



**Southwest Study Group – Special Service District
Building The BeltLine For All Transcript
Live Questions and Responses
2.16.2021**

Live Questions and Responses

SSD

- 1. Have the SW Atlanta commercial property owners been notified?**
 - A. Yes, the commercial property owners have been notified.

- 2. Will duplexes and industrial zoned properties be included?**
 - A. Industrial properties are included. Duplexes are not.

- 3. What is the link to check your address?**
 - A. <https://beltline.org/the-project/economic-development-commercial-real-estate/#planning-area>

- 4. Why "up to" \$150 million to minority owned construction companies? I think it should be worded "at least" to ensure equity for the wording presently leaves too much room for this not to become reality.**
 - A. Thank you for your suggestion. ABI is committed to supporting minority owned construction companies.

- 5. How long does the SSD levy stay in place?**
 - A. The SSD will be used to finance 30-year bonds to generate \$100 million for trail completion. As new development happens within the district, the additional revenue will be used to pay the bonds off as soon as possible. While the bonds will likely be for 30 years, they could be paid off sooner if more revenue is collected than projected. When the bonds are paid off, the SSD will be dissolved.

- 6. Will non-profit business be subjected to the tax, in full or at a reduced rate?**
 - A. The SSD millage is applied uniformly to all properties within the district. If a non-profit landowner is designated as tax-exempt by the Fulton County Tax Assessor, the assessed value of their property will be \$0, and they will therefore not contribute to the SSD.

- 7. It seems that new businesses and businesses already in the TAD on the unbuilt part of the beltline will be at a disadvantage because they haven't had the same economic benefits that the Eastside has been privy to. Should the tax be discounted for newer areas?**
 - A. Under Georgia state law, all properties within the SSD must be assessed at the same rate. However, the assessed values of properties along unbuilt portions of the trail that have seen less commercial activity to date tend to be lower than similar properties

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along completed portions of the BeltLine. Therefore, properties along unbuilt portions of the trail corridor will be generally be contributing proportionately less.

- 8. What will the \$100M SSD be used for? How much will be earmarked for light rail transit?**
 - A. The \$100 million from the SSD will be used exclusively to fund completion of the 22-mile mainline BeltLine trail corridor. 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.

- 9. It seems supporting the relatively small property tax increase will help build the BeltLine in the southern portion of the City and bring the BeltLine benefits to the south side where we have not enjoyed those BeltLine benefits. Is that right? More importantly, if we don't support the tax won't that mean it might be years in the future to finish the BeltLine on the south side of town? If all of this is right, I support the SSD for sure.**
 - A. You are correct. Thank you for your support.

- 10. Upper Westside CID and other business associations have called out transparency/accountability issues. How will the legislation be updated to address those concerns?**
 - 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.

- 11. "SSD's are used throughout the country (and called SADs more often). They are either the most important or one of the most important ways cities can use to raise large amounts of money for infrastructure. They are also one of the least regressive. And they can raise huge amounts of money. Commercial Property owners should have a voice in but not decide behind closed doors the funding mechanisms our city uses for infrastructure and we have 1 chance to get it right. It is widely agreed that we need more local money to build rail on the BeltLine. Why can't we shoot higher as many other cities have done and create an SSD of \$400 million and get both the trail and the rail out of it?"**

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- 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.
- 12. How and when will amendments and tweaks to the legislation be made known to the owners and business owners before the proposed SSD legislation is submitted for vote at the CDHS Committee and ultimately the City Council?**
- A. Legislation being considered by City Council and links to Council meetings can be found at www.citycouncil.atlantaga.gov.

Economics

- 13. As a small business owner and resident of the beltline corridor, how can we access these opportunities?**
- A. Small business owners within the Atlanta BeltLine Planning Area that are not currently receiving our Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. economic development team communications should e-mail us at business@atlbeltline.org or call us at 404-477-3657. We will use multiple ways to communicate to BeltLine businesses as opportunities become available.
- 14. Is the ABI consulting with independent economists about the SSD and more broadly about the economic impact and attractiveness of the Beltline? The visible success of the beltline makes me think that beltline planners can ask for a higher SSD and better develop the transit and the entire beltline. It's clear that businesses will always say taxes are too high so I hope you can tell us what independent economists think.**
- A. We continue to work with consultants and other groups to help us better communicate about the economic impact of the Atlanta BeltLine. We have not engaged independent economists around the Special Service District.

Design & Review

- 15. Why is the planning area boundary wider in some areas around the BeltLine?**
- A. The 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.
- 16. How do you determine which neighborhood areas will be developed earlier or later?**
- A. In the past, the decision has been predicated on what land do we own and how much money do we have available. Now with SSD, the decision is more relative to when are we done with a given design and permitting. It is very likely that there will be a time in the near future where we have multiple trail sections under construction at the same time; something that happened for the first time in 2020.

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17. If the SSD isn't adopted, what is the estimated time of completion of the beltline? what is the estimate time of completion of the light rail inclusion?

- A. We don't have an estimated time for completion of the trails without the SSD as there is not currently sufficient construction funding. The Atlanta BeltLine will cease operations, by law, in 2030 when the TAD sunsets and the SSD will enable us to complete the trails before then. Per the current More MARTA program, the overall completion of light rail is 3-4 decades in the future.

