

October 2021

ACTIVATE ATL

ONE ATLANTA

DRAFT Comprehensive Parks and Recreation
Master Plan

MAYOR KEISHA LANCE BOTTOMS



ATL
PARKS
& REC



One of the newest developed LEED projects is Westside Park, the City of Atlanta's latest premier destination! This newly opened park is on track to achieve SITES Gold certification. Sitting at 280 acres, the park is the largest greenspace in the city and serves as a critical backup source of drinking water. Westside Park will change the surrounding landscape and serve as a catalyst for Westside neighborhoods in Atlanta. Photo: HGOR



KEISHA LANCE BOTTOMS
MAYOR



CITY OF ATLANTA

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To our Beloved Atlanta Community:

Activate ATL is a 10-year masterplan aimed at improving and expanding Atlanta's parks, recreational programs and facilities citywide. I want to extend special thanks to everyone who shared ideas and feedback with our Parks and Recreation team during the initial phases of community engagement. Your input matters! Our goal is to make sure Activate ATL is shaped *by* the community, *for* the community. It is extremely important that this plan reflects the priorities of ALL our unique, dynamic and diverse Atlanta communities!

Everyone deserves access to quality parks and recreational offerings! The value they offer supports our wellbeing in many ways. Parks and recreation provide opportunities for improved physical and mental health, connectivity with nature, environmental benefits and serve as a community space for families, children and individuals to gather.

As mayor of this great city, I have always envisioned *One Atlanta* — “an affordable, resilient, and equitable city, for all!” Ensuring equitable access to quality parks and greenspaces is vital, particularly in communities that have been historically underserved. Equity is a driving force of Activate ATL and is foundational to our shared vision of a safe and welcoming city surrounded by thriving communities.

Today, there is still work to be done in creating a more equitable parks and recreation system for the City of Atlanta. This understanding is supported by national data trends as well as findings from community input. As a result, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is developing a new Parks and Recreation Equity Data Tool.

The Equity Data Tool will use data-driven mapping to accurately identify disparities within our current parks and recreation system. In turn, it will also pinpoint specific strategies to eliminate those disparities. The interactive platform will also help to measure the success of our efforts and promote equitable funding practices for capital investments, programming and maintenance.

A key metric of equitable park access is the number of residents who reside within a 10-minute walk to a quality park. To help support increased park access in Atlanta, I signed onto the 10-Minute Walk National Campaign. The goal is steeped in a vision for 100% of Atlantans to have safe access to a quality park or greenspace within a 10-minute walk of home by 2050.

The Department of Parks and Recreation plays a critical role in this continued work and our focus on equity is supported citywide by cross-departmental collaboration. Activate ATL will be the City's guide and blueprint toward achieving a world-class parks and recreation system for All over the next 10 years!

As DPR continues to work closely with the community, I encourage you to stay actively engaged through the implementation process. Your voice matters, and we hope that you will continue to share your feedback to help us Activate ATL!

Sincerely,

Keisha Lance Bottoms



KEISHA LANCE BOTTOMS
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JOHN DARGLE, JR.
COMMISSIONER
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION



Greetings to All!

In the spring of 2020, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) embarked upon the development of our ten-year comprehensive parks and recreation system master plan that provides recommendations for provision of facilities, programs and services; parkland acquisition and development; maintenance and operations; and administration and management – Activate ATL: Recreation & Parks for All.

The focus of Activate ATL is to improve our parks and recreation system for ALL to enjoy. In doing so, we understand that our parks, programs, and recreation events must reflect the needs and desires of the diverse neighborhoods and communities that we serve.

Shortly after we launched Activate ATL, the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the social unrest following the murder of George Floyd ensued. Despite these tragedies, we were able to keep our parks open and provide needed recreation services such as meal distribution through our Centers of Hope and Learning Pods to support families.

These combined events of 2020 reinforced the positive impact parks and recreation can have on many of the interconnected issues within our beloved city. Through collaboration and innovation, we were able to develop a master plan guided by community input. In fact, our public engagement process for Activate ATL is the most robust and inclusive effort DPR has undertaken.

To better understand the condition and usability of our parks and recreation amenities, we closely examined the existing conditions of each and every park and recreation facility in our system. We also used various tools to collect information directly from residents regarding their specific needs and priorities for Atlanta's parks and recreation facilities such as a statistically valid survey, 16 virtual public meetings, 57 focus groups and our new HappiFeet App to name a few.

As we completed our Existing Conditions Assessment, it became clear that we needed to address disparities within the parks and recreation system. We believe that everyone, regardless of age, background, race or zip code, deserves safe access to quality parks and recreational facilities.

Activate ATL will provide the blueprint to improve the city's current parks and recreation system over the ten years. By equitably investing in, better connecting with the communities we serve, and growing our system, DPR strives to improve the health and overall wellbeing of our residents and visitors.

We are proud to present our vision for the future of Atlanta's parks and recreation system that is based on your input. Thank you for using your voice to define the parks and recreation YOU want to see: one that is equitable, connected, sustainable, inclusive, and innovative.

I encourage you to stay engaged with DPR as we carry out these recommendations over the next ten years. Together, let's ACTIVATE ATL by building a world-class parks and recreation system for the City of Atlanta.

Sincerely,

John Dargle, Jr., Commissioner



Executive Summary

Activate ATL is an ambitious, long-range framework to transform the City’s parks and recreation system into one of the most successful and dynamic systems in the nation. This high-level comprehensive master plan lays out the departmental mission, vision, goals, and action plan following an intensive evaluation of the existing conditions of the parks and recreation system, population growth, and nationwide trends.

During this process the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) established the following key findings that are fundamental to improving the City’s quality of life and achieving a world-class parks and recreation system:

- 1. The need to increase investment in the City’s existing parks and recreation system.
- 2. The understanding that the parks and recreation system provides Atlantans and visitors with essential services and is an integral part of the City’s critical infrastructure.
- 3. An inclusive public engagement process that captures the community’s priorities is central to achieving an equitable parks and recreation system.
- 4. Equitable access to parks and recreation facilities must address historic, social, and economic inequities.
- 5. Activate ATL’s Goals to Invest, Connect, and Grow DPR’s assets, resources, and system are interconnected and will require coordination and collaboration with partners.
- 6. DPR’s implementation strategy will apply an equity lens in order to prioritize investment in areas that demonstrate the highest need for improvement.
- 7. Implementing Activate ATL presents numerous opportunities for DPR to help address the variety of challenges facing the city such as blight, safety and crime, homelessness, lack of amenities, and affordable housing.

Addressing these critical findings will meet the parks and recreation needs of city residents and generate economic, social, and environmental benefits for the entire Atlanta community.

Activate ATL is rooted in the belief that great parks and recreation systems make great cities. The pages that follow evaluate the system, define community priorities, and provide a roadmap for making strategic and equitable investments through the year 2030 and beyond.



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WHY ACTIVATE ATL?



1.1 | Introduction

Activate ATL: Recreation and Parks for All is a comprehensive plan that provides recommendations for provision of facilities, programs and services; park land acquisition and development; maintenance and operations; and administration and management over the next ten years.

Fundamentally, this plan serves to address the parks and recreation needs of our current and future residents. Also, importantly, the plan looks toward ways to make our parks and recreation system an even more impactful and cherished component of our city, helping to solve our complex challenges through creativity and cooperation. The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has a central role to play in our city. In order to prepare a vision for improving our recreation and parks system, this plan involved nearly two years of research, review, public engagement, and design, to understand the current conditions and identify ways to make progress.

As Activate ATL was created, we faced significant challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic and movements for racial and social justice deeply impacted our lives. These events also helped change perceptions about what we need to enjoy a high quality of life in our city.

There is increasing awareness that parks are more than just “nice to have” spaces, they are an essential part of our critical infrastructure. Parks and recreation services provide multiple benefits: they serve as social and cultural connectors; as the lifeblood of our natural environment; as sources of

personal health; and as foundations of economic strength.

They can also help address the complex issues in our communities—from physical and mental health to educational attainment; from stormwater management to affordable housing. They intersect in numerous ways with the five citywide goals established by Mayor Bottoms’ One Atlanta agenda.

Atlanta’s population is growing, and this plan comes at a crucial moment, giving us the opportunity to prepare for future residents and continued change. Through increased coordination and collaboration with other city departments and partners, Activate ATL envisions an enhanced role for the parks and recreation system to assist in tackling the challenges Atlanta faces.

Activate ATL is critical for advancing Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms’ citywide goals for ONE Atlanta:

- 1. A safe and welcoming city;
- 2. World-class employees, infrastructure, and services;
- 3. An ethical, transparent, and fiscally responsible government;
- 4. Thriving neighborhoods, communities, and businesses; and
- 5. Residents who are equipped for success.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

This is called a Comprehensive Plan because it looks at the entire system of citywide parks and recreational offerings. Comprehensive Planning is a common technique that is used to identify parks and recreation needs in a community, predict future demand, and build a shared vision and framework for long-term parks and recreation system development.

The plan evaluates our:

- facilities, programs, and services;
- approach to acquiring and developing park land;
- maintenance and operations; and
- overall administration and management.

Carrying this out through an assessment of the system—and comparing our performance to peer cities across a wide range of metrics—is also part of ensuring that DPR achieves accreditation through the National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). This marker of high performance is achieved by only 1% of parks agencies across the U.S.

The objective of Activate ATL is to lay out a series of actions for the future of Atlanta’s recreation and parks system, and to establish a strategy to implement those plans over the next 10 years (2021–2030). Activate ATL is a big effort, focused on big ideas, which will ultimately lead to real changes throughout the parks and recreation system.

The Activate ATL Approach

Several distinct phases go into the creation of a comprehensive plan, each playing an important role and building on the work previously completed. The entire process involves nearly two years of development, with extensive staff, community, agency partners, and input from elected officials.

1	Existing Conditions Analyses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of existing and proposed plans• Review of existing and projected demographics• Review and analysis of existing recreation and parks system
2	Needs + Priorities Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public Input• Research and data analysis• Comparison to peer cities and national benchmarks
3	Long-Range Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboratively develop a Long-Range Vision to respond to Atlantans’ recreation and park needs and address the complex issues most important to residents
4	Strategy to Implement the Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)• Identify CIP and operations funding sources• Establish a phased implementation strategy
5	Final Plan + Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public review and comment• Adoption by city• Final plan release

1.2 | Atlanta Yesterday and Today

Planning for the future of recreation and parks in Atlanta requires understanding our past. For 140 years, Atlanta has had a parks department that provides natural and recreational spaces and programming. But there is a longer history of interaction between people and land that has brought us to where we are today.

For thousands of years before there was a city called Atlanta, indigenous people lived on this land. Their legacy is still present throughout our landscape; much of Peachtree Road and other major corridors follow ancient ridgeline trails.

Atlanta's origins as a rail hub meant the city was important to the antebellum southern economy, and a focal point of the Civil War. Reconstruction brought the promise of a "New South," but segregation and systemic injustices continued the legacy of deep racial division. Despite these social challenges, the city grew consistently through the first half of the 20th century—expanding both its land area and population to become a city defined by its varied single family home neighborhoods under a canopy of Piedmont forest.

Atlanta's central role in the Civil Rights Movement signaled social progress, but underlying prejudices were not fully resolved. In the 1970s and '80s, Atlanta's suburbs boomed, while urban core neighborhoods struggled. Many areas saw significant depopulation and disinvestment. In 1996, the Centennial Olympic Games was a catalyst for investment and development that spurred a new wave of growth and revitalization which continues today.



ABOVE Grant Park was the city's first major park, and its Lake Abana was a popular site for boating, as seen in this image from the 1890s.

OPPOSITE ABOVE Martin Luther King, Jr. addresses civil rights activists in Hurt Park, 1963.

OPPOSITE BELOW Adams Park was a Fulton County park that became part of the city's system when it was annexed in 1952.

ATLANTA

PARKS AND RECREATION HISTORY



OLMSTED FIRM HIRED

Commissioner Joel Hurt convinces the Park Commission to hire the Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects, to develop a comprehensive plans for Grant, Springvale, and Mims Parks.



FIRST PUBLIC POOL

Atlanta's first public pool opens at Piedmont Park. The rudimentary pool is an enclosed portion of Lake Clara Mere.



FIRST PUBLIC GOLF COURSE

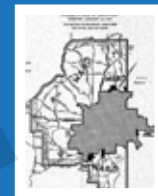
Construction begins on Atlanta's first public golf links at Piedmont Park. The course closed in 1979.

1910

1920

POST WAR BOOM

1949-1960



PLAN OF IMPROVEMENT

The Plan of Improvement results in large portions of Fulton County being annexed by the city. The city adds 57 Fulton parks, including Chastain and Adams Parks, increasing Atlanta's parks from 1,600 to 2,300 acres.

1952



George Simons, Parks Manager

George Simons assumes the role of General Manager of parks, a position he will hold for 34 years.

1931-1965



ECONOMIC SLUM AND OIL CRISIS

URBAN RENEWAL

Urban Renewal Projects, or the leveling and reconstruction of "slum areas," often resulted in displacement of African American residents. These federally funded projects sometimes incorporate public parks in planning stages.

1956-1974



POOLS DESEGREGATED

A federal court order results in the desegregation of Atlanta's public pools and all park space. The judgement declared all city ordinances on segregation as unconstitutional. The order is not enacted until the following season in 1963. Atlanta's pools were the last park facilities to be desegregated.

1962



SUMMER OF LOVE

The Summer of Love in San Francisco sparks a national cultural movement that will soon be felt in Atlanta. Hippies begin to occupy public parks, especially Piedmont Park, causing the Parks Department to question if and how to regulate the use of public space.

1967



SPRING SWING

A matched fundraising program raises \$150,000 for playground equipment. Citizens, the parks department, and the fundraiser's matching donor, C & S Bank, install new equipment in 67 playgrounds.

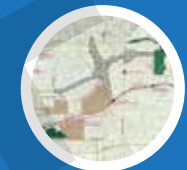
1971



ATLANTA TO HOST 1996 OLYMPICS

Atlanta is selected as the location of the 1996 Olympic Games. Winning the bid triggered a chain reaction of municipal beautification projects.

1990



FREEDOM PARK

After decades of legal battles beginning in the 1960s, an agreement is reached between community activism groups and GDOT over the planned Presidential parkway and the "Great Park" plan. Freedom Park and Parkway are the results of the agreement.

1991

COVID-19

In the last few years, parks have played a critical role even in the face of adversity. In addition to offering a respite for the community to enjoy fresh air, physical exercise and spaces for families to gather during the COVID-19 pandemic, parks have also been host to many peaceful social justice protests, highlighting their role as a space for civic activism.

PRESENT DAY



ATLANTA'S ZOO

George Gress buys out a defunct circus and donates the animals to the city of Atlanta. Grant Park is chosen as the location for the Gress Zoo.

1889



PIEDMONT PARK PURCHASED

The city purchases Piedmont Park, paying \$93,000 for 185 acres. The site was the former location of several cotton expositions as well as home of the Piedmont Driving Club.

1904



WASHINGTON PARK DONATED

Six acres are donated to establish a park for African Americans. Washington Park was the first park that Atlanta's African American population was allowed to use, opening 40 years after Grant Park.

1919

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

2020

1882

GRANT PARK DONATED

L. P. Grant deeds 100 acres to the city of Atlanta for the establishment of a city park, marking the beginning of Atlanta's park system.

1915

LAKWOOD PARK BECOMES FAIRGROUNDS

The Southeastern Fair Association is formed and leases Lakewood from the city, developing it as Atlanta's new fairgrounds.

1929-1939

DEPRESSION

The Great Depression begins. Funds will be drastically cut from the parks budget amid an increased need for recreation services for adults out of work.

1941-1945

WORLD WAR II

GOLF COURSES DESEGREGATED

In Holmes vs. Atlanta, the Supreme Court rules in favor of Alfred, Oliver and H. M. Holmes, forcing the city to desegregate all municipal golf courses.

1955



1965-1972

JACK DELIUS, PARK MANAGER

Following George Simons' retirement, Jack Delius assumes the role of Parks Manager. He will head the department for the next 10 years.



1971

ATLANTA GAY PRIDE FESTIVAL

The first Pride March occurs in Atlanta, terminating in a celebration at Piedmont Park. The march becomes an annual event and recurs every year in June, always ending with a large festival at the Park.



1986

PARK PRIDE

Park Pride is created as an advisory committee by Parks Commissioner Betsy Baker to help citizens take on more responsibility of parks management as the parks department budget continues to tighten. In 1989, Park Pride becomes a non-profit organization.



Atlanta Today

Over the last 20 years, much of Atlanta has thrived. DPR has embraced an expanding role, collaborating with partners to keep pace with a booming city. Growing partnerships, like those with Park Pride, Trees Atlanta, the Atlanta Beltline, and the Department of Watershed Management, have led to healthier parks and stronger communities.

With almost 50% tree canopy coverage, our identity as the “City in the Forest” is proudly celebrated. Our streams and waterways are continuing to be improved, as focus is placed on both their environmental condition and recreational opportunities. DPR is looking to recent planning visions like *Atlanta City Design: Nature* to understand how to strengthen our native ecology in the face of a changing climate and the pressures of development.

As the city grows, our parks and recreation system must grow along with it. Since 2000, the Department has added 40% more park land and increased its budget by 46%. Concurrently, in-town neighborhoods have been invigorated by park and trail projects, such as Historic Fourth Ward Park, Westside Park, and the Atlanta BeltLine, while business districts across the city have also grown.

Continued growth requires collaborative efforts and leadership to ensure that parks and recreation resources are equitably distributed, and that legacy residents can continue to enjoy the health, economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits that local neighborhood public park spaces provide.

BELOW Historic Fourth Ward Park, developed by the Atlanta BeltLine in partnership with DPR, has become a national example of stormwater management incorporated into public greenspace.



Atlanta’s Parks and Recreation System

374 PARKS

27 INDOOR RECREATION CENTERS

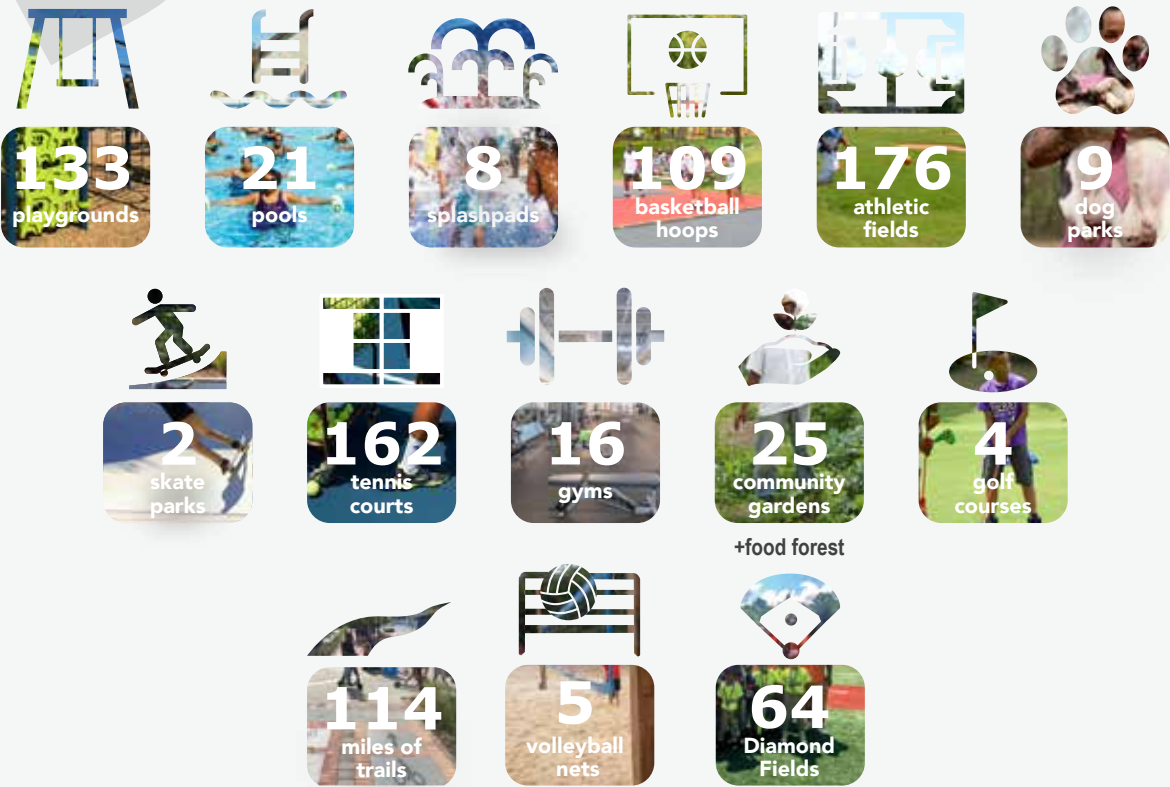
PARK LAND & GREENSPACE

4,198 acres
of Fields, Forests,
Playgrounds, Pools,
Picnic spots, Art,
and More!

INDOOR RECREATION SPACE

562,277 sq ft
of Gyms, Aquatics,
Computer labs,
Classes, Courts,
and More!

AMENITIES





ABOVE Opened in 2017, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreation and Aquatic Center replaced an aging natatorium. The new 64,000-square foot facility is a state-of-the-art, light-filled building that serves the nearby Sweet Auburn district, as well as residents across the city.

A Legacy of Parks and Recreation as Essential Services

When first developed in the late 1800s, neighborhood parks and centers served as places where residents could go to receive essential services, such as a warm meal, nursing care, hygiene, workforce training, education to assimilate to the American culture, and other programs.

Continuing this tradition, challenges that have tested our community have often been met with innovation in the recreation and parks system. Seeing a need to help struggling communities during the Great Recession, in 2011, the Department transformed the City's recreation centers into Centers of Hope. Centers of Hope are the recreation centers where the Department invests in youth and/or senior programming.

Parks have also regularly been used as a community gathering hub and a space for civic activism. As one of the centers of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the city's parks were often used to host peaceful civil rights demonstrations.

In light of numerous protests in recent years for racial and social justice, our parks system has continued to play an important role as host to many peaceful protests.

Parks also continue to be the site of some of Atlanta's most prominent gatherings, including the annual Pride festival in support of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, parks are often the site of farmers markets, neighborhood festivals, and other community events.

ABOVE DPR staff and volunteers provide food for Atlantans in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parks and Recreation During a Pandemic

Due to the significant hardships created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of parks and recreation gained new value to many members of our community.

At the onset of the pandemic, businesses, schools, playgrounds, and other park amenities in Atlanta were closed to help slow the spread of the virus. However, under the leadership of Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, open spaces in parks remained open, providing critical relief to residents confined to the indoors.

DPR also stepped up to assist community members in need, providing meals, virtual programming, on-site Learning Pods, and other resources.

The possibilities for the parks and recreation system to be a binding force and providing means for connection in the community requires us to seek bold ideas. Despite the challenges of our time, there are profound opportunities for parks and recreation to play a greater role in improving the quality of life for all Atlanta residents.

Addressing recreation and parks system needs and tackling Atlanta's social and economic inequities should involve extensive partnership-building and close collaboration across city departments and organizations.

1.3 | An Equitable Parks and Recreation System

Everyone deserves access to safe, quality, and well-maintained parks. Recreation and Parks for All means achieving equitable access to quality recreation and parks for all Atlantans, no matter your age, culture, race, ability, gender, or ZIP code.

Equity in parks and recreation requires an understanding that historic injustices have resulted in marginalized communities with parks that require more extensive revitalization than in neighborhoods that have historically been supported. Equity emphasizes neighborhoods getting the resources they need, as opposed to all neighborhoods getting equal resources.

Activate ATL has a critical focus on cross-departmental collaboration and activating community voices to help grow equity in Atlanta. It is only through prioritizing the leadership and participation of voices who reflect the communities we serve that we can best support the people at the heart of the issues.



ABOVE A new boardwalk installed as part of the trail network around Rosel Fann Recreation Center in 2016.

OPPOSITE ABOVE The new playground at Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park, opened in 2019, was built above an underground stormwater storage system to help alleviate flooding in the English Avenue neighborhood.

OPPOSITE BELOW The Thomasville Resource Center was opened in 2018 to provide computer and Internet access, as well as community meeting space.



The Vision for One Atlanta

As city leaders, we must aspire to make Atlanta a city that supports all residents—especially communities that have been historically left behind. Equity is a driving force of Activate ATL, and is foundational to our shared vision of One Atlanta: an affordable, resilient, and equitable Atlanta; a safe and welcoming city; a city with world-class employees, infrastructure, and services; an ethical, transparent, and fiscally responsible government; thriving neighborhoods, communities, and businesses; and residents who are equipped for success.

In this vision, we are a city in which all Atlanta residents will have equitable access to high-quality parks and recreational activities that will meet their needs and promote health, well-being, and quality of life.

As a citywide team, we embody the principles and performance of One Atlanta. We are galvanized by the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, which works with city leaders, departments, and partners to operationalize the One Atlanta vision. The Office leverages the combined power of government, private and non-profit partners, and communities to dismantle systemic inequities and barriers to opportunity—demonstrating to the world the power of aligning strong leadership with collaborative action to build an Atlanta that creates opportunities for all.

DPR and Activate ATL have a critical role in this work and focus on equity that will continue to be supported by cross-departmental collaboration and working closely with community to help achieve our Vision for One Atlanta.



ABOVE The ribbon cutting for the Westside Park in 2021 featured Mayor Bottoms, City staff, and councilmembers celebrating the promise of a new park to serve both the Atlanta region and the surrounding neighborhoods which have faced years of disinvestment.

Activate ATL: Focus on Equity

Consistent with how DPR has strived to allocate improvement dollars equitably in recent years, the Activate ATL Plan proposes to formalize and operationalize the consideration of disparities in access to parks and recreation through its focus on equity. This focus is supported by goals that look to ensure the consistent and systemic fair, just, and impartial investment in parks, programs, and people to:

- Invest and improve the quality, appearance, and experience provided by the parks and recreation system in all areas throughout the city.
- Connect and facilitate safe connectivity and create awareness of the offerings and benefits of the parks and recreation system in all areas throughout the city.
- Grow and keep pace with the city's growing population and increase resources to improve, maintain, and operate the parks and recreation system in all areas throughout the city.

What Does Equity in Parks and Recreation Mean?

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) has Equity as one of its Three Pillars and has established a Working Definition of Equitable Park & Recreation Access, which DPR will look to as a guide:

The just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks and green space, recreation facilities, as well as programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone. When people have just and fair access, our health and social well-being improve, and our communities can protect and better recover from environmental, social, and economic challenges.

A fundamental goal of Activate ATL is using an iterative and inclusive process to help break down barriers by prioritizing marginalized communities that are in need of more extensive revitalization. Guiding the city towards meaningful progress in addressing equity gaps and breaking down barriers requires understanding their roots.

Many communities have experienced systemic injustices and historic inequities in access to public services and economic opportunities. These inequities have impacted park investments over time, resulting in geographic disparities around park amenities.

