



The Buckhead Council of Neighborhoods

Board Meeting

June 25, 2009

Peachtree Presbyterian Church

6:40 – 8:40 PM

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Attendees:

Name	Neighborhood/Organization	Email Address
1 Graham Balch	Grady High biology teacher/Speaker	graham.balch@gmail.com
2 Randy Bassett	Castlewood	rbassett@kslaw.com
3 Glenn Cartledge	Memorial Park	glennacar@bellsouth.net
4 Gordon Certain	North Buckhead	gcertain@comcast.net
5 Julian de Juan	Margaret Mitchell	jdejuan@rawdatabinc.com
6 Glenn Delk	Historic Brookhaven	glennedelk@mindspring.com
7 Jeremy Ellis	Peachtree Park	jeremyellis@earthlink.net
8 David Jernigan	KIPP Schools/Speaker	
9 David Gylfe	Collier Hills	dcgylfe@bellsouth.net
10 John Haliburton	Peachtree Hills	john@thrashgroup.com
11 Tom Harper	Tuxedo Park	tharper@foltzmartin.com
12 Bob Herbert	Buckhead Heights	herbertbob60@hotmail.com
13 Barbara Kennedy	Collier Hills	Bar2010@aol.com
14 Jim King	Chastain Park	jimking@mindspring.com
15 Lee Kolber	Collier Hills North	Lee.Kolber@troutmansanders.com
16 Bill Langley	Ridgedale Park	langleybill@comcast.net
17 Walda Lavroff	North Buckhead	waldalavroff@comcast.net
18 Jennifer Moyers	Whitewater Creek	jennifermoyers@beacham.com
19 Elizabeth Pritchard	Peachtree Battle Alliance	elizpritchard@bellsouth.net
20 James Ray	Spikes for Mayor of Atlanta	
21 Sue Roberts	Peachtree Heights East	Sroberts20@bellsouth.net
22 John Schaffner	Buckhead Reporter	johnschaffner@reporternewspapers.net
23 Jesse Spikes	Candidate for Mayor of Atlanta	jesse@jessespikesformayor.com
24 Jim Wright	Ardmore Park	wrightjr@mindspring.com
25 Henry Wyche	Grant Estates/South Tuxedo Park	hwyche@valleycap.com

Representation by Neighborhood:

Neighborhood/Organization	Name(s)
1 Ardmore Park	Jim Wright
2 Buckhead Heights	Bob Herbert
3 Castlewood	Randy Bassett
4 Chastain Park	Jim King
5 Collier Hills	Barbara Kennedy, David Gylfe
6 Collier Hills North	Lee Kolber
7 Grant Estates/South Tuxedo Park	Henry Wyche
8 Historic Brookhaven	Glenn Delk
9 Margaret Mitchell	Julian de Juan
10 Memorial Park	Glenn Cartledge
11 North Buckhead	Gordon Certain, Walda Lavroff
12 Peachtree Battle Alliance	Elizabeth Pritchard
13 Peachtree Heights East	Sue Roberts
14 Peachtree Hills	John Haliburton
15 Peachtree Park	Jeremy Ellis
16 Ridgedale Park	Bill Langley
17 Tuxedo Park	Tom Harper
18 Whitewater Creek	Jennifer Moyers

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I. Welcome

Jim King called the meeting to order at around 6:40 PM. A quorum was present.

II. Introductions

Two neighborhoods were represented at BCN for the first time this month:

- Buckhead Heights, represented by Bob Herbert
- Collier Hills North, represented by Lee Kolber

Commendation: Henry proposed a commendation to John Schaffner for regularly attending BCN meetings and regularly reporting on BCN activities, concerns, and decisions. The motion was seconded and then approved unanimously. Thank you, John!

