

# PARC

Parks Atlanta Rescue Coalition

## 2009 ACT TO SAVE ATLANTA'S PARKS (ASAP)!

Among the nation's 25 largest cities, Atlanta continues to have the smallest percent of its land dedicated to parks. After several years of improved management and increased funding, Atlanta's parks budget is again on the chopping block, cut more than \$1.4 million (11%) this year. Budget cuts also have undermined already inadequate public safety in our parks.

Atlanta's park system remains imperiled

In 2001, PARC – a broad coalition of greenspace advocates, community leaders and environmental groups – united to save Atlanta's parks. PARC galvanized public support and tangibly improved our parks and quality of life. Yet the coalition's work remains unfinished, and its achievements are now threatened by political ambivalence in difficult economic times.

For these reasons, PARC has reunited to Act to Save Atlanta's Parks (ASAP)! embracing three simple steps that will provide our parks, natural areas, trails, greenways and public spaces the permanent support they need to thrive, meet the needs of our people, and create a great city.

- 1. ENSURE THE QUALITY OF ATLANTA'S PARK SYSTEM BY DEDICATING 1 MIL OF EXISTING PROPERTY TAX TO OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE - BY 2012**
- 2. ESTABLISH DEDICATED FUNDING FOR LAND ACQUISITION AND PARK DEVELOPMENT SO THAT ATLANTA'S PARKLAND NO LONGER RANKS LAST AMONG THE NATION'S 25 LARGEST CITIES - BY 2013**
- 3. TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO MAKE ATLANTA'S PARKS SAFER – BY 2010**

The 2009 PARC Act to Save Atlanta's Parks (ASAP)! has been endorsed by the following organizations:

Park Pride  
BeltLine Partnership  
Capacity Builders, Inc.  
Chastain Park Conservancy  
The Conservation Fund  
Freedom Park Conservancy  
Friends of Collier Heights Park  
Friends of Grant Park Pool  
Friends of Iverson Park  
Friends of Peachtree Hills Park  
Friends of West Manor Park

Friends of Wolf Creek Park  
Georgia Land Trust  
Ga. No Child Left Inside Coalition  
Grant Park Neighborhood Ass'n  
Historic 4th Ward Park Conservancy  
Historic Oakland Foundation  
Morningside Lenox Park Association  
Mt. Paran Garden Club  
Olmsted Linear Park Alliance (OLPA)  
PATH Foundation  
Piedmont Park Conservancy

Public Policy Advocacy Committee of  
the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta  
Special Places for Atlanta's  
Community Environments (SPACE)  
Sylvan Hills Neighborhood Assn.  
Trees Atlanta  
The Trust for Public Land  
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance  
(WAWA)

## GOAL 1

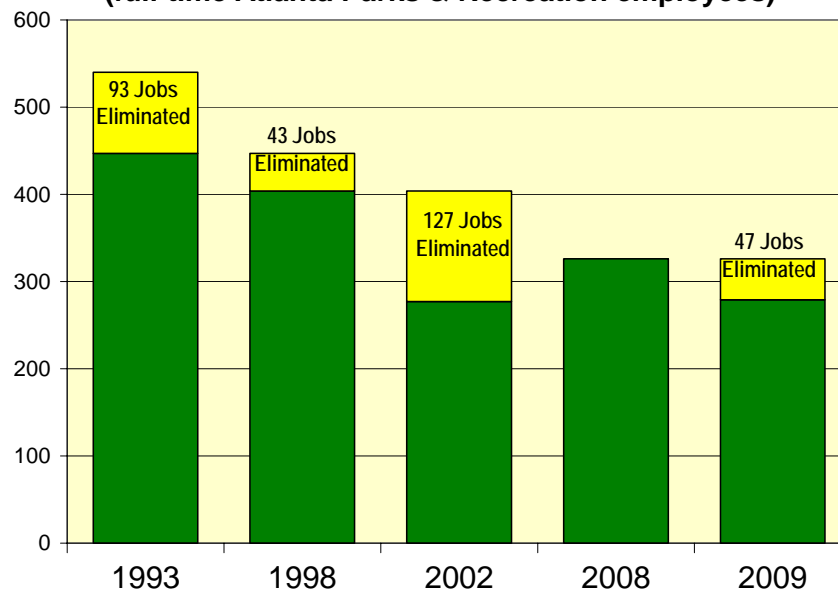
### Dedicate 1 mil for park operation and maintenance by 2012