Understanding Historical Inequities

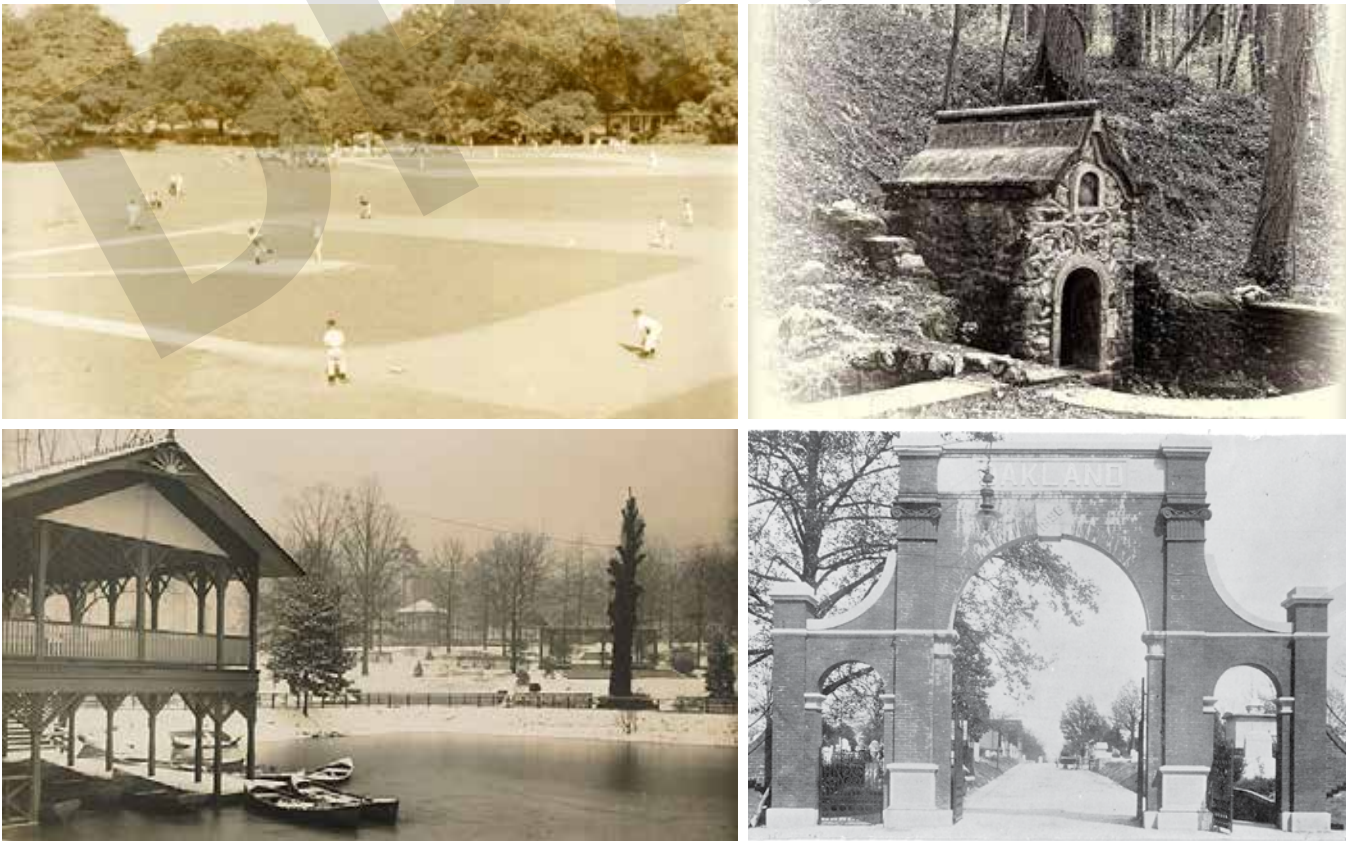
Inequities in Atlanta have deep roots. These inequities are revealed by looking at current demographic and socioeconomic attributes in relation to areas that have experienced systemic injustices in the past.

Jim Crow policies, for example, including the racial and class segregation and widespread systemic injustices that occurred for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, have left a mark in Atlanta’s socioeconomic landscape.

The maps on the following pages demonstrate how many areas continue to face inequities after they were given the lowest rating for mortgage loans by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation in 1938. This rating put many services out of reach for residents of certain neighborhoods, based on race or ethnicity during the Jim Crow era.

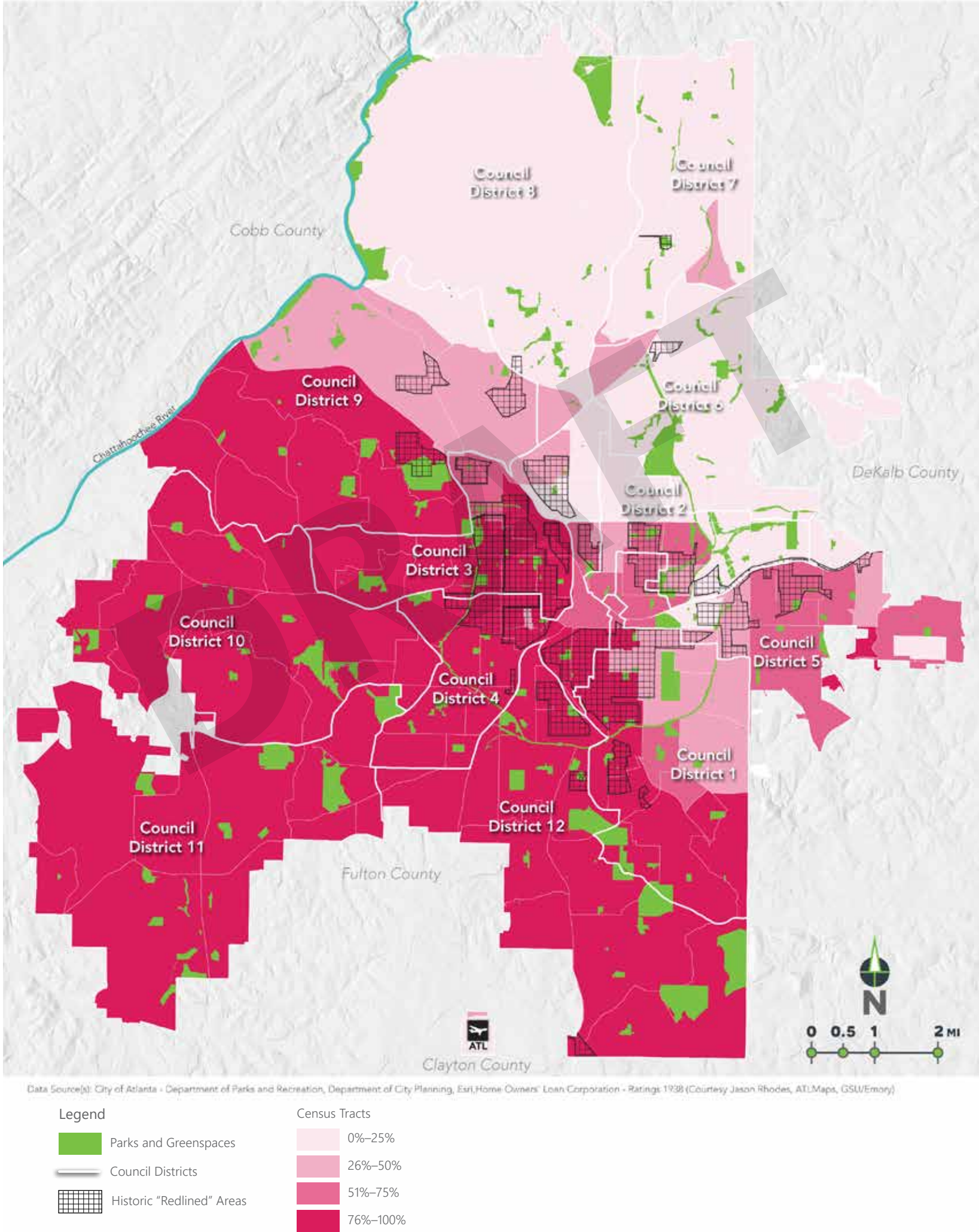
This practice, commonly known as “redlining,” was a deliberate and intentional discriminatory practice that marginalized Black and Brown communities across the country, including in the City of Atlanta.

The result of this discriminatory practice can still be felt decades later. As the city has expanded geographically, these redlined areas appear to have functioned as the edge between two socioeconomically divided areas.



ABOVE Historic photos of Atlanta parks, including (clockwise from top left) Piedmont Park, Cascade Springs, Oakland Cemetery, and Grant Park.

OPPOSITE The percentage of residents identifying as Black or African-American per Census Tract in 2019.



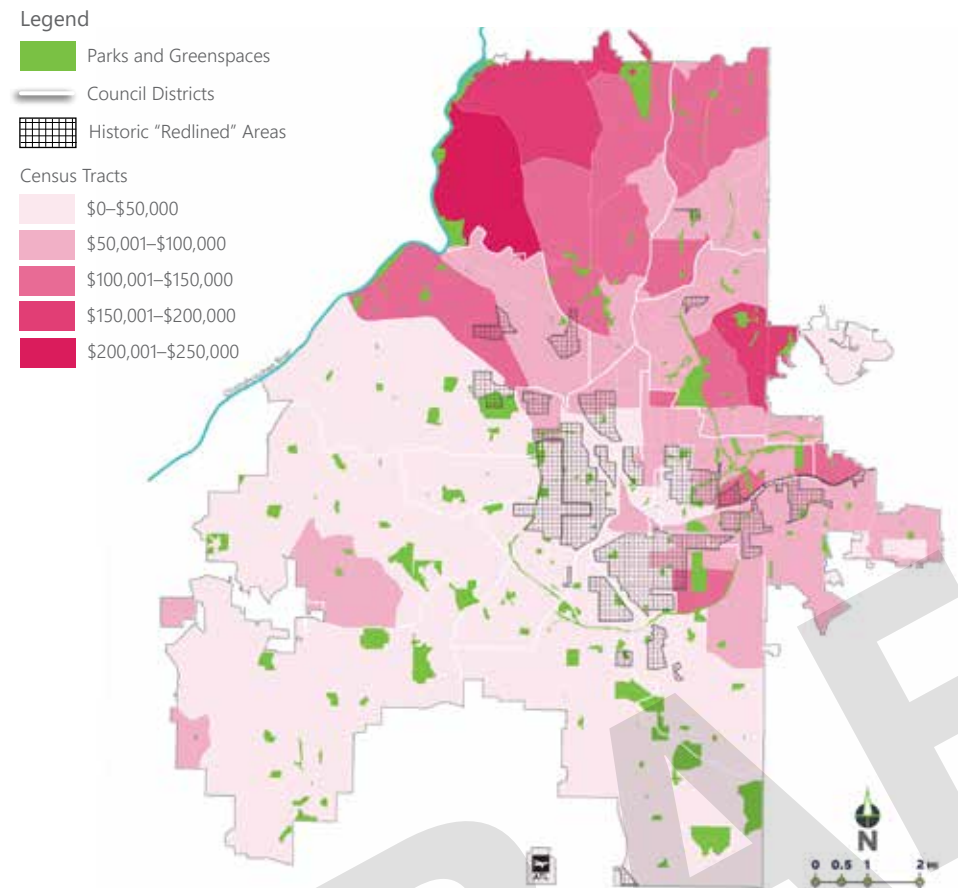
Data Source(s): City of Atlanta - Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of City Planning, Esri, Home Owners' Loan Corporation - Ratings 1938 (Courtesy Jason Rhodes, ATLMaps, GSU/Emory)

Legend

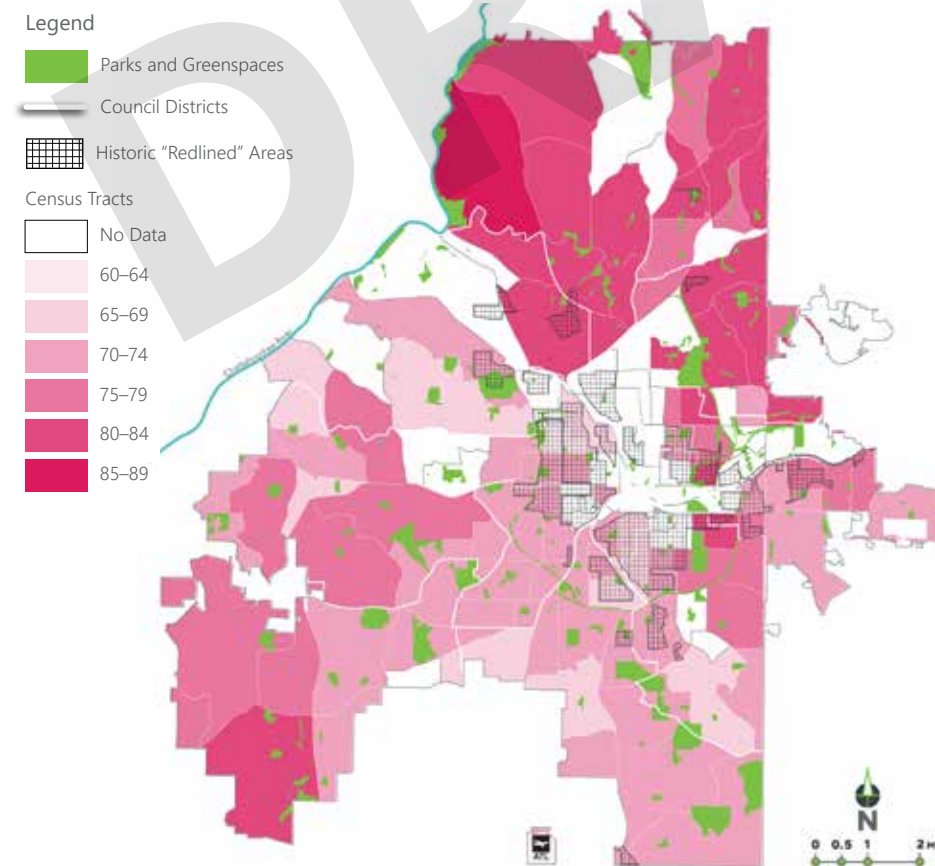
- Parks and Greenspaces
- Council Districts
- Historic "Redlined" Areas

Census Tracts

- 0%–25%
- 26%–50%
- 51%–75%
- 76%–100%



LEFT The Median Household Income (MHI) per Census Tract in 2019.



LEFT The life expectancy (in years) per Census Tract in 2019.

Role of Conservancies and Historical Investment

DPR is committed to understanding and undoing these historic patterns of injustice through a systemic approach. It is critical to acknowledge and address these disparities as we work to help make Atlanta a more equitable city.

A key factor to addressing parks and recreation equity is understanding the impact of private resources and that every park begins from a different "starting point." While historic inequities impacted park development in certain areas of the city through land use patterns, legal systems, redlining, and other racially restrictive covenants, parks in other areas of the city may have benefited from decades of supportive policies and investment.

Increased support is typically linked to surrounding high-quality parks, strong park stewardship, and in many instances, a high quality of life in the surrounding areas. The impact of private resources and park conservancies inadvertently contribute to inequities in parks. Conservancies like those in Piedmont Park, Grant Park, Chastain Park, and others, all bring more resources to their parks, which are not available to parks in lower-income communities.

Considering the "starting point" of these parks, future investment in historically underserved parks may look very different than areas that have benefited from decades of supportive policies and investment.

Conservancies vs. "Friends of" Groups

Some parks in Atlanta, primarily large parks that serve the metro region, are supported by a conservancy. Conservancies are non-profit organizations with a staff that assists DPR in maintaining and programming the park. They rely on philanthropic donations to support their projects and operations, in addition to revenues from park amenities and events. There are also non-profit parks organizations that support many parks through grants and other improvements, including acquiring land for new parks. The two most prominent in Atlanta are the Trust for Public Land and The Conservation Fund.

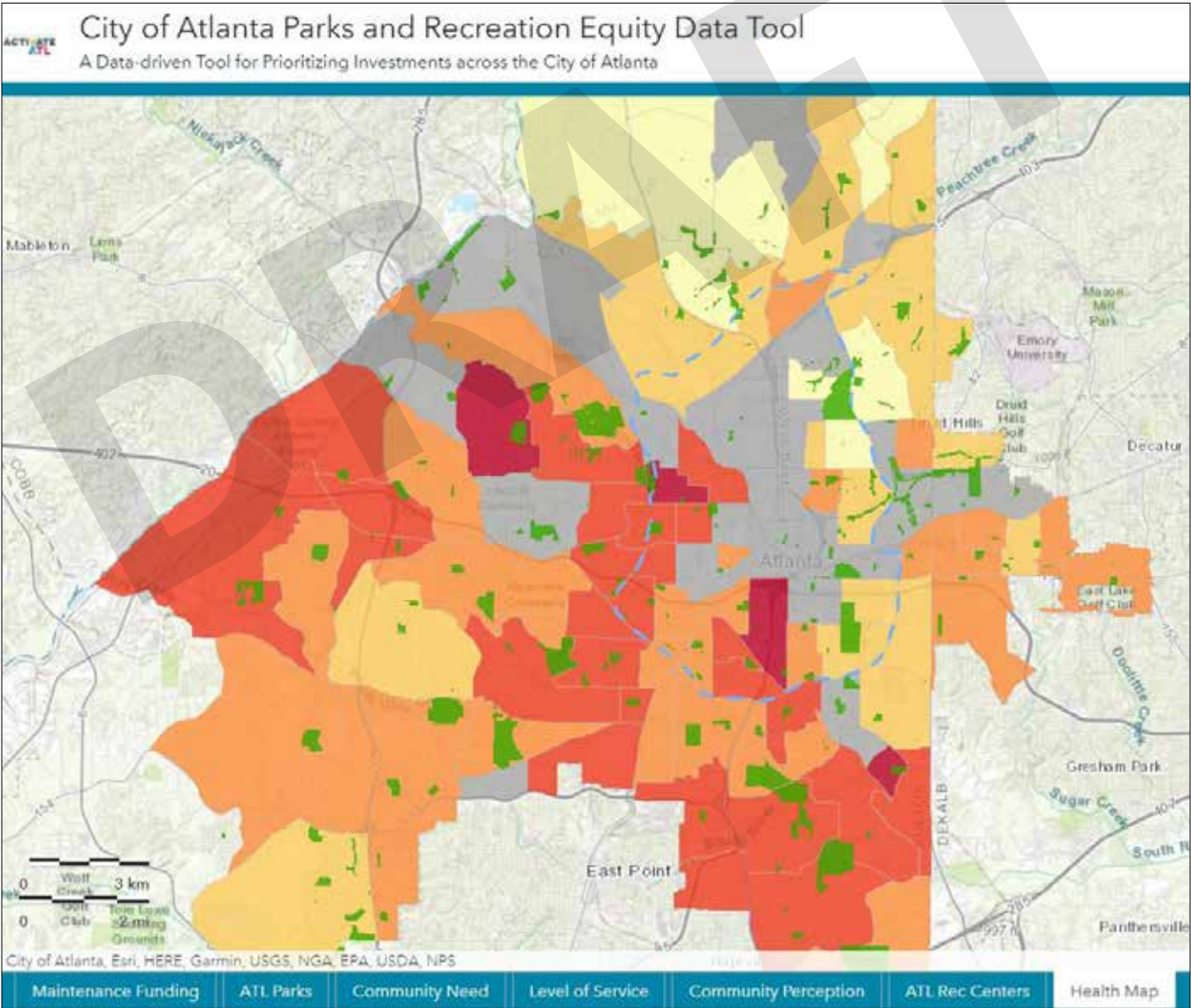
In contrast, a "Friends of" group typically serves one neighborhood park or small park and is composed of active neighbors and volunteers who offer their own time and resources to make improvements to the park. In Atlanta, Friends of groups are organized and supported with grants by Park Pride.

Activate ATL will use data-driven models to accurately identify these disparities. This will help determine strategies to eliminate disparities, measure success, and ensure equitable funding practices for capital investments, programming, and maintenance.

Parks and Recreation Health Equity

Neighborhood disparities in health also exist across the City of Atlanta. For example, noncommunicable disease burdens such as heart disease, stroke, obesity, and diabetes vary significantly by neighborhood and census tract. Because of these differences, we also see large gaps in life expectancy across the city. In fact, there is a 24-year difference in life expectancy between some neighborhoods that are only a few miles apart.

Fortunately, DPR recognizes the important role that parks and recreation can have on reducing disparities and improving overall health and quality of life for Atlantans. Therefore, the parks and recreation Equity Data Tool was created to support data-driven decision-making through an equity lens.



ABOVE The Parks and Recreation Equity Data Tool Health Map depicts life expenctancy and other health outcomes for census tracts across the city.

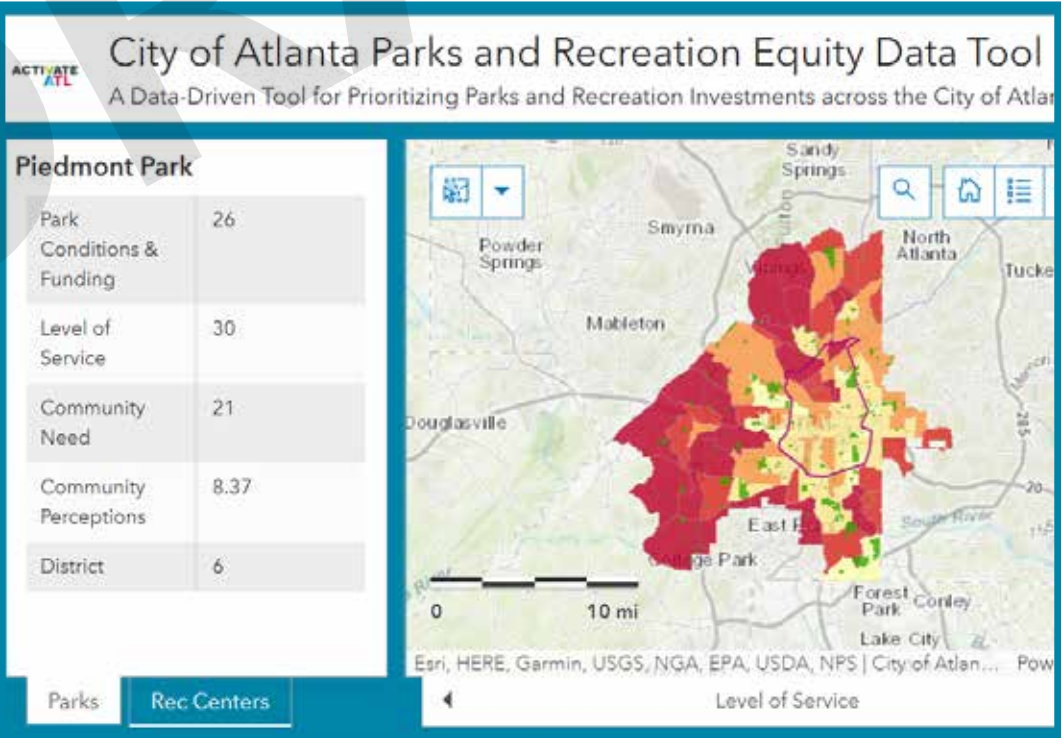
Parks and Recreation Equity Data Tool

The Parks and Recreation Equity Data Tool is the result of a two-year partnership between the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation and Bloomberg Associates to advance park and recreation equity across the city of Atlanta. To help the city prioritize neighborhoods, parks, and recreation centers with the greatest need for investment and capital improvement, Bloomberg Associates created an interactive decision-making tool to guide these efforts.

The data tool will offer an interactive method of evaluating over 300 of Atlanta’s parks and recreation centers, while also measuring neighborhood determinants of health for each of the census tracts surrounding the parks and recreation centers. The data tool is designed as a mechanism for prioritizing parks, recreation centers, and neighborhoods with the greatest need for park investment and capital improvement. It can also be utilized to measure, monitor, and evaluate DPR’s efforts and impact over time.

DPR will be able to determine which parks to prioritize for future funding and investments informed by the data available in the tool. DPR will also use the tool to track baseline park evaluations, community perceptions of Atlanta parks and recreation services, and neighborhood determinants of health.

Furthermore, parks and recreation efforts will be connected to health equity and life expectancy by providing specific park and recreation recommendations that can improve Atlantans’ health and quality of life.



ABOVE The Parks and Recreation Equity Data Tool Parks Map provides a color-coded score for each park, which includes four scoring categories.

National Trends for Equitable Park Access

Today, there is still work to be done in creating an equitable parks and recreation system for the City of Atlanta. This understanding is supported by national data trends as well as findings from community input.

The Trust for Public Land has recently reported that equity in park access is an issue across all scored cities in the United States. People of color in the 100 ParkScore cities have access to 44% less park space than neighborhoods that are predominantly white.

Another key metric of equitable park access is the number of residents within a 10-minute walk to a quality park. Currently, 72% of Atlanta residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park from their home. Although this is better than the national average of 55%, there is still progress to be made.

Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms has signed onto the 10-Minute Walk Campaign and endorsed the vision that 100% of Atlantans should have safe access to a quality park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home by 2050.

