

ATLANTA'S FREEDOM PARK MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MASTER PLAN AT A GLANCE

Process and Framework Summary

BACKGROUND

Freedom Park is an approximately 130-acre park on the Eastside of Downtown Atlanta connecting the neighborhoods of Sweet Auburn, Old Fourth Ward, Poncey-Highland, Virginia-Highland, Inman Park, Candler Park, Druid Hills, and Lake Claire to the Atlanta BeltLine, Martin Luther King Jr. Historic District, and Downtown Atlanta. Freedom Park is a critical link in the growing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure of the city of Atlanta, and offers skyline views, a variety of open and wooded spaces, miles of walking and cycling trails, gardens, a growing collection of significant public art, and historic landmarks.

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 stemming from the late 1980s-early 1990s, also resulted in the creation of the Freedom Park Conservancy, formerly the activist CAUTION Group). Another outcome of the settlement during the park’s founding was the “passive” designation of the park, a restriction that would not allow for large gatherings, buildings, or commercial recreational establishments within the park’s boundaries going forward.

In light of all the urban transformations that took place in the last 25 years since the initial 1996 plan for Freedom Park, Freedom Park Conservancy (FPC) set out to develop a Master Plan that would create a definitive vision for the park’s future in the new century. Between the summer of 2020 and spring of 2021, and building on FPC’s original vision for Freedom Park to be “Atlanta’s most innovative green space, celebrated for its inspiring origin story, works of art and natural beauty”, the design team of SWA and Sycamore Consulting worked with FPC and the public to develop a flexible idea-driven improvement plan for the park’s complex geography. This document is a guidepost for how it is operated, maintained, and programmed in the years to come.

PROCESS

The approximately 9-month-long planning process was largely guided by public input and on-the-ground knowledge and ideas contribution by multiple stakeholders. Important to note here, that as all initiatives launched in 2020, the pandemic-related restrictions greatly impacted public engagement and outreach during the months of 2020 and 2021. The majority of stakeholder and all of public engagement was conducted on-line via social media platforms, a specially developed website with “Social Pinpoint” interactive tools, as well as videoconferencing, presentations, and both real-time and web-based polling. Once the plan is reviewed by the neighborhoods and the City, the intent is that more robust (and hopefully face-to-face) stakeholder and public engagement in relation to the plan’s recommendations for study and implementation will be ongoing.

FRAMEWORK

The framework for the master plan is established based on the legacy of the park’s origin as a site of struggle for urban preservation. The master plan ushers in a new era of Freedom Park’s evolution from a former infrastructural “scar tissue” into a more potent “connective tissue” that engenders unique cultural dialogues, civic activism, environmental stewardship, and simply a richer park experience for today’s and future audiences. The plan leverages the park’s unique history, context, and association with some of the nation’s great leaders in social justice movement 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 as Atlanta’s People’s Park.

Based on this framework, seven overarching goals for the master plan were established. The positioning of each goal acknowledges the park’s important service as a local amenity, a regional resource, as well as a place of national relevance and international significance. Based on the public dialogue that took place during the master planning process, a community ranking exercise helped prioritize these goals, giving the needed focus to the ideas developed in the course of the project.

Seven Master Plan Goals:

1. Enhance Ecological Value of the Park;
2. Complete the Park as Alternative Regional Mobility Infrastructure;
3. Position the Park as Unique International Art Space;
4. Support Adjacent Neighborhood Vitality;
5. Highlight Local, National and International Civic Role of the Park;
6. Elevate National Significance of the park as Signature Atlanta Open Space;
7. Increase Economic Viability of the Park.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Stemming from the seven goals of the master plan, over 70 initiatives were identified, making the vision more grounded in real opportunities on the site. In order to prioritize future funding and feasibility study efforts associated with the potential projects, a series of five prioritization criteria were developed, with which each project was evaluated:

Five Project Prioritization Criteria:

1. **Catalytic** (projects provide immediate improvements while elevating the park profile in alignment with the goals of the master plan);
2. **Opportunistic** (projects that leverage existing partnerships or have a high value-to-cost ratio);
3. **Contributing to Public Safety** (projects that provide benefit through improvements that address the safety, security and well-being of park users);
4. **Big Ideas that Require Further Study** (projects that require significant Public Agency coordination and feasibility assessment);
5. **Public Priority** (projects prioritized based on public survey response).

Based on the evaluation of these criteria, seven Signature Projects were envisioned to move Freedom Park towards achieving the seven goals of the master plan. In order to assist in developing interest and coordinate design efforts of interrelated projects, each Signature Project consists of a series of aligned projects that are to be studied, planned, fundraised for, and potentially implemented as a singular effort. With funding from a variety of potential sources (such as public agencies, philanthropic interests, the community, etc.) still pending, the City and FPC will work towards project implementation once it becomes available.

Collectively, master plan recommendations touch on themes relating to the recognition of the legacy of national heroes, environmental stewardship, places for civic engagement, prioritizing pedestrian experiences, expanding mobility opportunities, promoting cultural expression and neighborhood vitality. Taken together, they re-position Freedom Park as an equitable, culturally rich, and civic-minded urban park within the City of Atlanta—a national example for the importance of citizen empowerment and the value of common ground.