Increase funding for parks maintenance and dedicate existing property tax revenue to the Office of Parks. Funding would increase from the \$11.4 million passed in the initial fiscal 2009 budget (equivalent to revenue from 0.57 mils of property tax) to the revenue raised by 1 mil by 2012. From 2012 forward, dedicate, revenue from 1.0 mils of property tax to park maintenance.

#### Background

In 2005, the Office of Parks developed minimum standards for the maintenance and operation of its parks. A cost analysis found that meeting these standards would require about \$20 million annually (equivalent to what 1 mil raised in 2008). That same year, the City committed to increase park funding by \$2 million annually for four years, which would have culminated in an \$18.8 Million budget for the Office of Parks in 2010. Instead, the City increased funding to \$12.8 Million in fiscal 2007 and then cut funding by \$1.4 million (and counting) in fiscal 2008. The City also eliminated all funding for equipment.

### 50% Reduction in Force over 10 Years (full-time Atlanta Parks & Recreation employees)



#### Concrete Deliverables

Improved maintenance is essential to attracting private investment in our park system and the proposed Atlanta BeltLine. In fact, the single most effective action that the City can take to support the BeltLine is to identify and secure a dedicated funding source for maintaining existing parks and the new parks and public spaces that the BeltLine promises to create.

To this end – and to raise the standards of park maintenance throughout the City, dedicating 1 mil of existing property tax to park maintenance would allow the City to:

- Increase mowing schedule from 11 days to 5 day mowing schedule in regional and community parks, 7 days in others
- Increase off-season litter control from 1-3 times per week to 4-5 times per week
- Reinststate the kudzu and other invasives spray program, expand to 80 parks
- Reinststate the aeration and fertilization program for lawns and turf
- Cut in half the time required to take down a dead or dying tree
- Initiate efforts to address long-standing infrastructure failures such as deteriorating sidewalks, trails, stormwater drains and severe erosion

## GOAL 2

### Establish a dedicated funding source for land acquisition and park development by 2013

Secure a significant, dedicated funding source that will allow Atlanta to expand its park system while improving current facilities. Potential sources of dedicated funding include:

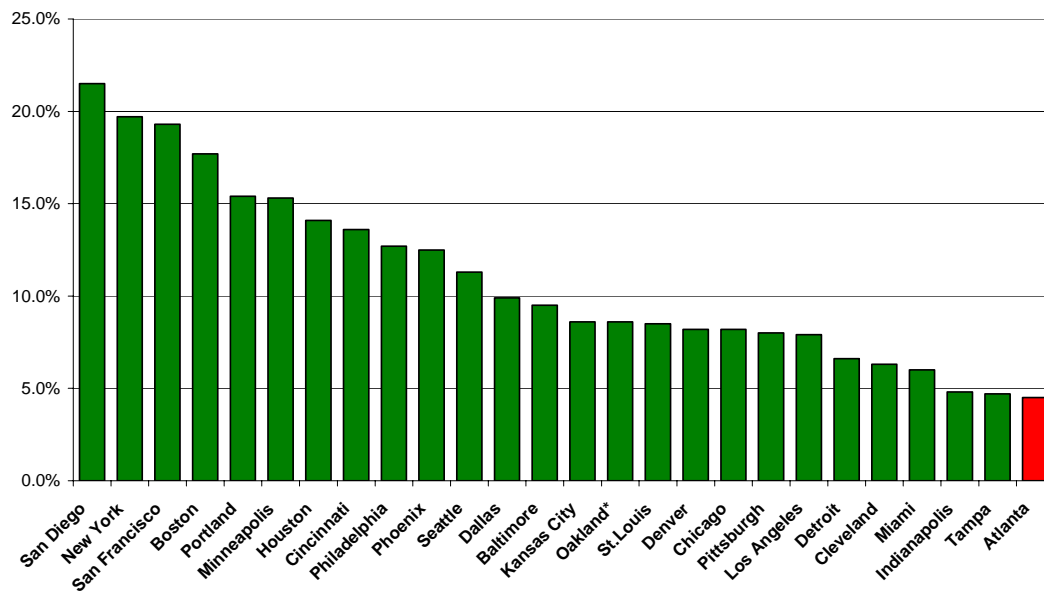
- Sales Tax (e.g. Gwinnett County)
- Real Estate Transfer Tax (e.g. Rhode Island, Washington State)
- Stormwater Utility (DeKalb County)
- Transfer of Development Rights (Chattahoochee Hill Country, Montgomery County)