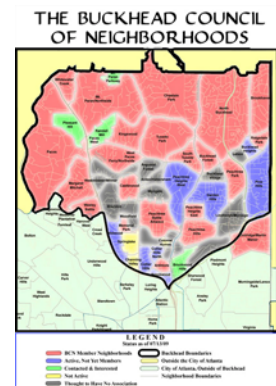
III. Secretary's Report

Minutes for the April and May board meetings were approved by the Board.

IV. Treasurer's Report

BCN has slightly more than \$2,000 in the bank.

No neighborhoods petitioned the board to join BCN this month. The map at the right shows the status of BCN membership. Twenty-three neighborhoods are members (shown in light red) and nine additional neighborhoods have been represented at least one BCN board meeting (light blue).



V. Committee Reports

a. Public Safety

No report.

b. Transportation

There's a new GDOT commissioner for the state.

Wieuca Road: There was brief discussion of the unenforceable 25 MPH speed limit on Wieuca Road, as contrasted with the enforced 25 MPH limit on Peachtree Battle.

North Buckhead neighborhood and Sarah Smith PTA representatives and Board of Education member Katy Pattillo met with city officials including Councilman Howard Shook, Zone 2's Lt. Deborah Cox and Sandra Jennings of Public Works to work out arrangements to calm traffic along Wieuca Road in preparation for the opening of the new Sarah Smith elementary annex in January. A package of interim changes was proposed by the neighborhood, including raising the speed limit to 30 MPH so it would be enforceable with radar. Other changes include two sets of all-way stop signs, two pedestrian-actuated traffic signals, and limited additional sidewalks. It is expected that the average speed will decrease as a result of these changes.

Jim suggested that North Buckhead and Chastain Park neighborhoods work together once the Wieuca changes are accomplished to establish consistent speed limits and calming on similar roads, such as West Wieuca, Powers Ferry and Lake Forrest.

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I-85/GA 400 interchange: Jim is attempting to determine the status of the environmental study for the expanded I-85/GA 400 interchange. Transportation funding bills are expected in Congress which may provide needed funding. The use of GA400 tolls as a funding source was mentioned – this has been explored with Rep. Ed Lindsey but it is not clear that it could be used for the interchange. Henry urged more “intensity” in BCN efforts related to this interchange. He thought it would be good for the project and good for BCN.

Northside Drive turn lane: Elizabeth reported that the City has completed the portion that they took over from GDOT. The center lane is now a turn-only lane, beginning at Norfleet Road all the way to Arden Road. The lane ends abruptly at Norfleet Road and the posts that were put up at that end have been “taken out” at least once. The lane continues to be reversible between Norfleet Road and I-75, so it is confusing. However, from Norfleet Road to Arden traffic is flowing “incredibly well and turning is much safer”.

The GDOT has maintained control of the improvement project at Collier Road, which includes sidewalks plus a median between Sagamore Drive and Peachtree Battle. This “phase 2” segment is supposed to start in April 2010, though environmental studies are required and Elizabeth thinks there won’t be any construction before 2011. A concerned neighbor marked trees he thought would have to be removed on the west side of Northside between I-75 and Collier to accommodate the GDOT sidewalks. But some of the trees marked by the neighbor may not be actually impacted by the sidewalk. The neighbors on the west side road have the option of not having the sidewalk if they decide against it.

New Lake Forrest stop sign: Jim mentioned a new stop sign on Lake Forrest at Laurel Drive – it is being enforced by APD. Some felt the stop sign was hard to see for northbound traffic – this concern has been addressed by the removal of vegetation obscuring the sign.

Peachtree Boulevard project: It was reported that Phase 2 of the “Boulevard” project has been fully funded and that work will start in January.

c. Education

No report.

d. Parks

A “park vision” developed in coordination with Park Pride for a new city park was unveiled at the end of May. The park, Little Nancy Creek Park, is on Peachtree Dunwoody Road, the dividing live between North Buckhead and Historic Brookhaven. About \$2 million in private contributions are expected to be needed to complete the park.

VI. Speakers

Note on Presentation Reports: For simplicity in reporting, the material reported below is usually reported from the point of view of the speakers. These reports reflect the opinions of the individual presenters and may not necessarily be the position of BCN or its member associations.

