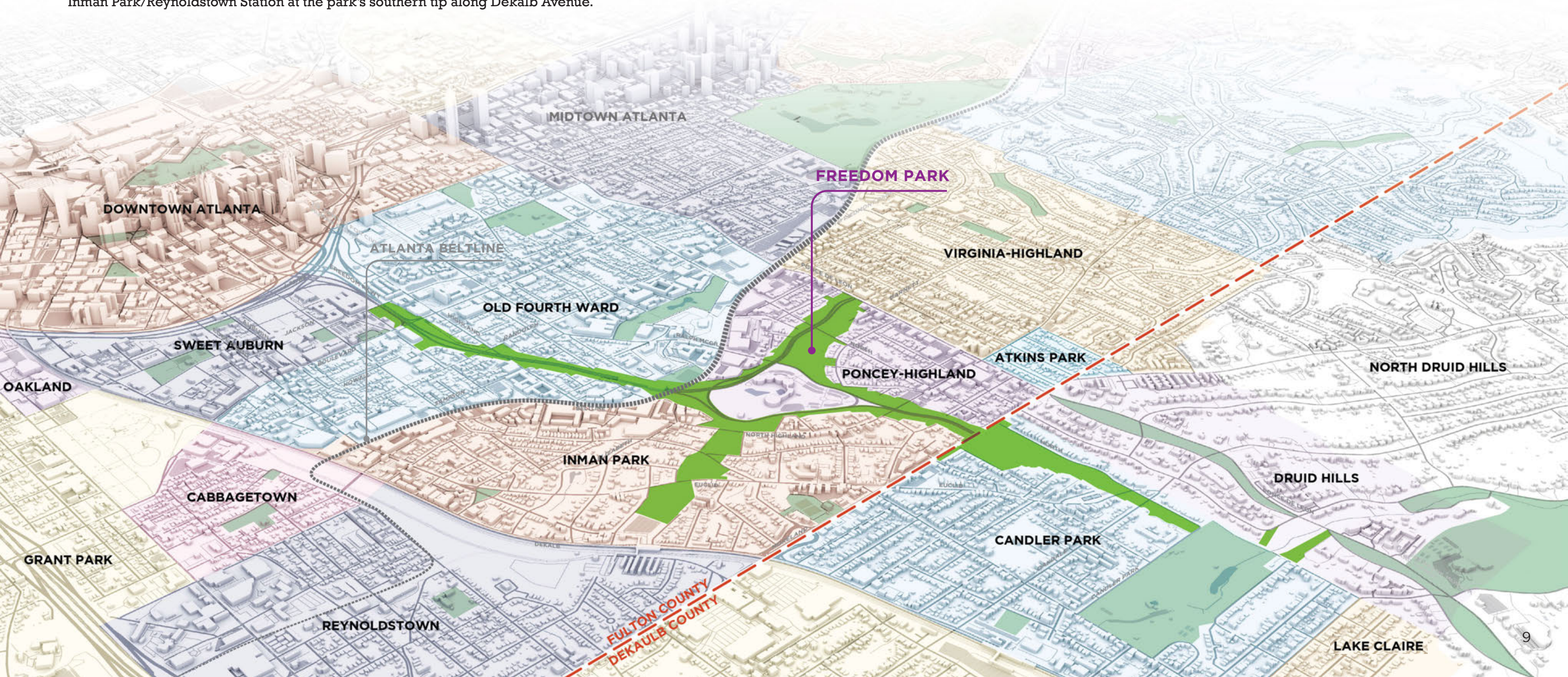
Regional Context

From its far eastern tip along the banks of Lullwater Creek, to its iconic Downtown Skyline overlook at the Jackson Street Bridge to the west, Freedom Park’s green canopy and undulating topography offer an immersive network of open spaces stitched though some of the city’s most vibrant and historical neighborhoods. At over 130 acres in size, stretching over 2.5 miles in length, and with a perimeter that stretches over 8 miles, the park offers an invaluable reserve of open space for the city and for the over 35,000 people living within a 10 min. walk of the park—convenient access to miles of trails and parkland close to the heart of downtown.

Existing hike and bike trails within the park are an integral part of the Path Foundation’s 19 mile long Stone Mountain Trail, connecting Centennial Olympic Park with the region’s iconic Stone Mountain. Connections to the Atlanta Beltline trail system offer linkages to one of the nation’s most recognized “rail-to-trail” corridors. Regional transit connectivity can be found within the park through a network of bus stops as well as MARTA’s Inman Park/Reynoldstown Station at the park’s southern tip along Dekalb Avenue.

