

TrailNation Summit, October 2025

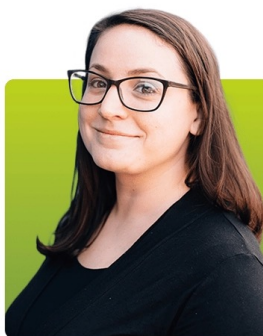
Trails as Economic Engines

Urban Cohort



Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Photo Credit: Erica Fisher

Introductions



NICOLE MUISE-KIELKUCI



**JUSTIN
WHEELER**



**KELVIN
COLLINS**

ATLANTA BELTLINE, INC.



LIZ THORSTENSEN
RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY



**ERICA
BRIGGS**

RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY

Trails as Economic Engines

Agenda

Class Overview

Liz Thorstensen, RTC

Part 1: Strategies for Leveraging the Economic Potential of Urban Trails

Nicole Muise-Kielkucki and Justin Wheeler, Fourth Economy

Part 2: Case Study - Atlanta Beltline

Kelvin Collins, Atlanta Beltline, Inc.

Part 3: Developing Your Action Plan

Nicole Muise-Kielkucki and Justin Wheeler, Fourth Economy

Objective S

Objective 1:

Understand how urban trail systems can be leveraged to revitalize aging commercial corridors, support mixed-use redevelopment, and strengthen urban quality of life.

Objective 2:

Learn strategies to revitalize industrial and commercial corridors through trail-oriented development while centering equity and anti-displacement strategies.

Objective 3:

Explore case studies and actionable tactics that demonstrate how trail networks enhance economic competitiveness, create cultural destinations, and strengthen social and neighborhood connectivity.



