Achieving Fairness of Place
Closing Racial Equity Gaps Through
Neighborhood Revitalization

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The Dickens administration has adopted the goal of transforming Atlanta’s most distressed neighborhoods into healthy, thriving places

• “By joining together – right now, today – by strengthening our partnerships and aligning our missions; by working together in a spirit of innovation and service; by focusing on transforming our most disinvested places; and by centering equity and the voices of our residents, we can make Atlanta the best city in the country to raise a child.”

• “We need to reimagine a future for our city. A city of healthy, thriving neighborhoods that are accessible to people of all races and income levels. Neighborhoods that are safe, healthy, culturally rich, with good schools and dynamic economies.”

• “If we can achieve that goal, then all the outcomes we all care about – public safety, educational opportunities, health equity, economic mobility – will improve.”

-Mayor Andre Dickens
The outcomes that concern us – failing schools, crime & violence, health disparities and the lack of economic mobility – all share the same root cause.

Segregated neighborhoods of concentrated poverty inhibit the healthy development of young people

1. Distressed neighborhoods expose children to sources of toxic stress that impede their neurological and physiological development and serve as the engine of intergenerational poverty.

2. These neighborhoods were engineered into existence through mal-intended public polices and private actions. It is that legacy that must be remedied through catalytic investments in housing, education, health, economic development, recreation and public infrastructure that attract private investment and reverse the cycle of disinvestment that has persisted for generations.

3. By transforming distressed neighborhood into healthy ones, we can create the conditions needed to produce young adults with the capacity to lead happy, healthy and productive lives.

Neighborhood revitalization represents the most viable pathway to sustainably improving outcomes

What is the place-based approach?
Delivering a set of tailored investments designed to catalyze private capital and reverse the cycle of historic disinvestment in distressed neighborhoods (e.g., redlining, food deserts, substandard housing, etc.).

What are the characteristics of a place-based approach?
Developing and implementing neighborhood-specific and holistic revitalization plans. These plans are:

- Designed and owned by the neighborhoods themselves
- Focus on catalytic capital investments and complementary services that collectively change the trajectory of a neighborhood
- Create the conditions that support families and children becoming more engaged, connected, and resilient.
We now know that childhood exposure to sources of toxic stress impedes healthy physiological and neurological development.

- By two years of age, **obvious gaps** in the neurological fabric of children have already developed.
- This is **permanent damage**, and directly impacts the cognitive functioning of children, particularly with regard to executive function and future decision-making.
- Most of the formal interventions dedicated to preparing children for school don’t start until a child is four years of age.
  - What the science suggests is that this is **four years too late**.
For example, living in proximity to a homicide materially impacts the test scores of children

- **Exposure to a local homicide** within a short period preceding an academic test reduces performance substantially.
- The magnitude of the effect depends on the proximity of the homicide to the child's residence, and the length of time that passes between the homicide and the test.
- The **effects are substantial**, suggesting that local homicides have a nontrivial acute effect on African-American children's performance on cognitive tests.
- Given the concentration of homicides in our cities, this data suggests that African-American children living in a city's most violent neighborhoods spend at least one quarter of the year - or roughly one week out of every month - functioning at a low level because of local homicides.

Source: Patrick Sharkey PNAS 2010;107:26:11733-11738
We have a research interest across all of these drivers of “neighborhood effects”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood Effects Drive Outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Social Contagion:</strong> Behaviors, aspirations, and attitudes may be changed by contact with peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Collective Socialization:</strong> Conform to local social norms conveyed by neighborhood role models and other social pressures</td>
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<td>• <strong>Social Networks:</strong> Influence by interpersonal communication of information transmitted through neighbors</td>
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<td>• <strong>Social Cohesion and Control:</strong> Degree of neighborhood social disorder and its converse, “collective efficacy”</td>
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<td>• <strong>Competition:</strong> Groups within the neighborhood compete for resources</td>
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<td>• <strong>Relative Deprivation:</strong> Residents with some socioeconomic success a source of dis-amenities for less-well off neighbors</td>
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<td>• <strong>Parental Mediation:</strong> Parents’ physical and mental health, stress, coping skills, sense of efficacy, behaviors, and material resources</td>
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<td><strong>Environmental</strong></td>
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<td>• <strong>Exposure to Violence:</strong> People in danger suffer psychological and physical responses that impair their functioning</td>
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<td>• <strong>Physical Surroundings:</strong> Decayed physical conditions of the built environment</td>
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<td>• <strong>Exposure to Toxicants:</strong> Exposure to unhealthy levels of pollutants because of land uses and other ecological conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Spatial Mismatch:</strong> Little connectivity and accessibility to economic opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Public Services:</strong> Inferior public services and facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Stigmatization:</strong> Public stereotypes held by powerful institutional or private actors</td>
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<td>• <strong>Local Institutional Resources:</strong> Low quality quality institutions</td>
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<td>• <strong>Local Market Actors:</strong> Bad market actors that may encourage or discourage certain behaviors</td>
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The Atlanta Committee for Progress has agreed to coordinate the launch of the Neighborhood Revitalization initiative

- The Taskforce will have two major responsibilities:

  1. **Devise and finalize the core mission, values, and impact aspiration for [New Org]**, the nonprofit organization that will serve as the "backbone" of the neighborhood efforts citywide. Develop its strategy, organization, communications and financial plan.