These trail and transit connections link some of Atlanta’s most historic neighborhoods and cultural assets, including the King Center, the Carter Presidential Center, and the Fernbank Museum, among others. Likewise, the park’s expansive footprint and trail network provides connectivity to adjacent, regionally significant open spaces, such as the Olmsted Linear Parks, Candler Park, and Fernbank Forest.

In the spring of 2020 Freedom Park Conservancy embarked on a new stage in the life of the park by commissioning a master plan that would help better define the role of Freedom Park in the growth of 21st century Atlanta and position the park to live up to its full potential through expanded program, improved maintenance, and more memorable overall presence.



NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE 21ST CENTURY PARK

Themes of Freedom Park

The narrative behind the establishment of Freedom Park bears form in its unique geographic footprint; tracing its struggle and impact through a diverse assemblage of neighborhoods in Eastside Atlanta. Beneath its surface, however, Freedom Park contains narratives that extend beyond the struggle of a local community, offering stories of both national and international relevance.

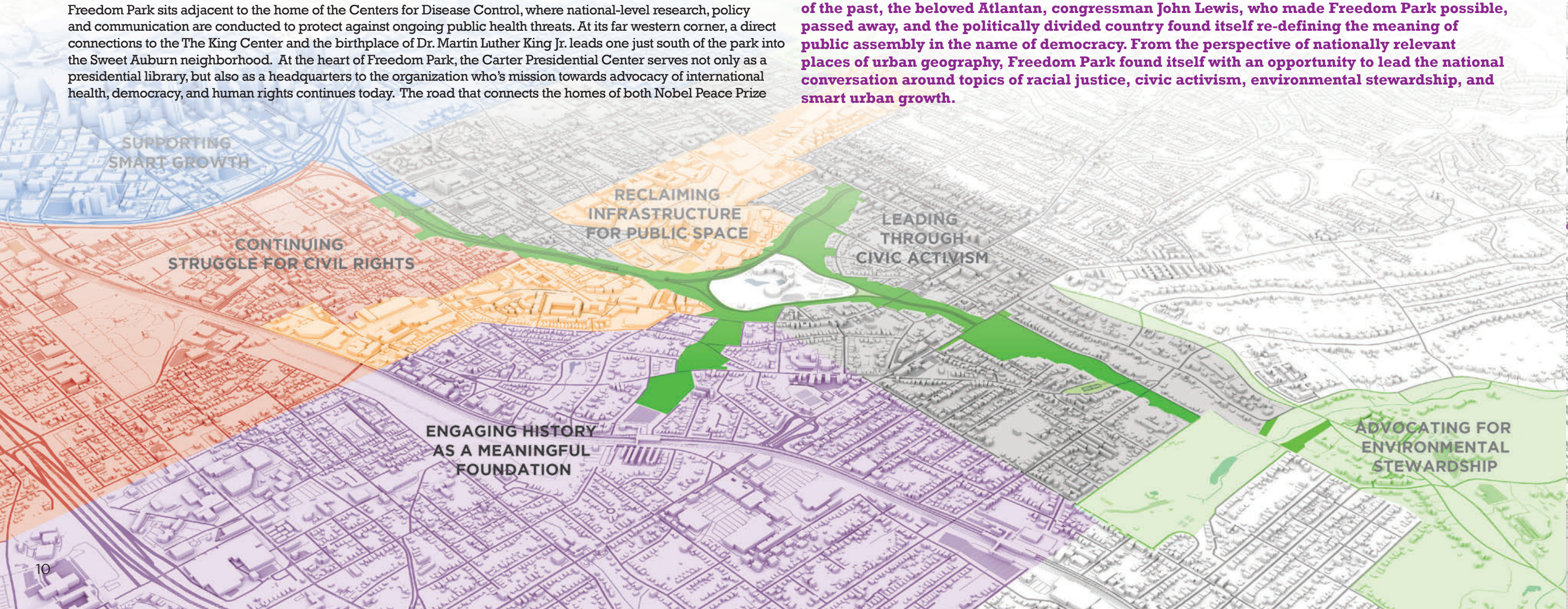
The narratives touched on by Freedom Park are laid out along a transect that extends from the birth place of Martin Luther King Jr. to the foothills of Stone Mountain. The park's connection to national and international leaders, historic events, demonstrations of civic action and cultural iconography form an urban palimpsest unique to the land on which it sits. The park lies immediately adjacent to the Eastern Continental Divide, the ridge line that divides the rivers that drain to the Gulf of Mexico from those draining eastward to the Atlantic. Along the ridge of this divide, Atlanta's first railroads were built, helping to form the economic foundation on which Atlanta grew as a city. The park is the site of the Civil War's "Battle of Atlanta" where Union and Confederate lines faced off along what is now the southern wing of Freedom Park. The Park adjoins the historic Druid Hills neighborhood, who's bucolic Linear Parks were the last commission of Frederick Law Olmsted before his death in 1903, and of Fernbank Forest, one of the country's largest and most significant urban Old Growth Forests.

