



## Castleberry Hill Neighborhood Association

The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation  
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Castleberry Hill is a historic downtown neighborhood, unique in Atlanta. Its future is informed by its colorful past: markets, shops, restaurants and residences enjoyed by diverse peoples. In this urban oasis situated amidst business, government, transportation, sports, entertainment, and convention facilities, old buildings are given new life. The community takes pride in its streetscapes, green spaces, public art, and historic structures.

Located on the southwestern edge of Downtown Atlanta and south of CNN Center, the Philips Arena, Georgia Dome and Georgia World Congress Center, Castleberry Hill was recently featured in the “Homefinder” section of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Jan. 13, 2002). One of the more notable characteristics of Castleberry Hill is its 40-acre federally recognized Historic District, placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985, containing the largest and best-concentrated remnant of railroad buildings in Atlanta. The railway, which defines street and building patterns as it cuts through the neighborhood, is as old as Atlanta itself. Peters Street, the traditional route from Downtown to West End, cuts through this district.

Many of the early 20th-century warehouse buildings have been converted to lofts and are now the predominant housing type. There is a recent, culturally diverse population which is usually young and single or married without children, although there is also an older presence. Some residents have called Castleberry Hill their home for decades. Few youngsters play, and they can be found on sidewalks or empty parking lots. All of these people want their community to be a better place to live and work and have expressed a strong desire for useable, green, open space. The 1990 US Census data lists the median household income as \$6,849, and, despite the recent influx of residents, Castleberry Hill continues to have deterioration in existing buildings and sites, a deficient street layout, patterns of vacant land, and environmental conditions detrimental to public health, safety and welfare.

The Castleberry Hill Master Plan, a collaborative effort between the Castleberry Hill Neighborhood Association (CHNA) and David Butler & Associates, Inc., was administered by the City of Atlanta Bureau of Planning and funded by a grant from the Atlanta Empowerment Zone Corporation and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Adopted by the Atlanta City Council and incorporated into the 2001 Comprehensive Development Plan, the Master Plan studied the existing conditions within the neighborhood and, through review of these findings and with input from public meetings, established neighborhood goals and objectives. One of the seven stated goals is “To develop parks, open spaces and convenient pedestrian circulation.”

Castleberry Hill had been trying to establish a park prior to the Master Plan. After having a \$900 tax lien excused on approximately 2,500 sq.ft. of land along Haynes Street between Peters and Bradberry Streets (195 Peters St.), Castleberry Hill was promised the property in February 1998. A City Council resolution introduced by Cleta Winslow gave CHNA permission to maintain the property, the Department of Parks & Recreation allocated \$13,288.80 from their Park Improvement Fund for trees, and \$44,660 was approved by CDBG for neighborhood signage, street banners and an art garden. While CHNA was waiting for the deed from the Land Bank, the Bureau of Planning instead turned the property over to Beazer Homes to construct a showcase project for a builders’ convention held in January 2001.

This past fall, in conjunction with Trees Atlanta, CHNA planted 43 trees in the neighborhood. Atlanta Fire Station #1 offered to let the volunteers use the station's water supply to fill the large watering containers. An "Adopt a Tree" program was initiated, where a resident chose a specific tree or trees to care for during the first year, and a group of residents have also formed a tree care group to water all of the new trees in times of drought.

On a quarterly basis, neighborhood residents and business people don their gloves, pick up bags, and hit the streets. In the last year alone, the CHNA Clean-up Committee has collected over 100 bags of trash. City Councilperson Cleta Winslow has arranged for people that have been required to provide community service to supplement our volunteers, and we have been very successful in tackling the rough spots – whether it be removing old furniture and appliances or picking up trash, empty bottles and building supplies – where private owners have failed in maintaining their property. We also participated in the City of Atlanta's Tire Amnesty Day, collecting over 80 tires from throughout the neighborhood for pickup.

Through a series of public meetings which included residents and developers, Castleberry Hill compiled a series of architectural design guidelines to preserve the historic, industrial live-work neighborhood character. These have been submitted to the Urban Design Commission as a basis for writing Historic District zoning, outlining limits/requirements for building heights, materials, parking, open space, and the like.

In November 1999, Norfolk Southern announced plans to dispose of their buildings and vacant land in Downtown Atlanta, all of which lies within or borders Castleberry Hill. The Master Plan concludes that Parcel D "will probably have the most significant impact on the neighborhood in the short term" and identifies it as a prime site to create a community park, develop a greenway trail along the railway, and preserve the operation of the horse-drawn carriages which serve Downtown. In addition, a community center has been proposed at the site where a railroad depot, destroyed by fire in the late 1980s, once stood on Peters Street between Castleberry Street and the bridge. This facility, built overlooking the old railroad yards, would be a meeting place for community groups and house offices for the Castleberry Hill Development Corporation. It may also incorporate a small display room featuring the history of the railroad and the neighborhood. Other rooms could include offices, residences, and street-level retail leased to cover operating expenses.

