



**Westside Study Group – Special Service District  
Building The Beltline For All Transcript  
Live Questions and Responses  
2.15.2021**

**Live Questions and Responses**

**Economics**

- 1. How many SW LANDLORDS have you spoken to? Not business owners because this is a PROPERTY tax and falls on the landlord not the business owner even though it's the BUSINESS owner who will be charged higher rents and we the customers who will have to pay that?**
  - A. We mailed a letter about the Special Service District to all 2,144 unique taxable property owner addresses within the proposed Special Service District (so this would include all SW taxable property owners). We have been e-mailing info to our 4,091 business e-mails (which would include business owners that own their property). We also did a RoboCall to the 5,116 unique business phone numbers (which would include business owners that own their property).
  
- 2. Has a similar analysis (to the community retention fund/homeowner analysis) been done to determine how much funding is needed to retain small businesses?**
  - A. Not exactly, over the past few years we have been speaking with businesses individually and through our business association and community improvement district roundtables to understand the funding need. Business impact surveys were conducted early on in the pandemic, and we will be working with partners to do another round of surveys so that we have the most up to date information about the need.
  
- 3. As these small business funding opportunities come about, how will the Beltline commit to engage a diverse group of businesses to help craft the actual funding programs?**
  - A. We have a quarterly roundtable of the 15 business associations and community improvement districts all around the BeltLine. These groups represent a majority of our businesses around the corridor and the diversity of our businesses. This roundtable is critical to the development of the small business support program. We will also continue to engage and get feedback from individual businesses as well through surveys, interviews, meetings, and other opportunities to ensure that the supports are programs that our businesses need.
  
- 4. How many small businesses are owned by legacy residents & own their buildings / locations - not leased?**
  - A. The city does not collect this data as part of their business license process, but we have been partnering with them to acquire additional data to help us better understand these numbers.



- 5. But did you talk to small business tenants and multifamily renters? Is there an appetite for this tax amongst those individuals?**
- A. We have been e-mailing info to our 4,091 business e-mails (which would include small business tenants). We also did a RoboCall to the 5,116 unique business phone numbers (which would include small business tenants). Information about the SSD and the six Study Group meetings was also e-mailed to the In the Loop list of 29,000 which would include multifamily renters. We have spoken with many small business tenants, both for and against the district. Small businesses that are for the district cite their ability to tap into new customers and the desire to finally get the BeltLine in their community.

#### SSD

- 6. This tax is on commercial properties and multifamily homes. Does that include industrial properties? what about duplexes?**
- A. Industrial properties are included. Duplexes are not.
- 7. My condo community includes commercial tenants. How would we be impacted?**
- A. If the commercial tenants have their own parcel ID numbers with the Fulton County Tax Assessor (e.g. ground level retail), they would be included in the SSD. The owner-occupied condos would not be included.
- 8. Why is more funding going to the community retention fund than the small business support fund when homeowners aren't impacted by this extra tax, but commercial properties/business tenants are?**
- A. The community retention fund (a.k.a. [Legacy Resident Retention Program](#)) is a philanthropically funded initiative, and our ability to raise these funds will be enhanced with passage of the SSD. The size of the fund was based on an independent assessment by APD Urban Planning + Management of eligible homeowners along the southern and western parts of the BeltLine. The \$7 million for small business support will come from additional Tax Allocation District revenue that will be made available if the SSD is passed.
- 9. Investments in the beltline area are among the best real estate investments opportunities in the country. There is great momentum for a good return. Is 2-mills too low of a rate for the privilege of getting into this prime investment? Why not think bigger and have a bolder plan for beltline greatness? 3-mill is a minor increase, yet 50% more to build a great project?**
- A. We appreciate the interest in generating more revenue via the SSD. There are similarly strong advocates for minimizing the millage. The purpose of the SSD is to generate \$100 million for trail completion, and we expect to be able to achieve that goal through an increase of approximately 2 mills.
- 10. It is my understanding that the day care center (and other commercial properties) cannot vote on this tax increase. Why is that, and shouldn't they have a vote on raising their cost of doing business?**