Freedom Park sits adjacent to the home of the Centers for Disease Control, where national-level research, policy and communication are conducted to protect against ongoing public health threats. At its far western corner, a direct connections to the The King Center and the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. leads one just south of the park into the Sweet Auburn neighborhood. At the heart of Freedom Park, the Carter Presidential Center serves not only as a presidential library, but also as a headquarters to the organization who's mission towards advocacy of international health, democracy, and human rights continues today. The road that connects the homes of both Nobel Peace Prize

winners, King and Carter, is named after congressman John Lewis, a man who galvanized the Civil Rights movement and without whom Freedom Park would be but another urban highway interchange.

More recently, progressive infrastructure development and cultural iconography continue to develop the park's many narratives. Freedom Park straddles Atlanta's visionary Beltline greenway that became a national model for the repurposing of transportation infrastructure and urban redevelopment. It's bridges and roadways have been the scene for pop-culture videos and iconic television scenes. And views to Atlanta's iconic downtown skyline are captured daily from the top of Jackson Street bridge.

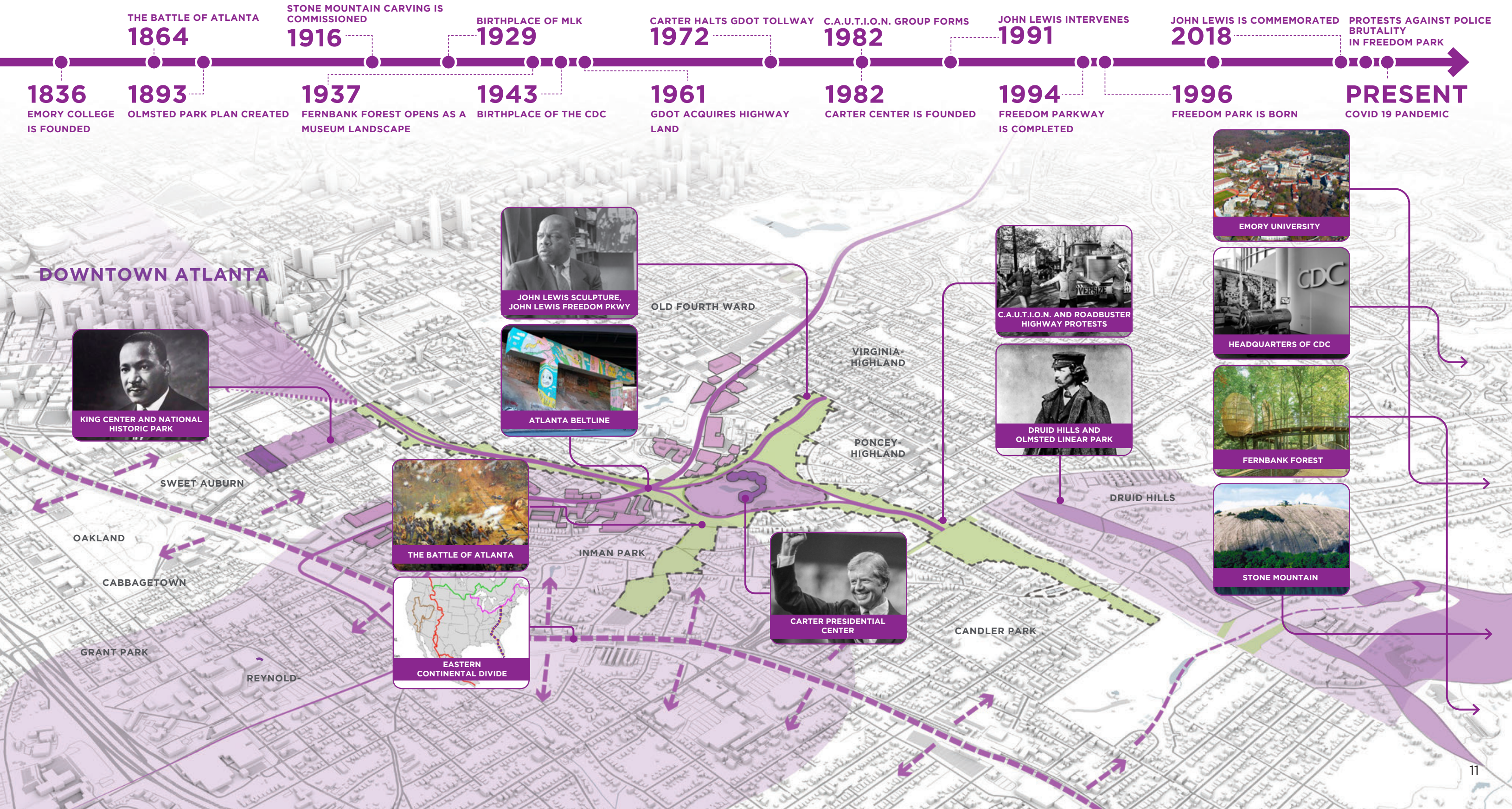
Narratives underlying Freedom Park's geographic reach come together as a palimpsest of urban evolution from pre-history to the present day. In some ways, it took the year 2020 to unleash the dynamic potential of the park that for years lay dormant in its bucolic setting. The pandemic activated linear strands of open spaces like never before, global environmental crisis brought the idea of balance and urban nature even more into focus, racial justice movement was reignited and moved society to revisit interpretations of history in monuments of the past, the beloved Atlantan, congressman John Lewis, who made Freedom Park possible, passed away, and the politically divided country found itself re-defining the meaning of public assembly in the name of democracy. From the perspective of nationally relevant places of urban geography, Freedom Park found itself with an opportunity to lead the national conversation around topics of racial justice, civic activism, environmental stewardship, and smart urban growth.



