

**Bill Gowen**

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**To:** "Friends of Tanyard Creek Park" <friendsoftanyardcreekpark@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, January 25, 2008 7:42 PM  
**Subject:** News Coverage on this week's Northside Study Group Meeting

BeltLine's Tanyard Creek Park PATH decision is final, ignores residents  
Most at meeting say trust, support lost in the process  
by John F. Schaffner

January 25, 2008

Some 70 residents representing neighborhoods in south Buckhead attended the final meeting of the Northside Study Group for the BeltLine Master Plan process Jan. 22 and almost unanimously told representatives of the Atlanta BeltLine Inc., the city of Atlanta and the PATH Foundation they had lost the trust and support of the neighborhoods.

During the meeting, Atlanta BeltLine CEO Terri Montague was unwilling to revisit the final decision, which ignores input from residents concerning the route of the PATH Foundation trail through Tanyard Creek Park.

"This is a final decision," she told the group of angry neighborhood representatives toward the end of a planned two-hour meeting.

Montague said BeltLine staff and city representatives came to the meeting for a "conversation" about the decision to adopt the route preferred by the PATH Foundation, which encroaches on the meadow for its entire length, a decision that blatantly ignores the residents' preferred route for the trail on the west side of Tanyard Creek and out of the park's meadow.

But the truth of the matter is that the decision had been made by the BeltLine staff and management and cast in stone Jan. 15 by Mayor Shirley Franklin's BeltLine sub-cabinet to accept the cheaper and easier trail route proposed by the PATH Foundation. The residents' preferred route would have cost about \$300,000 more.

Jonathan Lewis, the chief city planner working on the northern sub area of the BeltLine Master Plan, gave a presentation explaining the decision to go with the PATH-proposed route was based primarily on three complications with the western route, preferred by the neighbors. He said the western route would have a 450-foot encroachment on the stream buffer, would require 265 feet of the stream bank to be reinforced and would have serious impact on trees, according to the arborists for the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs.

Lewis pointed out that the technical study of the two routes that the western route would impact 32 trees, 11 of which would be removed. Those trees represent 643 inches of caliper. The eastern route, preferred by PATH would impact five trees, four of which would be removed, for a total of 186

inches of caliper.

According to Dianne Harnell Cohen, director of the Parks Department, the loss of trees and tree canopy were major considerations in the decision.

Lewis also said the pervious trail material required for the western route, doesn't provide for all potential users — a requirement of Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. — and would need to be frequently vacuumed. Montague accused those in the crowd, who opposed the decision to go with the PATH preferred route on the east side of the stream – as offering an ultimatum: either select the western route or no trail at all.

But the neighborhood representatives, led by Steven Hart who served on the citizen steering committee, pointed out that the neighborhoods had been the ones to work out a compromise — first among themselves and then with the BeltLine staff and consultants — which resulted in the western route they proposed for the PATH and which they felt the BeltLine staff and PATH had supported.

One after another, residents in the audience said they felt they had been misled and that they had lost trust and support in the community input process associated with the BeltLine.

Some questioned the value of this segment of the trail to the BeltLine project, since it presently lacks connectivity with other PATH segments. They cited correspondence with CSX railroad officials who claim there is no agreement to allow the path to pass under the railroad trestle in the park in order to connect up with the Ardmore Park segment of the PATH.

PATH Foundation Executive Director Ed McBrayer had told BeltLine officials and neighborhood representatives months ago that CSX had agreed to allow the connection under its railroad trestle.

Even those in the audience not directly associated with the Tanyard Creek Park trail issue questioned the value of participating in the community input sessions if the community's viewpoints are not seriously considered.

In addition to representatives from Collier Hills, North Collier Hills and Ardmore Park neighborhoods and representatives from the Friends of Tanyard Creek Park organization, the neighborhoods of Peachtree Hills, Brookwood Hills, Piedmont Heights and others along the border of south Buckhead were represented in force at the meeting.

"How does the accepted route represent any input from the neighborhoods?" asked one member of Friends of Tanyard Creek Park.

Universally, the neighborhood representatives said they are not opposed to the trail. They are opposed to the route chosen for the trail and are upset that months worth of negotiations and compromising have been "ignored" in the decision-making process.

Montague told the group she has been discussing with city council members the issue of citizen participation in the BeltLine process over the 25-year course of its development. She questioned how to determine whether the viewpoints voiced represent a vocal few or a majority opinion.

Furthermore, she seemingly questioned whether community input from small segments of the Beltline project should impact decisions that are important to the success of the entire project.

"All decisions are not created equal," Montague stated. She said loss of dollars and loss of momentum are important factors in BeltLine decisions.

It was pointed out that BeltLine COO Tina Arbes had been asked several times during the community input sessions who would make the final decisions and had not been able to answer the question. Just last month, those who have been involved in every meeting discovered that Mayor Shirley Franklin has a BeltLine sub-cabinet that would make the final decision and did so on Jan. 15.

When asked who represented the neighborhoods' viewpoints at the subcabinet meeting, which involved only representatives of city departments and the BeltLine, Arbes said Lewis represented the neighborhoods' viewpoint.

Montague said the decision normally would be made by Atlanta BeltLine Inc., the city's Parks Department and PATH, but she took it to the mayor's sub-cabinet "knowing there would be controversy involved in the decision."

Hart, who had the last word at the meeting, urged the BeltLine officials to return to the table with neighborhood representatives and continue to work on reaching a compromise that will be acceptable to all parties. His offer was met with silence.

Karen Levy, a member of Friends of Tanyard Creek Park, told Montague that they had had the opportunity to marshal "support of the neighborhoods and build momentum for the BeltLine," but this decision and the blatant disregarding of the neighborhoods' input has changed that.

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