

# 3.0 PROCESS



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## PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Peachtree Shared Space Study took place in late 2020 and early 2021, and implementation is ongoing. The focus is on a 1.25-mile portion of Peachtree Street in Downtown Atlanta between North Avenue and Marietta Street. Through a community process and a review of existing conditions this study identified a preferred location for a shared space within that study area and developed a conceptual design for the project, along with other recommended improvements to the street and public realm throughout the corridor. Project elements included:



- **Community Engagement:** Community members were invited to participate in a series of educational and collaborative activities to help understand key challenges, shape the project vision, and develop the conceptual design. *(See page 32 for more information.)*
- **Existing Conditions and Technical Analysis:** To establish a baseline understanding of site conditions and constraints, a technical analysis was conducted for existing plans, geospatial data, site observations, traffic modeling, and environmental and historical due diligence. *(See page 49 for more information.)*
- **Alternatives Analysis and Concept Development:** Several alternative concepts for the corridor were developed and refined, grounded in the community input and technical analyses. This included both a design for the shared space in the preferred pilot project location, as well as designs to retrofit the rest of Peachtree Street within the study area to improve safety, enhance the quality of experience, and transition to the shared space. *(See page 122 for more information.)*
- **Activation and Programming Strategy:** This strategy will identify interventions and initiatives that will help the shared space and surrounding neighborhood thrive, including recommendations for placemaking opportunities, vacant and underutilized properties, integration of housing, park and plaza improvements, and programming. *(See page 237 for more information.)*
- **Demonstration Project:** A demonstration project was designed and installed between Baker Street and Ellis Street as a short-term, low-cost way to test aspects of a shared space using temporary materials. *(See page 201 for more information.)*
- **Action Plan:** The action plan will guide the next steps for implementing the shared space project, outlining key tasks, responsible parties, estimated costs, and potential funding sources. *(See page 230 for more information.)*

This work was led by the City of Atlanta Department of City Planning in collaboration with the City's Department of Transportation and with support from partner agencies such as Central Atlanta Progress and MARTA, and consultants at Toole Design Group, Modern Mobility Partners, Street Plans, Stantec, James Lima Planning and Development, and Edwards-Pitman. It was funded with support from the Atlanta Regional Commission.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

One of the primary goals of this study was to better understand the community's vision and needs for the future of Peachtree Street. A series of educational, information-seeking, and collaborative activities were hosted to invite community members to join the design process. A project website— [sharepeachtree.com](http://sharepeachtree.com)— hosted information about the project and engagement activities. Due to social distancing requirements in response to COVID-19, all activities were held virtually, in keeping with the City of Atlanta's COVID-19 response policy. Activities were promoted through social media, press releases and coverage in local publications, and direct outreach through partner organizations, city contact lists, and flyers. The following are summaries of all major engagement activities; more detailed summaries are available in the Appendix.

## Public Space Working Group

The Public Space Working Group (PSWG) was created as a steering committee for this project, with the intention of a life beyond this study. A group of about 20 community members was formed, including neighbors and representatives from nearby buildings, hotels, Central Atlanta Progress, MARTA, Atlanta Bicycle Coalition, Atlanta Regional Commission, Sweet Auburn Works, Center for Civic Innovation, Peachtree Center, and AmericasMart. It is a flexible, growing group meant to evolve over time as it guides the ongoing implementation of the Peachtree Shared Space and supports other public space projects for Downtown Atlanta. The group met four times over the course of the project to ideate, review draft concepts, and discuss implementation strategies and will continue to meet in the future.

