

The Atlanta Committee for Progress:

A public-private partnership driving Atlanta's most exciting economic development initiatives

Dating back to the Cotton States Exhibition in 1895, Atlanta's city government has enjoyed a strong, cooperative relationship with the private sector. The two have worked closely together and have achieved successes through both the cohesiveness of the business community and the efforts by Atlanta's mayors to engage business leaders.

The Atlanta Committee for Progress (ACP) continues the City's tradition of working in tandem with the private sector to develop public policy initiatives. ACP brings together top business executives and academic leaders to advise the mayor and other top public officials on selected issues that are important to the city of Atlanta's economic development.

At first glance, ACP may appear similar to the blue-ribbon commission model of the past, or the loaned executive model that Atlanta has relied on heavily to find solutions to big challenges. While it is true that Atlanta's public sector leaders have always engaged the private sector to take part in audits, ad-hoc commissions and committees, ACP embodies a new model – one based on joint accountability for planning and execution.

The committee is charged with identifying key issues and ensuring that they are addressed, through either existing organizations or new initiatives. Some of these new initiatives are temporary; others spur the creation of new organizations that continue long-term execution.

"The Atlanta Committee for Progress functions much like a venture capital firm – seeking solutions, identifying and leveraging leadership to jump-start initiatives, and then spinning them off to operate independently," said John Ahmann, principal of Ahmann, Inc. and executive director of the ACP.

Mayor Shirley Franklin called for the creation of the ACP in 2003, after a pro-bono research report by Bain & Company found that a public-private leadership committee would help drive economic development in Atlanta and move the City towards its goal of becoming "best in class." Launched by A. D. "Pete" Correll, then chairman and chief executive officer of Georgia Pacific, ACP's concept was loosely modeled on Chicago's Civic League and the Cincinnati Business Committee, both of which were studied by Bain & Company.

ACP's current board is made up of 31 leading executives from Atlanta's major businesses, colleges and universities. James M. Wells III, Chairman and CEO of SunTrust Banks, is chairman of the board and hosts the board's quarterly meetings. Mayor Franklin is an active participant, attending all of the meetings and engaging fully in its discussions. Other ACP officers include Peter Aman, partner with Bain & Company, who serves as secretary of the board; and Claire Arnold, CEO of Leapfrog Services, Inc., who is treasurer.

The ACP works to advance the seven goals of the Mayor Franklin's [Economic Development Plan](#):

1. Create 60,000 new jobs
2. Develop 24,000 new, airport-related jobs
3. Create a \$26-billion increase in property value
4. Create 10,000 new, affordable workforce housing units
5. Establish 1,900 new acres of parks and green space
6. Facilitate a 50 percent decrease in the crime rate
7. Support a 72 percent high-school graduation rate for students in Atlanta Public Schools

To achieve these goals, the mayor and ACP form task forces to develop policy recommendations. Each of these task forces is led by an ACP member, and additional ACP members, corporate executives, civic leaders and content experts are invited to participate.

A task force's job is to generate and evaluate the best ideas to address its designated goal. Task force members are expected to think big and come up with the best possible strategies, without concern for political obstacles. The mayor is then responsible for navigating any political hurdles that arise. This ensures that the task force's recommendations are neither dictated nor compromised by politics.

Ahmann is pleased to support ACP's efforts by serving as its outsourced management team. John Ahmann serves as executive director to the coalition, and the entire Ahmann organization assists with strategic thinking, research, content development, media relations, and project management throughout the life of each task force and initiative. From coordinating meetings to identifying potential task force members, Ahmann uses its collective skill sets to help ACP achieve its mission.

ACP is focused on what it can impact; hence, it centers its efforts on Atlanta's economic development. It is currently working on the following initiatives.

1. [King Collection](#) – Acquiring the works of Martin Luther King, Jr.
2. [Local Education Fund](#) – Finding dedicated funding to support Atlanta Public Schools
3. [Cultural Investment Fund](#) – Increasing public funding of the arts
4. [Center for Human and Civil Rights](#) – Creating an Atlanta-based center
5. [Peachtree Corridor Partnership](#) – Transforming Peachtree into one of America's "great streets"
6. [BeltLine](#) – Enhancing the city's green space and transportation
7. [Brand Atlanta](#) – Improving Atlanta's appeal and reputation
8. [Affordable Workforce Housing](#) – Creating housing for "city infrastructure workers"

[King Collection](#)

The King Collection contains more than 7,000 manuscripts and books, along with thousands of other items handwritten by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This important collection was scheduled to be sold to the highest bidder at a public auction at Sotheby's in New York in June 2006. An Atlanta-based consortium of donors, working in conjunction with the King Family Estate, worked feverishly to pull them off the auction block and prevent any other private purchase of the documents. The consortium committed to raise \$32 million to purchase the papers, which had been appraised by the Library of Congress in 1999 for \$28-\$30 million. ([Read more](#) about how Ahmann helped keep the King papers in Atlanta.)

