

# AVE ECODISTRICT

ATLANTA, GA, USA • AUGUST, 2017



## SNAPSHOT

**PROJECT TYPE:** Mixed-Use District

**SITE SIZE:** 229 acres

**RESIDENTS:** 22,000

### DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 92.6% African American
- 4% White
- 3.4% Other

### ECONOMY:

- Household Income less than \$15,000: 42.4%

### HISTORIC UNIVERSITIES:

- Clark Atlanta University
- Interdenominational Theological Center
- Morehouse College
- Morehouse School of Medicine
- Morris Brown College
- Spelman College
- Booker T. Washington High School

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES:

Green infrastructure, safety, complete streets, placemaking, urban agriculture, bike shares, resource efficiency, watershed restoration, equity, environmental education, affordable housing, and quality K-12 schools

### KEY STAKEHOLDERS + STRATEGIC PARTNERS:

- Atlanta City Council Districts 3,4
- Atlanta Housing Authority
- Atlanta University Center Consortium
- Atlanta Regional Commission
- Chattahoochee River Keepers
- Arthur M. Blank Foundation
- City of Atlanta
- Friendship Baptist, LLC
- HJ Russell & Company
- Integral Group
- Park Pride
- Proctor Creek Stewardship Council
- The Conservation Fund
- Westside Future Fund
- West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
- NPU -T
- West End Merchants Coalition

## NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

Located west of downtown Atlanta, the AVE Ecodistrict is developing projects and initiatives to promote sustainable and resilient neighborhoods. AVE, formerly known as AUC Vine City & English Avenue Ecodistrict, is made up of several neighborhoods in the Proctor Creek Watershed including: Atlanta University Center, Vine City, English Avenue, Ashview Heights, Just Us, Booker T. Washington, West End, and Washington Park.

Totalling nearly 230 acres, AVE Ecodistrict is home to approximately 22,000 residents, about one third of which are students enrolled the local historic colleges and universities. Residents in this dense urban neighborhood have a median household income of approximately \$25,000. Geographically, this Ecodistrict is located in the Proctor Creek Watershed – the only watershed that is completely contained within the City's borders. As a low-lying geographical location, many neighborhoods in the AVE Ecodistrict have experienced flooding mixed with combined sewer overflows (CSOs) during storm events. Minimal funding for infrastructure and a decline in local economic opportunities has impacted the quality of life in many instances, leaving residents to face numerous challenges.

The residents of AVE Ecodistrict take pride in their neighborhoods and are encouraged to address issues to increase the livability and opportunity for their neighborhoods.



AVE ECODISTRICT TEAM AT 2016 INCUBATOR

AVE Ecodistrict is working with many of the neighborhoods within its boundaries through strategic public-private-civic partnerships and cross-sector collaboration. Through these partnerships, AVE Ecodistrict wants to close the social, economic, and physical gaps that separate each neighborhood in order to make it one cohesive Ecodistrict. Projects and developments within the Ecodistrict include: addressing connectivity issues, reconnecting residents with jobs, affordable housing, education and health, safety and security, restoring the waterways of Proctor Creek and increasing open space, and ensuring residents are not displaced as a result of the development of the new LEED Platinum Mercedes Benz Falcons Football Stadium and the Atlanta Beltline.

## AVE ECODISTRICT + TARGET CITIES: REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOOD VIBRANCY

The partnership between AVE Ecodistrict and EcoDistricts began in 2014 when AVE joined the Target Cities program. Stakeholders became interested in the EcoDistricts' framework as a means through which to revitalize the vibrancy of each neighborhood that makes up AVE Ecodistrict. Through the Target Cities program, AVE Ecodistrict was supported through training, technical assistance, and peer networking to help align stakeholder interests and responsibilities, develop a long-term governance model and strategy framework, complete an EcoDistricts Assessment and Roadmap (integrated footprint analysis and project identification), and support the launch of projects. The AVE Ecodistrict team was brought together five times over the course of eighteen months, both independently and with the entire cohort of Target Cities. For each convening, EcoDistricts assembled a team of staff and experts to support AVE's urban regeneration goals. Through the Target Cities program, drafts of the EcoDistrict's Protocol and templates were made available to Target Cities teams.

In addition to being a Target Cities team member, AVE EcoDistrict had the unique experience of participating as a team in the EcoDistricts Incubator in 2016.

### ABOUT THE ECODISTRICTS TARGET CITIES PROGRAM

Target Cities was a two-year immersion program that has benefited 11 districts across nine North American cities. Launched in 2014 as a Clinton Global Initiative Commitment, the program was designed to advance sustainable, district-scale development while creating replicable models for change. By providing peer learning and technical assistance, Target Cities helped participating teams elevate their sustainability strategy with an emphasis on project governance, performative roadmapping and EcoDistricts Certified readiness.

Together, the cohort of 30 practitioners from 11 industry sectors participated in four peer learning workshops and a series of best practice webinars.