- A. Similar to the authority City Council holds to assess property taxes generally, the Council has the authority to create a Special Service District under Article IX, Section II, Paragraph VI of the Constitution of the State of Georgia. The Georgia Constitution empowers local governments with the ability to create a Special Service District without requiring a vote from each individual property owner.
- 11. How might this affect small mom and pop businesses who own their property but may not be able to afford the increase. Are these businesses considered legacy?**
- A. The SSD millage rate will be applied consistently to all properties in the district. Nearly 50% of taxable parcels in the SSD will be asked to invest less than \$250 annually based on 2020 assessed values and the projected rate of 2 mills. The passage of the SSD will allow us to generate additional funds for supporting small businesses. We will continue to engage small mom and pop businesses to understand the types of programs and support they need, especially our long-term businesses and those that were there prior to the BeltLine project.
- 12. Is there any way to shield small-businesses and entrepreneurs from the pass through of the tax increase?**
- A. Whether the SSD assessment is passed through depends on the structure of the lease between the tenant and property owner. If the assessment is passed through, this is not expected to occur until the first quarter of 2022, when true-ups typically happen between landlords and tenants. The Georgia Constitution mandates that all property of the same class be assessed and taxed uniformly.
- 13. This section of the beltline has no development yet, how can we be sure that our large district, which is providing a lot of this SSD will be developed proportionately to our "investment"?**
- A. The Atlanta BeltLine is a citywide project that relies on public and private sources of funding for trail construction. We will utilize the SSD revenue towards trail completion as funds are needed around the corridor for real estate acquisition, design and engineering, and construction. A timeline chart that estimates when those activities will take place and where is available at [www.beltline.org/ssd](http://www.beltline.org/ssd). The BeltLine will be built to the same quality standards throughout the loop.
- 14. What land use codes are expected to be included in the SSD?**
- A. The intent is for the SSD to include properties that will experience a commercial upside from completion of the full 22-mile BeltLine trail corridor (i.e. commercial and apartment properties within the Atlanta BeltLine Planning Area). There are approximately 150 land use codes represented in the SSD, though land use code was not the only criteria used to identify eligible parcels.
- 15. How will single family home investors that own hundreds of properties be taxed under the SSD?**
- A. Single family homes are not included in the SSD.



**16. How come homeowners who have benefited financially from the Beltline aren't given similar consideration as commercial owners who have benefited?**

- A. The intent is for the SSD to include properties that will experience a commercial upside from completion of the full 22-mile BeltLine trail corridor (i.e. commercial and apartment properties within the Atlanta BeltLine Planning Area).

**17. Will business owners/property owners have a chance to vote on this proposal like they would for a CID?**

- A. No. City Council has the authority to create a Special Service District under Article IX, Section II, Paragraph VI of the Constitution of the State of Georgia. Unlike a CID, which has its own taxing authority, City Council retains taxing authority with an SSD.

**18. Should not individual homeowners invest in the beltline also? They also should reap it's benefits as well.**

- A. The intent is for the SSD to include properties that will experience a commercial upside from completion of the full 22-mile BeltLine trail corridor (i.e. commercial and apartment properties within the Atlanta BeltLine Planning Area).

**19. So, I live in West End/Oakland City. Does this tax apply to residents as well? So, it looks like I am in the TAD. Does this mean I would see the tax on my house go up?**

- A. Single family homes are not included in the SSD.

**20. The legislation doesn't say that funds will be spent specifically & solely on the trail. It reads "completion of the BeltLine trail public improvement within the district, including any facilities, systems, parks, trails, streets, greenspace, and other integrated public or private development features included within any adopted infrastructure or transportation plan, urban redevelopment plan, strategic implementation plan, redevelopment plan, workable programs or comprehensive plans."**

- A. The SSD will be used exclusively to fund completion of the BeltLine trail corridor, including land acquisition, design and construction. Revised legislation will be introduced to more explicitly describe the use of funds consistent with this intent, which includes all of the components of the trail corridor (e.g. concrete trail, linear greenspace, lights, security cameras, railings, ramp and stair connections to streets, road crossings, retaining walls, stormwater management, utility duct bank, bridges, signage, etc.)

**21. What other amendments are on the table?**

- A. City Council members have the sole authority to introduce amendments. As of February 25<sup>th</sup>, no amendments have been introduced.

**22. Was a more traditional CRA tax increment financing district considered where tax on the increased property value is reserved for improvements in the area?**

- A. The vision for the BeltLine as laid out in the BeltLine Redevelopment Plan is for the project and its benefits to be delivered to all of the communities it promises to connect.



There is only one BeltLine area, and the SSD will be used to complete the full 22-mile trail corridor within that area.

**23. Upper Westside CID and local business associations have called for more oversight of SSD funds. Will the legislation be reflected to reflect this?**

- A. Because the City and Invest Atlanta intend to bond against the SSD revenue, the bond ordinances layout the requirements for bond indenture and other documents, which act as legal contracts that require the funds to be spent towards trail completion. To ensure meaningful citizen oversight and input into the planning, design, and implementation of the BeltLine, the City Council previously adopted through legislation a robust framework for citizen participation, which includes (a) a community representative on the Board of Directors of Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., (b) a formal community engagement and reporting requirement, (c) a "citizen participation advocate" within Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., and (d) the establishment of the BeltLine Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee. Any SSD funds allocated towards trail construction will be part of an annual budget that must be reviewed and adopted by the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. Board of Directors and the Invest Atlanta Board of Directors. ABI's spending is audited annually by an external auditor and ABI is proud to report eight straight years of clean audits with no findings.

**24. How will the property tax money from the TAD (more than \$1/2 billion) over the next 10 years be used and why isn't that enough to complete the trail without the SSD?**

- A. The property tax money that flows from the TAD must be allocated toward multiple components of the Atlanta BeltLine program and not just trail completion. Some of those components include a significant annual debt service for the bonds, administration and operational costs, affordable housing, economic development, parks, environmental testing/remediation, streetscapes, community engagement, salaries, design services, easements, and trail construction. The SSD is needed because of the shortfall in the amount of TAD funds originally projected in 2006 for the TAD, the great recession, early lawsuits challenging the amounts of funds that could be allocated to the TAD by schools, renegotiation of PILOT payments to the schools, fewer bonds being issued than initially contemplated, tax abatements, slower economic recovery than anticipated after the great recession, and rising costs of construction, design and materials for trails, etc. All of these factors impacted the compound growth of the TAD for the first decade of the Atlanta BeltLine and therefore less TAD revenue was generated.