Figure 2. Community Input Map Comment Points

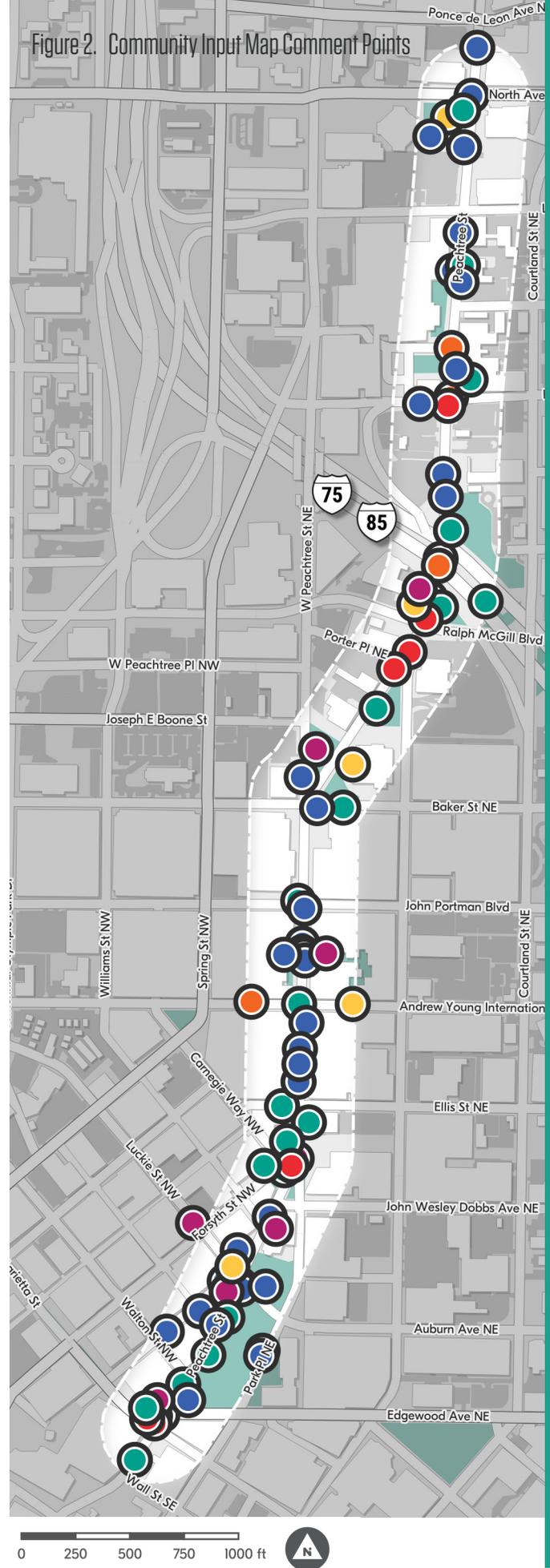
## Community Input Map

An interactive, online map was used to crowdsource information about and ideas for the study area. More than 200 unique comments were received in November 2020, including 85 original comments and peer feedback to posted comments. They shared insights on places and features they loved and wanted to keep; issue spots for transportation and access; ideas for public space features; ideas for transportation and access improvements; and the best and most concerning spots for a potential shared space. All comments are included in the Appendix.

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | Places or features you love & want to keep |  | Places where a shared space concerns you       |
|  | Issue spots for transportation & access    |  | Ideas for public space features                |
|  | Best spot for a shared space               |  | Ideas for transportation & access improvements |

### Themes included:

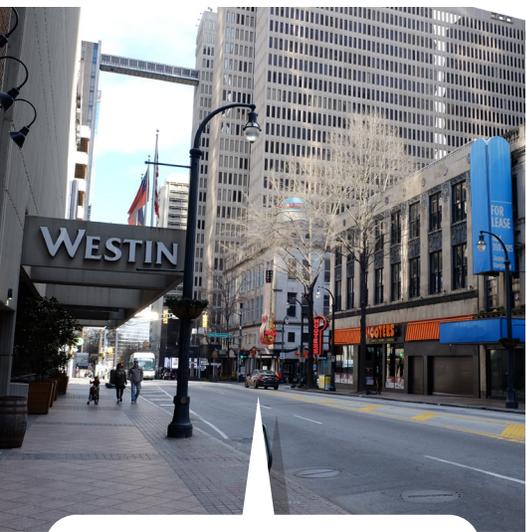
- Interest in refocusing the street to serve the neighborhood rather than regional commuters
- Disappointment with existing streetscape design feeling suburban, boring, and uninviting
- Desire for buildings to better address the street and plazas
- Concerns over the need to maintain clear vehicular access to Emory University Hospital Midtown
- Desire for more sidewalk cafes and vendors
- Desire to spruce up and fill vacant storefronts with new businesses