Trails as Economic Engines: Urban Cohort

TrailNation Summit | Cleveland, Ohio | October 2025



ABOUT US

**We help create
strong communities,
impactful organizations,
and thriving economies**



Economic
Development
Planning



Emerging
Industries



Housing



Organizational
Strategic
Planning



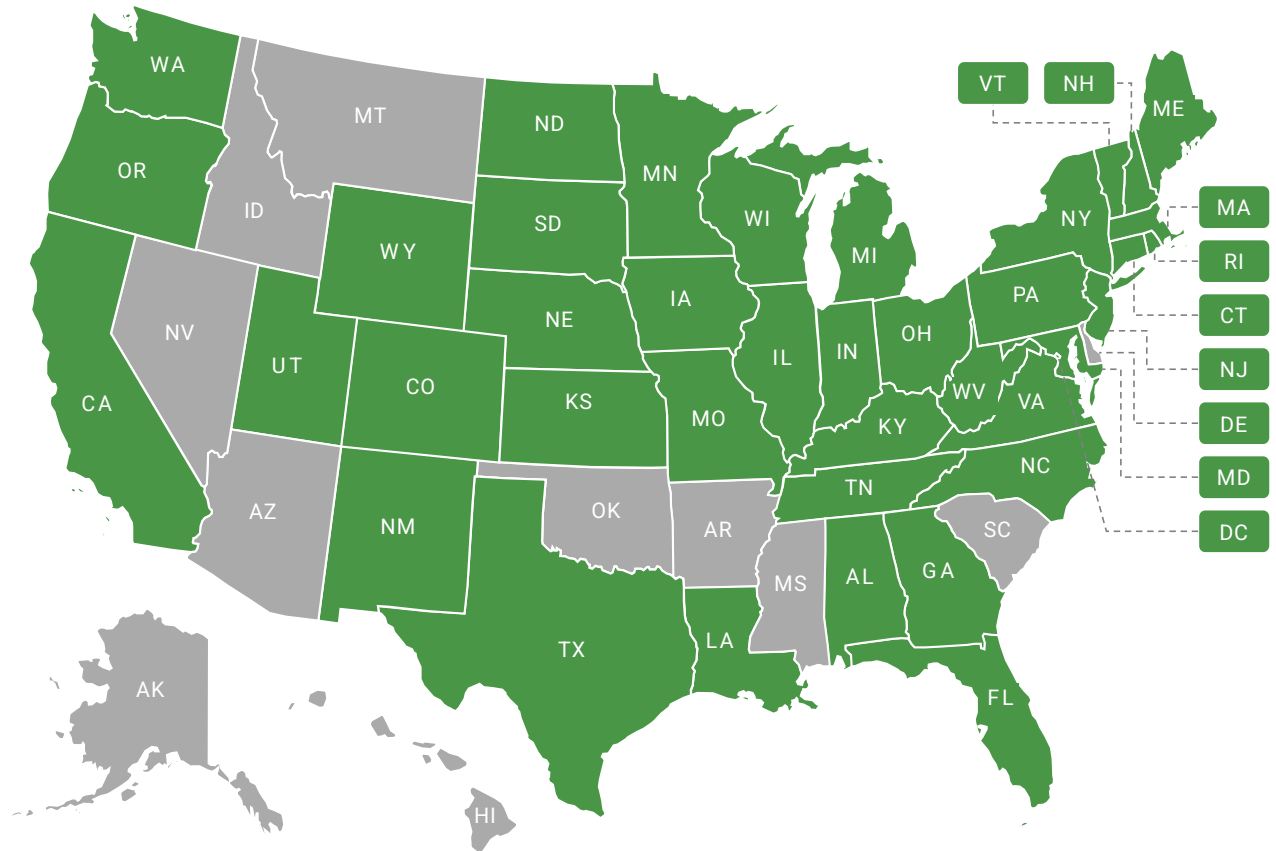
Outdoor
Recreation
Economies



Quality of
Life and
Place

Clients We Work With

- Economic Development Organizations
- Local, State, and Regional Governments
- Nonprofits
- Trade Associations
- Colleges & Universities
- Community Organizations
- Philanthropy & Foundations
- Private Developers

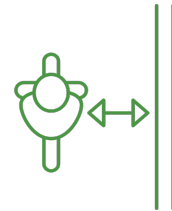




Integrating Trails into Planning and Economic Development

Key Urban Barriers

- High land costs, challenges with property/site control
- Jurisdictional and governance complexities (e.g., zoning, right-of-way)
- Public, private, and community sector buy-in
- Care and maintenance challenges
- Aging infrastructure and environmental remediation needs
- Safety approaches
- Risk of displacement and gentrification
- Community fears/misperceptions (vandalism, increased neighborhood traffic)
- Mistrust from past planning practices



What is your **top barrier** to realizing the full economic potential of your urban trail system?

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#1687 672



Integrating Trails with Urban Economic Development

Opportunity to set the vision for connectivity and scale, integrating with local and regional redevelopment plans and policies. This includes reviewing and aligning zoning category and land development regulations: e.g., allowing for inclusionary zoning



Community Benefits Agreements & Inclusionary Zoning

“The 78” in Chicago

- The 78 is a \$7 billion mixed-use development project along the Chicago River. The name comes from the goal of creating Chicago's "78th neighborhood."
- The CBA includes a commitment to dedicate a **half-mile of riverfront to the Chicago Riverwalk**. This is will not be an isolated new feature, instead the riverwalk will connect the new neighborhood to existing parts of the city, including downtown and Chinatown's Ping Tom Park.
- The agreement reserves a substantial portion of the project's land—**40% of the 62 acres**—for green and public open spaces.
- The CBA also includes provisions for the ongoing maintenance and "activation" of these public spaces - with particular attention to all-season recreation



Planning & Policy Tools for Trail-Oriented Economic Development

Optimizing development for multiple use and benefit



- Establishing character and scale
- Revising codes and policies
- Overlay districts
- Districts and Main Streets
- Development incentives
- Equitable development
- Housing trusts

Land Trusts and Anti-Displacement Funds

Douglass Community Land, Washington, D.C.



- 11th Street Bridge Park's first Equitable Development Plan was in 2015
- Goal was to create an equitable future for residents who live near the park.
- The Douglass Community Land Trust board residents participated in overall strategy, selecting partners, and reviewing ground leases.
- The Bridge Park raised over \$3M for early property acquisition to move this initiative forward.

Planning & Placemaking

Integrating trail development into ongoing and placemaking efforts

Considerations Affecting Land Uses:

- Comprehensive / General Plan
- Neighborhood or District Plan
- Brownfield Redevelopment
- Allowable Uses – lodging, retail, residential
- Density and Intensity

Development Forms for Consideration:

- Building orientation
- Visibility
- Parking – bike and car
- Public spaces
- Access and connectivity

Placemaking – the “4 Ds”