#### Background

In 2001, Atlanta mayoral and City Council candidates endorsed the PARC 911 agenda calling for Atlanta to triple the number of park acres per resident. Atlanta then had 7.6 acres per 1,000 residents. Since that time, Atlanta has added one thousand acres of parks and greenspace, as well as nearly 100,000 residents. The net result is that Atlanta currently has 7.7 acres per 1,000 residents, about half the national average. In addition, among the 25 largest cities, none has a smaller percent of its land dedicated to parks and greenspace (4.7%).

Atlanta not only lacks sufficient parkland, it also lacks trails, ballfields and other facilities that are in high demand among its residents. A 2005 Park Opportunity Bond provided tens of millions of dollars to upgrade existing facilities and create new facilities. However, the bond funding was inadequate to meet existing needs and reduced future revenue for park improvements.

## % Land Dedicated to Parks



#### Concrete Deliverables

The City of Atlanta is projected to add another couple hundred thousand residents over the next 20 years. As the City already lacks sufficient parks to meet the needs of its residents, it must double, if not triple the amount of land in its park system. The City also can improve new and existing parks by increasing access through greenway trails and the creation of new entrances into existing parks. This requires significant, dedicated funding.

The Atlanta BeltLine is an integral part of any effort to expand and connect Atlanta's park system. The BeltLine promises to add more than 1,000 acres of new parkland connected by 33 miles of multi-use trails. While funded through tax-increment financing, additional funds may be necessary to fulfill the BeltLine vision.

### **GOAL 3**

#### **Take concrete steps to make parks safer**

Institute programs that have proven effective in other jurisdictions. In particular, Atlanta should:

- Provide subsidized housing to police officers adjacent to parks. In exchange, that officer would commit to spending one hour a day in the park.
- Dedicate a certain percentage of any new police hires to monitor parks through a “Park Ranger” or similar program that provides a visible security presence in parks.
- Install structural safety equipment - such as security cameras and increased lighting.
- Increase structured and unstructured activities in parks, especially for children.

#### Background

Both the 2001 PARC 911 agenda and the 2003 “Six Big Ideas” developed by the Mayor’s Parks and Green Spaces Task Force identified public safety as “the most fundamental underpinning of a good park. Any other positive aspect of a park is rendered moot if the property itself is not safe.”

The Office of Parks has taken several steps to structurally change its parks to improve safety. As recommended by the Mayor’s Task Force, park rules are posted at each park entrance. The city has created additional entrances to parks, removed underbrush and improved site lines to make it easier to see into the park – a proven tool for reducing crime. In addition, the Office of Parks has partnered with the Police Department to improve lighting in several parks. The Office of Parks also has improved its response time for removing graffiti, picking up trash and fixing broken items. Reducing evidence of neglect also is a proven tool for reducing crime.

The biggest shortcoming to park safety efforts is the absence of a clearly identified authority figure in the park. Atlanta has no park ranger program, and maintenance personnel visit parks only once every 11 days. In many areas of town, public safety officers place a low emphasis on patrolling parks and enforcing park rules, despite the fact that the Office of Parks lacks enforcement authority.

#### Concrete Results

The greatest shortcoming in efforts to increase public safety in parks is the virtual absence of any authority figure in our parks. More than 90% of the time, there is no public official – either public safety or park employee – in any given park. The programs outlined in this proposal have the potential to address this shortcoming by getting public safety officials in every park at least once a day. Combined with efforts to increase programming in parks, these programs will increase the number of people in parks, decrease the perception that parks are unsafe, and actually make parks safer.