Charter Schools with Graham Balch and David Jernigan

Graham Balch is currently a biology teacher at Grady High School. A MBA graduate of Wharton, Graham took a large pay cut from his consulting job to become an APS teacher. He also set up a foundation that awarded \$20 million to south Atlanta college students. Graham is a candidate for State Senate District 39. Graham was appearing on his own behalf and was not representing the Atlanta Public Schools.

David Jernigan is executive director of KIPP Metro Atlanta, an independent charter school operator. David was also the founder of KIPP Ways Academy, a charter school which was reported as Atlanta’s top-rated middle school in spite of its area’s 90+% poverty levels.

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Graham and David, with help from others, organized the Southeast's only symposium on charter schools. Their purpose was to get operators of district and charter schools to share their experiences.

Graham and David alternated in making their presentation. Since their comments were complementary and not adversarial, this report will merge their comments.

Overview of charter schools

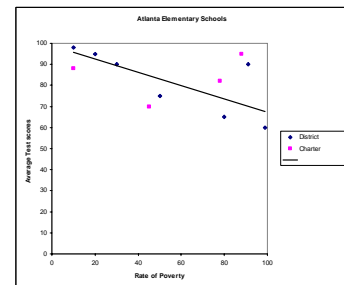
Charter schools are public schools operated under contract between the school and an authorizing entity. There is no tuition since charters are public schools. Typically, the authorizer is the local school district. HB811, which became effective on 7/1/09, strengthens the state Department of Education as an alternative authorizer.

Four basic principles or attributes characterize charter schools:

- Non-selectivity – Charter schools cannot select the cream of the crop. All students seeking to attend must be accommodated. If too many apply, a lottery is held to determine who gets to attend.
- Choice – Charter schools offer families a choice in schools. Typically, families can only send their children to the district school servicing their geographical area. If that district school is a low-performing school, the student has no alternative.
- Accountability – The charter operator enters into a contract with their authorizer. The contract established academic and financial measures of performance which, if not met, lead to the termination of the contract. This increased accountability allows the charter school greater freedom to reduce bureaucracy and avoid some legal limitations which are thought to tie down traditional district schools. The charter school principal usually has substantial or complete control of the school's budget and can make quick decisions.
- Terms of Employment – Charter school teachers are typically "at will" employees. Some examples were provided of actual experience in district schools, where poor-performing teachers were not only kept on the job but paid substantially more than outstanding teachers. In another case, the principal terminated a poor-performing teacher but the district forced his reinstatement. It was said that in charter schools, if a teacher doesn't perform well, they are immediately replaced (though sometimes "cultural" considerations keep this from happening).

Performance of Atlanta Schools: district vs. charter for varying levels of poverty

Diagrams were shown of all Georgia and all Atlanta elementary schools and middle schools. (High schools were not shown due to limited data points.) The drawing to the right shows the approximate appearance of these charts using hypothetical data – school test scores were on the Y axis, the rate of poverty on the X, with different colors assigned to district and charter data points. The state's average trend line was also included which showed a general tendency for test scores to decline as poverty levels increased. However, there were examples of both charters and district schools having outstanding performance despite high poverty levels. Correspondingly, some charter and district schools performed below the state trend, showing poorer performance.



Generally, charters as a group outperformed district schools as a group. Capital View Elementary, a district school in a high poverty area, had high performance, as did Buckhead district elementary schools. Other outstanding district elementary schools in economically challenged areas were mentioned and the point was made that they had really good principals, who were willing and able to fight the red tape that characterizes district schools. As a group, Atlanta middle schools compared more favorably to the state trend line than Atlanta elementary schools. Sutton was reported to be slightly below the line.

Expanding role of charter schools in Georgia

Georgia was reported as ranking 18th of 41 states in policies which were friendly to the establishment and expansion of charter schools. For instance, some states have caps on the number of charter schools permitted – Georgia doesn't. Some states, including Georgia, have multiple authorizers of charters.