Morehouse College, Dr. King's *alma mater*, will own the papers and will house them at the [Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center](#). The library has ample physical space (including vault and archival storage rooms), security and environmental controls appropriate to secure the collection, as well as workspace to process the papers and make them available to scholars and students.

To facilitate the purchase of the papers, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta borrowed \$32 million from SunTrust and established ATLCF Collections LLC, a 501(c)(3) organization. ATLCF Collections used the borrowed funds to purchase the papers and will transfer ownership to Morehouse.

As part of the purchase agreement, the King Family Estate agreed to allow the collection to be displayed at the Atlanta History Center, the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, the King Center, and Atlanta's future civil rights center. Other sites may also display the papers with permission. Mayor Franklin will appoint an advisory committee to determine what further public exhibition of the papers is appropriate.

ACP is working to raise \$34.5 million to pay down the SunTrust loan plus interest that was used to purchase the collection, and to ensure that the collection will be available to scholars, students and the public. As of October 2007, the effort has secured pledges of approximately \$25 million. Donations have ranged from \$10,000 to \$2 million, with most participating corporations donating \$1 million.

ATLCF [continues to seek donations](#). Additionally, community leaders have begun a grassroots effort to solicit contributions from a wide range of people. Dubbed the [King Papers Society](#), the effort has raised over \$260,000 with contributions from more than 130 individuals.

Atlanta Education Fund

In 2005, ACP sponsored the "APS Strategy Reform Articulation Project," a study conducted in partnership with the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and Great Schools Atlanta. The study recommended 10 improvement initiatives for APS, which Superintendent Dr. Beverly Hall adopted. ACP member Dr. Walter Massey, then president of Morehouse College, led a committee to find ways to implement the report's other recommendations. His committee proposed the creation of a local education fund, and in 2006, ACP took on this task.

The mission of the Atlanta Education Fund is to "collaborate with Atlanta's public schools and the community to increase our collective capacity to support, monitor and advocate for excellent student achievement." Specifically, it seeks to:

1. *Engage the public* – Increase awareness of reform efforts and collect stakeholder feedback on those efforts; increase stakeholder involvement in the schools; and ultimately create a sustained community interest in the improvement of Atlanta's public schools. Stakeholders include parents, students, teachers, principals, faith-based organizations, elected officials, citizens at-large, business leaders and the media.
2. *Monitor performance* – Build community understanding of the performance of Atlanta's public schools and their students, seek feedback on these results, and use performance measures to identify what is working and where the greatest continued reforms are needed.
3. *Provide support for specific reform initiatives* – Seek funding and leadership for specific new reform efforts (with an initial focus on high-school reform, math and science instruction, and early childhood education).
4. *Research important issues* – Research other critical policy or instructional topics relevant to Atlanta's public schools to assist in identifying the next wave of potentially valuable reforms for the LEF to champion.

Through a national search, the Atlanta Education Fund secured Hosanna Johnson as its president. John Rice, Vice Chairman of General Electric and President & CEO of GE Infrastructure, serves as the chair of the Fund's top-level board of directors. So far, the Atlanta Education Fund has raised \$1 million for its first year of operating expenses and is the fiscal agent for a \$10-million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to support APS high-school reform efforts.

Cultural Investment Fund

In April 2006, in recognition of the importance of a world-class arts community to Atlanta's economic development, Mayor Franklin announced the formation of the Atlanta Arts & Culture Funding Task Force. Penelope McPhee, president of the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, served as the task force's chair, and Dr. Andrea Barnwell, curator of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, was vice-chair. The task force was charged with developing strategic recommendations for increasing public funding for Atlanta's nonprofit arts and cultural organizations. When the task force completed its work in 2007, its recommendations included the creation of a [Cultural Investment Fund](#) (CIF).

If endorsed and funded by the City of Atlanta, the CIF would distribute nearly \$10 million a year towards arts and culture. The CIF would generate revenue through an earmarked index of a dedicated funding source that may only be used to fund cultural investments. The specific revenue source is at the discretion of the mayor and city council, but the task force recommended that it be tied to the hospitality and tourism industries, so that increased arts and culture patronage would in turn yield greater revenues. The Atlanta City Council intends to review and consider the CIF in coming months.

Center for Human and Civil Rights

In 2005, Mayor Franklin commissioned a working group (on which John Ahmann served) to develop the vision and concept for a new, Atlanta-based center to commemorate the contributions of Atlantans and Georgians to historic struggles for civil and human rights. The center would also be a place for ongoing dialogue about, study of and contributions to current and future struggles for the freedom of all people at the local, national and international levels.

With this initial concept in place, Mayor Franklin in 2007 appointed a [Center for Human and Civil Rights Partnership](#). Its goals are to:

1. Form a permanent organization, including a board of directors, by January 2008.
2. Raise 50 percent of its capital budget by January 2008.
3. Break ground on a new facility by December 2008; open the facility in 2010.
4. Open debt-free and with an endowment to support ongoing operations.