Current Resident Feedback

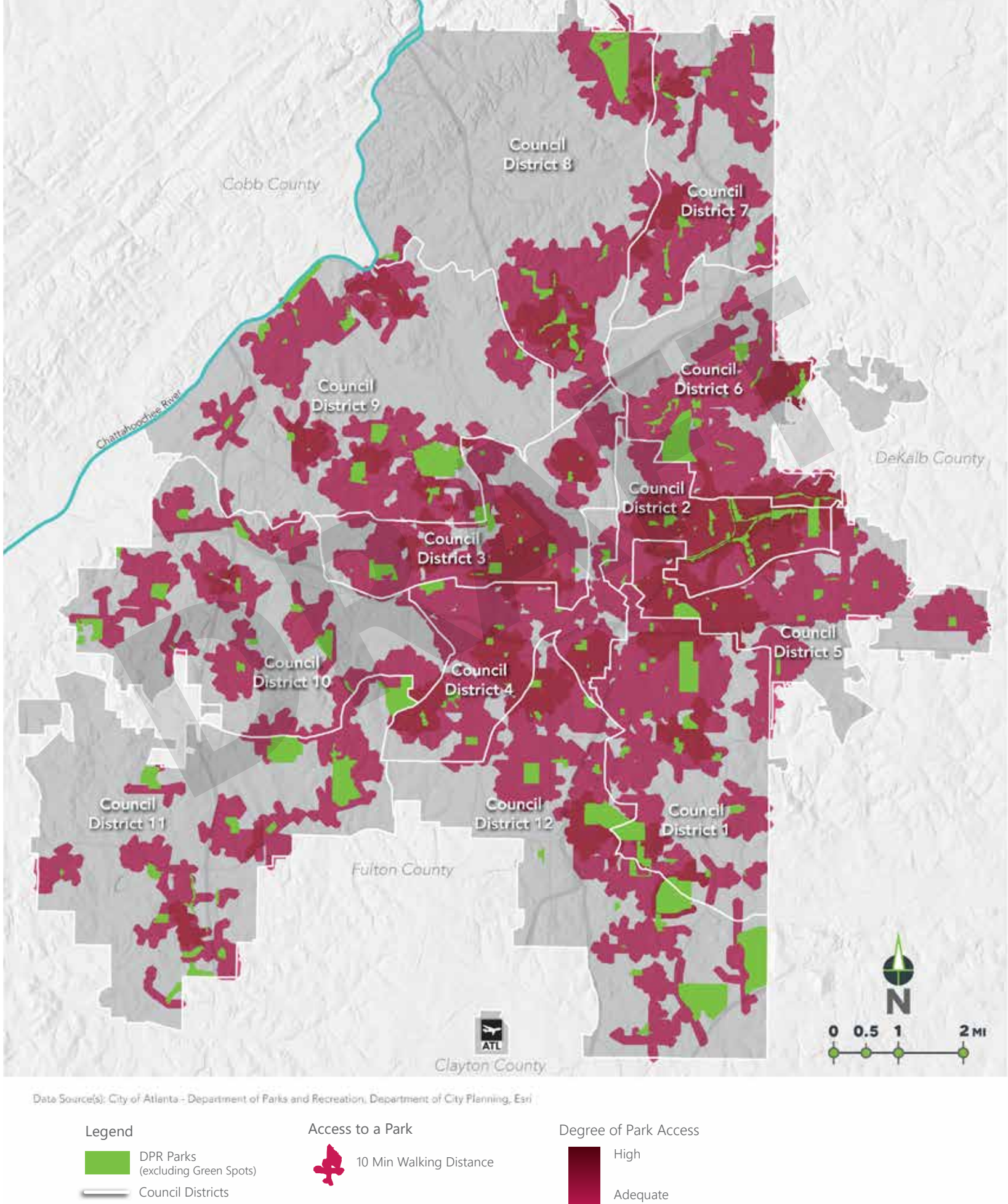
Findings from the ActivateATL Statistically Valid Survey further support this focus on equity. 24% of residents who responded to the survey stated that park facilities were not well maintained, which is twice the national average. However, it is important to note that the survey was completed during the pandemic at a time when, due to travel restrictions, local park usage may have been increasing and the Department was experiencing staffing challenges.

Across all sources of public input, North Atlantans consistently rated the physical condition of DPR parks and amenities higher than South Atlantans. Additionally, 90% of statistically valid survey respondents stated that they were very supportive or somewhat supportive of improving and upgrading existing parks and outdoor recreation facilities.

Underpinning all these findings is a call to equitably improve and expand our recreation and parks system. An equitable parks and recreation system is shaped by the community, for the community. Activate ATL is a living, breathing document that calls for continued transparency and accountability through plan implementation with a top priority to listen to the community, learn, and lead an effort to improve the health and wellness of Atlantans and provide an equitable parks and recreation system..

Close collaboration with partners, advocates, and the public has been a critical strategy throughout the Activate ATL process to ultimately ensure future decision making directly reflects the needs and desires of the community.

OPPOSITE Park access within a 10-minute walk across Atlanta shows there is widespread coverage across the center of the city, but large gaps exist in northwest and southwest Atlanta, as well as scattered gaps in every council district.



1.4 | Engagement

Recreation & Parks for All Means Hearing FROM All!

Public engagement for Activate ATL was the most inclusive and robust outreach effort the Department has ever undertaken, and aimed to ensure that everybody had an opportunity to participate. This was achieved by utilizing a wide range of technologies and outreach methods to help reduce barriers to access and foster a sense of community, belonging, and public ownership in the master planning process.

There is continued opportunity to ensure ongoing engagement by residents. Community engagement helps create a more equitable system by developing plans that directly reflect the community it serves. As part of the public engagement for Activate ATL, we worked closely with many local organizations and community representatives committed to advancing equity in the City of Atlanta.

One community member stated that, "First and foremost, city government must have the political will to drive transformative change within the park system in order to achieve equity in how all resources are shared and how all parks are maintained."

To achieve this, we must ensure that everyone has a seat at the table with the opportunity to share their voice. By utilizing representative community feedback, we can build a shared vision for tomorrow and improve existing processes today. To build this shared vision over the next 10 years, DPR will continue to:

- Create compelling and meaningful opportunities to engage
- Provide transparent access to information
- Ensure engagement is inclusive of Atlanta's diverse communities
- Support the inclusion of historically marginalized and often underrepresented groups with intentional and active outreach
- Minimize barriers to access such that everyone can have an opportunity to participate

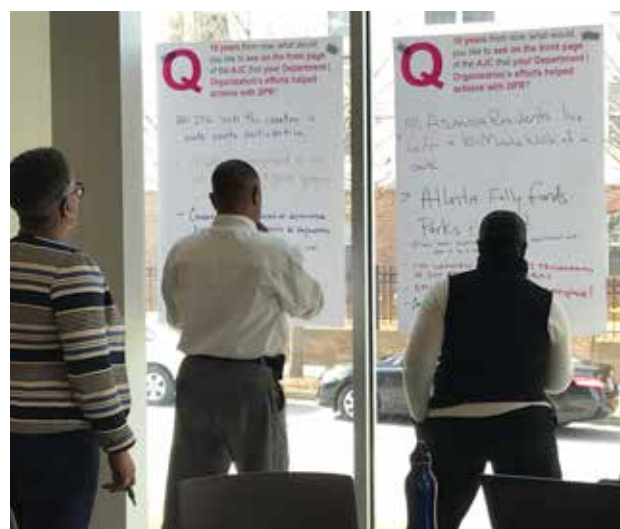


16
Virtual
Public
Meetings

1,867
Responses to Online
Survey



250
Lawn
Signs in
Parks



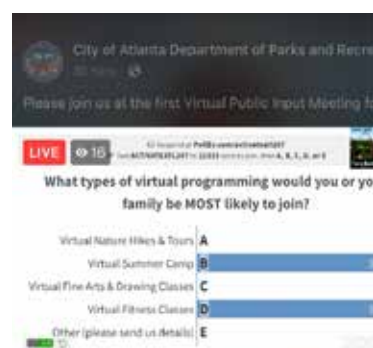
57
Focus
Groups

1,227
Responses to
Statistically-
Valid Survey



10,000+
Atlantans across every city ZIP code
weighed in on ActivateATL

6,608
Public Meeting
Engagements



717
Virtual Public
Meeting Attendees



What we heard from you...

“Our parks and rec spaces offer some of the only respite from quarantining. We’ve always used our local parks and playgrounds, but the last few months, it’s taken the place of all other physical activities.”

“We’ve been able to prioritize time each day for walks around and through our neighborhood park. It’s been a saving grace for our family!”

“The city needs sustainable green spaces. I really appreciate the steps DPR has taken to make more spaces available for general recreation during the pandemic, and support decisions like less cutting of the grass on some parks to help cut costs.”

“Atlanta has a great opportunity to become a world class outdoor recreation destination. Buy as much land as you can and preserve the tree cover and natural landscapes. Improve options for movement that don’t preference motor vehicles. Leverage MARTA train stops to branch out with paved or unpaved foot and bike paths that lead to natural areas with off-road bicycling and hiking trails.”

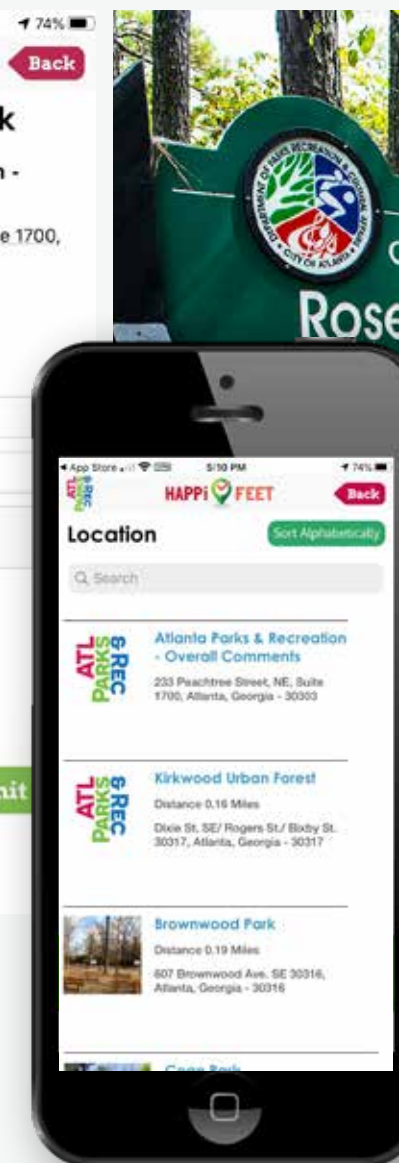
“There’s a fairly obvious divide between the quality/upkeep of parks in more affluent majority white neighborhoods. This inequality must be addressed.”

“Please work on improving existing parks and resources. Conservation should also be a priority. Invest more with the arts.”

“We love using the parks. Our biggest problems have been related to having no bathrooms nearby.”

In addition to all the public engagement methods introduced to collect feedback, Activate ATL also marked the launch of a HAPPiFEET mobile app for Atlanta parks.

The app allows users to share positive and/or negative experiences with DPR staff in real time through text, pictures, or video from parks and greenway trails. Because the app allows users to begin a maintenance request from the park site with documentation of the issue, it has been a valuable tool for streamlining maintenance.



Collectively, all these public engagement methods and many other analysis techniques led to an understanding of why we need to Activate ATL.

Key Findings from the Public Input

The following takeaways represent a sample of the most important findings from the Statistically Valid Survey. In most cases, these findings were also supported by the input from the online survey and stakeholders.

1 84% of respondents said that they had **used a park or recreation facility in the last year**. For comparison, the national average is just 77%.

2 24% of respondents said that they were **discouraged from using DPR amenities because they are not well maintained**.

3 When asked how they **would spend \$100** on parks and recreation, **most money was spent on improving the existing system**.

4 The **top 4 most important facilities** to residents were:
1) paved multi-purpose trails, 2) unpaved walking and hiking trails, 3) natural areas, and 4) restrooms at parks.

5 The **top 4 most important programs** to residents were:
1) health/wellness programs, 2) movies in the park, 3) local food, and 4) senior classes/leisure programs.

6 90% of respondents were **very supportive or somewhat supportive of improving, enhancing, upgrading, and renovating existing parks and outdoor recreation facilities** to meet resident needs.

7 89% of respondents were **very supportive or somewhat supportive of developing new trails, facilities, lighting, sidewalks, benches, and shelters** with connectivity between each other.

8 The **#1 preferred way** of learning about programs, activities, and special events were **emails and/or activity calendars**.

9 64% of respondents said they **don't know what programs are being offered**.

10 59% of respondents selected that the **top thing DPR could do to promote a healthier lifestyle** would be to **establish green markets that sell fresh fruits and vegetables in parks and indoor recreation centers**.

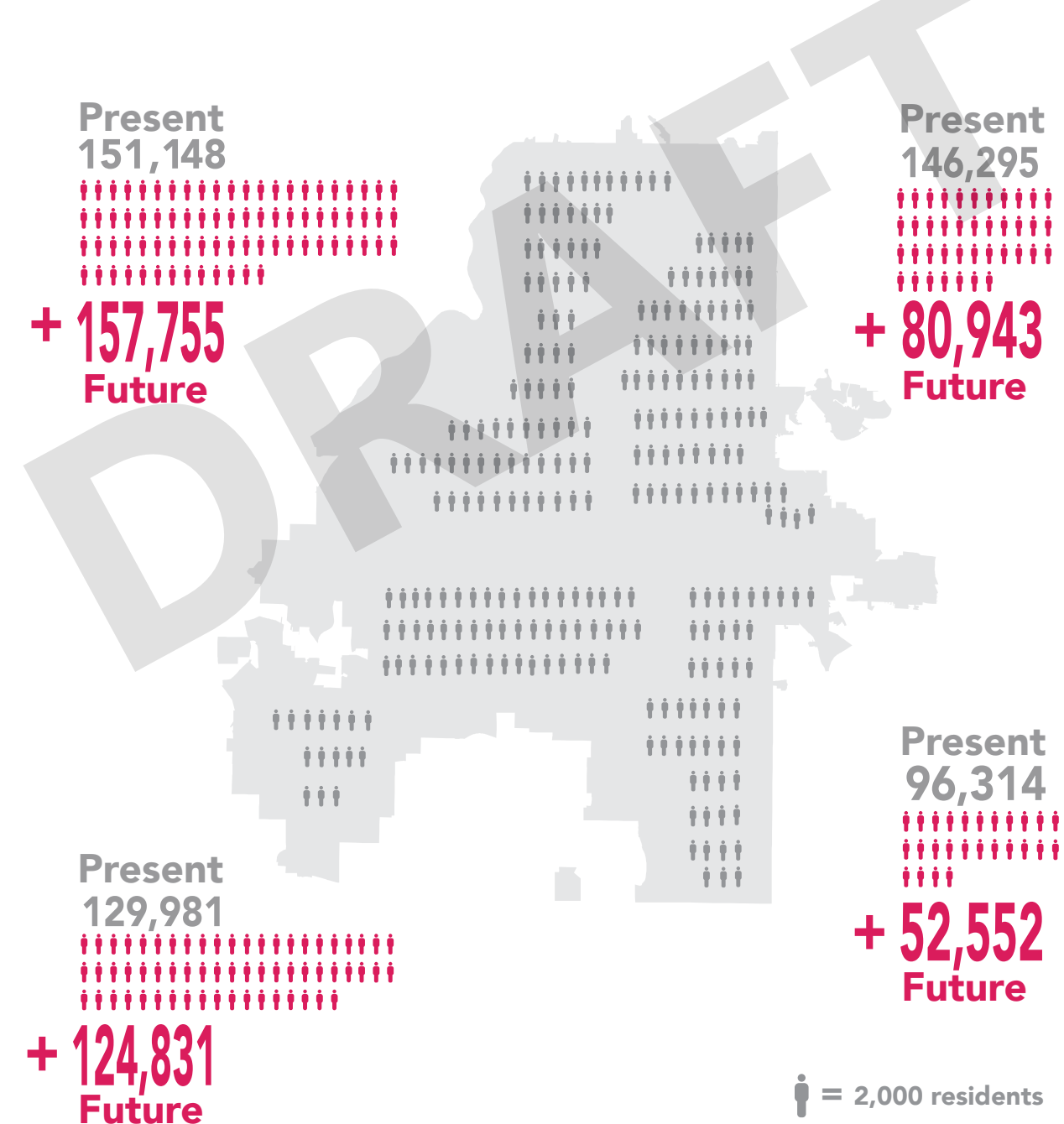
These findings represent the needs and priorities that Atlantans identified for the parks and recreation system, including prioritizing access to nature, health & wellness programs, improved communications, and a special focus on maintaining and improving what currently exists.

Public engagement is built on the idea that everyone who is affected by an issue impacting their community should have a say in the decision-making around it. The public engagement process was designed with inclusion in mind to result in better community representation in the feedback stage and help generate solutions that benefit the greatest number of people.

Our Activate ATL mission, vision, and action items will reflect all our shared objectives to maintain our quality of life and how we enjoy Atlanta's parks and recreational offerings as the system continues to grow.

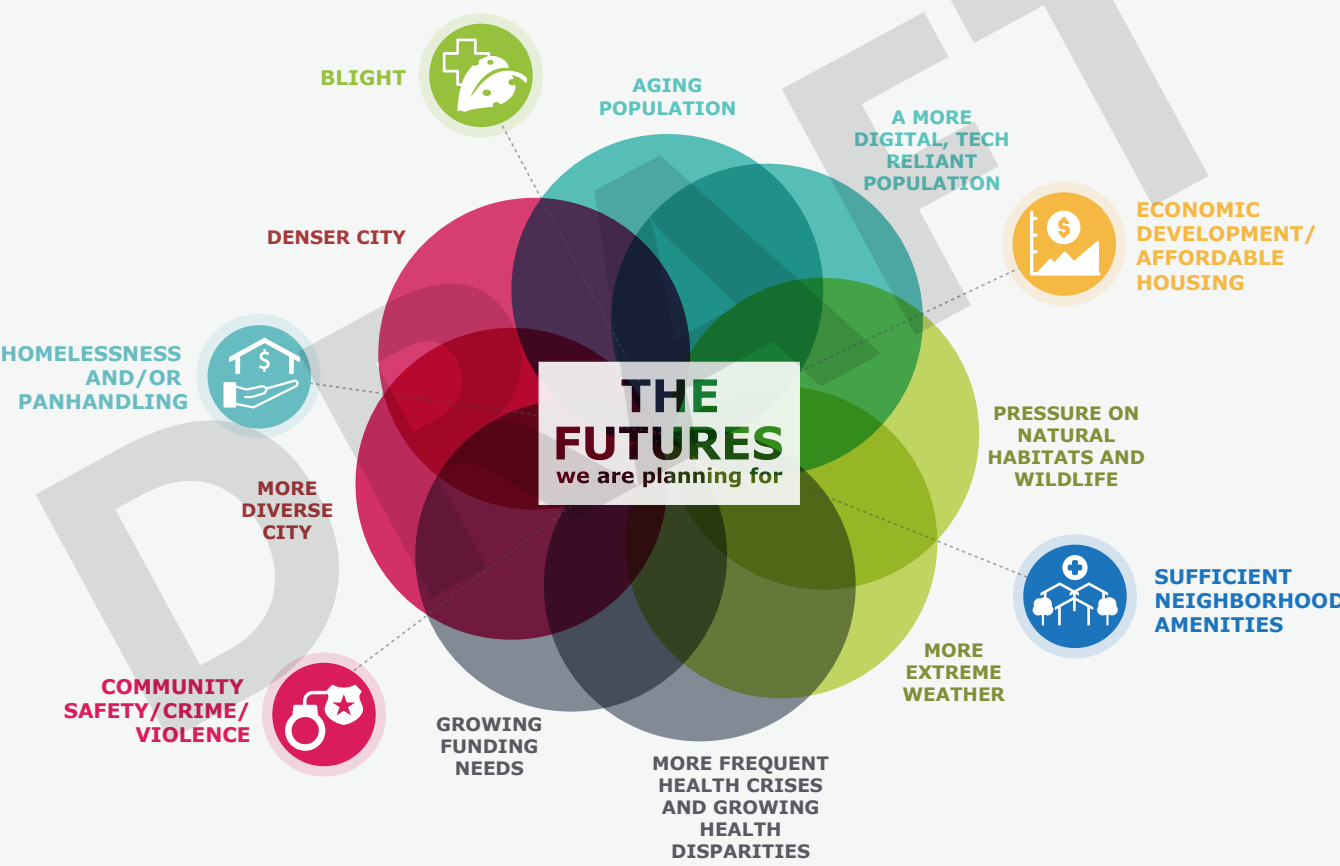
1.5 | Why We Need to Activate ATL

Over the next few decades, Atlanta’s population is projected to grow rapidly, adding as many as 400,000 residents by 2050. Population increase is expected to occur throughout the city, but guided by *Atlanta City Design*—the City’s vision for urban design and strategic growth—increasing density will be focused along specific “growth corridors.” Ensuring that parks and recreation resources in each quadrant of the city keep pace with this growth is a key focus of Activate ATL.



Atlanta’s Most Complex Challenges

As Atlanta grows, we know the need for recreation and parks services will become more pressing. We also know that the city faces a variety of changing conditions, many of which pose real challenges. These challenges exist at multiple levels, with some being faced by cities around the world; some challenges specific to DPR; and some identified by Atlanta residents as being particularly important (see Section 1.6).



The challenges specific to the Department of Parks and Recreation include:

- Ensuring public safety in parks and recreation areas
- Additional strain on facilities, services, and natural settings
- Backlog of maintenance needs
- Lack of awareness of parks and recreation offerings
- Inadequacy of traditional funding sources to meet growing needs
- Ensuring environmental stewardship and protection

Despite the complexity of these issues, there is great opportunity for the recreation and parks system to be a crucial component in addressing them. Activate ATL sets a game plan for how DPR can help transform Atlanta for the better and achieve Mayor Bottoms’ vision for ONE Atlanta.

1.6 | Addressing the Intersectionality of Issues

Activate ATL’s analysis revealed that DPR is much more than just parks, greenspaces, and recreation centers; it is a system that provides the community with essential services and places that serve as critical infrastructure.

This role is being increasingly recognized in the broader political environment and is raising important questions about how parks and recreation can help address the wide variety of challenges facing the city. For this reason, the surveys released for this plan asked respondents both “how DPR could help promote a healthier lifestyle” and about the “health, social, economic, and environmental challenges” facing their community. Top responses included:

- Blight
- Safety and Crime
- Homelessness
- Need for Neighborhood Amenities
- Affordable Housing

Activate ATL recognizes DPR’s unique position at the intersection of these issues. It also understands that DPR can help directly and indirectly address some of these community challenges that residents identified were most important to them. However, these challenges cannot be taken on by DPR alone; it also depends on strong partnerships and working across city departments to successfully address them.



RIGHT A member of the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District’s Social Impact Safety Team (A.S.I.S.T.) performs homelessness outreach in Woodruff Park.

Blight

To help address blight, DPR will ensure that park maintenance standards set the example for how properties should be maintained in areas with blight. DPR will also look for opportunities to build and improve parks and recreation centers in lock-step with community to provide additional opportunities.

Partners:

- Department of Public Works (DPW)
- Department of City Planning (DCP)

Safety + Crime

To address safety and crime, DPR will:

- Continue to make improvements in recreation centers and parks to increase positive activities,
- Add elements to enhance safety and security within our parks, such as improved lighting, cameras, call boxes, etc.
- Increase programming, even programs that go late into the night to encourage positive activity throughout the city,
- Work with partners to actively engage in parks to help all Atlantans stay active, engaged, and safe, and
- Continue to design future recreation centers and parks with crime prevention best practices in mind.

Partners:

- Atlanta Police Department (APD)
- DCP

Homelessness

For homelessness, we will look at coordinating partnerships, such as those providing health and human services to help the unhoused in our parks.

Partners:

- Constituent Services
- Office of Human Services

Lack of Amenities

In an urban planning context, “amenities” is a very general term that encompasses all forms of retail and commercial development, as well as public and private social services. While further study may be useful to determine what specific amenities communities may be lacking, DPR will continue to do its part to ensure residents have access to a variety of recreation and park amenities.

Partners:

- DCP
- Invest Atlanta
- Department of Watershed Management (DWM)
- Atlanta Beltline
- Park Pride

Affordable Housing

To address affordable housing, DPR will work with partners and other city departments to coordinate the development of affordable housing near parks.

Partners:

- Atlanta Housing
- DCP
- Atlanta Beltline
- Private affordable housing developers

Smart Collaboration: How Urban Parks Can Support Affordable Housing

The Trust for Public Land

Another Reason to Love Urban Green Space: It Fights Crime

Bloomberg CityLab

Stormwater Greening Is Good for Business

NextCity

Why Urban Parks are Essential Infrastructure

Governing

Turning Vacant Lots Into Green Spaces Can Improve Mental Health. Here's How

Time

Green Space: An Underestimated Tool to Create More Equal Cities

WRI

2

A VISION TO
ACTIVATE ATL



2.1 | Introduction

The vision to Activate ATL is ambitious. It is informed by the unique history of the City of Atlanta, and it looks strategically into the future to achieve realistic outcomes. This section introduces the framework that will guide the Department over the next decade. The Vision is tied to practical and achievable goals that will transform the Department’s impact across the city.

The vision is composed of Mission and Vision statements, Guiding Principles, Goals, and Actions. Each of these elements responds to the needs, priorities, and issues that Atlantans identified were most important. Combined, these elements create a roadmap to achieve the “Beloved Community” through Atlanta’s parks and recreation system.

Why Activate ATL? Three Key Findings

- 1. **Parks are essential services that serve individuals and the community in a variety of ways.** Atlantans value their parks and are using them now more than ever before, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. **Addressing park and recreation system needs and tackling Atlanta’s social, health, and economic inequities are complimentary, intersecting opportunities.** Solutions should involve extensive partnership-building and close collaboration across City departments and organizations.
- 3. **Atlantans are yearning for comprehensive, equitable improvements to their parks and recreation system.**

What are Mission and Vision Statements, Guiding Principles, Goals, and Actions?

Mission and Vision Statements, Guiding Principles, Goals, and Actions are used by organizations and government agencies to direct and focus resources. Following is an explanation of each of these elements.



The indoor rock wall at MLK Jr. Recreation and Aquatic Center challenges climbers of all ages.

2.2 | Elements of the Vision

The Activate ATL Mission and Vision are:



MISSION

"To provide equitable access to outstanding recreational, natural, and cultural experiences that enhance the happiness, health, and well-being of all Atlantans."



VISION

"Make recreation and parks the heart and soul of Atlanta through a diverse, yet seamless and interconnected system of parks, recreation, and natural areas."

Atlantans enjoy festival time at Piedmont Park.



Guiding Principles

Nine principles were established to guide the application of Activate ATL:



Provide plentiful and diverse experiences – Provide a plentiful variety of natural, recreational, and cultural experiences that enhance health and enjoyment for everyone.



Ensure equitable and inclusive practices – Ensure that the Atlanta parks and recreation system meets the needs of all individuals, families, and communities regardless of race/ethnicity, creed, age, sex, or national origin.



Cultivate stewardship – Cultivate a new generation of stewards who are devoted to ensuring an extraordinary parks and recreation system for everyone.



Offer safe, equitable, and seamless access and connectivity – Offer safe and equitable access to parks, nature, and recreational experiences with seamless connectivity citywide.



Maximize awareness of the parks and recreation park system – Maximize public awareness to boost the use of parks and recreation opportunities through branding, marketing, and public engagement efforts designed to reach all individuals.



Optimize current use of facilities and services – Improve existing parks, recreational facilities, and program offerings to optimize the use and value for all, by continually engaging and thoughtfully responding to the diverse needs of every community.



Foster partnerships – Foster sustainable partnerships to ensure responsiveness to diverse community needs.



Promote health and wellness – Promote health and well-being by designing park and recreation experiences that encourage physical activity, exposure to nature, and positive social interaction.



Monitor, evaluate, and prioritize investments – Monitor and evaluate DPR's system conditions, offerings, community perceptions, and socioeconomic environments in order to efficiently prioritize investments in park upgrades, recreation programming, and facility improvements.

Goals

To provide focus for the implementation of the Activate ATL Vision, and ensure that the plan addresses the needs and priorities of Atlantans, 3 goals are established for DPR to achieve over the next 10 years:



Goal #1:

INVEST
in Atlanta’s Parks and Recreation Assets



Goal #2:

CONNECT
Atlanta’s Parks and Recreation Resources



Goal #3:

GROW
the Parks and Recreation System

The following sections expand upon each one of these important goals and provide actions to guide the implementation of each goal. The chapters that follow will delve into specific tasks and key performance measures to be achieved for each task.