MASTER PLAN INITIATIVES MAP

LEGEND

PLANNING

CONTEXTUAL PLANNING SYNERGIES

MOBILITY

PEDESTRIAN-BIKE MOBILITY/SAFETY

ECOLOGICAL

ECOLOGICAL SERVICES

PROGRAM

PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVATION

IDENTITY

LEGIBILITY/MEMORABILITY OF CHARACTER IDENTITY

PROJECT'S RELATIVE PERFORMANCE CRITERIA BAR CHART

PROJECT INSIDE PARK BOUNDARY

PROJECT OUTSIDE PARK BOUNDARY

PROJECTS WITH HIGHEST RANKINGS IN ALL PRIORITIZATION CATEGORIES

PROJECTS IN IMPLEMENTATION PHASES WITH SECURED FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIPS

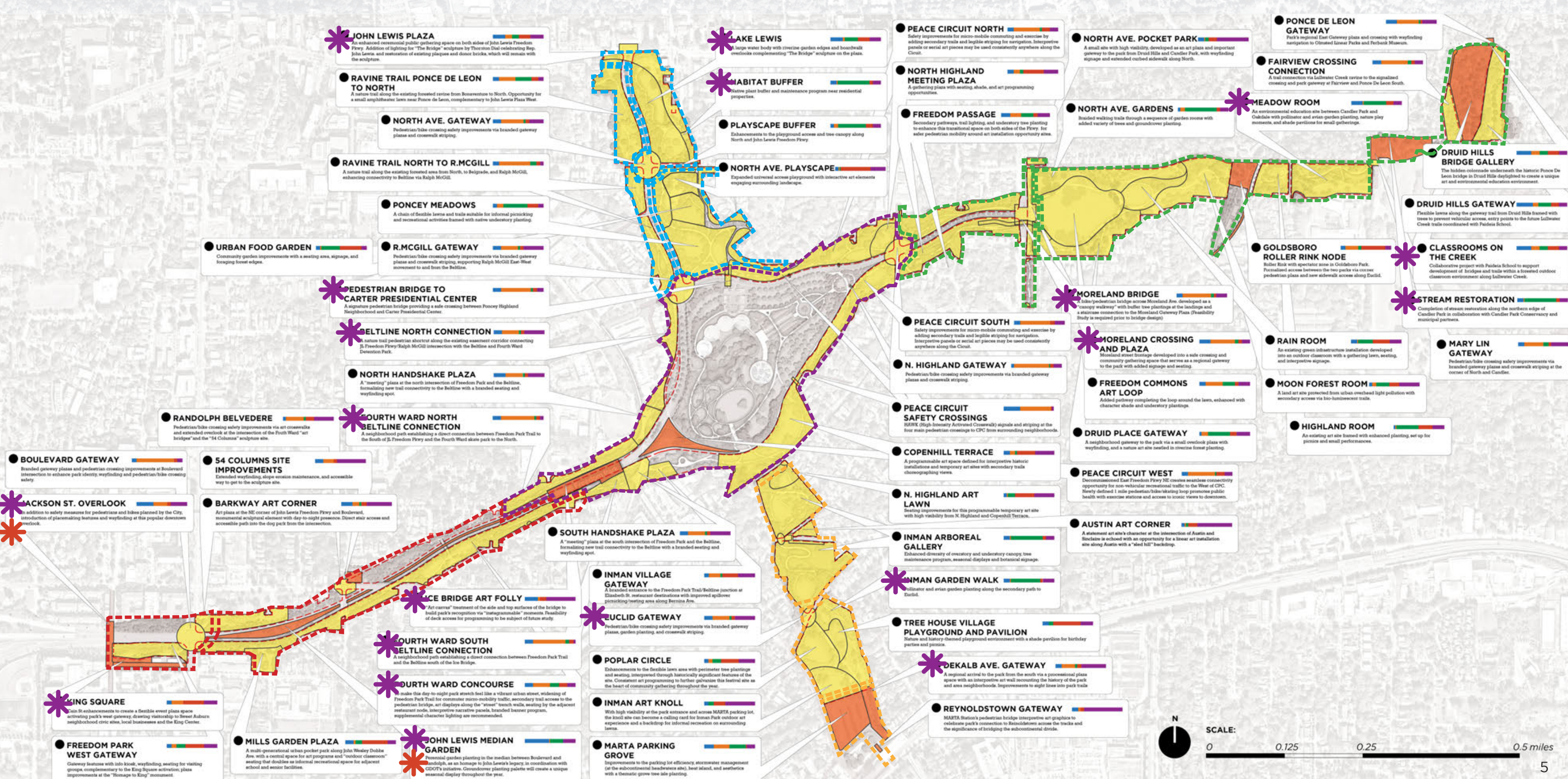
PROJECT ZONE I

PROJECT ZONE II

PROJECT ZONE III

PROJECT ZONE IV

PROJECT ZONE V



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