The Partnership currently is focused on organizational set up, conducting an economic impact study, launching a fundraising campaign, and developing a content outline for the future Center.

Peachtree Corridor Partnership

The Peachtree Corridor Task Force, which was launched by the ACP in November 2005, completed its work in March 2007 with the release of its report and recommendations. The report provided a vision of how Peachtree Street could be transformed into one of America's "great streets" and become a major destination for residents, businesses and visitors. The task force's recommendations focus on streetscape, mobility, public space and housing improvements for each of seven segments of Peachtree Street. Important components include establishing streetcar service, making the corridor more pedestrian-friendly, and promoting economic development along the corridor. The total package of improvements and investment proposed by the task force totals nearly \$1 billion.

If the task force's recommendations are to be fully implemented, the Atlanta City Council will need to create a special funding district to generate a significant portion of the required revenue. Otherwise, the improvements to Peachtree Street will be limited. The city council also would need to make zoning changes, improve roads and

right-of-ways, and create a public/private entity to oversee the long-term management of the corridor improvement program.

ACP has established the [Peachtree Corridor Partnership](#) to determine the best ways to implement the task force's vision and keep the project moving forward. Ray Christman, former president and CEO of Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, has agreed to lead the next phase of the effort.

BeltLine

The largest and most comprehensive city redevelopment effort in the nation, the [BeltLine](#) is an innovative solution to the challenges created by accelerating growth in Atlanta's inner core. The BeltLine will link 45 in-town neighborhoods with a 22-mile loop of transit, 33 miles of trails and 1,300 acres of new parks and green space. The BeltLine calls for a \$240 million investment in affordable workforce housing and includes a commitment to public art, historic preservation and environmental cleanup, making it a new model for development that is balanced, livable and sustainable.

The city's goals for the BeltLine are to:

1. Secure public and private funding for necessary infrastructure, including right-of-way and green-space acquisition and transit and transportation improvements.
2. Broaden awareness and understanding of the BeltLine and ensure extensive public engagement in planning and design of all BeltLine components.
3. Build an integrated system of parks, trails and transit.

The BeltLine project is already making progress. As of October 2007, the city had acquired more than 21 acres of land for the BeltLine's first new park, Boulevard Crossing in Southeast Atlanta, in addition to the landmark acquisition in 2006 of the Bellwood Quarry property in northwest Atlanta. After Vulcan winds down operations over the next two years, the Quarry is planned to transform into the most significant new park and greenspace to be developed along Atlanta's BeltLine. To continue acquiring green space, the Atlanta City Council approved \$28 million in Downtown Development Authority short-term bonds, which have been validated by the court. These bonds will provide interim BeltLine funding. In addition, more than \$15 million has been raised in the BeltLine Partnership Capital Campaign.

City residents surveyed in 2007 voiced strong support for the BeltLine and high levels of confidence that it will be completed as envisioned.

Brand Atlanta

[Brand Atlanta](#) is behind a concerted marketing effort that establishes a unified and consistent brand identity for Atlanta. By promoting Atlanta's attributes and benefits, Brand Atlanta aims to increase the city's appeal, leading to greater economic development.

A 501(c)(3) organization, Brand Atlanta is led by chairman Ronald D. Brown, president and CEO of Atlanta Life Financial Group; and executive director / chief marketing officer Melinda Ennis-Roughton.

Brand Atlanta's goals are to:

1. Ensure that Atlanta improves its ranking among preferred destination cities for visitors, residents, meeting planners and businesses.
2. Work in civic partnership with organizations, venues and leaders that hold a shared passion for and interest in Atlanta's economic vitality and success.

Affordable Workforce Housing

The Affordable Workforce Housing Task Force aspires to create 10,000 new affordable workforce housing units by 2009. The task force is co-chaired by Ron Terwilliger, chairman & CEO of Trammell Crow Residential, and Renee Glover, CEO of Atlanta Housing Authority.

The task force has focused on three main efforts, all of which are making great progress:

- *Housing Opportunity Fund* – In April 2007, the Atlanta City Council approved the Housing Opportunity Fund, allocating an unprecedented \$75 million for the creation of affordable housing units. This is a landmark investment in affordable workforce housing in Atlanta. The Housing Opportunity Fund is now accepting applications and has been tremendously successful in helping people afford homes in the city.
- *Inclusionary Zoning* – Inclusionary zoning ordinances have proven successful in California, New Jersey, Maryland and elsewhere. The Affordable Workforce Housing Task Force aims to make inclusionary zoning part of its toolbox for addressing the need for affordable workforce housing in Atlanta.
- *Land Assemblage Financing Fund* – This innovative fund, led by Enterprise Community Partners, will provide low-interest, short-term bridge financing for up to 120 percent Loan to Value. These loans will be available to small nonprofit and private developers assembling land for affordable workforce housing.

With its business acumen unencumbered by politics, ACP brings new solutions to these critical issues and more – yielding benefits that will improve Atlanta for many years to come.