FREEDOM PARK AS URBAN PALIMPSEST TIMELINE

Layers of Park History Connected to Park Geography

FROM CIVIL WAR TO CIVIC PROTEST



INFRASTRUCTURAL CONTEXT TIMELINE

Origin of Park as Infrastructure

Freedom Park was born from struggle to stop the expansion of a planned state highway in the late 1970s and 80s. Slated to tear through a historic urban community, the roadway established its footprint but was stopped through the grassroots efforts of neighbors, advocates and civic leaders. Freedom Park’s unique outline, crisscrossing through seven Atlanta neighborhoods, bears the scar of that struggle in what now appears as verdant open space.

The park’s history traces the history of American urban planning evolution from the mid-century car-centric efficiency model to the more holistic multi-modal and integrated approach towards urban infrastructure of today, with a lot of focus on repairing mistakes of the past and reclaiming infrastructural “scars” for public space. In that sense, the park’s role in Atlanta vis-a-vis another large but a more traditionally designed Piedmont Park, can be understood within the lineage of projects throughout the country, such as the Highline and waterfront parks in New York, the Chicago 606, the Rose Kennedy Greenway over the “Big Dig” in Boston, and the Atlanta Beltline itself.

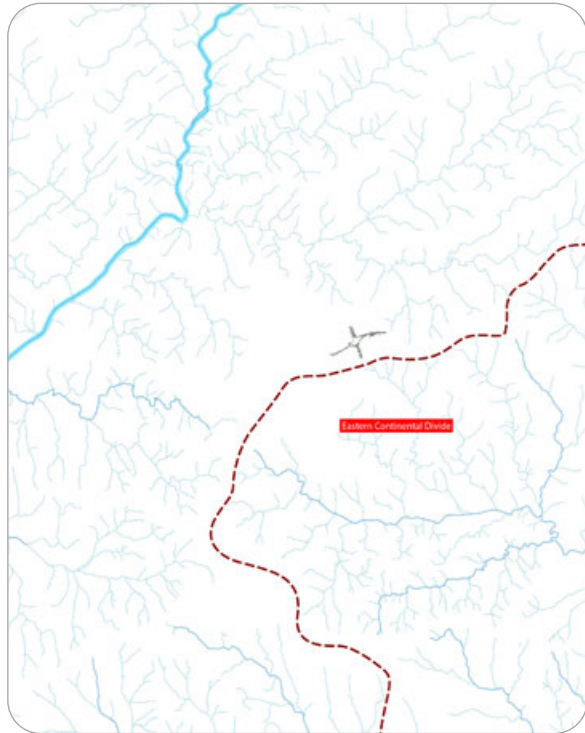
The existential question for the park going forward is how to transition from the legacy of a scar left by the 20th century disinvestment, poor planning, and environmental degradation to a new open space celebrated for its equitable access to nature in the city, cultural narratives, and as the center of communal life. Like other linear parks around the nation re-purposed from infrastructure, Freedom Park’s relevance to “smart growth” practices is now in focus more than ever.