Key program partners included Enterprise Community Partners, Global Green, USGBC, Reshape Infrastructure Strategies, Biohabitats, McGuire Woods, Neighborworks America and iSEED. A key outcome of the program was the production of the EcoDistricts Protocol and certification program, EcoDistricts Certified.

Learn more at:

[www.ecodistricts.org/target-cities](http://www.ecodistricts.org/target-cities)

From April 27-29, 2016, 10 districts from across the globe came to Portland for a three-day, project-based intensive designed to accelerate their district-scale urban regeneration projects. AVE Ecodistrict was matched with an expert facilitator with background in the team's unique challenges and goals. Throughout the event, each facilitator supported their team's development of a customized EcoDistricts Roadmap.

### PROJECT GOVERNANCE

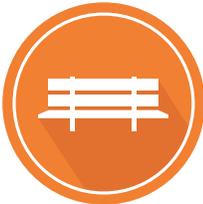
The University Community Development Corporation (UCDC), created in 1988 and established by the Atlanta University Center Consortium, is a nonprofit community-based corporation that focuses on the creation of a better community on Atlanta's Westside. It does this by encouraging home ownership, commercial and retail development, and employment creation.



The mission of UCDC can only be achieved through partnerships, relationship building, community development, and economic development. In 2014, UCDC was designated as the backbone organization for the AVE EcoDistrict. UCDC values creating neighborhoods that offer economic development, community well-being, and ecological health, all of which are fundamental for a sustainable Ecodistrict. The AVE EcoDistrict also receives strong support from the Mayor's Office of Sustainability, which provides the governance team with City staff support on many of their projects and programs.

### EARLY WINS

**PLACE:** The City of Atlanta, the Atlanta Housing Authority, partners, and neighbors created a redevelopment mixed-income housing plan for the University Homes housing community that was demolished in 2009. This plan was successful and the Atlanta Housing Authority received a \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods Grant to redevelop the former University Homes site (now known as Scholar's Landing) and the surrounding community. Scholars Landing will contain 446 mixed-income apartment units and the development will redevelop historic Roosevelt Hall, which will contain 18,000 square feet of neighborhood retail and provide enhanced security.



To create a safer environment for residents and visitors, AVE Ecodistrict partnered with the Atlanta Police Department and AUC Schools to install a video surveillance camera system in the Atlanta University Center neighborhood and surrounding area. This system became operational in January 2017. In partnership with the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, Phase 2 of the surveillance system will install 20 cameras and five license plate readers in the Ashview Heights and Booker T. Washington neighborhoods.



RELAY BIKE SHARE



RENDERING OF BOONE PARK WEST



**HEALTH + WELLBEING:** In June 2016, Truly Living Well relocated its urban farm to the Ashview Heights neighborhood. Truly Living Well (TLW) is a nonprofit urban farm dedicated to using organic farming in urban areas as a means of connecting people to healthier foods and providing agriculture-based training and jobs. TLW provides over 25,000 lbs of produce, as well as a variety of programs including a summer camp for elementary school children. It also provides a safe space and opportunity for kids to be involved with their community after school, teaching them new skills that can be transferable to a job later. In addition, TLW offers adult mentoring and technical support for 6 months to transition into agri-business opportunities or employment. TLW is creating an oasis of fresh and local food, transforming what has been perceived as a food desert into an opportunity to obtain healthy fruits and vegetables. TLW reconnects people with the land and its productivity, as well as to their own health, resourcefulness, and each other.



**CONNECTIVITY:** In June 2016, AVE Ecodistrict partnered with MARTA Army, a nonprofit that enhances the public transit ridership experience, and joined MARTA Army's Adopt-a-Stop program. Through this program, individuals can adopt a bus stop of their choice and MARTA Army will provide them with weather-resistant signs that include bus routes and schedule information for the particular stop, as well as a demonstration of how to install the sign. Whenever there are changes to the information that has previously been provided, MARTA Army will mail new timetables and maps to each adoptee. The Adopt-a-Stop program is free to all, providing equal opportunity for community members to engage with their local transportation system through ownership, transportation accessibility, and mobility.



In partnership between AVE Ecodistrict, the City of Atlanta Chief Bicycle Office, and Relay Bike Share, bike kiosks were installed within the Ecodistrict. Locations include Spelman College, Walmart, Robert Woodruff Library, West End Marta Station, and retail shops along Abernathy Blvd. These battery powered, solar charged bike share stations encourage mobility around the Ecodistrict and overall Westside Atlanta, providing an alternative transportation option while encouraging exercise and promoting outdoor community activity.

Boone Boulevard, which honors civil rights activist Joseph E. Boone, is the bordering street between the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods. Boone Boulevard was selected as the starting site to address the environmental, social, and economic challenges associated within an environmental justice community. Boone Park West, a City of Atlanta green street project, will focus on an area just over 2.5 acres in size.