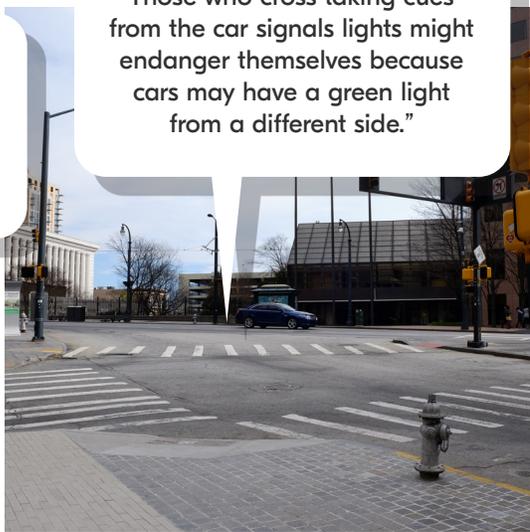


“The slip lane from Peachtree Street to Auburn Avenue allows vehicles to make turn movements at higher speeds, which results in drivers not looking for pedestrians in crosswalk.”

“This corner of the Flatiron Building is especially beautiful.”



“Remove the fencing along the sidewalk. It obstructs pedestrian flow, and thoroughly hinders pick-up/drop-off space for MARTA buses -- especially when buses bridges are replacing trains in emergencies.”



“The ped crossing here is terrible if you try to obey the ped signals. The wait is far too long. Those who cross taking cues from the car signals lights might endanger themselves because cars may have a green light from a different side.”



“This entire block could be open for ped crossing, while also accommodating a drop-off area.”

“The merge from Peachtree Street to Peachtree Center Avenue Cycle Track is dangerous and uncomfortable as there are vehicles approaching from every side. LIT users have to keep their head on a swivel.”

Sample comments from the Community Input Map. See the Appendix for a full list of comments.

- Need for a better pedestrian and bike connection between Civic Center Station and Peachtree Street
- Frustration with the abrupt termination of existing bike lanes on the north end of the corridor, as well as interest in adding protection to the existing bike lanes
- Disagreement over the importance of the bridge over The Connector for vehicular travel
- Intersections that feel hazardous, like Ralph McGill Boulevard, Peachtree Center Avenue, Forsyth Street, Auburn Avenue, and Edgewood Avenue/Marietta Street
- Desire to remove existing driveways and shift access to side streets
- Need to overcome the perceived “end of the road” at The Connector and draw people across
- Interest in upgrading Mayor’s #1 Park and Woodruff Park
- Need for better pick-up drop-off zones and loading operations
- Need to serve citizens who are homeless
- Specific design ideas like:
  - Making Peachtree Street a pedestrian-only corridor
  - Locations for new bike racks
  - Reducing the number of vehicle travel lanes to add protected bike facilities
  - Locations to widen sidewalks
  - Spots for new or enhanced wayfinding signs, especially at John Portman Boulevard and Andrew Young International Boulevard
  - Transit-only lane for streetcar
  - Removing slip lanes and expanding plazas

## Community Workshops

Two multiday virtual workshops were hosted to dive into deeper discussions with the community:

### Discovery Workshop Series

The first workshop series was held in November 2020 and focused on understanding key issues and opportunities for the project through the community’s eyes. Participants were asked their opinion on:

- What is the best spot for a shared space?
- What design features would you like to see?
- What issues should the design address?