Evolution of Atlanta’s Infrastructural Footprint
(maps based on “The Atlanta City Design: Aspiring to the Beloved Community”,
<https://online.flowpaper.com/72b006f2/ACDSecondPrintFINAL180820>)

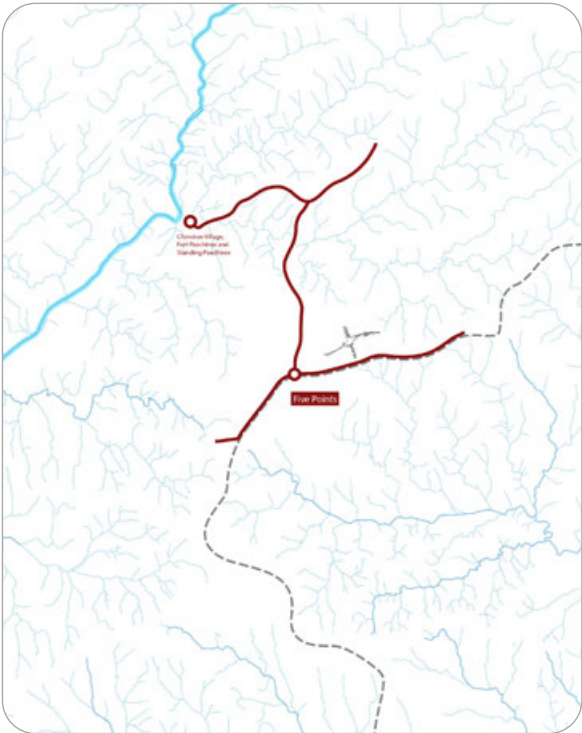
1940S



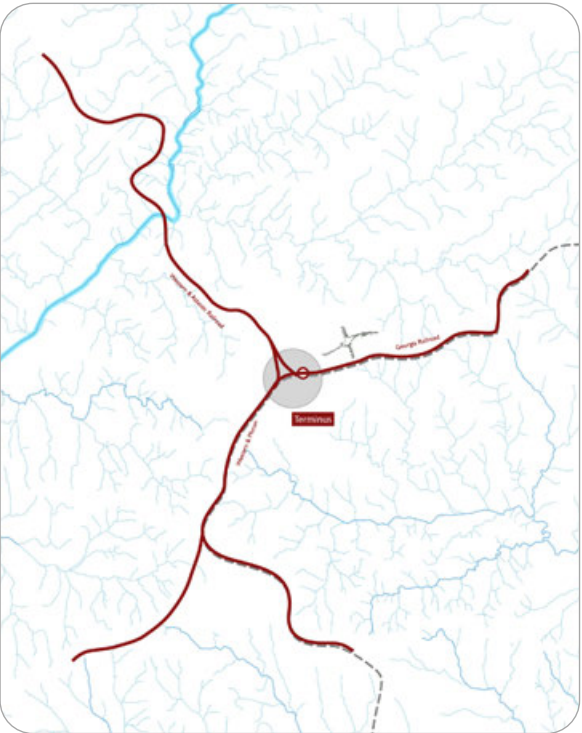
An aerial view of the Eastside Atlanta neighborhood fabric around mid-1940s with the GDOT’s land boundary to eventually be cleared for highway and later become Freedom Park.