2.3 | Goal #1:



INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets

This goal is focused on strategically investing resources to improve the quality, appearance, and experience provided by the parks and recreation system in all areas throughout the city.

Action

I.1

Improve the condition of our existing facilities and prioritize locations, based on identified needs. As examples, DPR should replace and reinvent playgrounds across the city; convert fields to artificial turf where appropriate; add lighting and seating; improve safety and accessibility features; renovate swimming pool bathhouses, park operation maintenance facilities, and restrooms; and refresh recreation center amenities, such as weight rooms, senior activity rooms, computer labs, and event and activity spaces.

I.2

Foster excellence in daily maintenance of parks and recreation facilities through investments in human capital, training, and resources.

I.3

Invest in programming opportunities that include diverse interests such as senior athletics, cooking and gardening classes, teen music programs, art programs, and emerging sports, and high priority programs.

I.4

Reimagine golf courses and tennis centers as welcoming places and increase/improve opportunities for other uses.

I.5

Invest in current and new employees to develop increased skills and customer service training to promote and encourage a career track based on continuous development and professionalism.

I.6

Invest in safety and security systems at recreation centers and parks through multiple strategies, including reducing crime opportunities through environmental design.

I.7

Invest in natural areas in parks for the dual purpose of preserving and protecting Atlanta's abundant tree canopy and wildlife habitat, while encouraging visitation for human respite and refuge.



Perkerson Park



Historic Fourth Ward Park



Cook Park



Cascade Nature Preserve



Manigault Street Playlot



Atlanta Memorial Park



Arthur Langford Jr Park



Indian Creek Park

2.4 | Goal #2



This goal is focused on connecting residents and guests of the City of Atlanta to the offerings and benefits of the parks and recreation system by facilitating a comprehensive network of parks and programs; eliminating barriers to access; and creating connectivity and greater awareness of what DPR provides in parks and recreation centers throughout the city.

Action

- C.1 Foster a system-wide, sustainable trail network that guides user access to parks and enables connections across the city. Improve wayfinding between and within neighborhood parks and the regional parks and recreation system.
- C.2 Prioritize youth and seniors in programming through ongoing research and embedding innovation in our culture and practices. Coordinate and collaborate with partners that offer unique services to youth, adults, and seniors.
- C.3 Identify opportunities to develop environmental education programming opportunities across the city. Utilize environmental education as a vehicle for new users to be introduced to parks and recreation, and to inspire the next generation of park stewards through education and outreach.
- C.4 Provide meaningful recurring and drop-in volunteer opportunities for a variety of abilities—furthering the work of Park Pride and DPR and fostering connections between neighbors, generations, and parks and recreation.
- C.5 Develop robust communication strategies to inform the wider community of parks and recreation resources, and connect/partner with the community.
- C.6 Strategically align youth programming services to fill gaps in city and other partner agency offerings, and specifically develop teen programming to build pathways to keep youth from entering the criminal justice system.



2.5 | Goal #3



This goal is focused on increasing publicly accessible parkland to keep pace with the city’s rising population and increasing financial resources to maintain, operate, and improve the parks and recreation system in all areas throughout the city.

Action

- G.1 Acquire park land strategically through property donations, purchases, public/private partnerships, or similar means to ensure parks are available and accessible throughout the city—with the goal of providing a park within a 10-minute walk of the population now and in the future.
- G.2 Increase park land acreage through partnerships with other city departments and governmental agencies, such as the Department of Watershed Management, Department of City Planning, Atlanta Housing Authority, and Atlanta Public Schools.
- G.3 Ensure communities across the city have access to recreational facilities, amenities, and programs that can provide a wide variety of programs to promote social, multi-generational, and cross-cultural recreational opportunities and interaction.
- G.4 Collaborate with partners to expand healthy food access through programming, green markets, updated kitchens in recreation centers, community gardens, and urban food forests—especially where access to food-growing space is limited.
- G.5 Increase access to high-quality outdoor facilities by building new athletic fields, courts, and other amenities in areas of demonstrated need based on the findings from the Needs Assessment and the growth of the city’s population.
- G.6 Ensure there is an appropriate allocation of parks and recreation staff and resources to meet the increased demands of parks and recreation system growth, including new park acquisition, development of new facilities, and increased recreation programs and events.

How will these goals and actions be implemented? By prioritizing investments, collaborating with partners, and tracking the implementation of the Activate ATL vision.



3



IMPLEMENTING ACTIVATE ATL

3.1 | Introduction

This Implementation Strategy is a way to organize actions to most equitably and efficiently realize the Activate ATL Vision. It is a set of guideposts that will keep the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) moving in the right direction. It lays out the actions DPR must take to advance the Activate ATL Vision over the next 10 years, including how projects will be prioritized and what projects should be implemented first.

The Implementation Strategy begins with Actions and Tasks, which are tied to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These Actions, Tasks, and Action Steps provide a framework for establishing work plans and departmental assignments.

The Implementation Strategy also includes a prioritization strategy, a funding strategy, and opportunities to expand and enhance partnerships. The prioritization strategy includes three elements:

- Funding Allocation Targets
- Equity Data Tool
- Prioritization Criteria

The funding strategy considers low and high estimates for funding over the next 10 years, compares recent funding to peer cities, and explores how different funding amounts and mechanisms would impact the overall ability to implement the plan.



OPPOSITE ABOVE DPR staff served hundreds of meals to families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

OPPOSITE BELOW Urban agriculture is one of the most highly requested programs; DPR has partnerships with numerous community gardens and the potential space for more.

3.2 | Fulfilling, Monitoring, and Evaluating the Impact of Activate ATL

Fulfilling, monitoring, and evaluating the outcomes of the Activate ATL Vision will ensure that this vision remains equitable, relevant, and impactful.

The following section compliments and builds on DPR's 5-Year Strategic Plan and provides a step-by-step process for how DPR will accomplish this important vision. This process includes the detailed Action Steps and KPIs that DPR will follow to implement the Goals and Actions identified in the Activate ATL Vision.



ABOVE Continuing to invest in new amenities, like this playground installed in 2020 at Grove Park, is a component of both the Invest and Grow goals.
OPPOSITE ABOVE DPR Arborist Department staff are responsible for trimming and managing all trees in public right-of-way, including fallen trees. Aging trees, increased development, and powerful storms make this a growing responsibility.
OPPOSITE BELOW Adult learn-to-swim classes are a prime example of the type of community-responsive programming that DPR has developed, effectively employing recreation expertise within aquatics facilities.



Goal #1

INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 1

Improve the condition of our existing facilities and prioritize locations, based on identified needs.

As examples, DPR should replace and reinvent playgrounds across the city; convert fields to artificial turf where appropriate; add lighting and seating; improve safety and accessibility features; renovate swimming pool bathhouses, park operation maintenance facilities, and restrooms; and refresh recreation center amenities, such as weight rooms, senior activity rooms, computer labs, and event and activity spaces.

Action I.1

TASK
1
2
3

TASK 1

Establish project list of facilities to be improved and develop project priorities and cost estimates.

KPI

Create annual, prioritized project list, publicly viewable on website, with anticipated projections of cost.

ACTION STEPS

- Review list of prioritized parks and indoor recreation centers from the Equity Data Tool and complete detailed site assessments to confirm facilities to be improved.
- Confirm planning level capital costs for confirmed facilities to be improved. Develop operations and management costs/implications for improvements to DPR properties.

Action I.2

TASK
1
2
3

TASK 2

Develop community-based, conceptual project plans, based on available capital and administrative dollars.

KPI

List of Top 10 active priorities and number of completed park site improvement plans to be updated annually.

- Complete community-based conceptual park site improvement plans using findings from the Needs Assessment and Facility Vision Maps as a starting point for dialogue with the community about potential park improvements.
- Work with partners such as Park Pride, Trust for Public Land, or Conservation Fund and/or develop RFP for procurement of conceptual park site plan and Phase 1 construction documents.
- Collaborate with the community to prioritize park improvements based on available capital and management dollars using available prioritization tools.

Action I.4

TASK
1
2
3

TASK 3

Complete on-going needs and priorities assessment of facilities and parks to confirm needs and update DPR's strategies.

KPI

Asset Management Software to track and project lifecycle replacement and estimated cost of scheduled replacement within 5 years.

Needs Assessment completed every 5 years.

- Procure asset management software, such as Lucity or similar; input data as required; and begin to track, monitor, and plan for improvements.
- Procure parks planning services every 5 years to complete needs and priorities assessment and update recreation and parks Master Plan.

Action I.5

TASK
1
2

Action I.6

TASK
1
2
3
4

Action I.7

TASK
1
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Goal #1

INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 2

Foster excellence in daily maintenance of parks and recreation facilities through investments in human capital, training, and resources.

TASK 1

Recruit and retain qualified people to fill existing vacant positions and ensure existing positions are compensated comparable to other municipal and private agencies.

KPI

Reduce vacancy rates for each division to at or below 10% annually.

ACTION STEPS

- Work to secure funding to reinvest in defunded positions.
- Conduct a salary study to determine which salaries need to be increased to develop equity in comparable positions between departments.
- Develop job postings that describe the culture of employment, needed skill sets, and advantages of employment with the city.

TASK 2

Invest in training of existing staff to increase skill sets and capacity for the demands of the parks system.

KPI

Increase actual training hours by 5% annually over 5 years.

- Identify needed skill sets at each level of operations and maintenance, analyze gaps from the cost of service, and build professional development plans that fill gaps.
- Build annual schedule for recurring training needs and incorporate periodic trainings in areas where building specific expertise is needed. Identify in-person and virtual training opportunities through NRPA, GRPA, CAPRA, USGBC, and with other city departments and city HR organizational development office, etc. (e.g., NRPA Virtual, Maintenance Management School, and Director's School).
- Track training hours by employee, division, and total to report to leadership.
- Confirm baseline of annual training hours.
- Develop a training program that provides career steps for promotion and advancement.
- Invest in the existing employee recognition program with incentives for staff that go above and beyond.

TASK 3

Identify the cost of service to maintain the park system at the current level, including full-time and part-time hours to deliver on the standards; ensure DPR has the needed resources to efficiently perform tasks to standard.

KPI

Increase consistency in performance measures achievement by 2% annually using monthly and annual DPR ATLStats metric data.

- Initiate a cost-of-service model for waste management, facilities maintenance, and landscaping services.
- Use data collected to determine the optimal resources to maintain the system to meet public expectation.
- Identify what services can be delivered to the fullest, those that cannot, and what resources are needed to meet expectations in the delivery of service.
- Work with the Mayor's Office and elected officials to increase DPR's operations and maintenance budget to be more in line with national benchmarks and top tier cities.

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Action I.7
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Goal #1

INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 3

Invest in programming opportunities that include diverse interests such as senior athletics, cooking and gardening classes, teen music programs, art programs, emerging sports, and high priority programs.

Top priorities for investment of programs based on the Statistically Valid Survey were 1) health/wellness programs, 2) movies in the park, 3) local food, 4) nature programs, 5) cooking and nutrition classes, and 6) learn-to-swim.

TASK 1

Increase funding to the core program areas to modernize the guest experience, expand staffing and continue to implement customer feedback methods.

KPI

Increase perception of excellent rating for activities, classes, and events by 3% annually (from current level of 21%).
Decrease perception of fair by 3% annually (from current level of 15%).

ACTION STEPS

- Determine funding necessary to improve individual service delivery by program including seniors, teens, and youth.
- Continue implementing customer feedback methods and establish an annual goal for the amount of feedback to collect.
- Review and suggest operational policy changes to develop and/or update cost recovery, earned income, and partnership policies.
- Update customer feedback methods, including utilizing HAPPiFEET, IParcs, or similar applications, to include customer satisfaction levels for new enhancements to services.

TASK 2

Reimagine recreational programming and delivery methods in development of new activities within each core program area, aligning with community needs.

KPI

Provide support for at least two new programs annually.
Achieve a 50% annual renewal of new programming through a focus on guest experience.

- Utilize the Program Evaluation Logic Matrix to identify programs that are in need of fresh activities and delivery methods.
- Identify new activities/improvements from the community needs assessment and local feedback to incorporate into reimagined programs.
- Evaluate all improved programs and newly developed programs with the Evaluation Matrix to determine the best appropriate action, annually.
- Track new and emerging program trends from sources such as NRPA, National Outdoor Recreation Reports, Sports and Facilities Industry Association, etc., to refresh the program pipeline.

TASK 3

Identify opportunities and capitalize on partnerships to provide services for seniors and teens, based on new recreation trends.

KPI

Develop new programming with at least 25% in collaboration as part of a partnership agreement.

- Develop a service provider analysis for senior athletics, senior life skills, teen programming, arts programming, and new trends in sports.
- Develop database of similar providers for future potential partnerships.
- Begin discussions to develop services and contract with the similar providers where missions intersect or align.
- Track outcomes of new programming and partnerships to identify amendments to terms and determine how best to serve the community moving forward.

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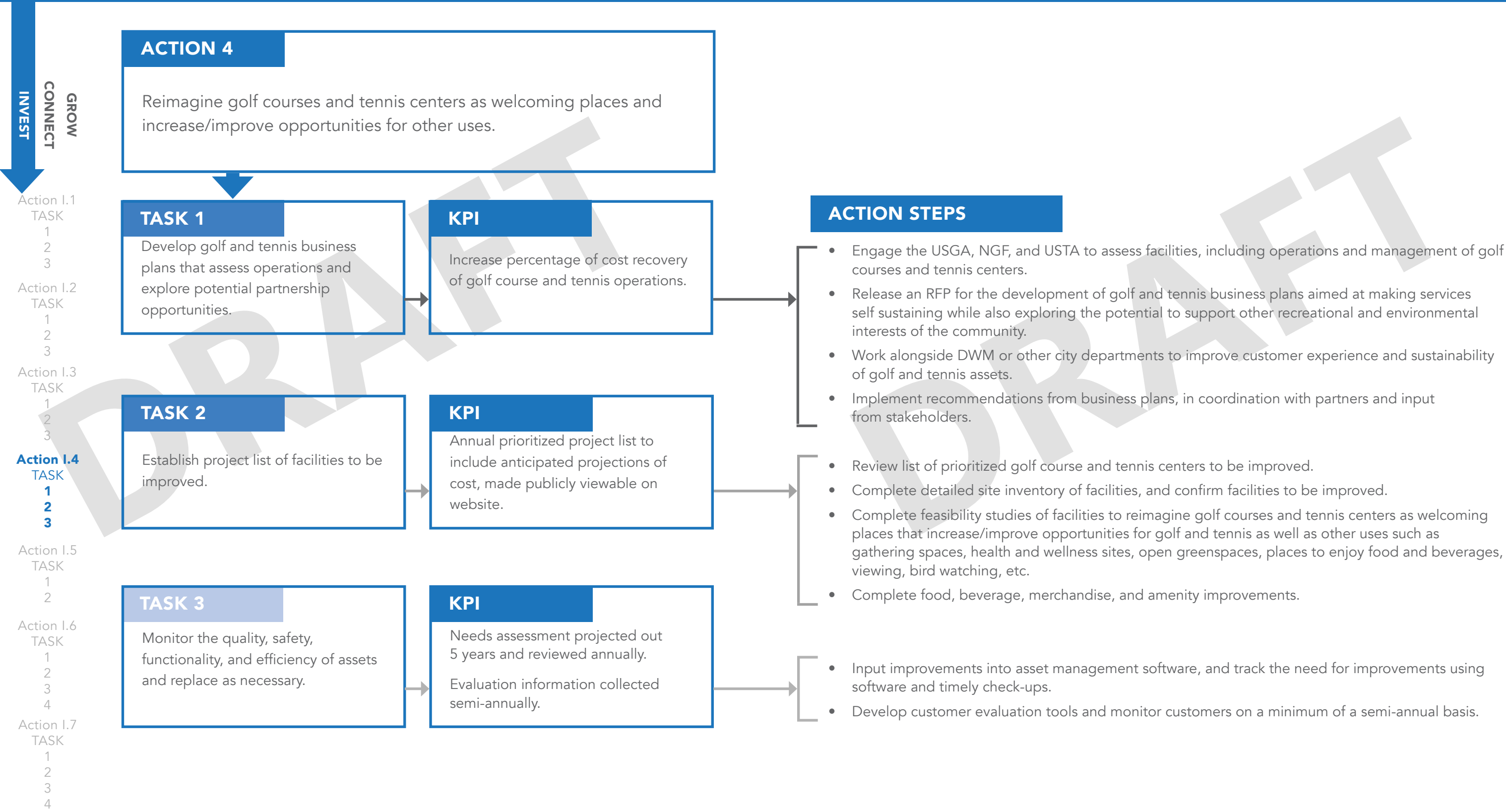
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Goal #1

INVEST

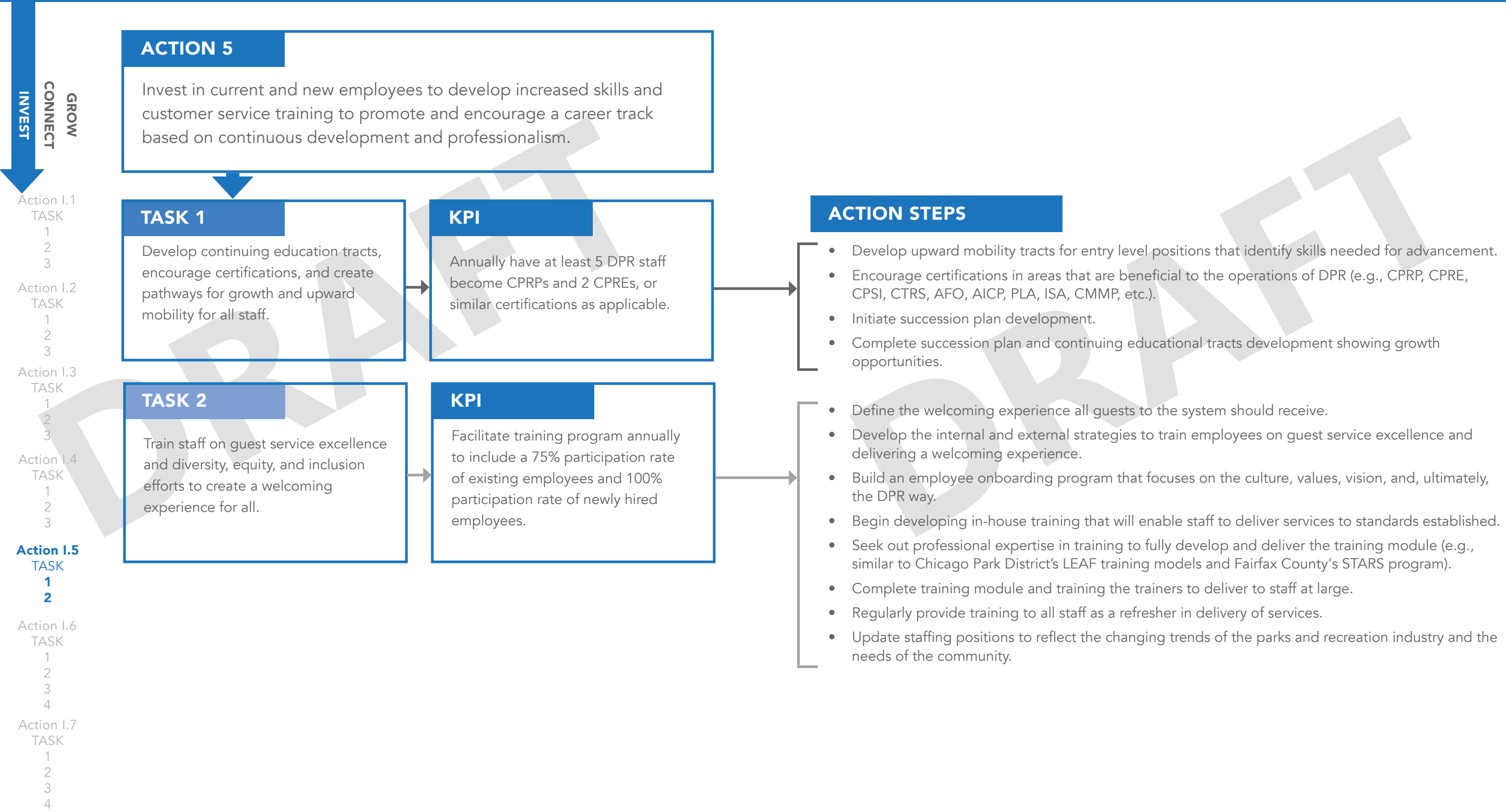
in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets



Goal #1

INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets



Goal #1

INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 6

Invest in safety and security systems at recreation centers and parks through multiple strategies, including reducing crime opportunities through environmental design.

TASK 1

Continue implementing already identified security measures.

KPI

Project list made publicly viewable on website.

ACTION STEPS

- Continue implementing security at pools.
- Continue implementing cameras at new parks such as Cook Park and Westside Park.
- Continue implementing cameras at recreation centers.
- Review APD crime data for parks and recreation centers.

TASK 2

Conduct an initial evaluation of additional security measures.

KPI

Ongoing project list to be updated annually, made publicly viewable on website.

- DPR and APD to coordinate to review the requirements and process for installing VIC enabled cameras in parks (i.e., data driven, square footage of park, size & usage of recreation center, etc.).
- APD to assess the best methods for increasing sworn officers and security in parks (i.e., review recapture and retired off-duty programs).
- Develop initial recommendations for additional security measures, including which parks and facilities most require additional security measures.

TASK 3

Develop a Parks and Recreation Security Plan.

- Conduct site reviews and security assessments to identify the specific additional security measures needed for the parks and facilities identified as needing additional security measures.
- Identify funding sources.

TASK 4

Begin implementation of the Parks and Recreation Security Plan and monitor the quality, safety, functionality, and efficiency of assets and replace as necessary.

KPI

Funds needed to maintain assets projected out 5 years and updated annually.

Track reported incidents year-over-year to target a reduction of 50% based on APD report data.

- Input improvements into asset management software and track the need for improvements using software and timely check-ups.

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Goal #1

INVEST

in Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Assets

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 7

Invest in natural areas in parks (see *Natural Areas Vision*, page 82) for the dual purpose of preserving and protecting Atlanta's abundant tree canopy and wildlife habitat, while encouraging visitation for human respite and refuge.

TASK 1

Establish project list of priority natural areas with potential for improvements.

KPI

Annual prioritized project list to include anticipated projections of cost, made publicly viewable on website.

TASK 2

Develop park improvement strategy.

KPI

Capital needs list and number of finalized agreements to be updated annually.

TASK 3

Develop community-based management plans, conceptual natural area site improvement plans, and construction documents for suitable properties, based on available capital and administrative dollars.

KPI

Completed park site improvement plans to be updated annually.

TASK 4

Manage and maintain natural areas and improvements.

KPI

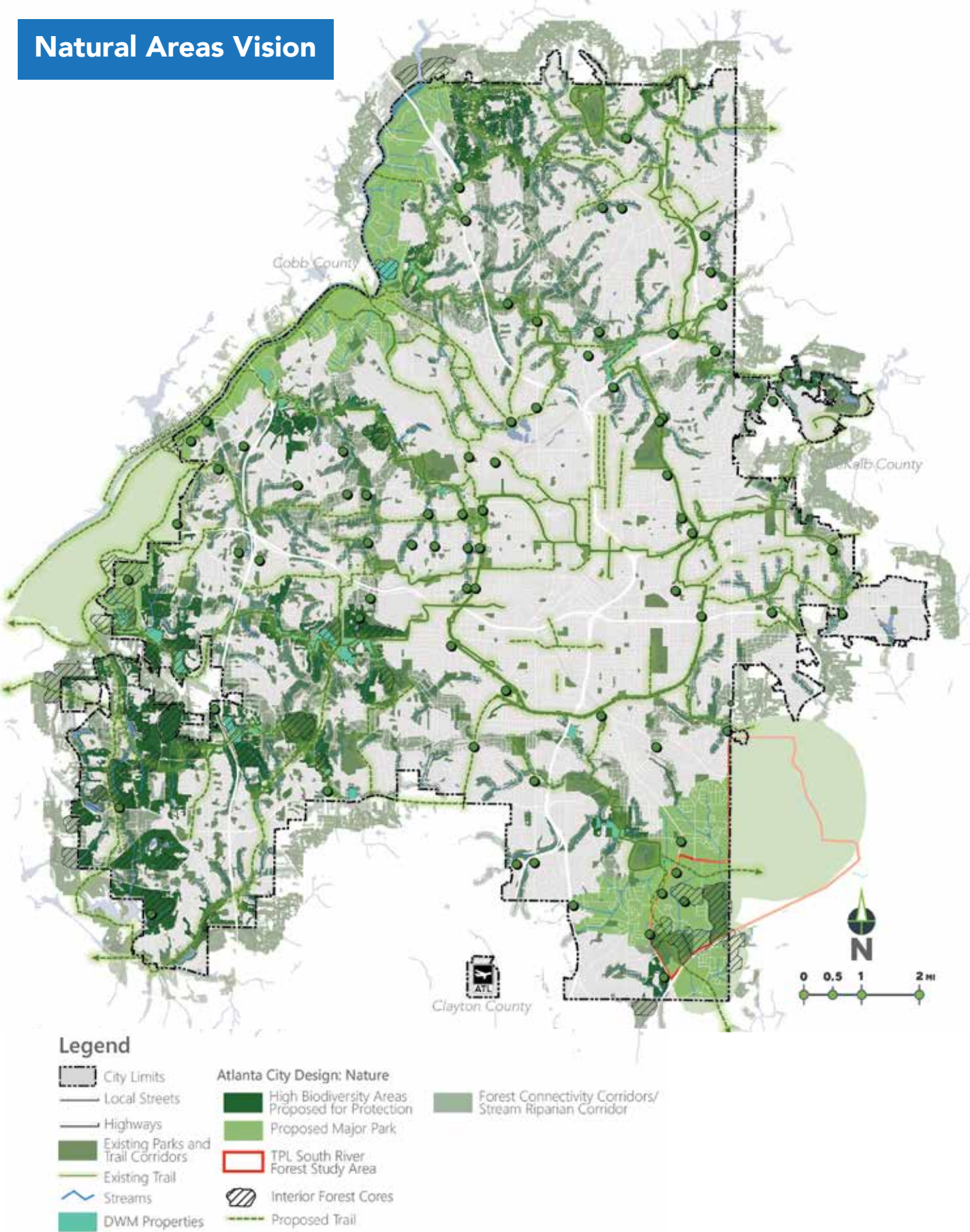
Natural Resource plan and funds need to maintain assets to be projected out 5 years and updated annually.