There were 196 virtual meeting registrants for events, including:

- **Community Kickoff Meeting:** An overview of the project area and shared spaces, with input from participants on the values that should shape Peachtree Street; elements to preserve, change, or add; and potential concerns about a shared space
- **Tactical Urbanism 101:** An introduction to tactical urbanism—an approach to testing infrastructure design with short-term, low-cost prototypes—and how it will be used to test a shared space.
- **Virtual Open Studio Sessions:** A series of collaborative design sessions used small breakout groups and a virtual whiteboard to discuss the existing conditions, aspirations, and potential solutions for each segment of Peachtree Street with community members.



- **Community Pinup Session:** A debrief on what was learned from the community through the week's virtual meetings and stakeholder interviews and how it would inform the design direction.

A key outcome of the workshop was the identification of a preferred location for the pilot shared space project. Participant preferences aligned with existing conditions analysis, with a clear preference for the Peachtree Center area (West Peachtree Street to Forsyth Street) as the best spot for a shared space. The higher level of density in that area combined with the lack of vibrant public space and relatively low traffic volumes made it the preferred location for most participants. The Woodruff Park area (Forsyth Street to Marietta Street) was also considered a desirable location for a shared space, but considered a next step, given the existing historic architecture, small businesses, and park that already contribute to an enjoyable environment.

## Design Workshop Series

The second workshop was held in January 2021 and focused on deepening community understanding of how a shared space would work and developing a conceptual design for the shared space in the preferred pilot project location, as well as retrofitting other parts of Peachtree Street within the study area. Participants were asked their opinion on:

- What are the right values, vision, and goals to shape the design?
- Do the draft design concepts align with those, and if not, how should they be modified to best fulfill them?

"Include features that make the space more livable, like water fountains, places for dogs to go to the bathroom and play, and public restrooms with nursing stations for moms and adult changing stations."

"Incorporate string lighting, up lighting on landscaping, and other softer, glowy elements."

"Consider maintenance from the beginning and choose something that won't look outdated in a few years."

"Movable seating makes it easier for people using wheelchairs or who want to find a quiet spot to regroup. Diverse seating heights and some seats with or without arms also adds helpful options."

"Add more trees, grass, and other natural elements to make it feel softer."

Above: Community members shared their ideas for the shared space design at the community pinup session, highlighted above and detailed in the Appendix. A central theme was to make it feel soft and inviting and to bring in amenities that make public life easy for many different kinds of people.

- How should the demonstration project be designed to test key elements of a shared space?

There were 182 virtual meeting registrants for events, including:

- **Live from Seattle – Bell Street Virtual Tour:** A remote field trip to Seattle’s shared space project to help the community better understand shared space operations by reviewing videos of people using the shared space today and hearing behind the scenes stories from the project’s designers.
- **Great Streets Forum:** A panel of national experts discussed and answered participant questions about what makes a street great and how best practices can help Peachtree Street succeed, focusing on the topics identified in the Discovery Workshop:
  - **Stormwater Management and Green Infrastructure:** Amalia Leighton Cody, P.E., AICP highlighted how green infrastructure can help manage flooding through a more natural, surface level design that also contributes to the landscape of the public realm.
  - **Activating and Programming Public Spaces:** Tara Green, CSEE discussed how a combination of inviting design features and a curated calendar of community events can bring life to a public space, along with potential models for successful governance and funding.
  - **Paradigm Shifts in Transportation:** Emily Weidenhof shared how the New York City

DOT’s approach to streets as public space has evolved and the context-sensitive toolkit they have used to rebalance their streets to prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders using strategies like shared spaces, slow blocks with traffic calming, and demonstration projects.