  2. **Build and consolidate business cases for investment across the six neighborhoods** and identify/mobilize preliminary partners needed for delivery.

- Taskforce will also provide support on key issues. These include:
  - **Safe and Secure Housing**: How do we acquire and rehabilitate key “problem properties” in target neighborhoods?
  - **Economic Mobility**: What combination of neighborhood investments and services are needed to most effectively advance economic mobility objectives in our target neighborhoods?
  - **Education**: What are the potential models for a strategic partnership between the City, APS, Georgia Tech (and other interested universities) and the leading technology companies to transform the Douglass cluster?
Extra Slides
The plan is to establish two organizations responsible to delivering different elements of the plan.

**Elements of the Neighborhood Revitalization approach**

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<th>What we are solving for:</th>
<th>How that will be accomplished:</th>
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<td><strong>1</strong> Scalable &amp; long-term holistic approach (e.g., extends beyond one administration)</td>
<td><strong>Split the responsibility and ownership</strong> of the neighborhood initiative <strong>across two entities</strong>, to ensure its long-term success with the right partners engaging in the right ways.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong> Utilize public-private partnership effectively</td>
<td><strong>Atlanta Urban Development Corporation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3</strong> Data-backed approach for equity driven approach</td>
<td><strong>[New Org]</strong></td>
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By mirroring Beltline’s structure, the Neighborhood Revitalization effort can deliver the same resilience across political changes and the same effective use of public-private-philanthropic partnerships.
Another source of stress is mass incarceration, which has served as a “toxin” in neighborhoods most affected by it.

• Residents in neighborhoods with high rates of incarceration suffer from high rates of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Major Depressive Disorder (MAD).

• This means that residents who have had no direct contact with the criminal justice system are still be severely impacted by living in a community where such contacts are commonplace.
  • Mass incarceration is therefore a public health issue.

• Social stress associated with mass incarceration generates feedback loops by inducing substance abuse and other behaviors associated with anxiety, in turn leading to further incarceration.

• Incarceration reduces future earning power, draining neighborhoods of future income.

“Harsher sentencing may hinder progress towards the intended goal of decreasing crime, creating safer communities and maximizing justice to the state, victim, and offender. Our model suggests that increased sentencing for an individual has negative effects that spread through social networks to affect families and whole communities. As a consequence, increased sentence lengths may create criminals from individuals who otherwise would have avoided criminal behavior.”

The relationship between neighborhood health and outcomes is clear in education. Although there is almost a perfect correlation between poverty rates and school performance among APS elementary schools, it is neither reasonable nor sustainable to expect a school to outperform its neighborhood. Low income students living in healthy neighborhoods perform substantially better.

Source: Georgia Department of Education

It is neither reasonable nor sustainable to expect a school to outperform its neighborhood.
Children exposed to toxic stress are at significant risk for psychological, social, academic, and physical challenges

- **Exposure to lead**, for example, impacts education outcomes and crime rates
  - 17% of Cleveland elementary school children have toxic levels of lead in their blood (2019)
- One study found that children exposed to an incident of violent crime reduced passing rates by three percentage points*
- Chetty and Hendren find that children who live in neighborhoods with higher crime rates for 20 years experience significant reductions in income as adults

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We now know that children exposed to sources of toxic stress are deeply susceptible to poor life trajectories

- All children will face adversity at some point in their lifetime and dealing with that adversity is a critical part of child development
  - Healthy environments offer “buffers” that protect the child from these adversities, ensuring that rises in stress levels are only temporary
- In distressed neighborhoods, stress levels in children remain elevated for significant periods of time, triggering physiological responses that impede the healthy development of neural circuitry

**Sources of Toxic Stress**

- Environmental toxicants and risks associated with poor quality of housing and related infrastructure
- Family instability and lack of healthy familial and community networks
- Lack of quality early learning experiences
- High transiency rates
- Direct and indirect exposure to crime and violence
- Lack of access to quality food and nutrition
The effort has begun in six target neighborhoods that can catalyze revitalization city-wide.

The target neighborhoods have nearly 70K residents, but with declining populations and high poverty rates.

Chosen because they transect the most distressed regions of the city and yet have significant public and private assets that can be leveraged as part of a transformation strategy.