EASTERN CONTINENTAL DIVIDE



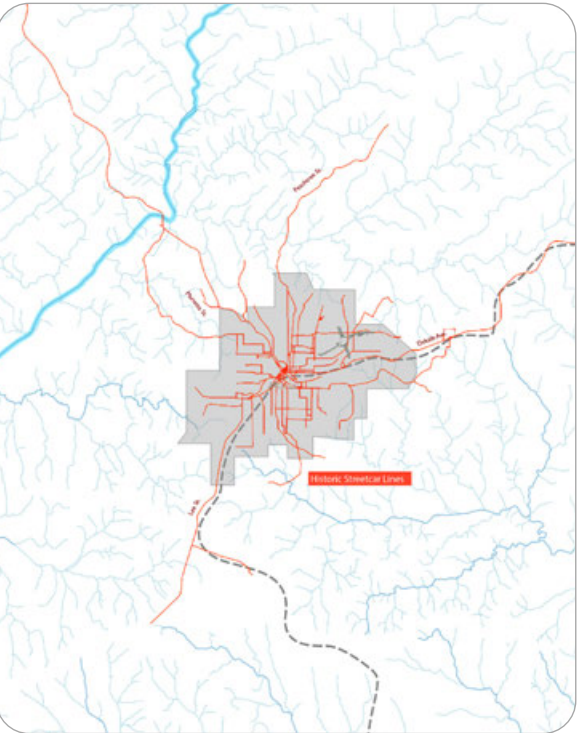
FIVE POINTS



RAILROAD NEXUS



RAILROADS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

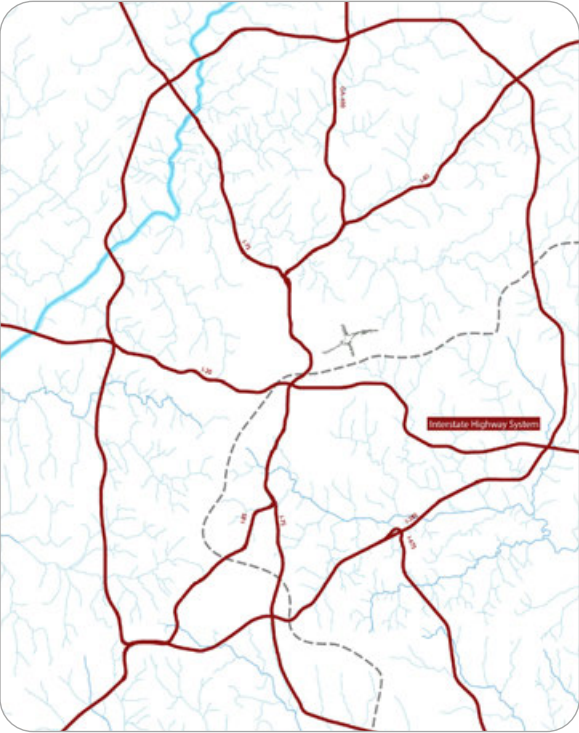


TROLLEY LINES TO THE GARDEN SUBURBS

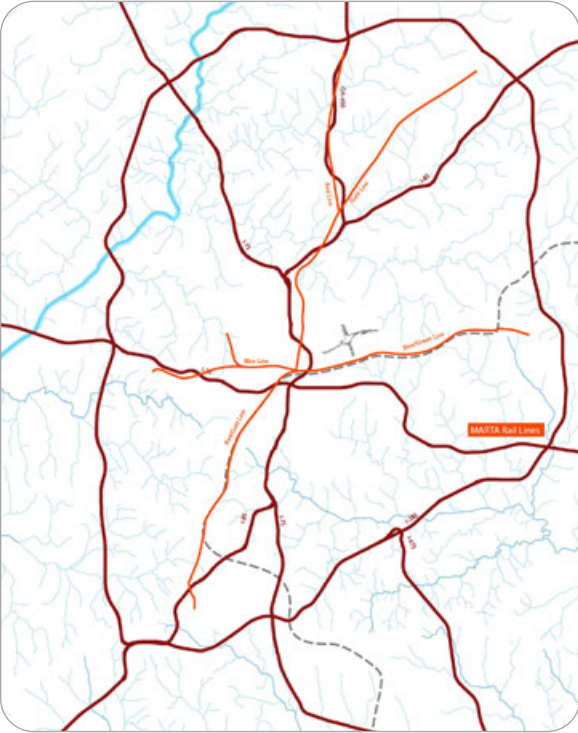
2000S



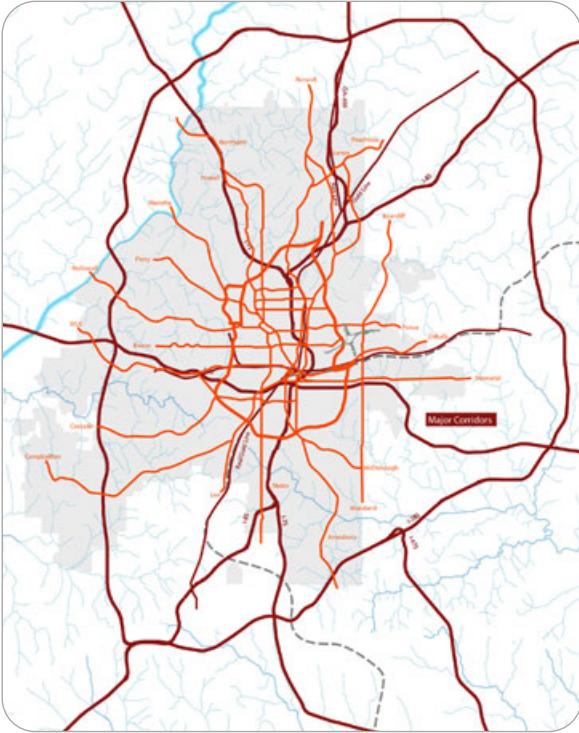
Cleared land was filled with trees and lawns following the original “Olmstedian” plan for Freedom Park, developed in the early 1990s.



INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

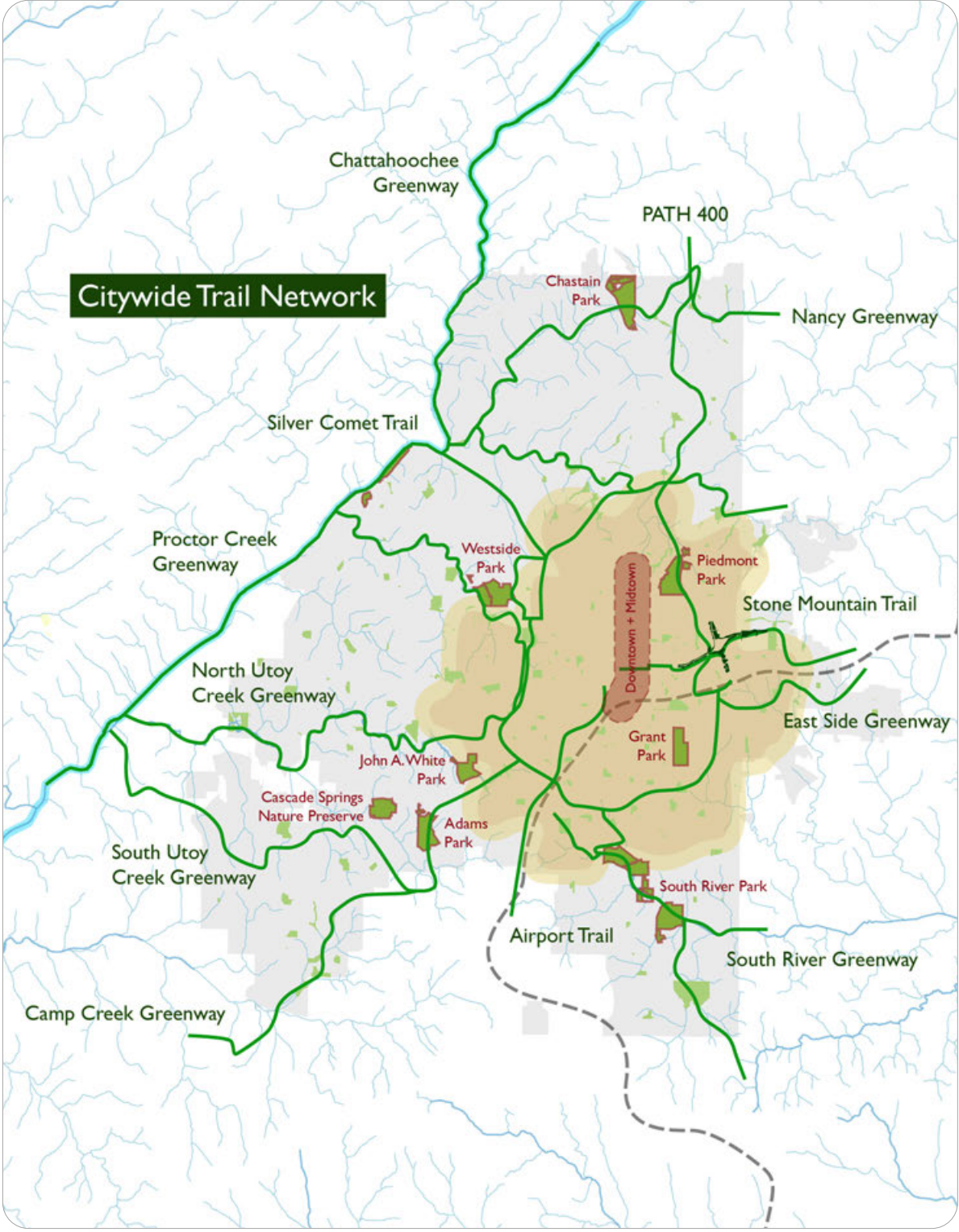


MARTA RAIL LINES



MAJOR CORRIDORS NETWORK

Land cleared for future highway expansion in Eastside Atlanta to become Freedom Park



REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORK

Park becomes key linear linkage in Atlanta's regional trail network and a major park node accessible from the Beltline loop