Density

Diversity

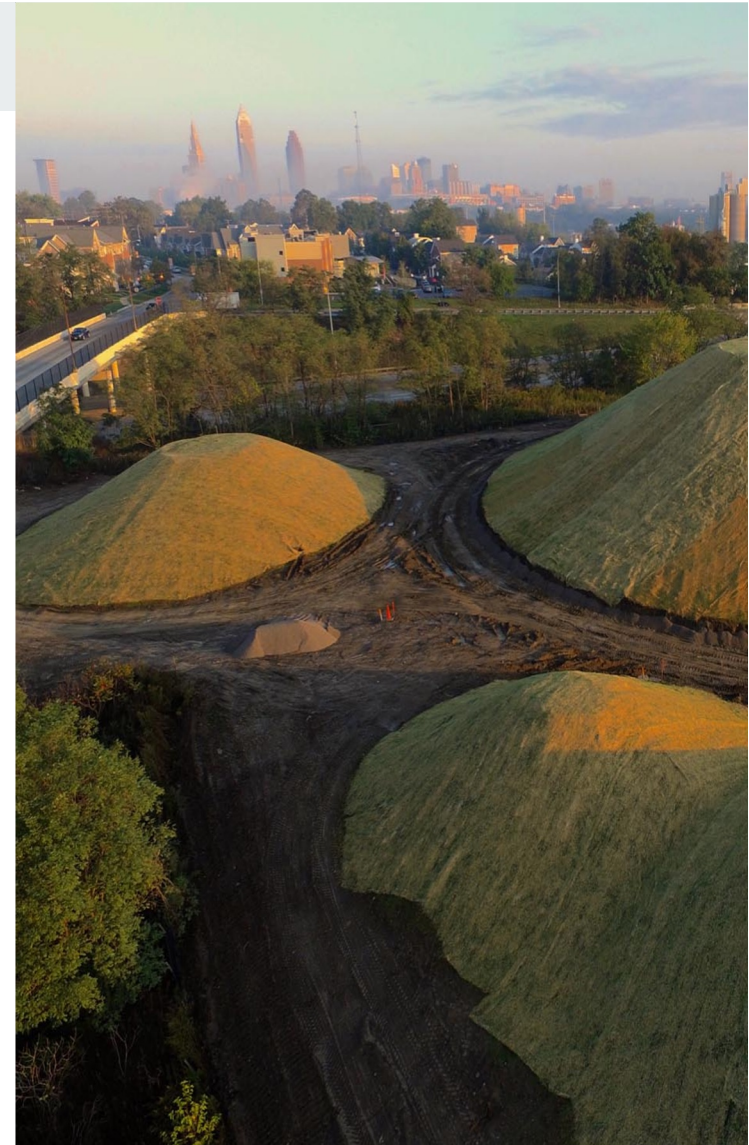
Design

Destinations

Creative Reuse of Industrial Corridors & Brownfields

Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail | Cleveland & Akron, OH

- Built along the historic Ohio & Erie Canal. Several rounds of investment over the last 10 years to revitalize and connect the communities along the Towpath Trail.
- In Akron and Cleveland, the trail runs through redeveloped industrial/brownfield zones, such as former Goodyear and Firestone properties.
- Restoration and remediation work was needed in several segments, particularly near the Cuyahoga River, once infamous for industrial pollution.
- Some sections highlight industrial heritage with interpretive signage, canal locks, and repurposed structures.



Identifying Champions

Generating Community Engagement and Buy-in



- Participatory planning and equitable development
- Storytelling with data and community insights
- Charrettes
- Surveys
- Walking audits
- "Friends of" & affinity groups

Participatory Planning & Equitable Development

Mantua Greenway, Philadelphia, PA



- This west Philly neighborhood has a history of community activism dating back to the 1960s. “We Are Mantua!” (WAM!)
- Early success building the neighborhood’s first community center, which took over a decade to complete. WAM’s motto is “Plan Or Be Planned For.” The Mantua Transformation Plan had 7 priorities.
- The Mantua Greenway supports the neighborhood’s priority of promoting healthier lifestyles, and to include a mile-long tree lined bike and pedestrian path, outdoor fitness amenities and artistic murals.

Enabling Access

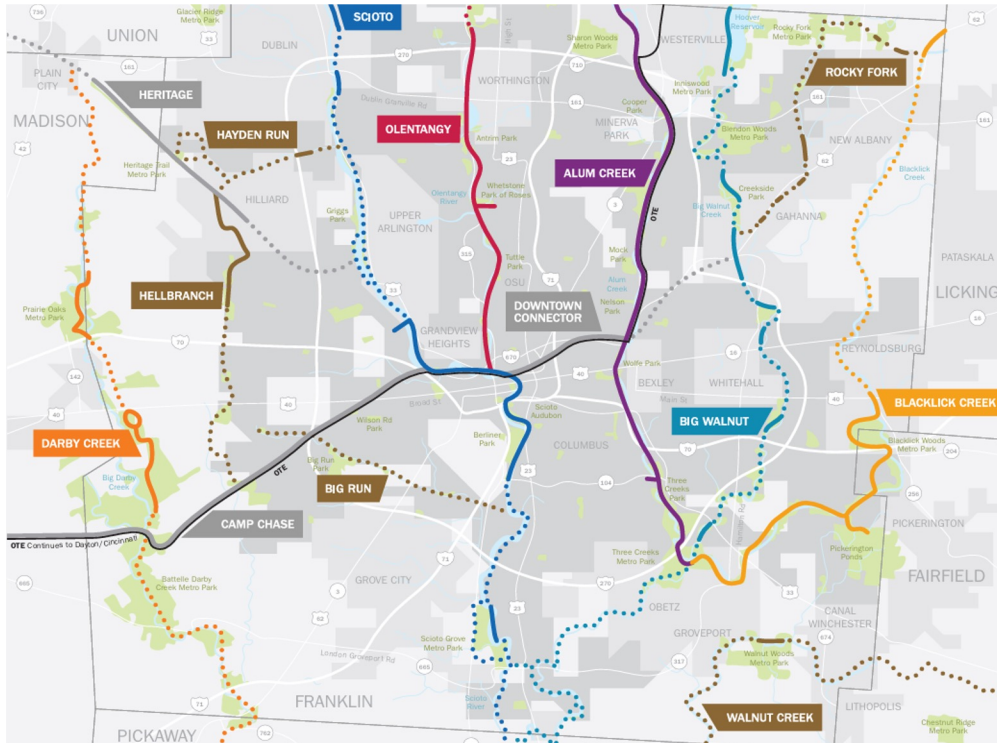
Ensuring full access to trail and surrounding amenities