ACTION STEPS

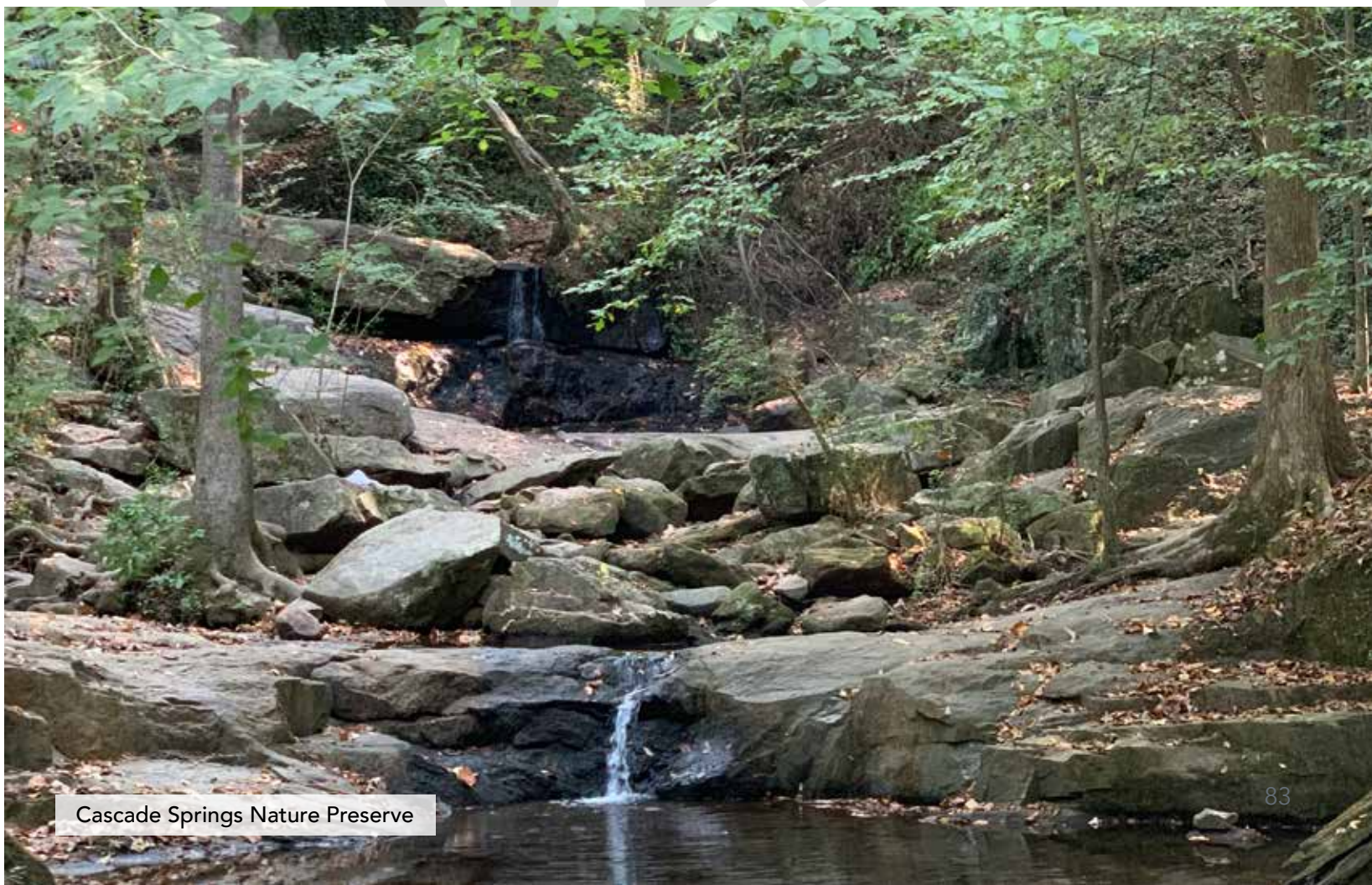
- Consult with partners such as Department of City Planning (DCP), Department of Watershed Management (DWM), Trees Atlanta, Park Pride, Trust for Public Land, Conservation Fund, and other partners and agencies—as well as landscaping/maintenance staff—to confirm priority natural areas as identified in Atlanta City Design: Nature and Activate ATL Nature Vision, illustrated on the following page.
- Create/update GIS inventory of available sites for improvement, and cross-reference with prioritized areas identified in Equity Data Tool. Complete site inventory of natural areas in prioritized parks, and confirm areas to be improved in parks.
- Confirm/update planning level capital costs identified for natural areas to be improved, and develop operations and management costs/implications for improvements to DPR properties.
- For joint DPR and partner properties, establish appropriate land management strategy agreement that considers construction, operations, maintenance, and asset management.
- Allocate design, site improvements, and management dollars.
- Work with partners such as DCP, DWM, Trees Atlanta, Park Pride, Trust for Public Land, Conservation Fund, and others and/or develop RFP for procurement of construction documents, based on available capital and administrative dollars.
- Manage natural areas, based on developed management plans (Natural Resource Plan). Input appropriate assets into asset management software and track the need for improvements using software and timely check-ups.
- Hire Natural Areas Manager to oversee natural areas and environmental stewardship services.

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Natural Areas Vision



Blue Heron Nature Preserve

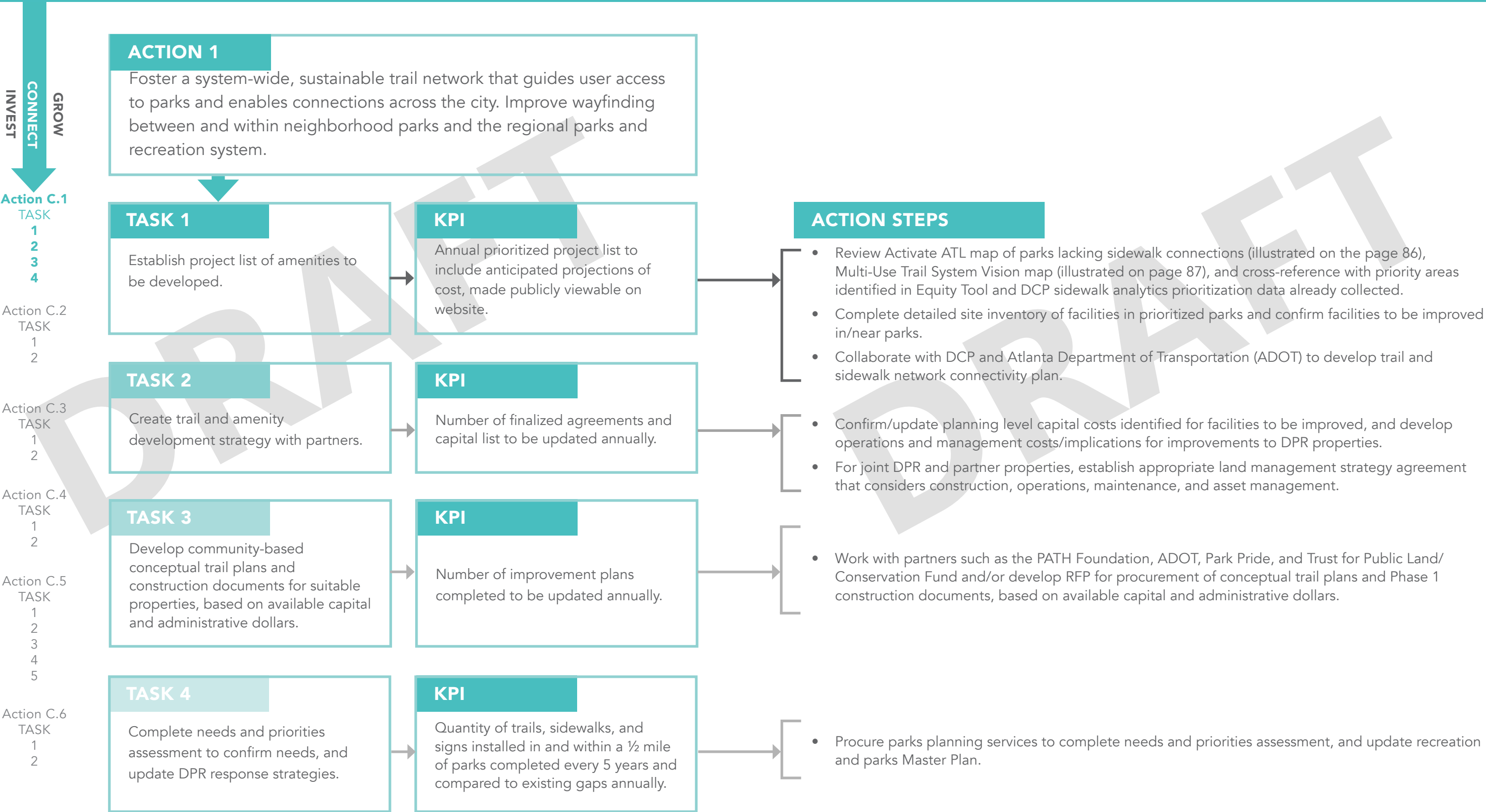


Cascade Springs Nature Preserve

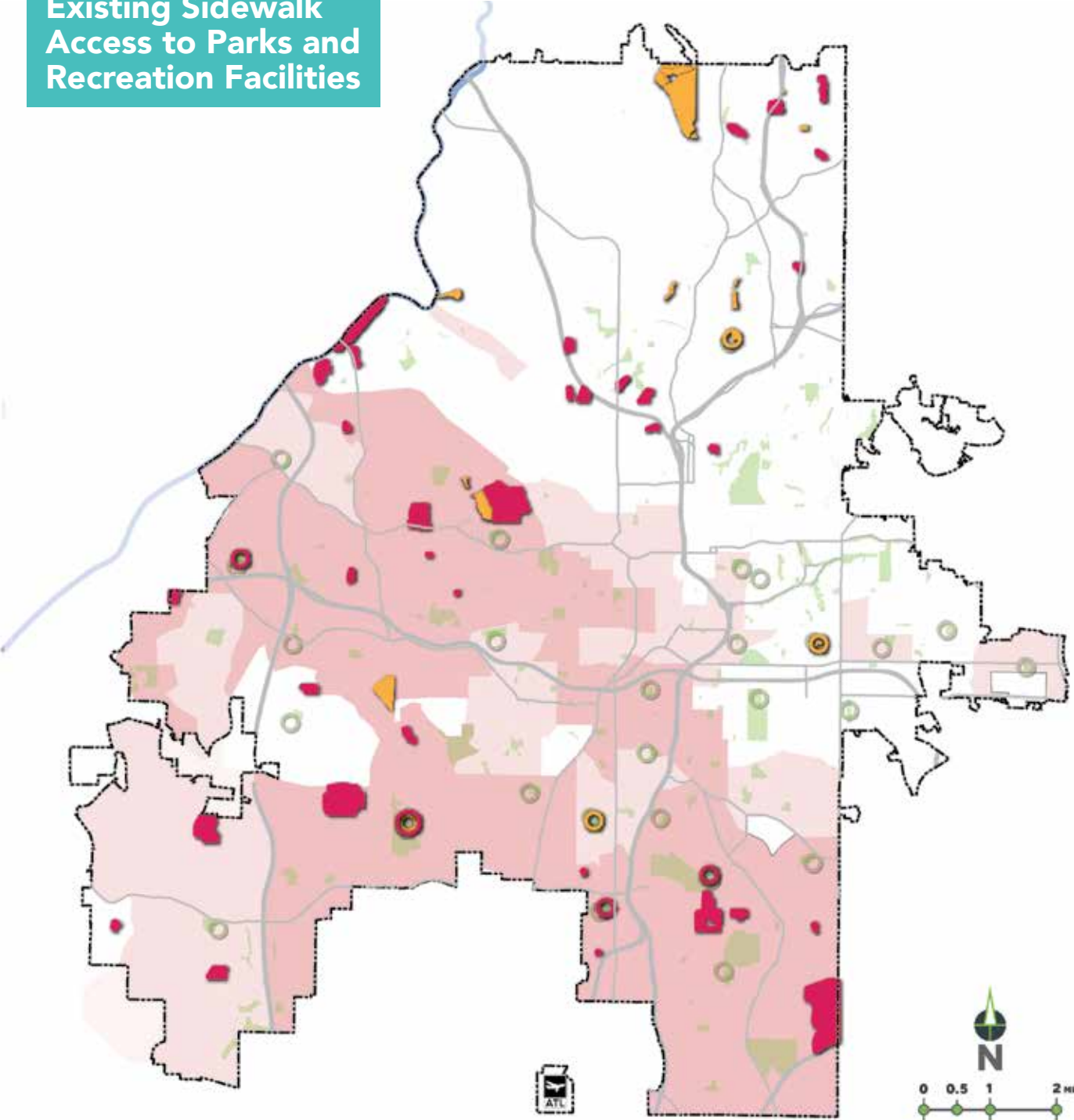
Goal #2

CONNECT

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



Existing Sidewalk Access to Parks and Recreation Facilities



- Legend**

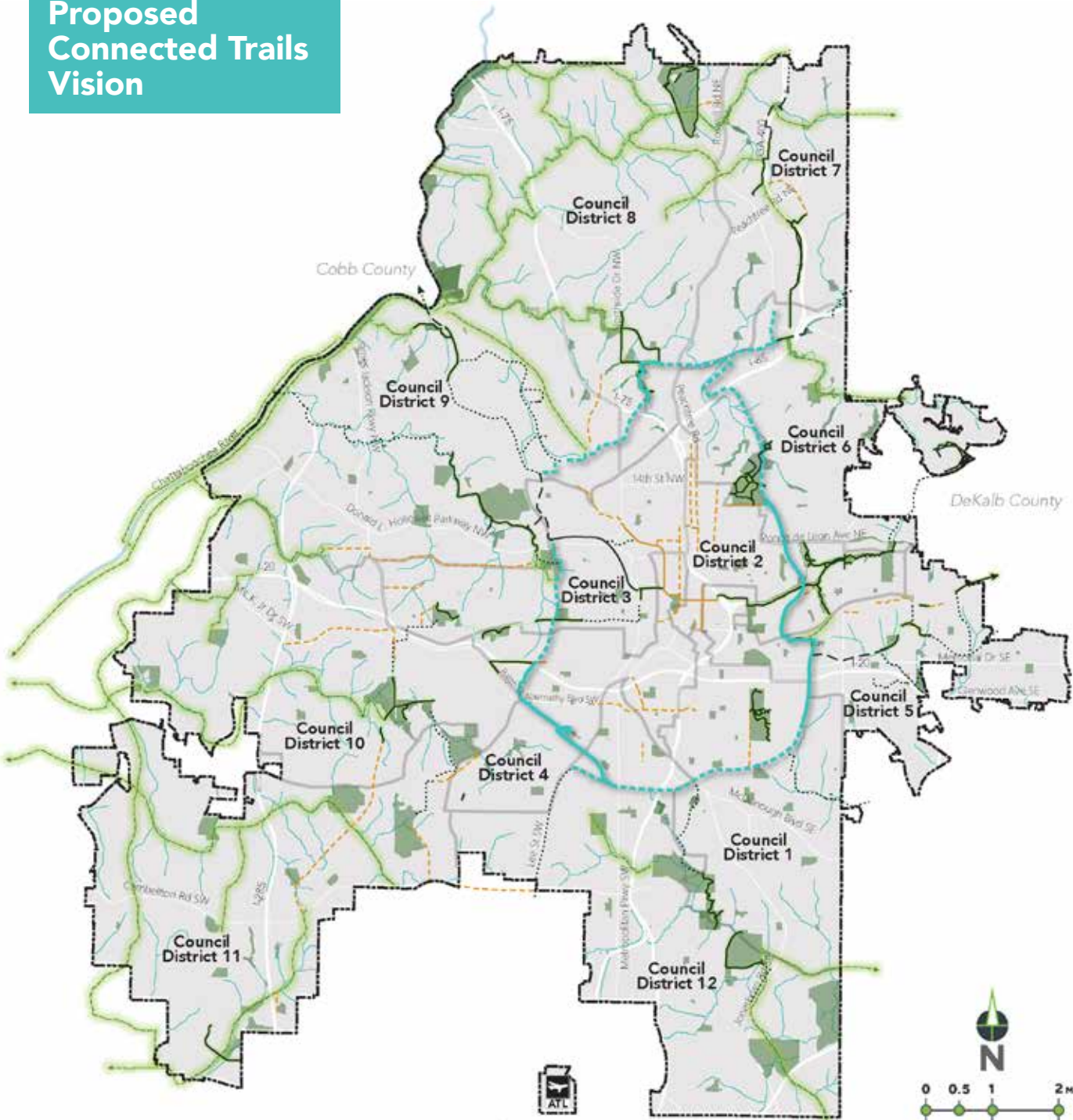
 - City Limits
 - State Highway
 - Highway
- Social Vulnerability Index**

 - Medium-High
 - Highest
- Park Evaluation Score**

 - Community Serving Park Without Transit Access
 - Park Without Sidewalk Access
 - Building Without Transit Access
 - Building Without Sidewalk Access

Note: Sidewalk access is defined as the presence of sidewalks that connect to park entrances and extend for at least 1/4 mile into surrounding neighborhoods. Transit access is defined as a transit stop (bus or rail) within 1/4 mile of the geographic center of the park.

Proposed Connected Trails Vision



- Legend**

 - City Limits
 - Local Streets
 - Highways
 - Streams
 - Existing Greenspace/Trail Corridor
- Bike / LIT Infrastructure**

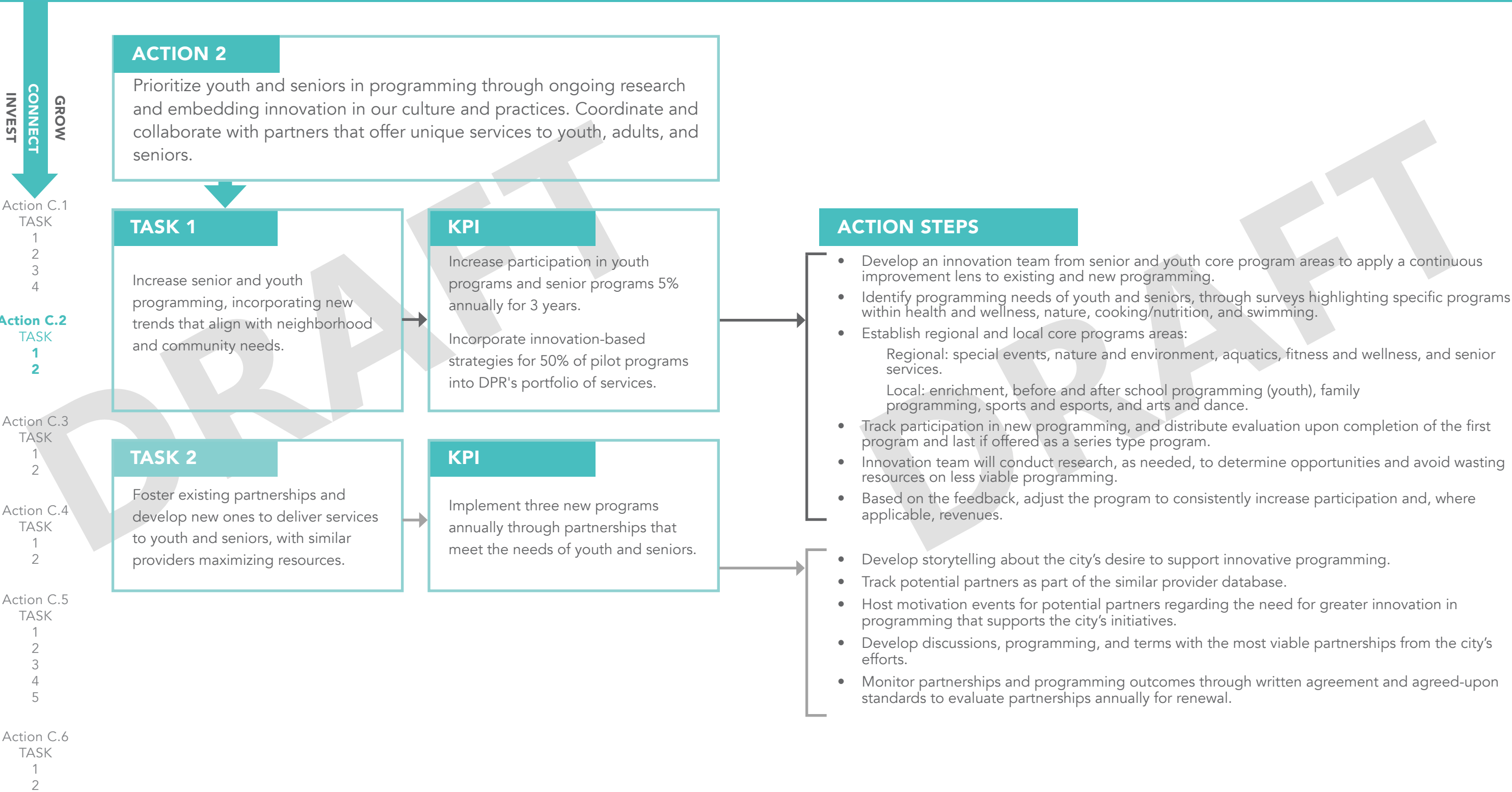
 - PATH Foundation Multi-Use Trail (Off road)
 - On-Road Multi-Use Trail (Protected Lanes, Cycle Tracks)
 - BeltLine
- Planned/In Development**

 - PATH Foundation Multi-Use Trail (Expected completion by 2022)
 - PATH Foundation Multi-Use Trail (Expected completion after 2022)
 - BeltLine
 - On-Road Multi-Use Trail (Protected Lanes, Cycle Tracks)
 - ACD; Nature - Proposed Trails

Goal #2

CONNECT

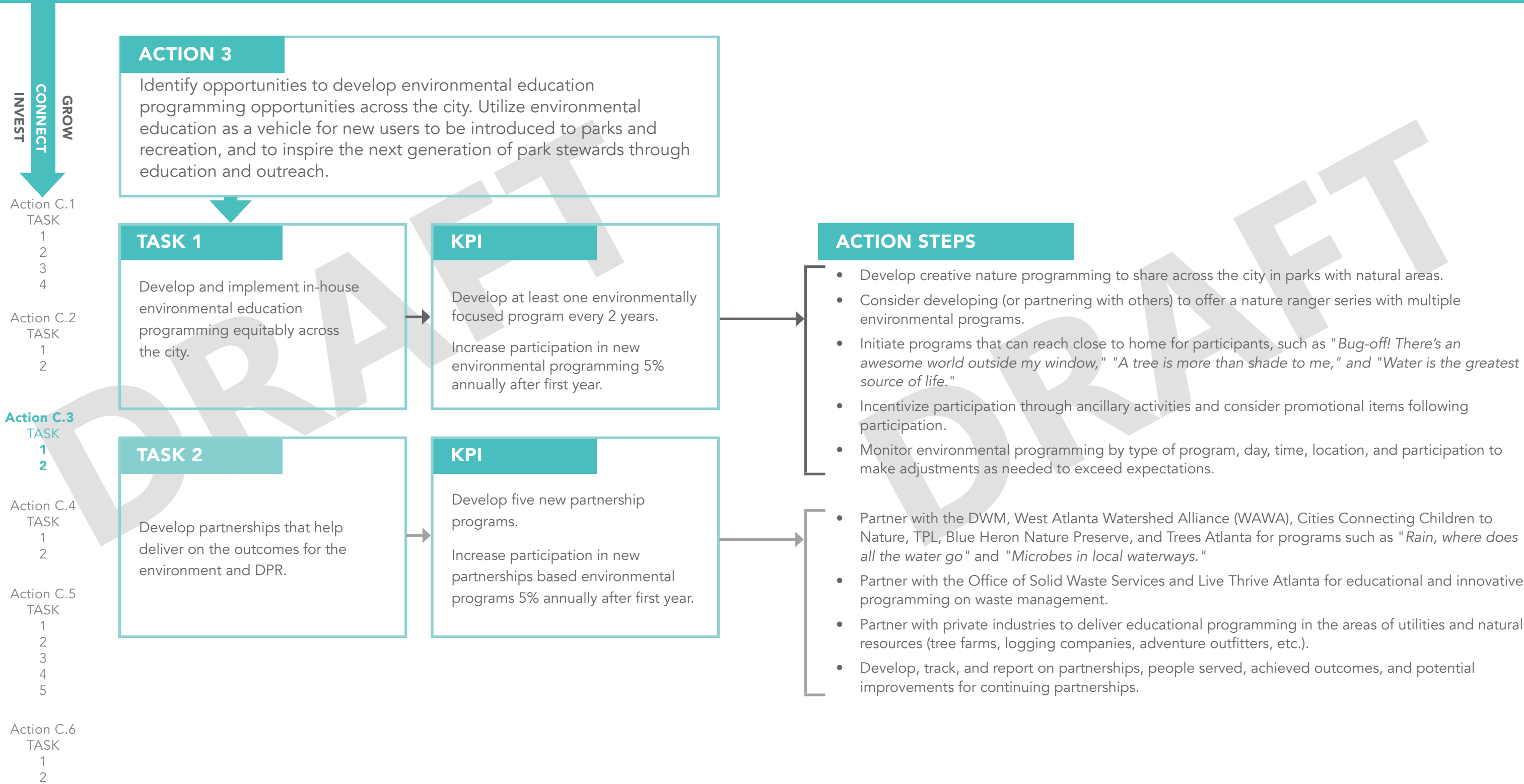
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