- **Equity:** Tamika L. Butler, Esq. underscored the importance of equitable planning, both in process and outcomes. She highlighted that we should be aiming for liberation and self determination, ensuring people can move freely. Institutional change needs to shift from power over to power with by genuinely listening to and acting on what people want, creating brave spaces for conversation, intentionally de-centering whiteness, and analyzing and challenging privilege.
- **Demonstration Project Open House:** An update on the in-progress concept for the demonstration project on Peachtree Street, with a discussion of how it should be modified to fit the context and test specific areas of concern.
- **Community Open Studio:** An overview of the draft values, vision, and goals, along with typical sections and public space elements for the draft conceptual design, with small group breakout discussions for feedback and collaboration.

Key direction from the Design Workshop Series included the refinement of the extents of the shared space; an acknowledgement that the space needed to be flexible to respond to today and tomorrow’s users; programming and activation of the space will be critical to its success; green infrastructure and shade are important; features like restrooms, seating,



Virtual stakeholder interview with students and faculty from Cristo Rey High School

and water fountains should make it easy for people to spend time in the space; soft lighting should be used to create a warm and inviting ambience; using features like landscaping to create pedestrian-only zones adds a sense of comfort; adding slight bends to the street to slow down vehicles is desired; loading and unloading areas should be incorporated; sustainable practices should be used; neighbors should be prioritized over tourists; and the space should be authentically Atlanta by incorporating local materials, artwork, cultural programming, and businesses.

Meetings from both workshops were recorded and posted to the [project website](#) for people who were unable to attend live. Post-workshop online surveys were open for a week after each workshop series to allow those community members to provide the same input as the ones who joined the live sessions. Community members were also invited to share photos with captions explaining their ideas for Peachtree Street, or to submit sketches of their concepts for consideration through social media challenges.

## Stakeholder Interviews

More than 80 people participated in one-on-one and small group interviews that were held as part of both workshops, and as supplemental activities to connect with additional community members.

Comments from participants in these activities are highlighted throughout this document in the “What We Heard” blurbs, alongside other information about the relevant topic. Full summaries of each of the engagement activities are available in the Appendix.

## COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Check out the “*What We Heard*” features throughout the report for comments from community members about corridor challenges, ideas for improvements, and other insights that helped shape the design and implementation strategy.

# VALUES

Community members discussed the values that should shape Peachtree Street at several engagement activities. The following emerged as values that should guide the project approach:

|                     |                         |  |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Safe for all people | Equitable and Inclusive | Accessible   | Vibrant           |
| Sustainable         | Flexible                | Serve neighbors and workers first, tourists second | Context-sensitive |

# VISION

A vision for Peachtree Street was developed with participants to capture the project’s core aspirations:

“The Peachtree Shared Space will be an exceptional public space for all people every day, supporting Downtown Atlanta as a vibrant, equitable, and joyful neighborhood.”

# GOALS

Based on community input, along with the existing conditions analysis, the following project goals were identified, which will be pursued through design, policies, programming, and other implementation strategies:



Design a space that feels authentically and memorably Atlanta



Create a safe, accessible space that prioritizes walking, rolling, biking, and transit



Foster, showcase, and attract thriving local businesses



Make all people feel invited, comfortable, and celebrated



Enliven the street



Naturally encourage safe, slow driving



Support the functions of a healthy neighborhood



Retrofit surrounding streets as needed to transition smoothly into the shared space and manage traffic

# THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

## What is a Demonstration Project?

Demonstration projects, also called Tactical Urbanism, are low-cost and short-term ways to change the overall use and feel of a public space prior to committing to a long-term, full build project. These short-term projects have the ability to test a variety of changes within the public right-of-way such as improving safety at intersections, expanding the pedestrian realm, implementation of bicycle facilities, reduction of vehicular lanes, and testing activation and programming strategies at key points just to name a few. This “test before you invest” strategy allows the short-term concepts to be evaluated and modified with real-time feedback from users that will influence the final design of the shared space.