- Business-friendly permitting
- Wide sidewalks
- Secure bike parking near commercial entrances
- Transit connectivity

Transit Connectivity

Central Ohio Greenways, OH



- Trails are integral to the region's transportation/mobility/infrastructure, not an afterthought.
- Trail planning and funding are embedded in the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC) core functions, ensuring dedicated staffing, grants, oversight, and technical assistance.
- MORPC sets regional priorities and standards (e.g., signage, wayfinding, connectivity), which local governments adopt to enhance coherence and reduce duplication.
- As an MPO/regional body, MORPC pools funding, coordinates multi-jurisdiction projects, and convenes municipalities, state agencies, and trail groups.

Placemaking and Hubs of Connectivity

Maximizing experience for users and visitors of all types



- Trailheads
- Wayfinding & branding
- Amenities (shade, water fountains, etc.)
- Mixed-use development

Trails as a Cultural Amenity

Indianapolis Cultural Trail, IN



- Internationally-acclaimed 10.6-mile biking and walking trail
- Connects existing assets in all six of Indy's Cultural Districts, several neighborhoods, and the city's greenway system.
- Created to promote public art, enhance urban mobility for cyclists and pedestrians, and serve as an economic development tool for revitalizing neighborhoods.
- The Legacy of Gene and Marilyn Glick nonprofit supports the trail with year round fundraising, advocacy, and maintenance.

Funding

Identifying and establishing responsive capital sources for project completion and maintenance



Capital and operating costs

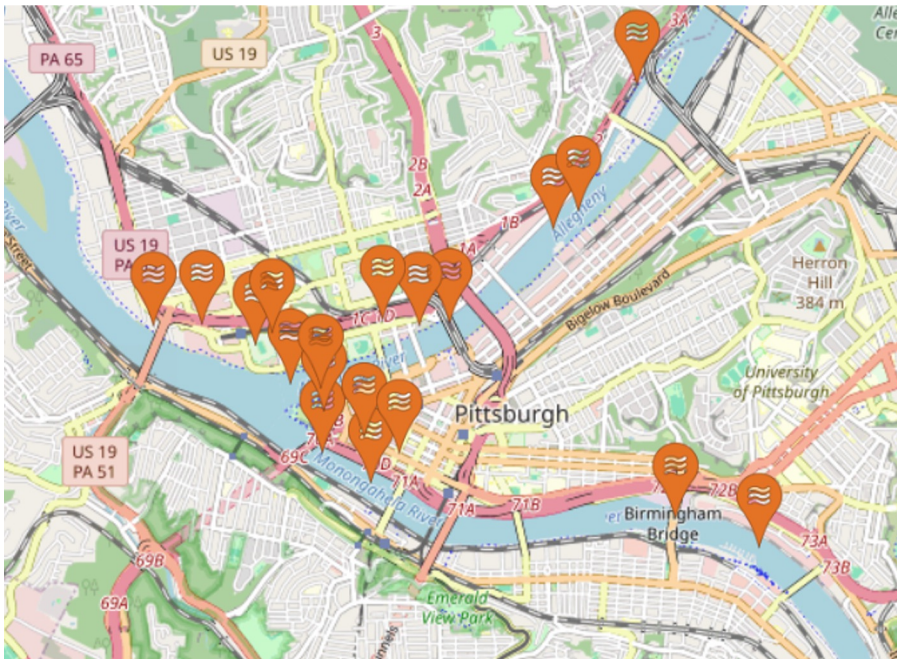
- Interlocal agreements
- Recurring revenue, value capture, grants
- Design, ROW, construction
- Maintenance and management
- Programming

Partnerships

- Community groups
- Foundations
- Public agencies

Incentives for Mixed-Use Development

PA Waterfront Development Tax Credit (WDTC)



- Designed encourage enhanced development of riverfront property through a public private partnership model that catalyzes further financial investment and job creation.
- A firm makes a contribution of cash or property to a designated WD organization, like Riverlife, to fund a waterfront development project.
- Businesses apply for the tax credits through PA Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) – October 15th to November 1st.
- If approved, the tax credit award equals 75% of the total contribution made to the waterfront organization.
- The Commonwealth issues up to \$5,000,000 in total tax credits per fiscal year.