Goal #2

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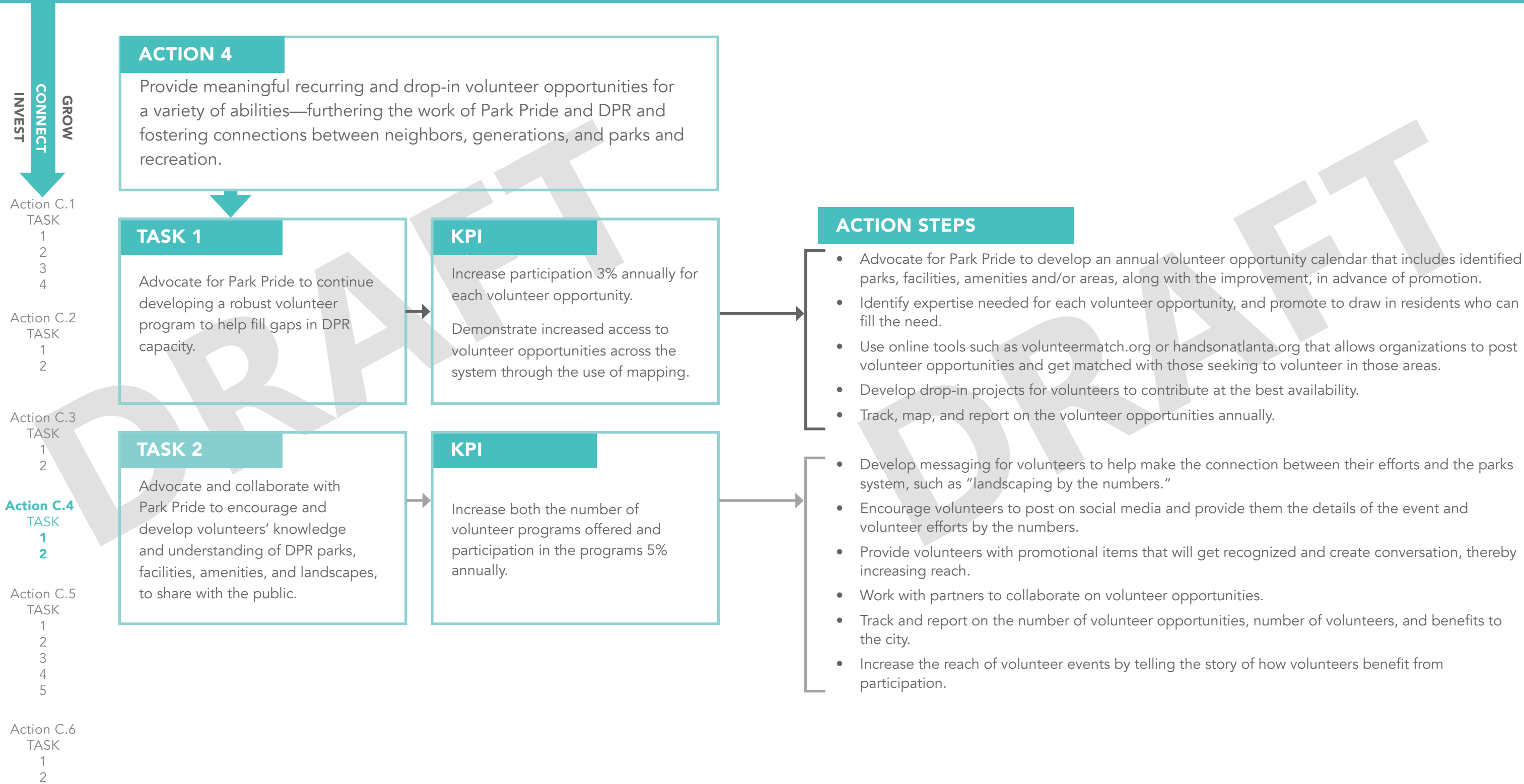
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



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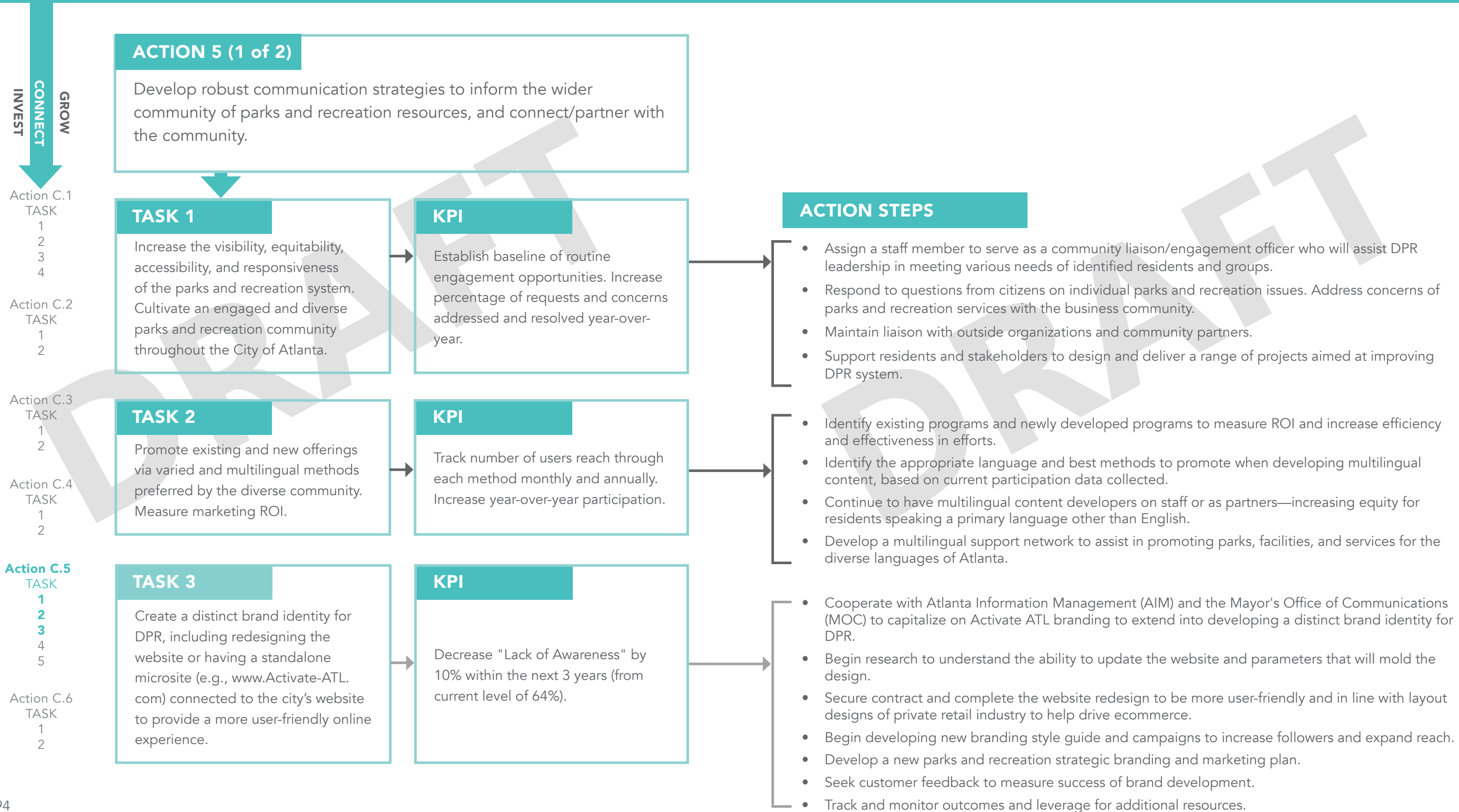
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



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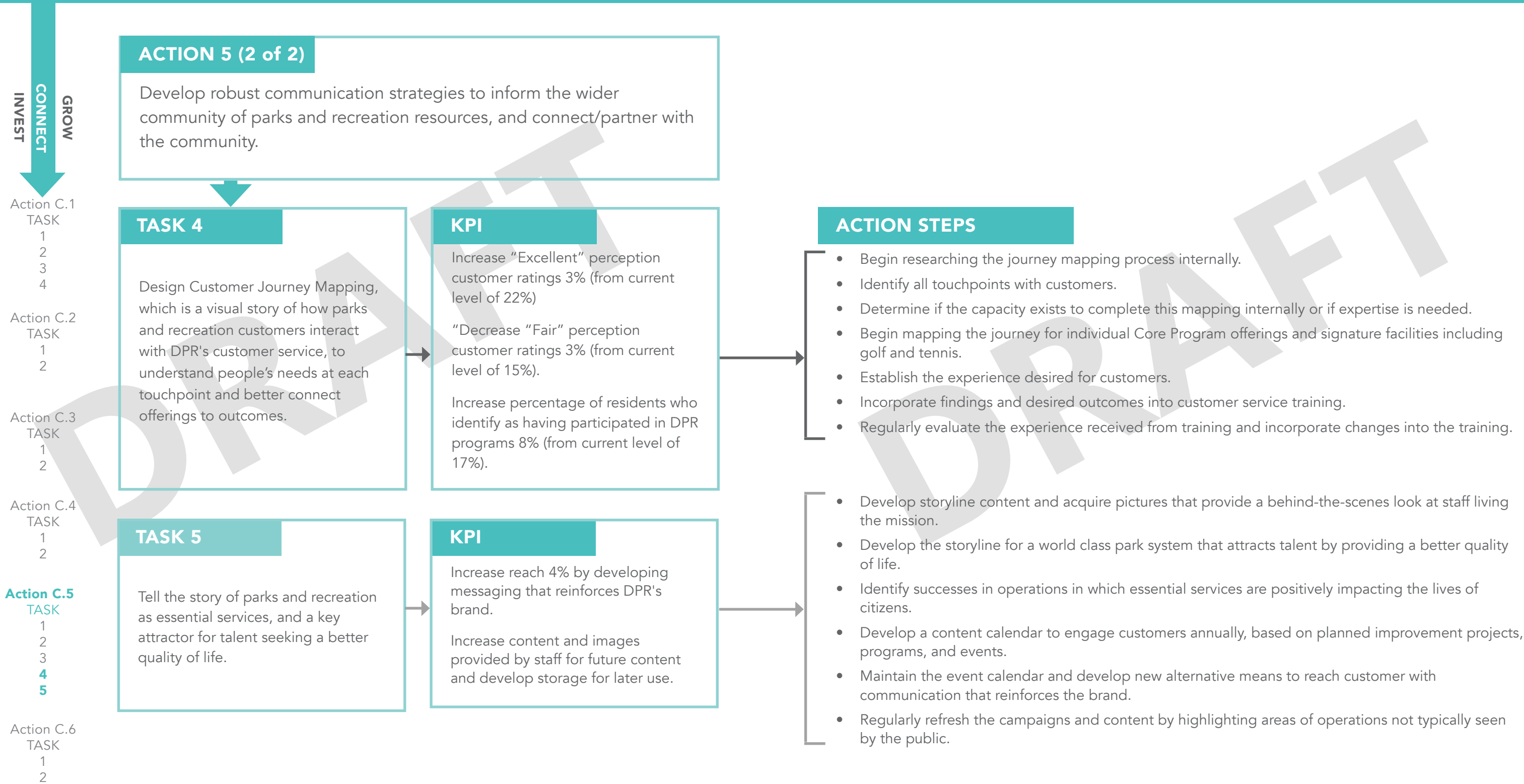
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



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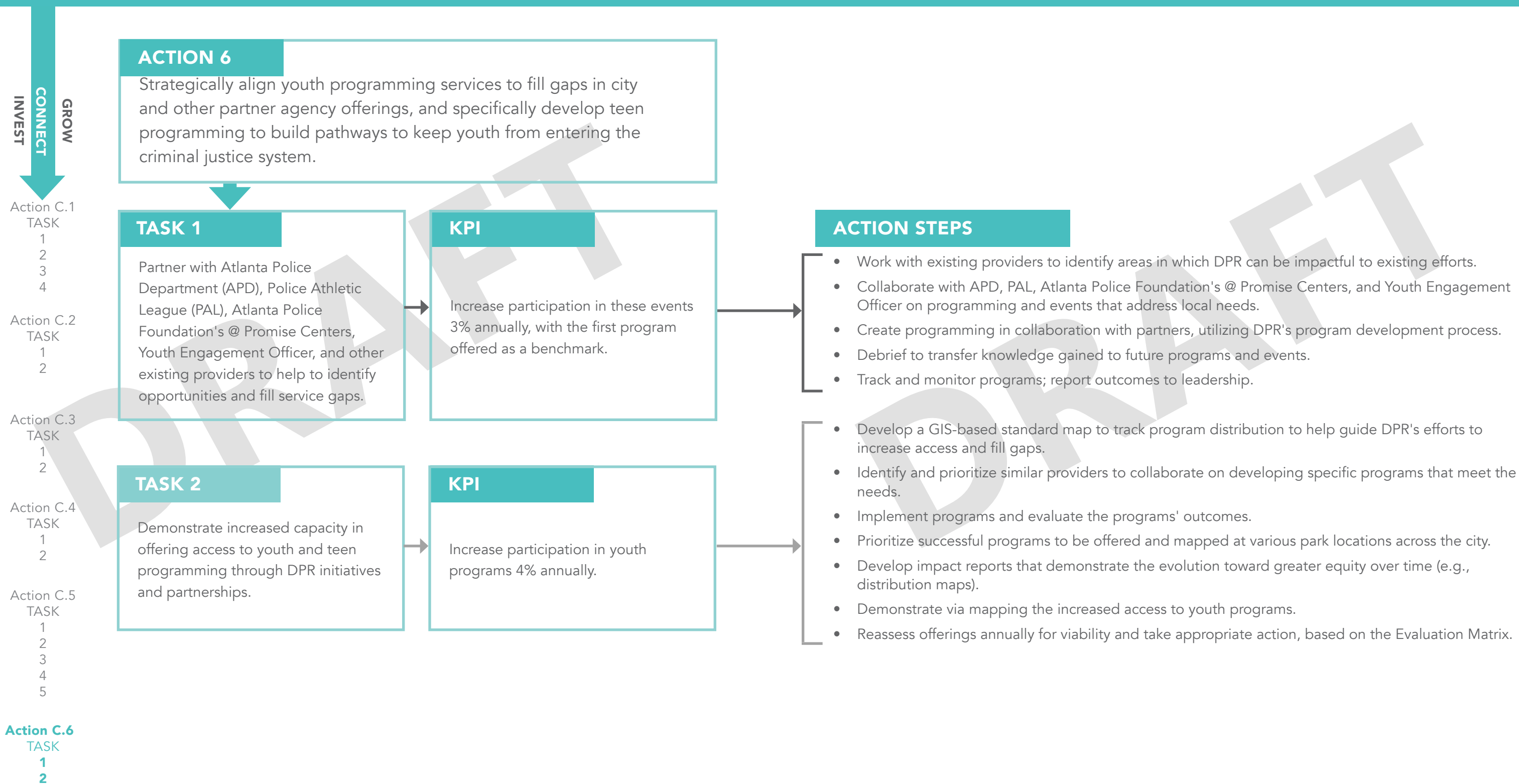
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



Goal #2

CONNECT

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation Resources



Goal #3

GROW

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 1 (1 of 2)

Acquire park land strategically through property donations, purchases, public/private partnerships, or similar means to ensure parks are available and accessible throughout the city—with the goal of providing a park within a 10-minute walk of the population now and in the future.

Action G.1

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Action G.2

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Action G.5

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Action G.6

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TASK 1

Identify vacant/undeveloped properties that are suitable for parks and recreation acquisition.

KPI

275 acres per year total (including Action 2 acquisition methods) of available land confirmed to be suitable for parks and recreation purposes in relation to city-wide acreage level of service target of 13 acres per 1,000 population (with the goal of preserving 50% of the land as natural area) in an effort to add 2,750 acres in 10 years. Updated annually.

TASK 2

Develop a mutually beneficial site management strategy for private properties determined to be suitable for addressing parks and recreation needs.

KPI

Number of finalized agreements to be updated annually.

ACTION STEPS

- Revisit criteria for reviewing / acquiring park land included in the City of Atlanta Community Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Greenspace Program Property Identification Questionnaire.
- Confirm areas of need, based on Park Land Vision Map (*illustrated on page 104*) and using 10-minute walk and other strategies.
- Prioritize areas in need of park land based on Equity Data Tool.
- Survey real estate listings of vacant properties on a weekly basis to identify potential acquisitions.
- Use weekly Property Closings meetings with DPR, The Conservation Fund, and other governmental partners to discuss potential acquisition opportunities. Consider expanding participants to include other agencies with specific interests (e.g., urban agriculture, affordable housing) that may address intersectionality of issues discussed on pages 44-45.
- Explore potential of property to address both parks and recreation needs and other city-wide needs (e.g., affordable housing, stormwater management).

- Meet with development partners (if applicable) to discuss DPR property construction and management needs in relation to partner(s) needs and expectations.
- Establish appropriate land management strategy agreement that considers construction, operations, maintenance, and asset management.

Goal #3

GROW

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 1 (2 of 2)

Acquire park land strategically through property donations, purchases, public/private partnerships, or similar means to ensure parks are available and accessible throughout the city—with the goal of providing a park within a 10-minute walk of the population now and in the future.

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Action G.2

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Action G.5

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Action G.6

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TASK 3

Acquire property.

KPI

275 acres per year (including Action 2 acquisition methods) of property acquired in relation to city-wide acreage level of service target of 13 acres per 1,000 population (with the goal of preserving 50% of the land as natural area) in an effort to add 2,750 acres in 10 years. Updated annually.

TASK 4

Complete needs and priorities assessment to confirm needs, and update Department of Parks and Recreation response strategies.

KPI

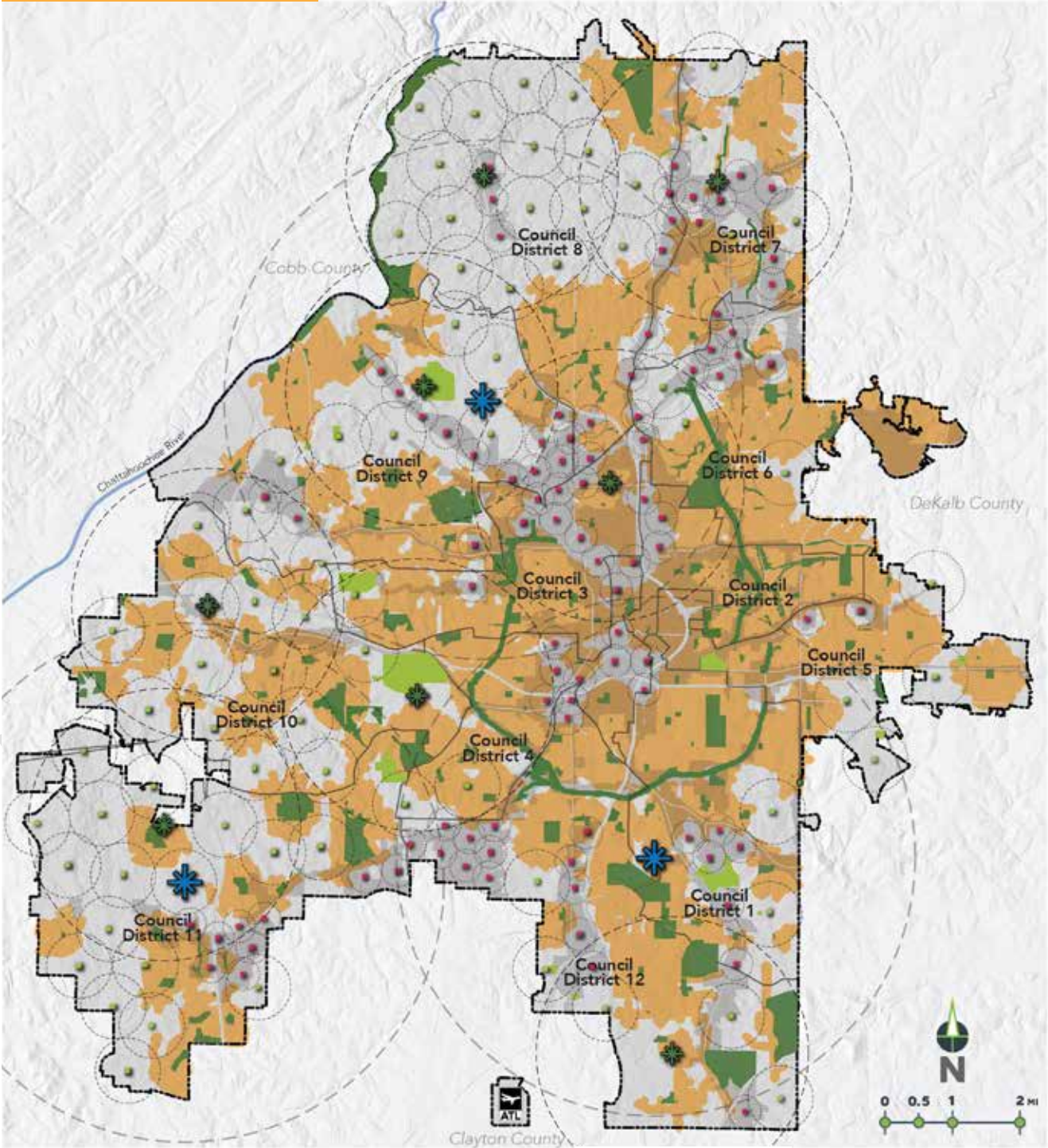
Complete needs and priorities assessment, and update recreation and parks Master Plan every 5 years.

ACTION STEPS

- Continue Property Closings meeting efforts to discuss DPR property construction and management needs in relation to partner(s) needs and expectations.
- Establish appropriate land management strategy agreement that considers construction, operations, maintenance, and asset management.

- Procure parks planning services to complete needs and priorities assessment, and update recreation and parks Master Plan.

Park Land Vision



- Legend**
- City Limits
 - High-Density Land Use Area
 - Medium-Low-Density Land Use Area
 - Council Districts
 - Street
 - Existing Parks, Greenspaces, and Trail Corridors
 - Existing Cemetery
 - Area Served By a Park, Greenspace, and/or Trail Corridor
 - Proposed Park in High-Density Area Not Served by a Local Park within 1/4 Mile
 - Proposed Park in Medium-Low Density Area Not Served by a Local Park within 1/2 Mile
 - Proposed Community Park in Area Not Served by a Community Park within 2 Miles
 - Proposed Athletic Facility | Complex in Area Not Served by an Athletic Facility | Complex within 4 Miles



Mountain Way Common

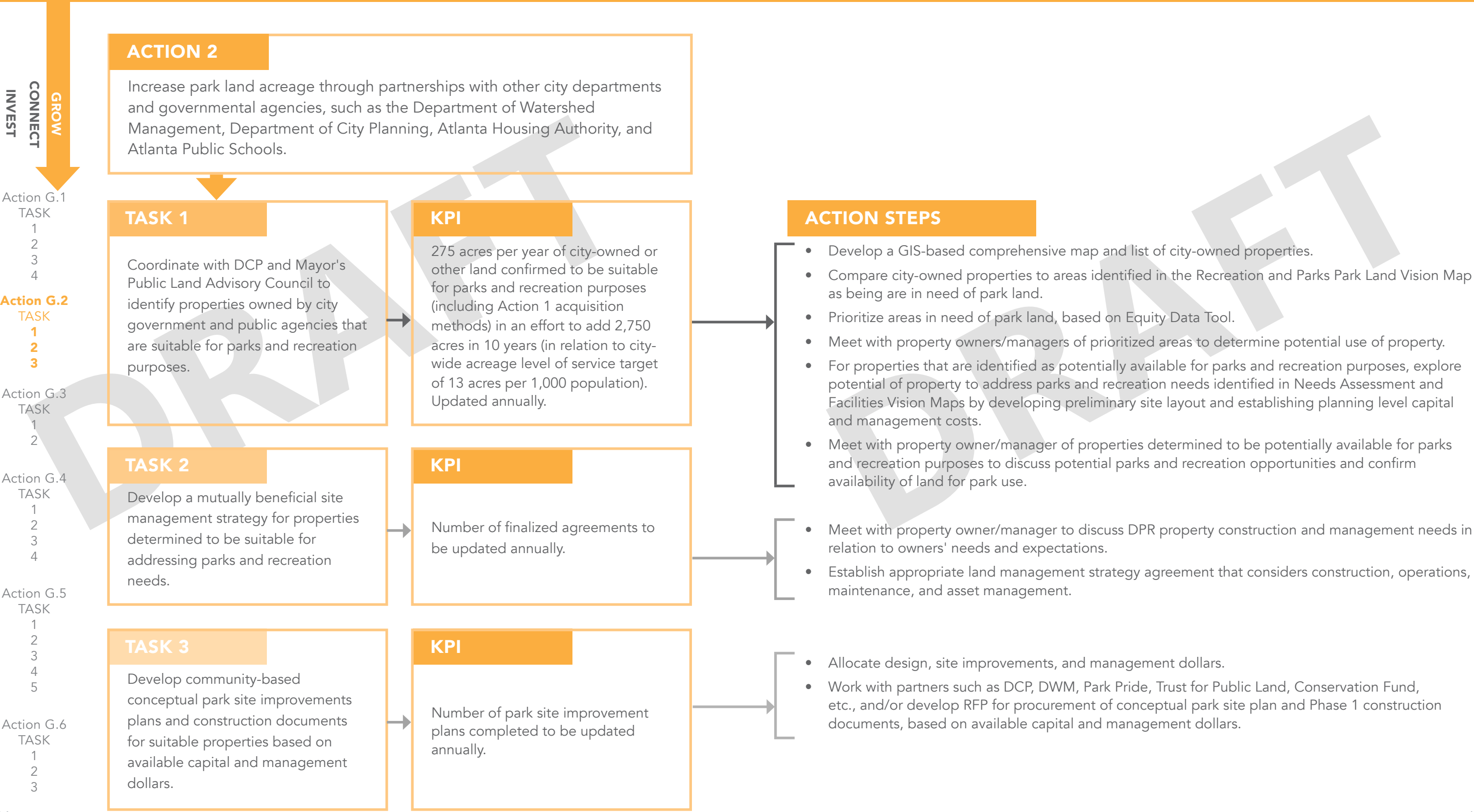


Ella Mae Wade Brayboy Park

Goal #3

GROW

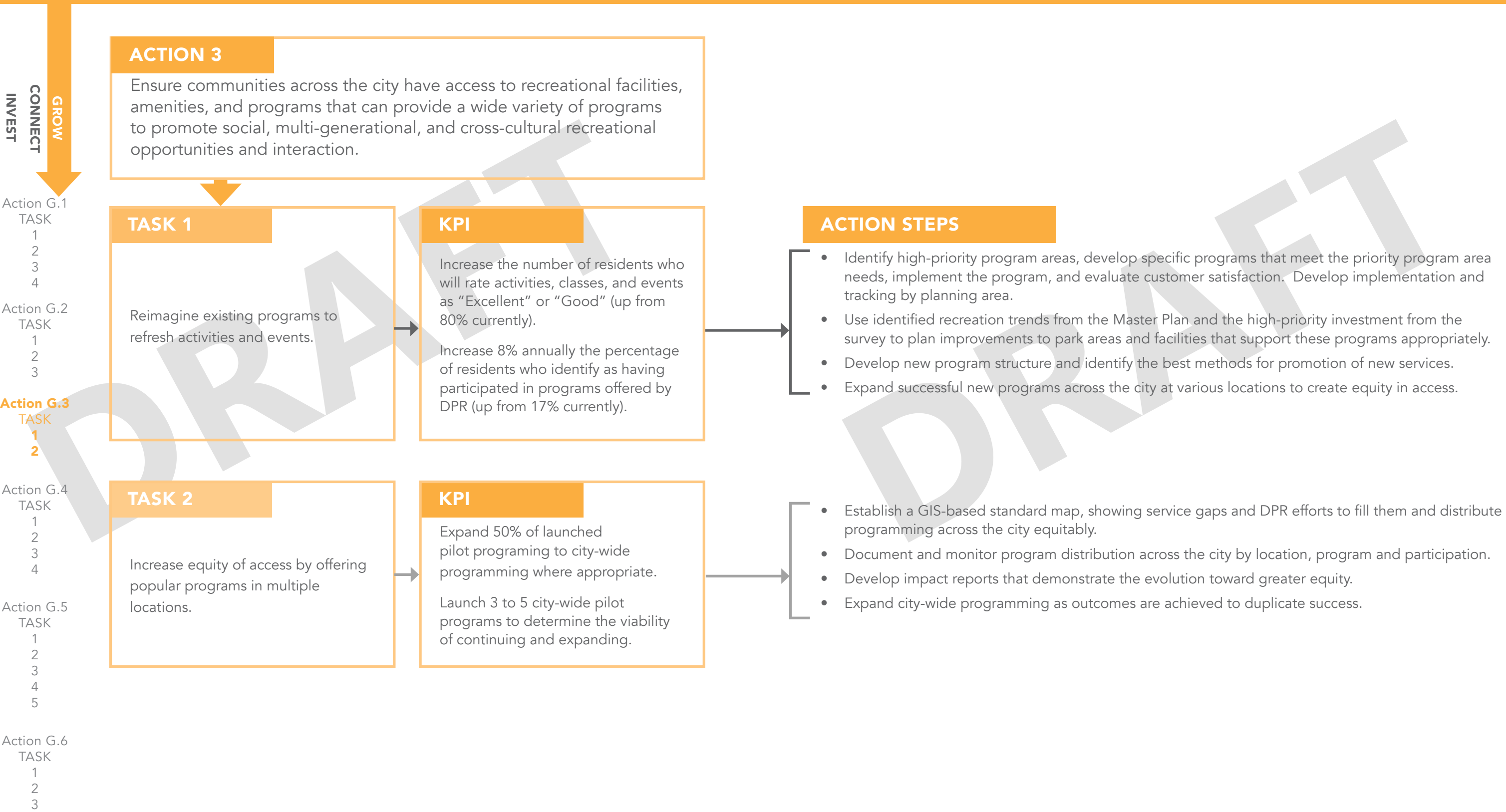
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System