**Design & Review**

**25. Why do BeltLine trails cost 10X more than equivalent PATH trails to construct?**

- A. We have many more parameters that go into our trails v. how Path approaches theirs. In no specific order:
  - i. We are required to comply with City of Atlanta stormwater regulations. As an example, on the Westside Trail, that infrastructure amounted to 10% of the total project cost.



- ii. We selected materials 10 years ago with an eye towards minimizing long-term maintenance; stainless steel guard/handrails (no rusting) and granite faced retaining walls to facilitate tagging removal.
- iii. Our trail is between 6-8" thick to accommodate emergency vehicles.
- iv. We have a utility duct bank to accommodate potential sales to fiber companies.
- v. We have lights every 90'.
- vi. We have security cameras.

**26. Is it possible to provide an estimate on the timeline for completion of with main-line Westside Trail with and without the SSD?**

- A. It really is not possible as w/o SSD we do not currently have sufficient construction funding sources identified to answer your question.

**27. How will the SSD affect the rollout of construction? Will the construction still be completed in a piecemeal fashion?**

- A. Construction will proceed as sections become ready for bidding.

**28. If the SSD is NOT passed, would construction of the beltline halt? Or would it be completed over a long-than-anticipated length of time?**

- A. Over a much longer timeframe that would most likely extend out beyond 2030.

**29. Will tree plantings on future Beltline segments have ongoing stewardship/care, e.g., weed/vine removal, watering as needed, replacement if needed? (which is currently not being done on PATH's Proctor Creek Greenway)**

- A. Our partnership with Trees Atlanta relative to the establishment of its Linear Arboretum has it providing tree maintenance for five years after planting.

**30. Westside Connector is a great walk even in its unfinished form. Are there plans for parks, housing, or retail along it?**

- A. There are currently a number of developments ranging in size and extending north and west from the Hollowell tunnel near Northside Drive.

**31. Why is the Subarea 8 planning area so much wider than the other Subareas?**

- A. The BeltLine Planning Area is generally ½ mile on either side of the trail corridor. In places where the TAD extends beyond this ½ mile, the Planning Area includes the TAD.

**32. Are there any plans to move forward on the Mozely park vision plan for the actual park?**

- A. Not currently. We will be moving forward with a revision to our Strategic Implementation Plan which may identify a timeline for that park.

**33. Our experience has been that we see no business from Beltline. The sidewalks and infrastructure between where we are, and the Beltline is more akin to the moon. Will the Beltline invest in and advocate for street level improvements in the TAD to better connect surrounding businesses and residents to the trail?**



- A. Not knowing where you are located makes it difficult to respond. We recommend that you reach out to Kelvin Collins, our VP of Economic Development. However, we do focus on streetscapes and how people connect into the BeltLine.

### Transit

#### **34. Why is transit funding not considered in the special service district tax?**

- A. Completion of the BeltLine trail corridor will support the ability to secure funding for transit by establishing the transit corridor in the linear greenspace alongside the trail, attracting residential density, and catalyzing the creation of job centers. The property owners making the largest investments via the SSD were willing to participate only if the SSD was dedicated to completing the trail corridor. More than \$900M for Atlanta Streetcar Expansion along the BeltLine Eastside and Westside Trails has already been earmarked by the MARTA board as part of the More MARTA sales tax passed by Atlanta voters in 2016. ABI will continue to support MARTA as they lead design and construction of future transit on the Atlanta BeltLine.

### Other

#### **35. Will there be money allocated for additional trash cans to be added to the beltline, as requested by Mozley Park community members for years now?"**

- A. We are happy to consider adding trash receptacles along our trail. Please contact Kevin Burke, our Dir. Of Design at [kburke@atlbeltline.org](mailto:kburke@atlbeltline.org) with the specific location(s) you are interested in.

#### **36. How is the Microsoft deal impacting plans?**

- A. The commitment to finish the Atlanta BeltLine does not depend on the plans of any individual company.

#### **37. Is there an opportunity to delay some of the more icing on the cake elements of the Beltline - like the public art component - that aren't as crucial to getting the basic Beltline completed?**

- A. Art on the Atlanta BeltLine is an essential component of the Atlanta BeltLine experience with the majority of the exhibition's funding coming from grants and philanthropic contributions.

#### **38. Referring to the Mozely park question, are there any funds going towards the Mozely park vision plan?**

- A. Not at this time but please see our previous response above.

#### **39. How do we know the Beltline will listen to advisory councils when TADAC recommendations seem to be ignored year after year?**

- A. ABI receives and considers TADAC's non-binding recommendations. ABI has implemented some of TADAC's recommendations.