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The biggest challenges to Georgia charters now are:

- Facilities – Charters used to be forced to pay rent to use old vacant school buildings. Under HB555, effective 7/1/09, vacant buildings must be provided free of rent. But, since no facilities funding is provided to Georgia charters, money must be raised to rehabilitate and maintain these buildings. Proponents of charters think that facilities funding (including SPLOST) should be provided to charters.
- Funding – Charters get less funding per student than district schools. Charters were reported to get just roughly \$10K per student while district schools get \$14K. Still, charters tend to outperform.
- Misconceptions – Misconceptions about charters, such as being supposedly able to hand-pick students, is affecting public support for charters. Also, school districts often look at money given to charters as being taken away from their schools. New York's "Empowerment Zones", groupings of district and charter schools which share funding and exchange experiences, was mentioned as a model way of dealing with some of these problems.
- Inadequate interchange – The role of charter schools is to demonstrate what is possible and share that information. Currently, there is too little interchange of experiences between district and charter schools.

Sandy Springs schools were discussed – are they charter schools? Up until now, the discussion of charter schools was directed at "independent startup charter schools". However, there are other options, such as "conversion charter schools" in use by the Sandy Springs portion of the Fulton County School System, Marietta, and Decatur. These schools have been converted to charter status, though they still employ centralized control, budgeting and oversight. According, while they have achieved some flexibility, they are not that much different from district schools.

Educational reform: opportunities and challenges for charter and district schools

All school systems have to deal with the following "uncontrollable" factors:

- Family income
- Previous performance
- State curriculum standards
- Parental involvement (Graham argued convincingly that, for a good teacher, this is actually controllable.)

Similarly, all schools have certain controllable factors:

- Administrative quality
- Teacher quality
- Instructional methods
- District support
- School culture
- Parental involvement

Of these, two were considered for further discussion: administrative and teacher quality.

Administrative quality

Graham maintained that following statement has a lot of truth: "There are no bad schools with good principals." If the leadership quality of a schools, district or charter, is improved, we improve the school. Good school principals (like good managers in business) are:

- Visible
- Data-driven
- Make smart decisions
- Support rather than control teachers
- Seek and utilize feedback
- Delegate effectively

There is not enough focus on good school management.

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Teacher Quality

Examples were provided about teacher pay and job security being unrelated to teacher performance. This is true of both district and charter schools, but especially district.

The following are needed:

- Certification reform
- Establish a merit-based pay system
- The public should insist on getting student test score data both for individual schools and for individual teachers – find out who is performing and who isn't.

A merit-based pay system requires state action but offers huge opportunities.

Summary: What do we do?

- Encourage more charter schools. Even when existing schools are good – competition leads to improvement.
- Encourage information exchange between charters and districts.
- Don't just focus on the percentage of students who meet the CRCT (Criterion-Referenced Competency Test) – that bar is set very low.
- Ask for how many students exceed the CRCT bar and by how much.
- Ask for how effective our schools and teachers are in getting results on national norm reference tests.
- Georgia requires students to take the Iowa Reference Test in the 3rd, 5th and 8th grades. Find out from your principal what your school has done on the ITS.
- Teachers and principals need to be accountable.

V. Community Concerns

Watershed Petition Status

Kristy was not in attendance. Jim led the discussion. The complaints of Buckhead residents captured through Kristy's web form were sent to Watershed Management Commissioner Rob Hunter, together with a BCN cover letter. Complaints included inputs from 152 residents who had at least \$105,000 in claims (not all respondents quantified the amounts in dispute). BCN asked that the complaints receive the direct attention of the commissioner and that he appoint a representative within 30 days to spearhead resolution of our complaints and to report to us monthly on progress being made. We have not received any response yet. Howard Shook's office also sent a copy of the petition package to Commissioner Hunter's office and had confirmation that it had been received. BCN's correspondence is on BCN's web site (www.buckheadcouncil.org) under the "Petitions" heading.