## What Can We Test?

A true shared space would be impossible to test as a short-term demonstration project. At the heart of shared spaces is a curbless design that allows flexibility in movement for transportation modes and expanded pedestrian areas that are seamlessly integrated into the right-of-way. These components would require a significant upfront financial investment. However, there are components of a shared space that can be tested through a demonstration effort. The Peachtree Shared Space Study demonstration project is testing:

- **Reduction in travel lanes:** Shared spaces provide flexibility in vehicular movement and generally operate in a more constrained area. The previous

## Citywide Context for a Demonstration Project

Since 2017, the City of Atlanta (CoA) has implemented multiple tactical and interim projects through its Placemaking Program where residents apply to receive technical assistance, funding and installation services for public space improvements they'd like to see in their neighborhood. To better support this initiative, as well as, provide an avenue for communities and other organizations to lead their own projects, the City of Atlanta (CoA) released its much-anticipated [Tactical Urbanism Guide](#) to support, guide, and empower communities to positively reshape their streets

and public spaces to improve safety, vibrancy, and build community capacity for change. Recent passage of the Vision Zero initiative, which aims to make Atlanta's streets safer for all users, and the outdoor, on-street dining ordinance passed in late 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 restrictions further highlight the policies in place to re-examine how we should think about and use our public realm. The 10th Street Pop-up Bike Lane and Atlanta Streets Alive are two local examples of tactical urbanism in Atlanta. We also have DCP's Placemaking Program which has installed multiple tactical projects throughout the city. The Peachtree Shared Space Study's demonstration project will build on these policies and projects to test a new type of space in Atlanta.



configuration of Peachtree Street Downtown was two vehicular travel lanes in each direction with dedicated left turn lanes in some locations. The demonstration project is testing reducing the travel way to one vehicular lane in each direction. Traffic analysis using existing, pre-COVID-19 traffic numbers, and growth factors in line with Atlanta Regional Commission's regional traffic model highlighted that a shift from four to two lanes on Peachtree Street in Downtown is feasible with minimal impacts on the surrounding network and positive impacts in improved safety with slower speeds along Peachtree Street. Special care has been taken at existing dedicated loading/unloading/taxi areas, particularly between John Portman Boulevard and Andrew Young International Boulevard.

- **Expansion of pedestrian areas and mid-block crossings:** True shared spaces allow pedestrians to cross freely at any location, as they are the priority mode. Sidewalks were expanded in the demonstration project to allow for a more comfortable pedestrian environment. This configuration, along with a reduction in travel lanes, provides narrower and safer pedestrian crossings at intersections and the new mid-block crossings at Peachtree Center. Removing the low fences that previously lined the sidewalks and adding planters along the edge of the outer travel lane further enhance the pedestrian realm.
- **Activation of pedestrian areas:** Expansion of the pedestrian areas affords an opportunity to activate a greater portion of the public realm. Activation ideas can be as simple as expanded seating for dining that is in line with the recent City ordinance,

seating areas for bus stops, and new locations for vendors and food trucks.

## Where Are We Testing?

The preferred location of the demonstration project was determined over the course of this study by engaging with community members and the Public Space Working Group, reviewing existing conditions, discussing with multiple property owners along the corridor, and collaborating closely with City of Atlanta, Central Atlanta Progress and MARTA staff. The conclusion was to create a demonstration project that would frame and test key components of the City's first shared space between Baker Street and Ellis Street.

Funding for the demonstration project was further enhanced through the public participatory budgeting effort of Downtown Decides. District 2 Councilmember Amir Farokhi led the Downtown Decides effort that identified \$225,000 to invest in making Downtown Peachtree Street a Complete Street.

## How Are We Testing?

The demonstration project took part in two phases during 2021:

- **Phase 1:** Lane reduction, curb extension, mid-block crossing
- **Phase 2:** Public space activation, asphalt mural, and street furniture

More information about the demonstration project phases, design, and outcomes is available beginning on page 199.