In January 2015, the Atlanta City Council approved the planned road diet that converts the existing four lane road to two 10-foot travel lanes with a 12-foot left turn lane at the selected intersections. A five-foot bike lane will be included on both sides of the street. The proposed road diet intends to reduce vehicle speeding and accidents, increase pedestrian safety, and provide a safe space for bicyclists.

**LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE:** At the Clinton Global Initiative Meeting in June 2016, AVE Ecodistrict partners, Park Pride, the Conservation Fund, Chattahoochee River Keepers, EcoAction, and Westside Watershed Alliance, along with UCDC, announced their Commitment to Action. The Commitment to Action proposes economic growth and opportunity for those living within Atlanta's Proctor Creek Watershed by converting several blighted lots in the English Avenue neighborhood into a vibrant park known as Boone Park West. The park combines green infrastructure with passive and active recreational elements to create a park that provides a safe place for kids to play, and for families and residents to gather. Most importantly, the park will reduce the impacts of stormwater flooding. Boone Park West is Phase 1 of a larger watershed restoration plan for the Proctor Creek Watershed. Community members have been engaged with the designers of the park to share their vision of its design and construction, and to provide residents with access to local jobs and workforce training which will boost economic revitalization.



The planning process for Boone Park West is currently underway and is supported through a \$100,000 planning grant from Invest Atlanta for a feasibility study for the Atlanta Urban Ecology Resource Center (AUERC). The park plan includes rain gardens, constructed wetlands, permeable pavement, and bioswales to capture, clean, and infiltrate at least 37,500 cubic feet of stormwater runoff from the surrounding streets. Native plants will be incorporated into the planting plan to attract wildlife and pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, and birds to support future local food systems. The AUERC will serve as an education, demonstration, and exhibition center for best practices in energy and resource efficient construction, green infrastructure design, urban greenspace preservation, and nature enhanced recreational opportunities.

In partnership, the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, City of Atlanta, and the Trust for Public Land have committed to build Cook Park, a historic 16-acre park in the Vine City neighborhood. Similar to Boone Park West, Cook Park will serve as an innovative stormwater management system to improve the water quality of Proctor Creek, provide an intergenerational and safe recreation space, and honor the civil rights leaders who used to call Vine City home, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.





CENTENNIAL OLYMPIC PARK

The Trust for Public Land hired a design team to work collaboratively with the City's Parks Department and the Department of Watershed Management. The design team will engage residents and gather their input on the design of the park, a stormwater management facility, public art honoring the civil rights era, a market plaza, and urban gardens. Planned green infrastructure features for Cook Park include a retention pond that can capture up to the 100-year level of flooding. Department of Watershed Management officials say that the investment in innovative green infrastructure system projects will reduce sediment in Proctor Creek by 30% and fecal bacteria by 25%.

**RESOURCE REGENERATION:** In 2016, the Atlanta University Center (AUC) received a \$10,000 grant from the Atlanta Region Commission (ARC) for energy audits at the AU Center Schools. Four buildings were selected by Ecodistrict team in conjunction with Facilities Directors for these audits. AVE Ecodistrict is using the grant to perform energy and water audits on the AUC campuses in efforts to properly monitor energy usage and water consumption, and ultimately identify areas for improvement.



## LESSONS LEARNED + CONTINUED CHALLENGES

At the completion of the two-year Target Cities program, the EcoDistricts board and staff evaluated each district. The comments below reflect assessments shared by all parties and describe challenges that the AVE Ecodistrict will likely face, similar to other communities' efforts to regenerate neighborhoods.

1. Development of the new Falcons Football Stadium and the Atlanta BeltLine have caused concern for residents around gentrification and displacement in the AVE communities. Westside Future Fund and other organizations are working closely with the community to share programs and opportunities for anti-displacement plans.
2. Since funding is a continuing challenge for projects and programs, there are plans to utilize Invest Atlanta for program financial support in the area of affordable housing and land assemblage. Invest Atlanta has multiple Housing Opportunity Bond Programs for housing development including: Multifamily Loans, Single Family Loans, Nonprofit Development Loans, and Land Assemblage funds.

## NEXT STEPS

1. Pursue EcoDistricts Certification for the AVE Ecodistrict.
2. Continue to partner with the City of Atlanta Public Safety Department, the Atlanta Police Foundation, and the AUC Community to increase and enhance security through the installation of more security cameras and license plate readers, and by increasing the presence of WestSide Blue.
3. Partner with housing developers to increase the affordable housing stock that is sustainable within the AVE Ecodistrict.
4. Partner with Southface, Just Energy, and other organizations to provide training to community residents on energy efficiency and sustainability.
5. Continue to focus on construction completion for Boone Park West.
6. Increase recycling and composting.



## ABOUT ECODISTRICTS

EcoDistricts is nonprofit that advances a new standard for community development. Through its programs and certification standard, EcoDistricts helps create equitable, sustainable, and resilient **neighborhoods for all**.