Data-Driven Care and Maintenance Pledge

Riverlife, Pittsburgh, PA

- Fourth Economy created **financial model for care and maintenance** along a 15-mile “loop” of riverfront trail in Pittsburgh
- Trail intersects a wide-variety of property owners – private businesses, housing developments, city, state, sports authorities, with differing incentives for a shared care and maintenance model
- Project was used to support the **creation and capitalization of a \$5M maintenance endowment fund**, and develop a MOU with the city and other property owners for baseline of care



An aerial photograph of a city park. A winding river flows through the center of the park, surrounded by lush green trees. A prominent red path with yellow dashed lines runs along the river, forming a large, stylized 'S' or '8' shape. The path is bordered by a low wall. The park is situated between two dense urban areas with many houses and buildings. The sky is clear and blue.

Innovative Solutions



Atlanta
Beltline

The Atlanta Beltline: A Blueprint for Trails as Economic Engines

Kelvin Collins

Vice President of Economic Development

TrailNation Summit - 2025





Today's Case Study

- The Vision: Transforming a City
- The Engine: Tax Allocation District
- The Proof: The Outcomes
- Strategies: An Inclusive Framework
- Lessons: Confronting Challenges
- Your Turn: Q & A



The Vision



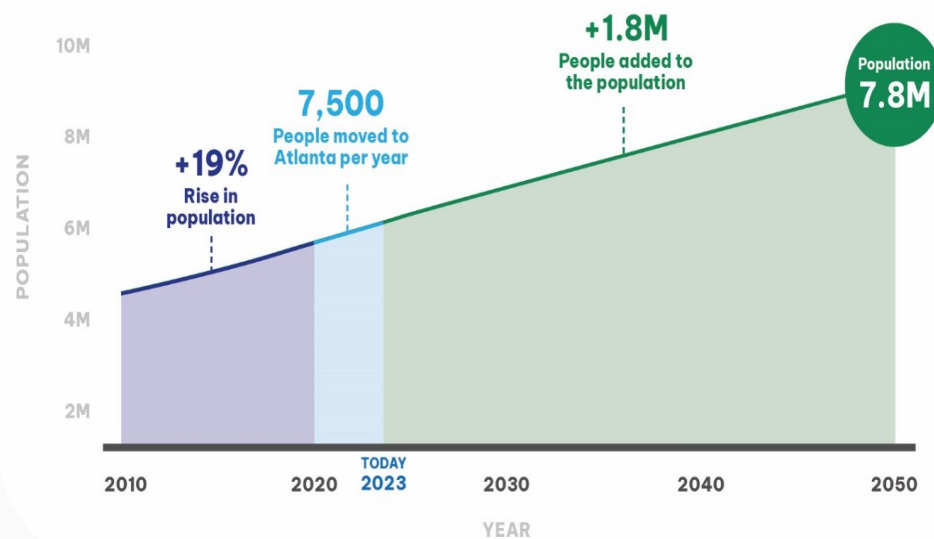
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Beltline

Managing Atlanta's Future Growth



Atlanta Population Growth

Forecasted and Reported by the Atlanta Regional Commission





Our Vision

To be the catalyst for making Atlanta a global beacon for equitable, inclusive, and sustainable life.