Survey of Neighborhood "Best Practices"

Craig C. Perry, President of West Paces Northside, collected survey forms sent by e-mail. Since Craig was not in attendance, this item was deferred until next month.

Property Taxes

Randy had forwarded to Jim an e-mail reporting that a notice was placed in the AJC, announcing that the City proposes to increase property taxes by 42%. There were related announcements about public hearings. Jesse Spikes reported that the millage increase was intended to eliminate the furloughs but would not increase public safety or other staffing. It was concluded that the percentage of increase was computed simply by dividing the proposed millage rate by the current millage rate. Jeremy noted that the increase would mean a \$500 to \$1,000 increase for typical Buckhead homes and did not represent a 42% increase in the total tax bill.

Gordon passed out copies of a 5/29/09 Buckhead Reporter letter to the editor entitled "Where have the city taxes gone?" written by Julian Bene. Bene's letter stated, among many other things, that between 2002 and 2008 the

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amount of property taxes collected by the City had not risen but had actually declined by \$2 million. Gordon pointed out that the city had changed the way it reported tax proceeds (specifically they separated amounts for debt services from other general fund tax income in 2005), and that he believed that Bene's report of a \$2 million decline was not accurate. But he said the situation was almost as bad: the property tax digest had increased by 40% to 45% between 2002 and 2008 while the City's tax proceeds increased by only about 17.3%. [In the discussion Gordon incorrectly stated the increase was 20% instead of 17.3%.] He said the actual general fund property tax revenues numbers (the general fund without debt service) were about \$117.5 million in 2002, increasing to \$137.9 million in 2008. Clearly the City's proceeds were not keeping up with increasing property values, yet Buckhead homeowners were having to pay more and more in property taxes. Gordon said Bene was on the right track and that something is definitely wrong with city revenues.

Glenn asked, how can the City Council consider passing a budget if they don't know the answer to this? Jeremy said the more fundamental issue is that we don't know what the financial situation of the city is, since they have not released audited financials for the past three years. We don't know what the history was so how do you predict the future? Why can't the City hire an accounting firm to produce audited financials?

A questioner (perhaps Glenn) asked if BCN had taken a position on the millage increase – Jim reported that BCN had not taken a position.

John Schaffner said that he had discussed this issue with Mary Norwood and that she said that for years she had been asking for certain reports on spending and revenues and hadn't gotten them as a city council member and that she was going to vote against the increase for that reason. Jim mentioned that Mary had also sent out e-mails saying that the city had not taken advantage of other opportunities such as privatization of services.

If the city can't tell us what the revenues and spending actually is, as Glenn put it, we should object to any tax increase. John Schaffner pointed out, if we object we better hurry since the budget has to be approved by June 30. John went on to quote Councilwoman Felicia Moore as saying the 3% millage increase will not solve all the city's problems – it will just barely get us back to where we were before the cuts.

Glenn emphasized that the school system had a much larger impact on property taxes than the city.

Gordon wondered if any of the millage increase was being proposed in anticipation that the tax digest was going to decline, either because of the 9% reduction in values set by the Fulton Assessors on several hundred thousand homes or because of anticipated appeals. (In other words, if the value of the tax digest decreased, the millage rate would have to be increased somewhat just to keep the property taxes "revenue neutral".) Based on board comments, no Buckhead neighborhoods seem to be involved with the 9% decrease. Jim noted that every time changes occur like the 9% decrease for non-Buckhead homes and no change is made for Buckhead homes, our share of the taxes goes up. It was noted that Buckhead has about 15% of the City's residents and pays about 45% of its taxes.

The impact of the drop in fire insurance ratings and the potential impact on our insurance bills was briefly discussed.

Glenn suggested that BCN consider a petition to the City, even if it is late, saying don't vote for a tax increase until they can tell us how they are spending the money. Q: What are the ramifications of not reaching a budget? Bankruptcy? The City can't operate without a budget beyond June 30th. By the Charter they have to have a balanced budget.