At the time the Master Plan was written, Parcel D was under contract by a local developer who was in positive discussions with the neighborhood to include a small park at the northern end as well as a greenway trail. However, he is no longer interested in pursuing that purchase, and the entire 6.656 acres are available. This presents the possibility of additional amenities such as an enclosed dog run, a horse grazing pasture, parking areas, a community garden and recycling facilities.

A community park has taken on special significance for Castleberry Hill since the death of Jerry Hoy in a shooting last March. He had lived in the neighborhood for almost 20 years and dedicated his life to making things better for his neighbors. He served as CHNA President for many years and was a familiar face at City Hall and in various city boards and committees. Even people who didn't know him recognized "that man on the motorcycle." Jerry was a photographer, and many of the images in the Master Plan are his. Because he gave his life protecting his neighborhood, it seems fitting to honor him through a tangible, visible display of community pride.

The residents of Castleberry Hill believe that Parcel D is an ideal location for community greenspace. It extends along the historically significant and community-defining railroad. It is the largest contiguous piece of vacant land in the neighborhood and is centrally located. The northern end is a gateway to the neighborhood from Downtown. And Jerry Hoy was one of the original residents of Castleberry Square, the building across Peters Street from the proposed community center.

The current condition of the land is untended and overgrown, littered with all sizes and kinds of trash, a breeding ground for mosquitoes, rats and other pests. Under the Peters Street bridge is known as "Sofa City," a mini-town of homeless people, similar to the settlement at the I-20 bridge which received media attention a few months ago. This is a haven for drug users and makes the neighborhood a target for associated crimes such as car and home break-ins.

Phase I of this project will include the land acquisition and clearing the property. Phase II will be the development of the greenway trail, the memorial park, the dog run, the horse pasture, and the community garden and recycling facilities. Phase III represents the construction of the community center. This application deals only with Phases I & II. We are asking that the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation grant CHNA \$3.5 million to purchase and prepare the land in Phase I; we are prepared to obtain funding for the Phase II development.

Admittedly, this is an ambitious undertaking, on a much larger scale than originally anticipated. However, we believe the opportunity is too great to let slip past. We recognize that we cannot accomplish this alone and, as we have with previous neighborhood projects, we are actively seeking support, guidance and partnerships.

CHNA has letters available upon request from City Council and the Department of Planning, Development & Neighborhood Conservation endorsing the establishment of a park on this site. About half of the parcel is located in an Empowerment Zone, favoring public/private partnerships. Because it is adjacent to the railway, it is eligible for funding under the Transportation Equities Act for the 21st Century and possibly from Rails to Trails. The 2001 CDP contains two line items: \$100,000 for land acquisition for the community center in year 5, and \$220,000 for land acquisition for the park in year 10. CHNA has \$44,660 in existing CDBG "Park Development" funds. We are also pursuing fair market value reimbursement of \$30,000 from Beazer Homes for the Peters/Haynes Street property. There is \$1,110 in the neighborhood's Jerry Hoy Memorial Fund. We have also approached several conservation and environmental non-profit organizations to partner with for the development and maintenance of the park, including Trees Atlanta, the PATH Foundation, the Atlanta Development Authority, Park Pride Adopt-a-Park, and the Georgia Wildlife Federation.

While the Master Plan calls for the formation of a community development corporation, the neighborhood has recognized that it does not yet have the experience or organizational structure in place to take on the serious responsibility of a 501(c)(3) corporation. The Community Development Committee of the CHNA is therefore spearheading the implementation of the Master Plan projects in the interim, and Park Pride has tentatively agreed to act as our fiscal agent in this matter.

The steps we have already take to improve the conditions in Castleberry Hill have reinforced our steadfastness to reduce crime, infestation and vagrancy in the neighborhood. Many residents have had positive experiences doing something for the community and, in the process, got to know their neighbors a little better. The Village at Castleberry Hill, the mixed-income garden-style apartment community which replaced John Hope Homes, lies just outside the official boundaries of the neighborhood at the intersection of Northside Drive and McDaniel Street. The residents of this 450-unit Atlanta Housing Authority/H.J. Russell development would also benefit from the proposed park. Communities are not merely areas defined by lines on a map – they are a network of relationships between people. The creation of this park provides a unifying focus for the neighborhood, and it is a place where relationships could be built and community strengthened.

The fulfillment of this vision begins with securing the land. Castleberry Hill hopes that the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation will help us take that first step to seize the huge opportunity presented here.

Sincerely,

Katherine Siegel  
Community Development Committee Co-Chair

Claudia Zevallos  
Community Development Committee Co-Chair