The Engine

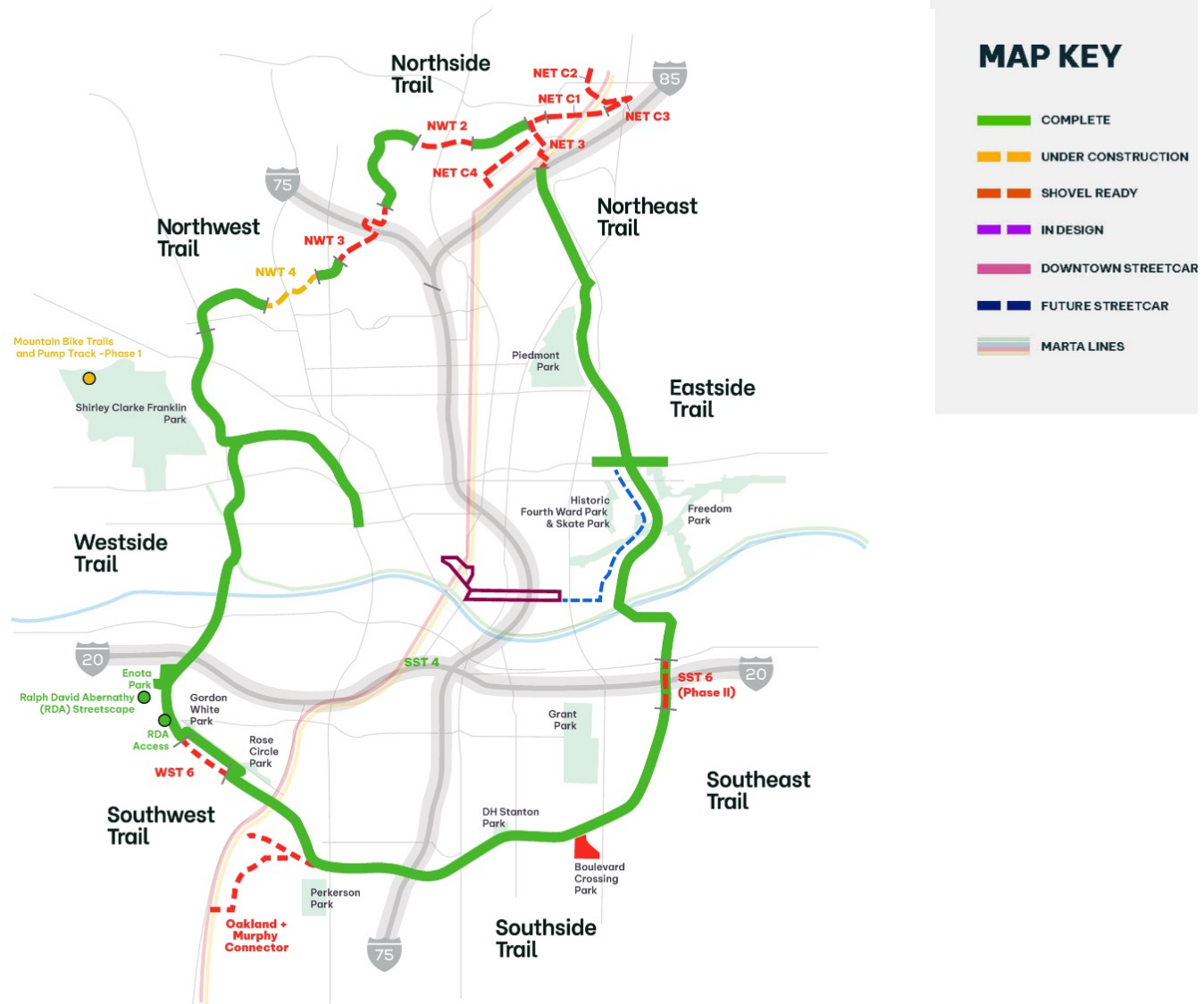


Funding Innovation: Tax Allocation District (TAD)



The Proof

17.9 miles
of continuous, paved
Beltline trail
by FIFA 2026





Affordable Housing

1,465

UNITS
Supported by
IA/ABI

+

364

UNITS
Supported by DCA,
AH, COA, and DFAC

=

2,075

AFFORDABLE UNITS

Beltline Planning Area
Outside TAD within 1/2 Mile
of Beltline

Affordable Units Created/Preserved



22 mile

ATLANTA BELTLINE CORRIDOR

2,544

UNITS
Supported by
IA/ABI

+

1,582

UNITS
Supported by DCA,
AH, COA, and DFAC

=

4,266

AFFORDABLE UNITS

Beltline Tax Allocation
District (TAD)
*TAD Goal:
5,600 Units*

TAD and Planning Area boundaries
are represented here or for
illustrative purposes only. For
precise boundary lines, please visit
beltline.org/map

LEGEND

ABI	Atlanta Beltline
AH	Atlanta Housing
COA	City of Atlanta
DAFC	Development Authority of Fulton County
DCA	Department of Community Affairs
IA	Invest Atlanta



Private Investment

10 to 1
ROI

Approximate return on
investment

\$9
Billion

Catalyzed in planning
area

\$719
Million

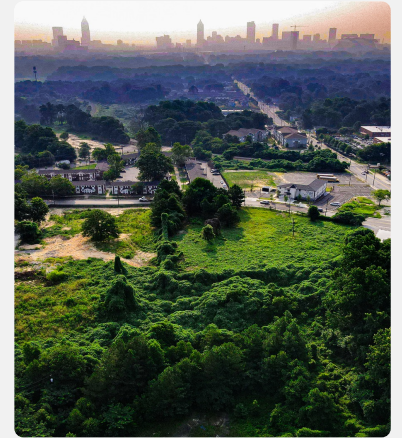
Invested in the project
so far

The Strategies



Preserving Affordability

- Beltline Inclusionary Zoning
- Buy land and control the development
 - More than \$60 million invested into 90 acres across 7 sites around the corridor





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Commercial
District
Support

Workforce
Development

Digital
Access &
Innovation



AtlantaBeltline

Economic Development Framework

Commercial
Affordability

Small
Business
Support

MISSION

Design and implement a community-driven economic development strategy that delivers shared prosperity for residents, businesses and the broader Atlanta Beltline community