It was suggested that the main reason we have a budget problem is the pension package approved by the City Council several years ago and the way to solve the budget problem was to get rid of those pensions. Others commented that it would be contrary to Federal law to do so, that pension plans can't be discontinued just to solve a budget problem.

John Schaffner mentioned a proposed Felicia Moore ordinance that would require the City do five-year budget planning. The City has never done this before. Under the new plan, each year the City Council would reconsider and re-approve its forecasts in light of actual experience and updated conditions and needs.

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In response to Glenn's proposed petition, Jim asked, "What message do we want to send? And if we send a message, it can't be a plain 'we're against taxes'. We need to show our concern for public safety and that seems to be driving about half of the proposed increase."

Glenn responded that Mayor Franklin is holding the populace hostage for this tax increase and the message we're sending by not opposing the tax increase is "that you can keep on taxing us until Hell freezes over. They are going to pass this increase regardless of what we do – because we are not marching in the streets down there."

Jim: "What action can we take tonight and what can we do between now and the 30th that either may or will have some impact?" Jeremy commented that we won't be able to have any impact by the 30th and didn't think we would gain any political capital by opposing the proposed budget – we will gain more political capital by putting our efforts behind candidates who will demand transparency and insist on producing the financial statements we need.

Glenn agreed that there's not much we could do about the proposed budget and withdrew his motion. He urged that we tell any candidate who comes before BCN that we are not in favor of any tax increases.

This discussion went on and on. It was generally agreed that there would probably never be a rollback of the 3 mill increase. To be continued...

Buckhead CID

The need was discussed to have a BCN member to attend BCID board meeting in order to represent the needs and concerns of BCN to the BCID and to report to back to BCN.

Impact Fee Accounting and Tracking

It was the consensus that the city's accounting system is not currently able to track impact fees including revenues, account balances and expenditures. Gordon mentioned that Howard Shook is currently trying to find enough impact fee money to provide interim infrastructure for the new Sarah Smith school on Wieuca Road – that will be a test of the capabilities of the system. It was also reported that The Mansion has never paid impact fees.

VII. Updates and Announcements

VIII. Next Meeting : tbd

IX. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at around 8:35 PM.

Prepared by Gordon Certain
BCN Secretary
July 15, 2009

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BCN Organizational Status as of 06/25/09											
			Represented?								
	Neighborhood	BCN Member?	2008 Oct	Nov	Dec	2009 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
1	Arden										
2	Ardmore Park	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Brookwood							Yes			
4	Brookwood Hills										
5	Buckhead Forest	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	
6	Buckhead Heights										Yes
7	Castlewood	Yes									Yes
8	Chastain Park	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Collier Hills									Yes	Yes
10	Collier Hills North										Yes
11	Garden Hills						Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
12	Grant Estates/South Tuxedo Park	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
13	Historic Brookhaven	Yes			Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
14	Kingswood	Yes	Yes							Yes	
15	Lindridge Martin Manor	Yes	Yes				Yes				
16	Margaret Mitchell	Yes					Yes				Yes
17	Memorial Park	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes
18	Mount Paran Parkway										
19	Mt. Paran-Northside	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
20	North Buckhead	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
21	P'tree Battle Alliance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
22	Paces	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	
23	Paces West	Yes				Yes	Yes				
24	Peachtree Heights East	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
25	Peachtree Heights West				Yes						
26	Peachtree Hills	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	Peachtree Park	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes
28	Pine Hills				Yes						
29	Pleasant Hill										
30	Randall Mill										
31	Ridgedale Park	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
32	Springlake										
33	Tuxedo Park	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
34	Wesley Battle	Yes				Yes		Yes			
35	West Paces Northside	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	
36	Whitewater Creek	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
37	Wildwood		Yes								
Count		23	17	13	18	14	20	17	12	14	18