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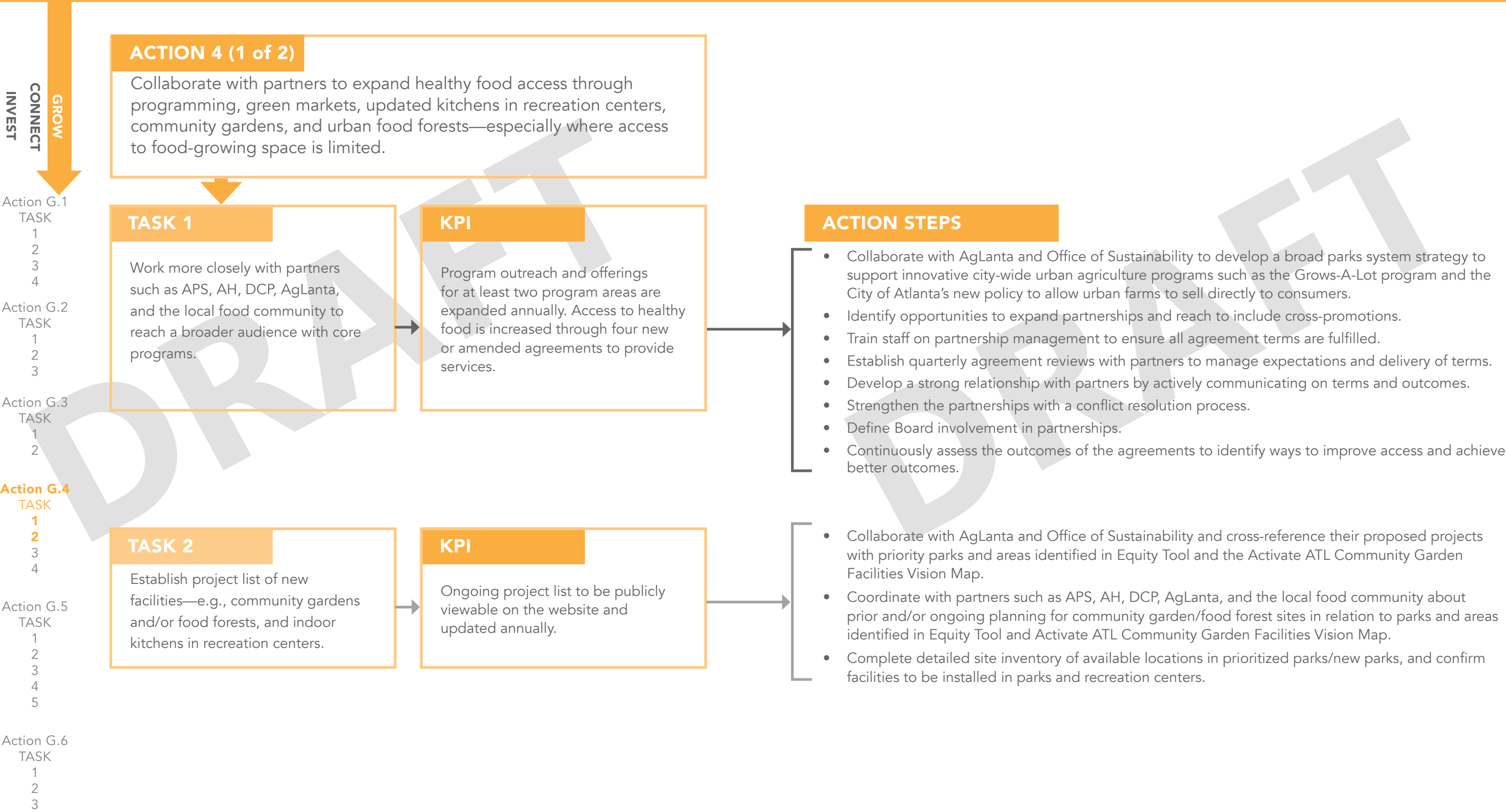
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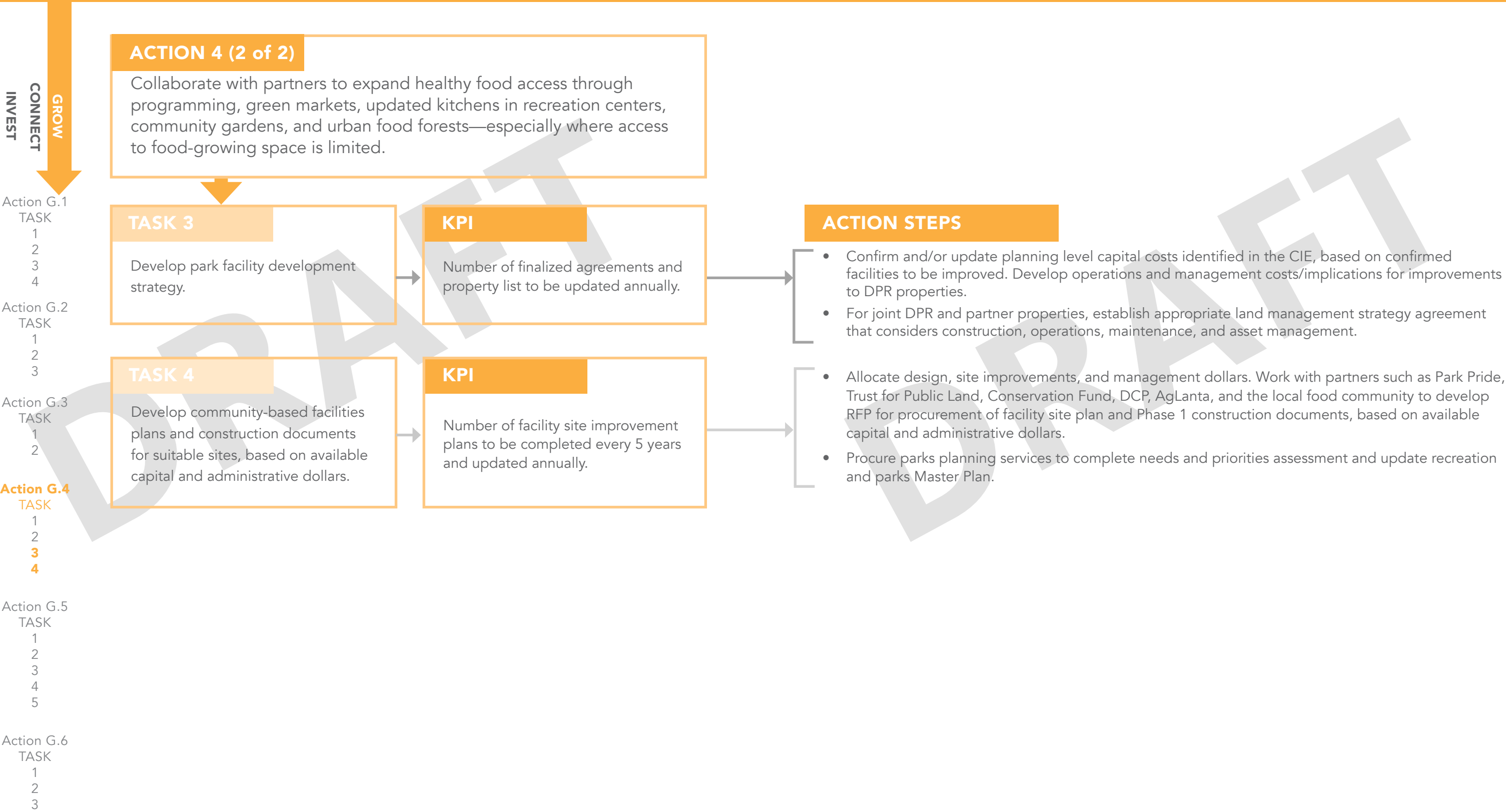
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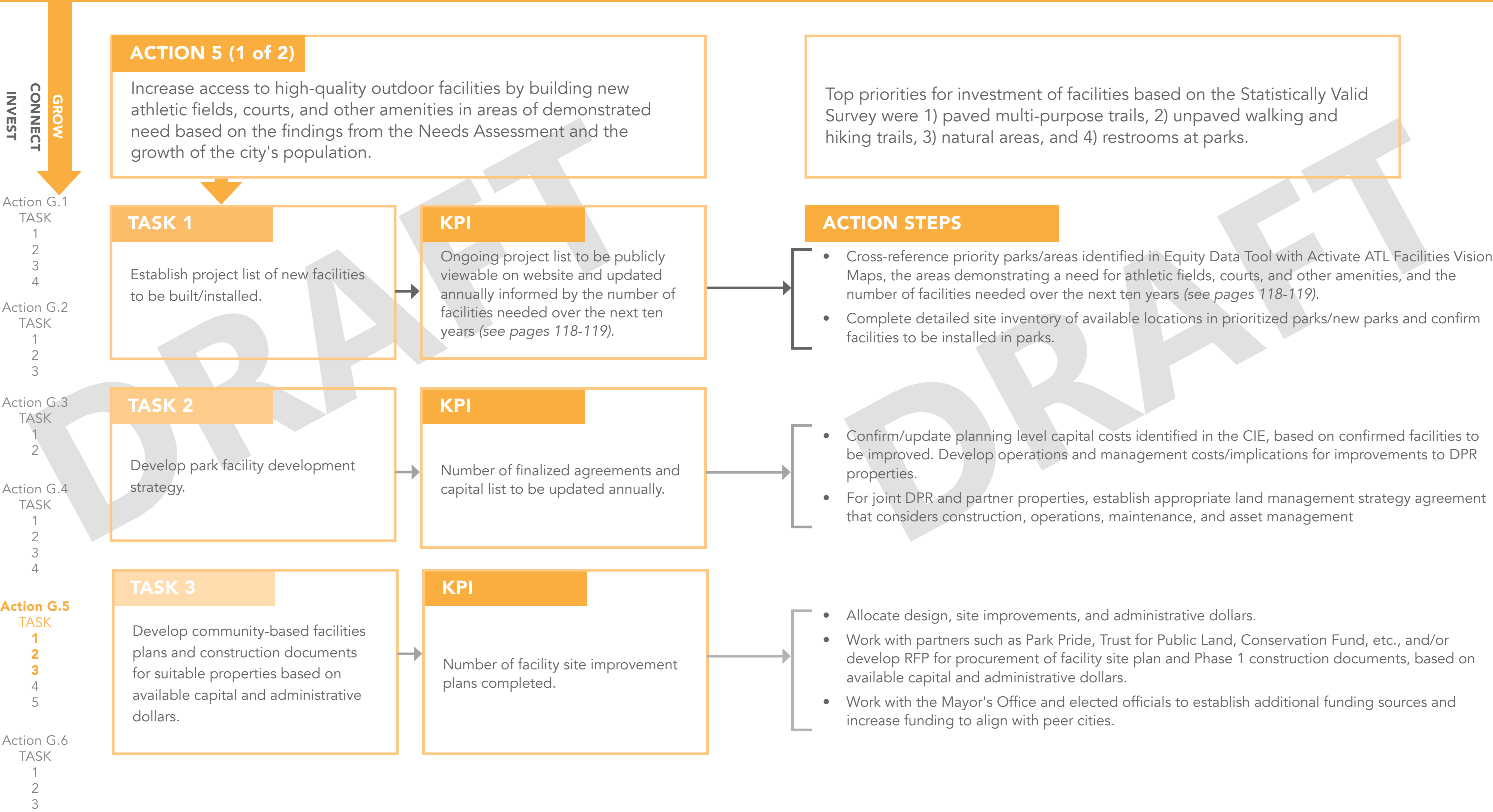
Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System



Goal #3

GROW

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System



Goal #3

GROW

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System

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GROW

ACTION 5 (2 of 2)

Increase access to high-quality outdoor facilities by building new athletic fields, courts, and other amenities in areas of demonstrated need based on the findings from the Needs Assessment and the growth of the city's population.

TASK 4

Monitor the quality, safety, and functionality of assets, and replace as necessary.

KPI

Funds needed to maintain assets. Updated annually and projected out 5 years.

ACTION STEPS

- Input appropriate assets into asset management software, and track the need for improvements using software and timely check-ups.

TASK 5

Complete needs and priorities assessment to confirm needs and update DPR's response strategies.

KPI

Needs and priorities assessment completed every 5 years.

- Procure parks planning services to complete needs and priorities assessment and update recreation and parks Comprehensive Master Plan.

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Action G.6
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Recreation Facility and Amenity Targets

Recreation facilities and amenities bring parks alive with activity—adults exercising at fitness zones, children playing on swing-sets, and people of all ages playing organized or pick-up sports. This activity not only makes for better parks, but also helps form better communities. DPR has hundreds of facilities, ranging from various types of fields and courts to playgrounds and community gardens. Considering the expected increase in population over the next 10 years, the City will need more recreation facilities to meet the demand.

Activate ATL anticipates this need by developing Facilities Level of Service (LOS) targets for key recreation and park facilities and combining them with projected population figures to identify the number of facilities that may be needed in the next 10 years. The table on the following page identifies the proposed Facilities LOS targets and the number of facilities that may be needed in the next 10 years. Some of these facilities may be added in existing parks, while many others may be included in the development of new parks. These targets should be reviewed every 2-3 years, pending new population estimates and surveys of community needs.



Little Nancy Creek Playground



Adams Park Splashpad and Pool

Recreation Facilities Level of Service (LOS) Targets and Future Need

DPR Category	2020 DPR Inventory	Proposed DPR Facilities LOS Target (1 Facility per X Population)	2030 Need/ Surplus
Baseball (Adult)	4	130,935	1
Baseball (Youth)	27	19,398	7
Tee-ball	1	523,738	1
Softball (Adult)	21	24,940	6
Softball (Youth)	5	104,748	2
Basketball	77	6,802	19
Community Garden	21	19,952	12
Dog Park	7	52,374	6
Football	6	87,290	3
Soccer (Adult)	12	34,916	7
Soccer (Youth)	6	43,645	9
Multipurpose Field (Natural)	55	9,372	24
Multipurpose Field (Synthetic)	3	122,206	3
Outdoor Swimming Pools Total	15	34,916	4
Outdoor Pool, designated exclusively for leisure (non-competitive)	4	130,935	1
Indoor Pool, competitive swimming: 25-meter	3	174,580	1
Indoor Pool, competitive swimming: 50-meter	1	523,738	1
Indoor Pool, designated exclusively for leisure (non-competitive)	1	609,768	1
Indoor Pool, therapeutic	1	340,864	1
Tennis Court	136	3,852	34
Playgrounds	133	2,950	89
Skate Park	2	209,945	2
Golf Course	4	130,935	--
Gym	16	32,500	5
Performance amphitheater	2	261,869	1
Outdoor Fitness Corral	26	16,115	15
Public Art / Sculpture	39	13,430	10
Restaurant / Concessions	6	87,290	2
Restroom	39	12,697	22
Splashpad	9	58,194	3
Track	6	87,290	2

Goal #3

GROW

Atlanta's Parks and Recreation System

INVEST
CONNECT
GROW

ACTION 6

Ensure there is an appropriate allocation of parks and recreation staff and resources to meet the increased demands of parks and recreation system growth, including new park acquisition, development of new facilities, and increased recreation programs and events.

TASK 1

Develop a more responsive approach to attracting, hiring, and retaining qualified employees.

KPI

Ensure targeted annual vacancy rate for all position is 5%, but no more than 10%.

ACTION STEPS

- Assess the right number of staff and resources DPR needs over the next ten years.
- DPR to work with HR department to efficiently hire diverse and qualified staff to fill vacancy gaps.
- Identify successful hiring tactics and further incorporate into the hiring process to consistently have a qualified applicant pool onboarded in a timely manner.
- Develop a priority list of positions to be filled.
- Develop job postings that describe the culture of employment, needed skill sets, and advantages of employment with the city.
- Work with HR to determine efficiencies that could help replace vacant positions faster within DPR.
- Amend the hiring process to meet demand for employees by DPR.

TASK 2

Understand the total cost of ownership in developing new facilities, based on the maintenance standard DPR can deliver on services.

KPI

Using the cost-of-service model, project the anticipated annual maintenance of any new park/facility/amenity, including replacement after achieving its lifecycle.

- Determine the program for new parks when conducting a site design concept.
- Develop an operational pro forma to forecast the operational costs and lay out the most appropriate management strategy.
- Identify revenue-generating services for new parks and facilities prior to completed design to help acquire resources, including staff.
- Identify any expertise that is needed with new park/facility concepts; identify existing staff capabilities; research the training/certification requirements; and identify possible companies that could be outsourced as an alternative to keep capacity.
- Monitor new park/facility needs and compare DPR staff and capacity to achieving the outcomes.

TASK 3

Understand total cost of staffing and marketing to increase programs and events in order to deliver services and resources to the community.

KPI

When developing new programming, incorporate the costs for new staff to implement the program and evaluate outcomes.

- Use data to educate leadership on resources needed to manage parks, facilities, and attractions to outcomes.
- Where hiring staff is not possible, seek volunteers from partners to help implement new programming.
- Contract out services with similar providers to deliver programming when expertise is needed and DPR does not have enough capacity.
- Identify special interest groups and potential partners for delivering programs from the medium-priority investment rating, where capacity does not exist within DPR.
- Ensure longstanding programs are still viable and avoid allocating resources to underutilized programs.
- Seek out partnerships and sponsorships to share in the cost of providing service, or use sponsorship dollars to acquire additional resources.

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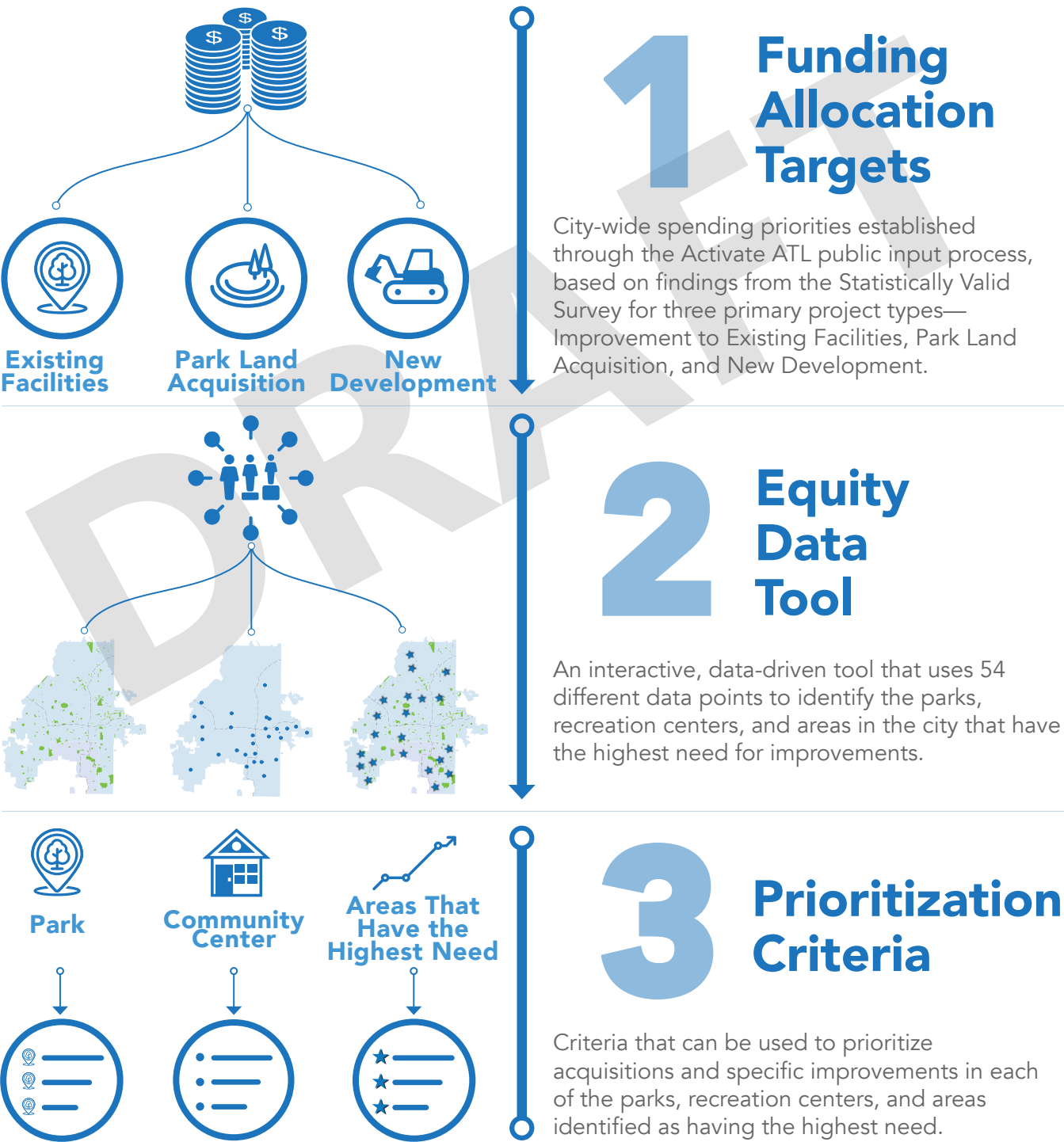
Action G.4
TASK
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Action G.5
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Action G.6
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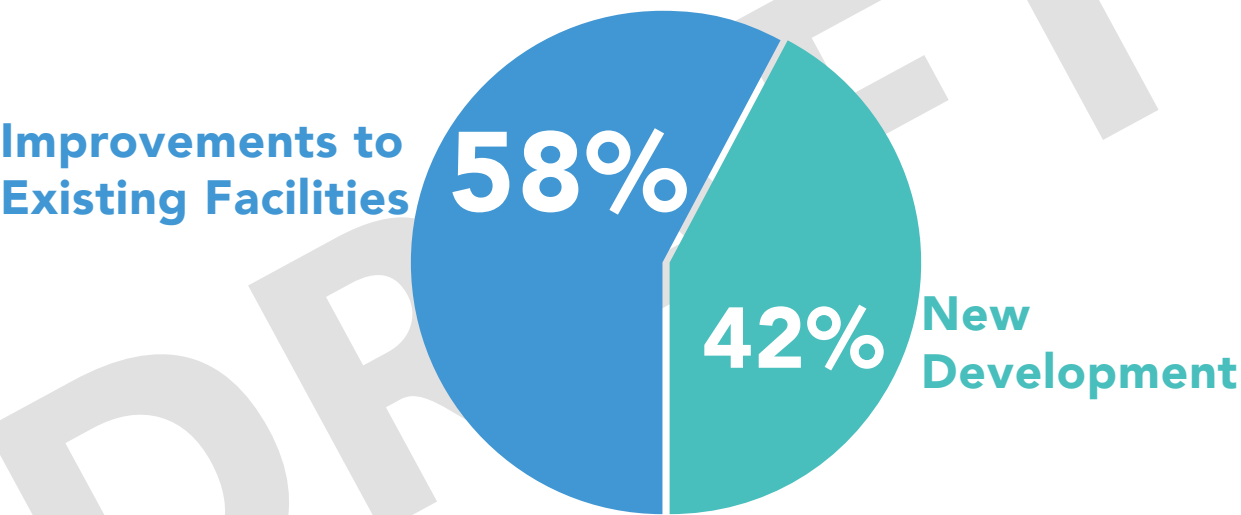
3.3 | Prioritizing Activate ATL

Prioritizing the implementation of the Activate ATL Vision is critical to ensuring that parks and recreation resources are allocated equitably, fairly, and justly. Three tools will be used to prioritize improvements:



1 Funding Allocation Targets

First, parks and recreation resources will be allocated based on project types. This will ensure that resources are expended based on how Atlantans expressed in the Statistically Valid Survey they would like to spend DPR dollars. As the graph below demonstrates, this means that 58% of available funds would be allocated for “Improvements to Existing Facilities” and the remaining 42% would be allocated for “New Development.”