Commercial Affordability Roadmap

- **Piloted a Local Developer Incentive Fund**
 - Deploy ~\$2 million to support small local developers with commitment to affordability
 - Recoverable grants \$150,000 to \$500,000
 - Launched – September 2025
- **Launch a Commercial Affordability Consortium**
 - In partnership with Kindred Futures & Urban Land Institute
 - ~25 stakeholders will guide & support Beltline's commercial affordability efforts
 - Projected launch - Fall 2025





Atlanta Beltline Marketplace



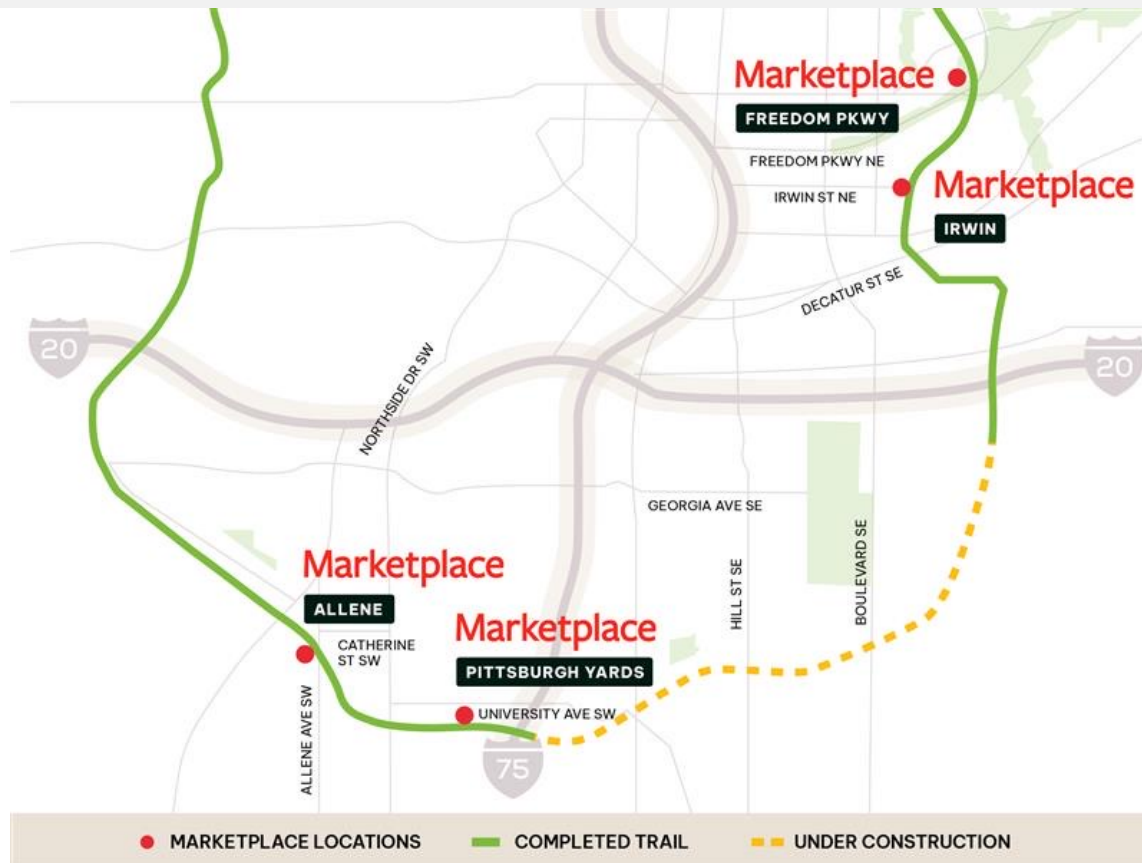
A small business incubator that offers affordable commercial spaces directly on the Beltline

- Architecturally designed shipping containers
- Wrap-around business support

AtlantaBeltline[®]
Marketplace



Atlanta
Beltline





Small Business Support

- Beltline Business Solutions Office
 - Beltline Business Ventures
 - Beltline Business Ventures: Artists Edition
- Enhancing and preserving business districts through grant opportunities
 - Business Façade pARTnership Grant
 - Commercial District Support Grant
- Connecting Beltline residents to job training for jobs at Beltline businesses
- Meet and greet events to connect DBEs