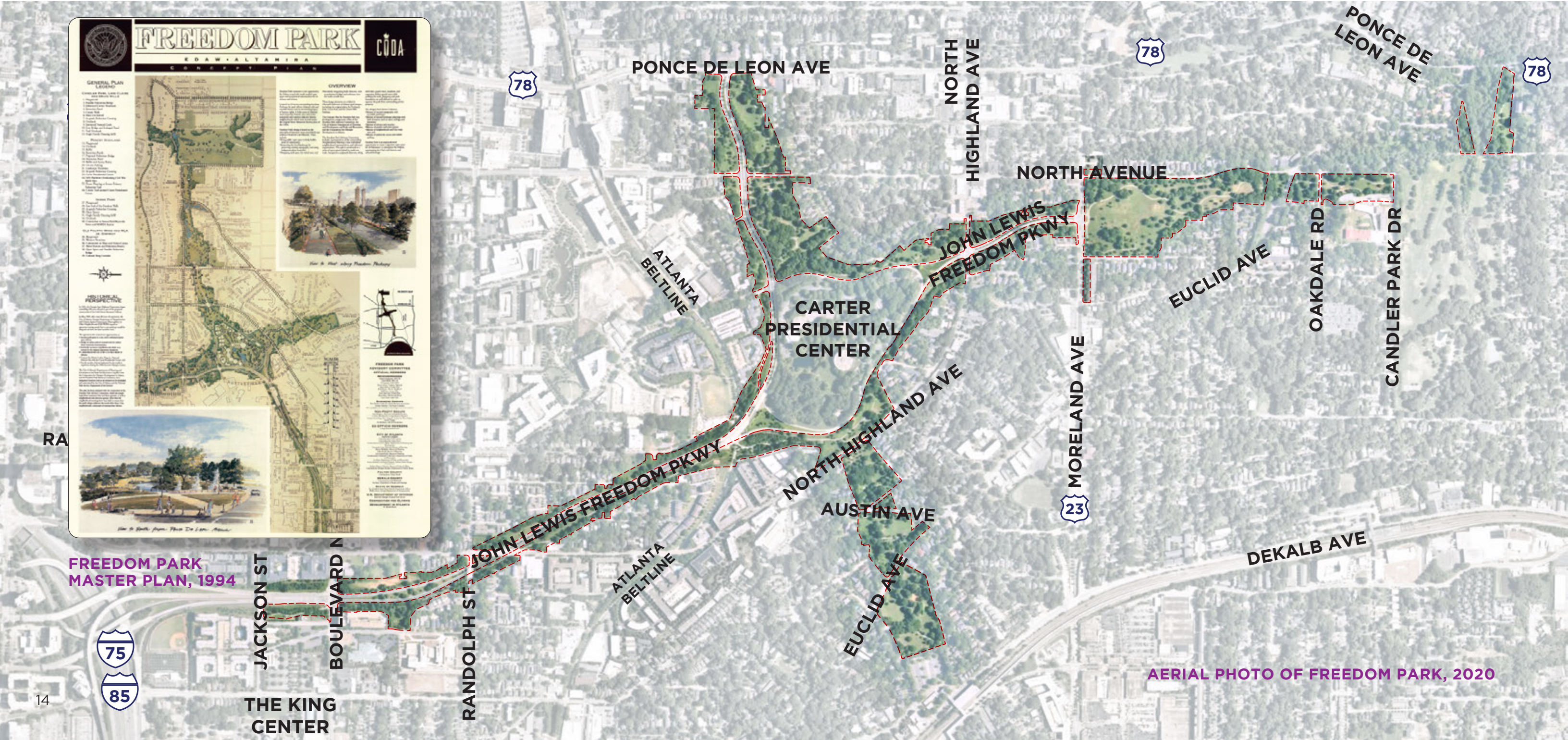
FREEDOM PARK CONFIGURATION

A “Roadside” Park

The current park land is part of a 99 year lease by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to the City of Atlanta for the express use as a ‘roadside park’. This legal settlement resulted in the creation of the Freedom Park Conservancy (FPC), formerly the activist CAUTION Group. Since its founding in the early 1990s, role of the conservancy has evolved from litigation to protection to an organization whose primary focus is in the improvement of the Park. Today FPC’s primary goal is to make the park a world class venue for art, ecology and the enjoyment of citizens and visitors. The history of the fight along with the highway-driven

configuration of the land has resulted in a somewhat ambiguous space with many weak edges and little in the way of programming to activate the park. This legacy, along with the original 1994 plan that aspired to create an ‘Olmstedian’ environment, established a number of fundamental design issues within the park itself. The original park Master Plan consisted of an illustrated park map showing possible future features of the new public space. The parkway and surrounding parkland were completed hastily in time for the start of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games.

--- Park Boundary



RA

FREEDOM PARK
MASTER PLAN, 1994



FREEDOM PARK FEATURES AND DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES

Park's Changing Context

While only a part of the 1994 plan was realized, the plan itself focused efforts on moving through the park as a linear system without much focus on places for people to gather and enjoy the natural, historic cultural richness of the surrounding neighborhoods. Natural systems that now more than ever play a critical role in the city are largely ignored in the fabric of the park itself. The development of the BeltLine's Eastside Trail, along with the restoration of the Olmsted Linear Park in Druid Hills, now not only expand the reach of the trail networks connecting to Freedom Park, but also invites a much larger audience to the park.

In 2007, the city designated Freedom Park as the city's art park with little definition beyond this description from the designation resolution: "...a venue for the installation of temporary and permanent public art...". The last 25 years have witnessed critical changes in the city of Atlanta and the neighborhoods that surround the park. Atlanta's Eastside has become one of the most desirable places to live in all of metro Atlanta. This changing context around the park and the surrounding city at large sets the framework for a new vision for Freedom Park itself.



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