18. Why is the northwest trail so low on the totem pole?

- A. The NW Corridor does not include abandoned rail corridor and, as such, it takes more time to include negotiations with stakeholders and abutters to arrive at a design that makes sense programmatically and economically.

Transit

19. What is the guarantee on rail? It doesn't seem that rail is being made a priority.

- A. Creating better connectivity through improved transit was a central element of Ryan Gravel's thesis in 1999, and it has remained a core component of the Atlanta BeltLine ever since. New transit services play a major role in realizing the vision of linking neighborhoods, bringing people together, and taking them where they want to go. Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. continues to work collaboratively with the City of Atlanta, MARTA and other partners to advance transit on the Atlanta BeltLine and throughout the city. **ABI is fully committed to rail transit on the Atlanta BeltLine.**

20. Could you speak more about light rail timeline and funding?

- A. Rail on the BeltLine is part of the MoreMARTA sales tax program. It is expected that rail transit would begin operations on the Eastside BeltLine in 2027 and Westside BeltLine by 2032.

21. Beltline Rail by 2045 or 2050? That's the same as saying never, and yet transit is the path to equity. Affordable housing and transit go hand-in-hand. Shouldn't Atlantans and ABI demand a much faster timeline?

- A. Transit, affordable housing, and access to jobs are key elements in an equitable and affordable city. As MARTA leads the design and construction of transit along the Atlanta BeltLine, ABI will continue to support and collaborate with them and the City to ensure transit is efficient, reliable, safe, and implemented equitably. MARTA anticipates rail transit in operation on the Eastside BeltLine corridor in 2027 and on the Westside BeltLine corridor in 2032.

22. If ABI is buying the land & MARTA will implement the transit, then who will own it? Will MARTA rent your land. I'm not clear about the cost sharing.

- A. Everything that ABI implements is delivered to City of Atlanta.

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23. Does anyone think light rail is a good idea for the Beltline? Personally, I think it will be detrimental to the project.

A. Yes, there is a large contingency of supporters for light rail on the BeltLine. Light rail transit/Streetcar is the heart of the BeltLine program of projects.

24. HousingHas anyone looked into the ratio of "affordable housing" in existence now along the purposed/existing trail to the projected goal of affordable housing to be made? It seems as if the job creation ratio is disproportionate to the goal for purposed affordable housing. It is hard to believe we're not falling far short of affordable housing goals. It doesn't seem fair that people will potentially force out of their homes while builders get tax breaks and people in general get rich.

A. We look at the affordable housing numbers consistently. Currently, there are 2,542 affordable housing units created/preserved in the BeltLine TAD since 2006. This is 45% toward the goal of 5,600 units in the TAD by 2030. There are also another 1,705 affordable units created/preserved in the BeltLine Planning area. This totals 4,247 affordable units created/preserved in the BeltLine overlay since 2006 to present. We are a little behind on the affordable housing goal, however we are making steady progress toward the goal. Some of the lag has been due to the shortage of the amount of TAD funds originally projected, the great recession that started in 2008 - 2011, lawsuits challenging the amounts to be paid by the schools, and fewer bonds being issued than initially contemplated, etc. Even so, we have established yearly milestones for the number of affordable units that must be created/preserved in the TAD through 2030 and are fairly confident we will meet our 5,600 goal. We also have several programs affordable housing and economic development programs to mitigate displacement of legacy residents.

Other

25. Why do property taxes keep going up while tax incentives are still going on? It seems residents are paying the bill! I realize the Beltline is not giving these incentives, but many/most/all? of the Beltline developers are.

A. The Fulton County Development Authority and Invest Atlanta are the agencies authorized to grant tax abatements.

26. How will the Lemon Grove community benefit from the Beltline. So many have moved and bought up the area and there are just a few of us left as original homeowners. How will we have access to capital to upgrade our homes as senior citizens?

A. Please visit www.beltline.org/retentionfund to learn about the Legacy Resident Retention Program. Please also visit www.beltline.org/empower to learn more about Home Empowerment workshops that connect homeowners and renters with partners, programs and resources to stay in their homes. You can also email empower@atlblp.org or call 404-446-4404 to learn more about these programs.

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27. Could you give an example of a large development worth millions and the tax rate calculation?

A. A large development along the future Northeast Trail has a 2020 assessed value of \$68.9 million. Based on the projected SSD millage of 2 mills, or \$2 per \$1000 of assessed value, this development would contribute approximately \$138K per year.

28. Why given all the feedback expressing dissatisfaction and the need for improvement do you all just continue as is?

A. Assuming this question is in reference to the proposed Special Service District, we continue to hear from residents across the City of their support for completing the 22-mile BeltLine mainline trail loop. We are conducting extensive outreach to educate, answer questions, and listen to feedback from communities around the entire BeltLine about the proposed Special Service District. We are always open to specific, constructive recommendations on how to improve the proposal or other BeltLine operations.

29. Reference was made last night to how attractive the BeltLine and similar amenities are to the incoming Microsoft and other such businesses looking to move into the city. Has any effort been made to get them to put up some funding since they seem to like the BL so much?

A. Yes.