ATLANTA BELTLINE

**Business Solutions
Office**

The Lessons



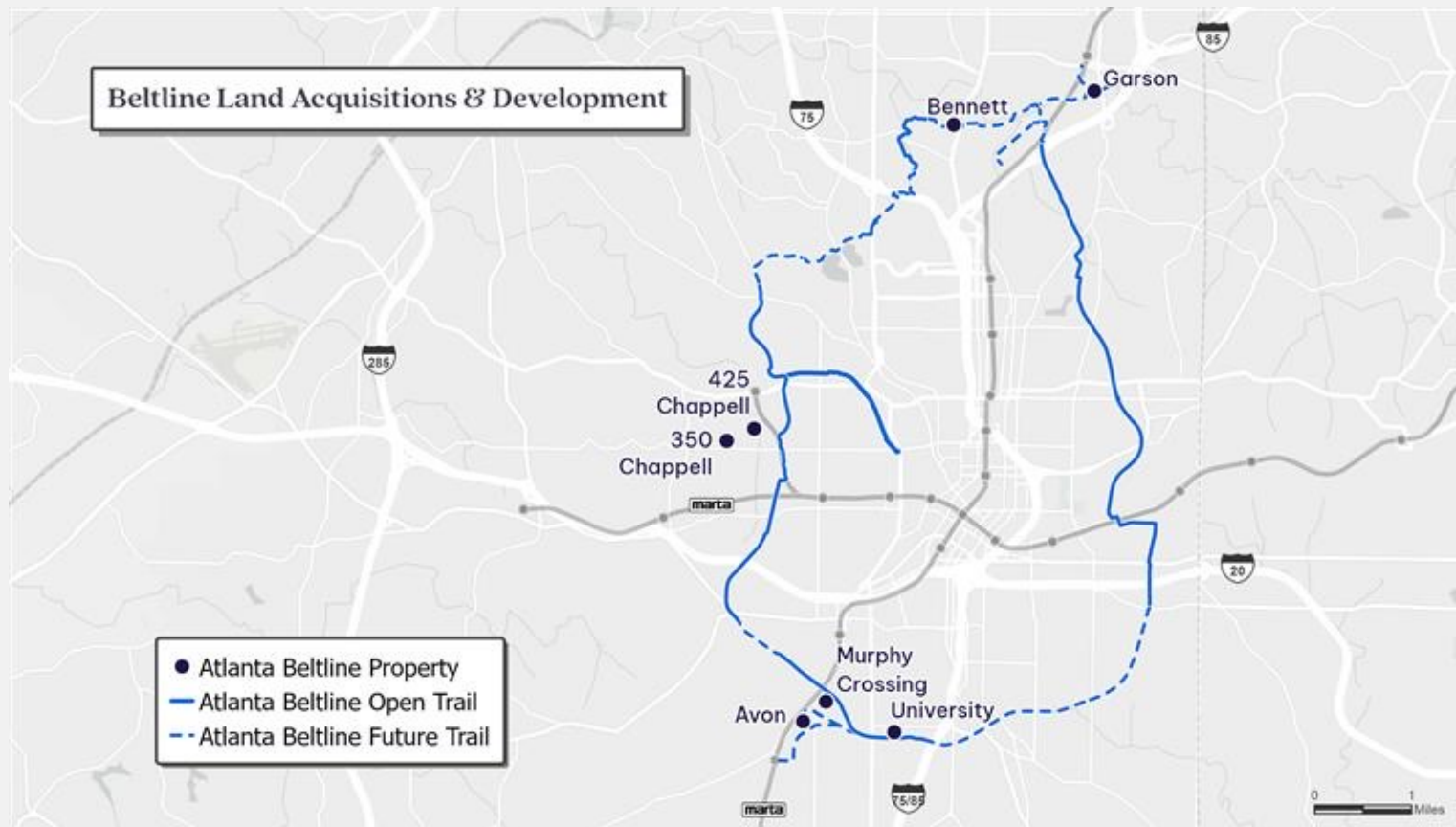
The People's Project

- Community & Stakeholder Engagement
- Build and strengthen relationships
- Work collaboratively
- Engage residents and businesses in defining community's vision and goals





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22-Miles of Transit: for Everyone

Transit is the catalyst for equity, ensuring access and mobility regardless of:

- Ability
- Geography
- Weather
- Wealth

Atlanta Beltline, Inc., City of Atlanta, and MARTA are currently working together to determine the best mode of transportation to activate on the Beltline.

The Takeaways



The Replicable Takeaways

- TAD provides fuel, while affordability strategies steer growth
- Relentless focus on equity ensures inclusive outcomes
- Not just a trail—comprehensive urban development framework
- Protect the investment for the next generation





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Beltline

What would work for your city?

Questions & Answers!



Action Planning



Individual Work Time (5 MINUTES):

- Digest new info
- Jot down your main thoughts in the Action Plan
- Identify: A key challenge to realizing the economic potential of your trail



Break into Small Groups (35 MINUTES):

- Break into groups of 4-6
- Share your challenges
- Utilize the power of the group to brainstorm solutions and strategies
- Identify a partner to follow up with



Sharing Out (5 MINUTES):

- Each group nominates one person to share out their top trending strategies and solutions in 20 seconds or less.



**Share Out:
Your Group's
Top Trending
Strategy/Solution**