The Activate ATL Plan allowed DPR to assess strengths and weaknesses as well as create a roadmap for the future to expand upon the strengths and overcome the weaknesses identified. Activate ATL created an inventory and completed a needs assessment viewed through an Equity lens in Chapter 1; established priorities and best practices in Chapter 2; and looks at establishing a guide for implementation and funding in Chapter 3. Although there are many priorities, most will fit into the following categories:

Funding Priorities

- Maintenance (deferred)
- Development of new indoor amenities
- Development of new outdoor amenities, including athletic fields
- ADA improvements
- Security
- Acquisitions

2 Equity Data Tool

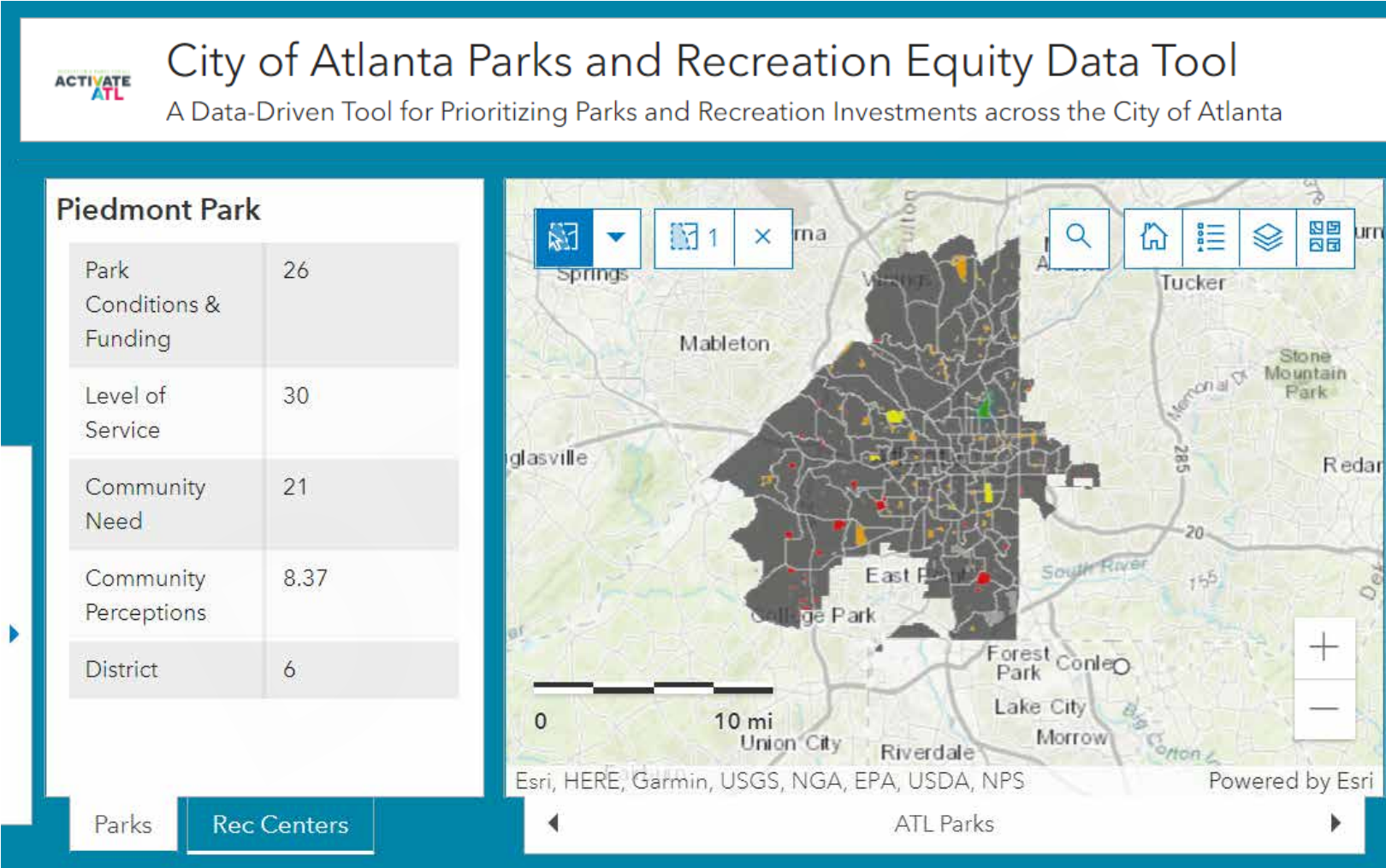
Next, the Activate ATL Equity Data Tool will be used to determine which parks, recreation centers, and areas have the highest need for park improvements and land. This interactive tool is the result of a two-year partnership between DPR and Bloomberg Associates (BA) to advance parks and recreation equity across the City of Atlanta.

To help the city prioritize neighborhood parks and recreation centers with the greatest need for investment and capital improvement, Bloomberg Associates created an interactive, data-driven, decision-making tool to guide these efforts. This tool combines 54 different data points ranging from the condition of parks, the amount of park land within a geographic area, access to parks, the health conditions of surrounding residents, and crime within a geographic area, just to mention a few, to help prioritize funding for improvements.

Based on this data, the tool will be able to calculate neighborhood determinants of health and life expectancy for areas around the city. This provides the ability to monitor DPR's efforts and impact over time while allowing parks and recreation efforts to inform specific park and recreation recommendations that can improve Atlantans health and quality of life.

Following is a screen shot of the Equity Data Tool. As improvements are made and new data is inserted, the Equity Data Tool will be regularly updated to reflect the current conditions.

Additionally, DPR will continue to update the Equity Data Tool to prioritize land acquisition for new park land across the city.



3 Prioritization Criteria

Lastly, improvements within the parks, recreation centers, and areas in the city that have the highest need may be further prioritized using the following criteria:



Health, Safety, and Welfare - Improvement addresses physical and safety hazards of facilities or amenities that may fail and cause harm to the public.



Preserve/Replace Facility - Improvement addresses facilities with significant disrepair and capital improvements to preserve necessary operability.



Community Needs - Improvement addresses community needs identified through the Needs Assessment findings, including filling Service Gaps.



Unique Benefits - Improvement provides environmental, economic, public art, historic preservation/cultural resources, and partnership benefits.



Project with Other Funding Sources - Improvement leverages public and private grants, philanthropic, or sponsorship funds.

DPR will use this list to work collaboratively with residents and elected officials to finalize the prioritization and completion of park improvement projects paid for through available funding.

OPPOSITE ABOVE The Rev. James Orange Recreation Center is one of the system's older facilities, due for modernization and upgrades.

OPPOSITE BELOW The Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreation and Aquatic Center represents a recent investment that provided a state-of-the-art facility to replace an older natatorium that had outlived its useful life.



3.4 | Funding Activate ATL

Implementing the Activate ATL Vision will require committed and consistent capital, operations and maintenance funding. As requested by Atlantans, this means increasing public funding for DPR to fund deferred maintenance, growing the system and sustaining it over time, and leveraging public funds through partnerships.

Capital Funding

Over the last 10 years, DPR has received approximately \$250 million of public funds for capital improvement projects. These funds were provided through a variety of sources, including allocations from the city's general fund, park improvement fund, park impact fees, bonds, and grants.

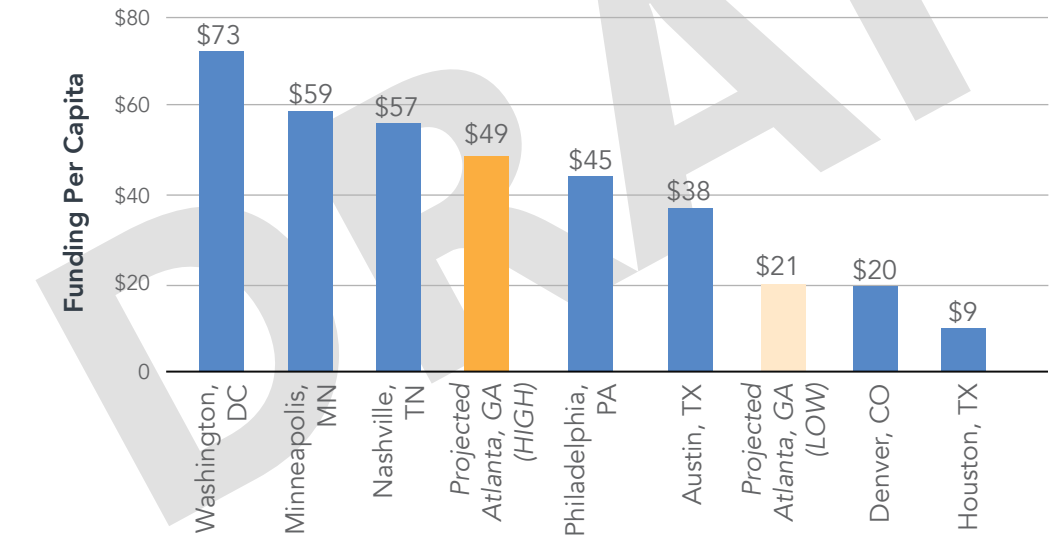
Additionally, over the last 5 years alone, DPR has benefited from approximately \$39.5 million from private/non-profit funding. This private funding amount has represented about 35% of the total public capital funding provided by the city between 2016 and 2020. Many of these funds, however, have been designated for specific projects, including the new Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreation and Aquatic Center and the Grant Park Gateway. Based on conversations with staff and partners, the table below identifies potential major funding sources and range of projections over the next 10 years.

Funding Type	Projected Funding Assumption Description	Projected Funding Assumption per Year (LOW)	Projected Funding Assumption per Year (HIGH)	Total Order of Magnitude Projected Funding Assumption Over 10 Years (LOW)	Total Order of Magnitude Projected Funding Assumption Over 10 Years (HIGH)
Park Impact Fees	\$1–2M per Impact Fee District (3) per year	\$3M	\$6M	\$30M	\$60M
Bonds (projected)	\$100M every 10 years	\$500K	\$10M	\$5M	\$100M
Park Improvement Fund	\$5M per year	\$5M	\$5M	\$50M	\$50M
Grants	\$500K per year	\$500K	\$500K	\$5M	\$5M
Total Public Funding	-	\$9M	\$21.5M	\$90M	\$215M
Private/Non-Profit Contribution Target	20% of Public Investment	\$1.8M	\$4.3M	\$18M	\$43M
Total Funding	-	\$10.8M	\$25.8M	\$108M	\$258M

Based on the city's 2020 population, the Projected Low Funding Assumption for capital projects would equate to \$21 of spending per resident (capita) annually, while the Projected High Funding Assumption for capital projects would equate to \$49 of spending per resident annually. The figure below compares these amounts to the 5-year median capital funding spending per resident of 7 peer cities (2015–2019).

These peer cities were selected based on characteristics such as population, size, density, and governance type. In addition, the list was also designed to include “aspirational” cities known for their excellent park systems, which can serve as a model for Atlanta. These include Washington, D.C. and Minneapolis, both of which rank highly in The Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore® Index.

Peer Cities' 5-Year Median Capital Funding Per Capita (2015–2019)



This comparison shows that these funding assumption projections are on the lower end to middle, as compared to the peer cities. Given current funding allocations, DPR will need to develop additional funding mechanisms or allocations to enable projects and acquisitions to be funded.

Moving forward, DPR staff will continue to coordinate with the Mayor’s Office and elected officials to work toward establishing additional funding sources and increasing funding to align with the peer cities illustrated above.

Operations and Maintenance Funding

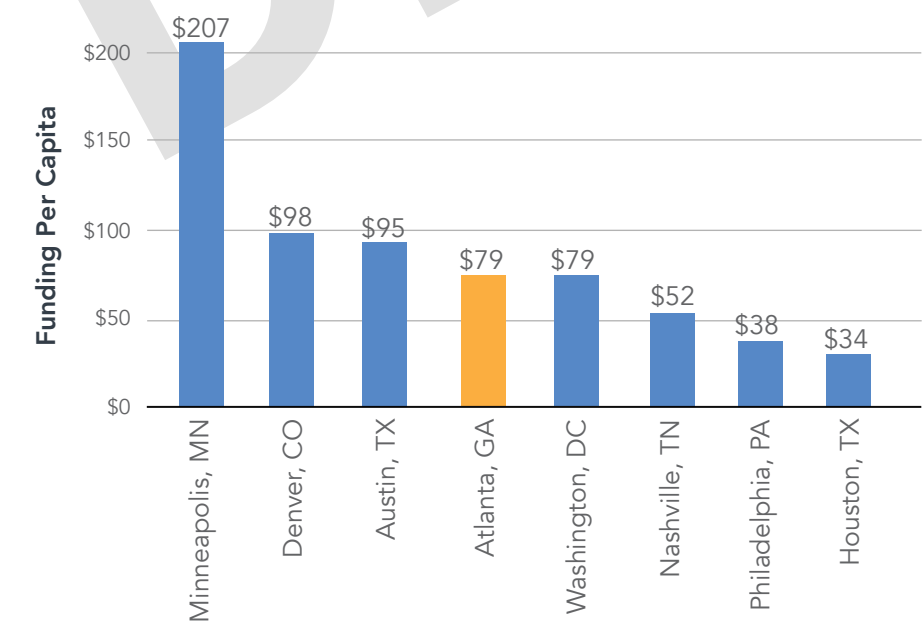
In order to respond to Atlantans' highest-priority need of improving existing recreation and parks facilities, parks operations, and maintenance funding must be increased.

The following table and charts show examples of what this would mean for DPR, using DPR's operations and maintenance funding from 2019 as a reference. Specifically, the table below shows what DPR's budget was per capita, per acre, and as a percentage of the city's overall budget in 2019.

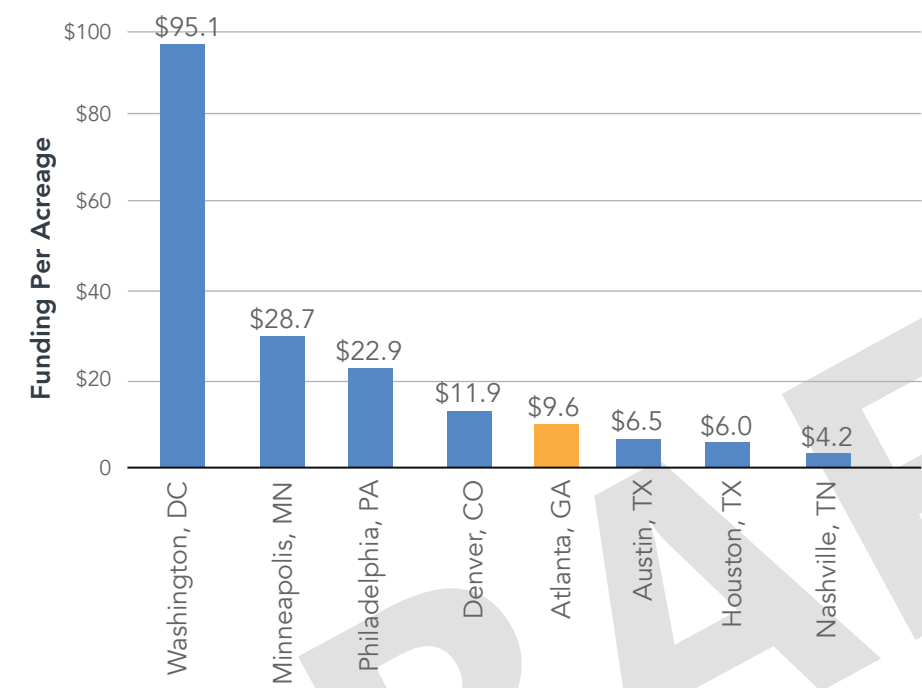
Operations and Maintenance Funding Metrics	2019 DPR Operations and Maintenance Funding Metrics	2019 DPR Operations and Maintenance Budget
Per Capita	\$79.49	\$40,611,688 (1.8% of overall city budget)
Per Acre	\$9,633	

The following charts show how DPR's operations and maintenance funding has compared to peer cities using three comparison techniques—funding per resident, funding per acreage of park land, and funding as a percentage of the city's overall budget.

Peer Cities' 5-Year Median Operations and Maintenance Funding Per Capita (2015–2019)



Peer Cities' Operations and Maintenance Funding per Acreage (in thousands), 2019



Peer Cities' Parks Department Operations and Maintenance Budget Percentage (2020)

City	General Fund Parks Department Operating Budget	Percent of General Fund Operating Budget
Minneapolis, MN	\$134,929,666	11%
Austin, TX	\$105,819,774	9%
Denver, CO	\$80,340,000	5%
Nashville, TN	\$42,442,000	4%
Houston, TX	\$78,556,551	3%
Atlanta, GA	\$41,799,261	2%
Washington, DC	\$54,642,227	2%
Philadelphia, PA	\$67,858,055	1%

These comparisons illustrate that DPR’s Operations and Maintenance funding has historically been toward the lower end in comparison with peer cities. The table below illustrates the range of what DPR’s budget should have been in comparison to top tier cities.

Operations and Maintenance Funding Metrics	Top Tier City Operations and Maintenance Metric Benchmark Range		Potential Range of DPR’s Operations and Maintenance Budget in 2019 Based on Top Tier City Benchmark Ranges
Per Capita	\$95–\$207	=	\$48M–\$105M
Per Acreage	\$11K–\$95K	=	\$50M–\$401M
Percentage of City Overall Budget	3%–11%	=	\$67M–\$248M

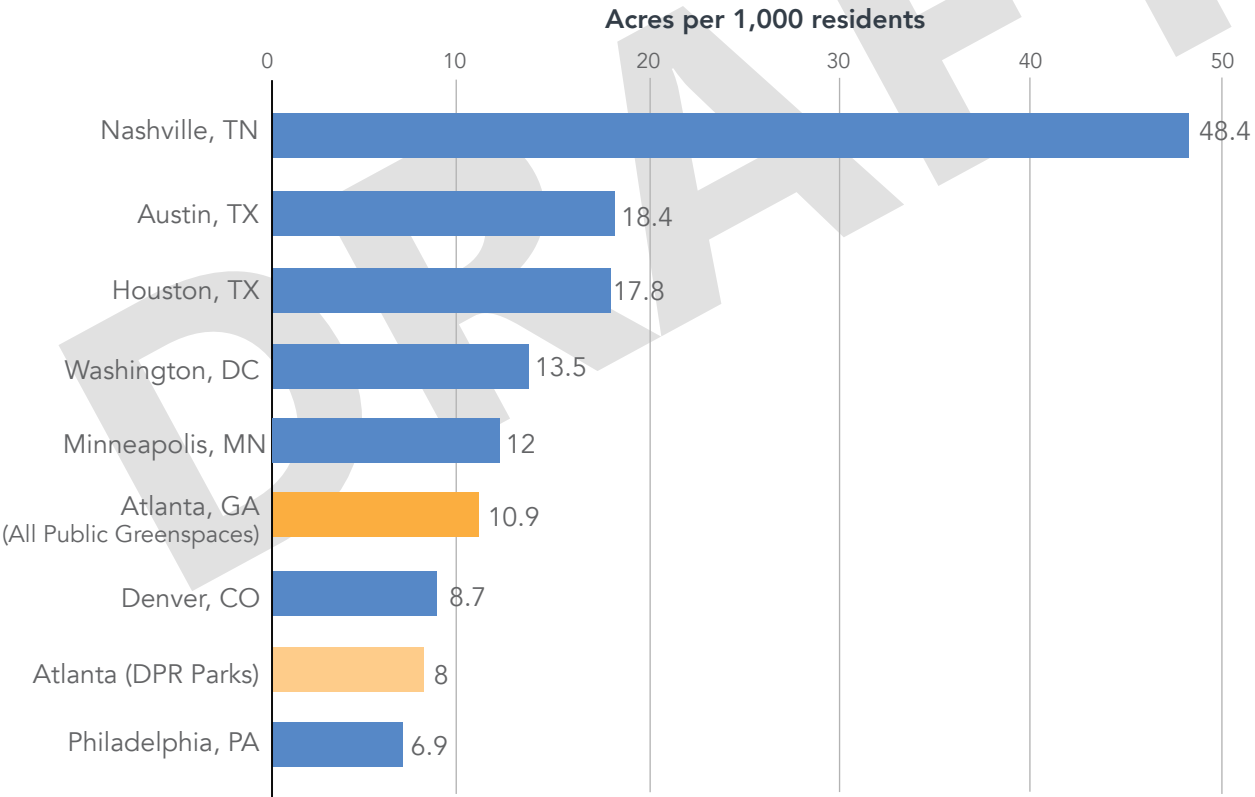
Moving forward, DPR will continue to work with Mayor’s Office and elected officials to increase DPR’s operations and maintenance budget to be more in line with national benchmarks and top tier cities.

Acquisition Funding

DPR, along with various departments of the City of Atlanta, has been successful in recent years in acquiring acreage through use of Park Impact Fees, Tree Trust Fund, and through partnerships. These acquisitions have included the purchase of a 216-acre natural area known as Lake Charlotte in 2020; the opening of new PATH and BeltLine Trails; and the openings of the 16-acre Cook Park and 280-acre Westside Park, among others, in 2021.

However, Atlanta currently provides 11 acres of park land per 1,000 residents, which is below the national median of 13 acres, and lower than that of most peer cities (Nashville, TN; Austin, TX; Houston, TX; Washington, DC; and Minneapolis, MN).

Peer Cities' Park Land Acreage per Resident, 2020



Assuming Atlanta’s population continues to grow at current projections, Atlanta will need to acquire an additional 1,445 acres within the next 10 years to maintain the current acreage per 1,000 residents. To achieve the national median of 13 acres per 1,000 residents, the city would need to acquire 2,750 acres.

Partnerships

DPR has a long history of building partnerships to benefit the community. Over the years, DPR has worked with partners throughout the community, such as local professional sports teams, civic organizations, facility management providers, Friends of the Park groups, Park Pride, recreation vendors, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Atlanta Public Schools, conservancies, and religious organizations. DPR also works closely with many other city departments, including DWM, DOT, DPW, and DCP.

These partnerships help to meet community needs with support through community engagement, volunteers, sponsorships, and implementation of programs and events. Moving forward, DPR will work alongside partners to update partnership policies, processes, and performance reporting to achieve shared goals and outcomes.

All partnerships require a working agreement with shared measurable outcomes that will be evaluated on a regular basis. This should include reports on monitoring costs and investments that contribute to maintenance and capital improvements.

All partnerships should maintain a culture that focuses on collaborative planning and review of shared performance metrics to identify any key areas of improvement through regular communications and quarterly and/or annual reviews.

With our partners, we will work together to support opportunities that strengthen the relationship over time and focus on positive outcomes in the community.

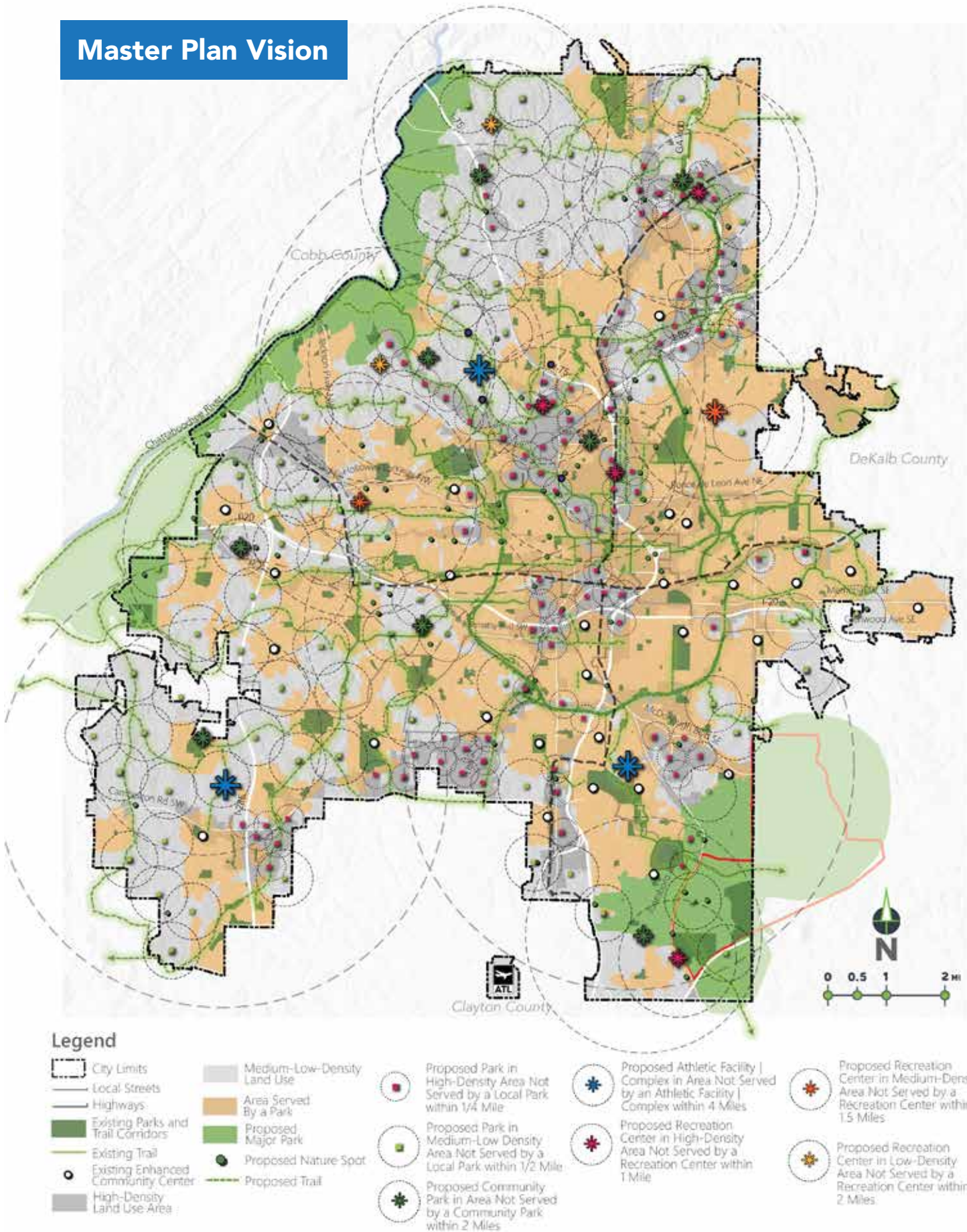


OPPOSITE Partnerships are a powerful tool for expanding DPR's impact, whether increasing access to healthcare resources (top) or providing food to Atlanta residents during the COVID-19 pandemic (bottom).

3.5 | An Integrated and Equitable Vision

At its core, the Activate ATL Vision is about providing meaningful and equitable benefits for all Atlantans. Its implementation will lead to beautiful parks within a short walk from everyone’s home. It will mean a variety of recreation and parks facilities across the city; natural areas for Atlantans to immerse themselves in nature; and indoor recreation centers designed to support DPR programs. Most importantly, it is a commitment to a high quality of life for all Atlantans.

The goals, actions, steps, and proposed vision presented in the Activate ATL Long-Range Vision can stand alone, but they are even more powerful when they are addressed as an integrated whole. The map on the next page demonstrates what the city’s fully realized Long-Range Vision would look like as an interconnected network. It stitches together the various recreation and park resources to achieve a better functioning system and, ultimately, to strengthen communities throughout the city. With Activate ATL, DPR is poised to confront the complex issues facing Atlanta by harnessing the “power of parks.”



Acknowledgments

Thank You!

Thank you to all community members, stakeholders, focus group participants, elected officials, and enthusiasts who live, work, and play in the City of Atlanta’s parks and recreation system!

Over the course of the planning process for Activate ATL, more than 10,000 of you provided constructive and brilliant feedback through virtual and in-person meetings, mailings, written and online surveys, signage, and more! The leadership of the Department of Parks and Recreation Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) has proven invaluable in furthering our collective understanding and interconnected execution of this 10-year plan to improve parks and recreation in our beloved Atlanta.

The Department of Parks and Recreation appreciates your support and engagement in planning for the future of our parks and recreation system. This document is dedicated to your love for our city and all her attributes!

The Honorable Keisha Lance Bottoms, Mayor of the City of Atlanta

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Felicia A. Moore, Council President

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Atlanta Housing Authority	Dept of Watershed Management	Mayor’s Pandemic Coordination Team
Atlanta Regional Commission	Fulton County Recreation Authority	Park Pride, Inc.
Atlanta Police Department	Georgia Dept of Natural Resources	Partnership for Southern Equity
Atlanta Public Schools	Georgia Power	PATH Foundation
Atlanta Visitor’s Bureau & Convention Center	Georgia Tech	Renew Atlanta
Children & Nature Network	Invest Atlanta	The Conservation Fund
Department of City Planning	Office of the Mayor	The Trust for Public Land
Dept of Enterprise Management	Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs	West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

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