



Peachtree/Auburn Design Competition

THE WINNERS

Street plans could mean higher taxes

By Alma E. Hill
Staff writer

Peachtree Street and Auburn Avenue property owners may soon have another thing in common besides their distinctive Atlanta addresses: higher property taxes.

Finance experts working with Central Atlanta Progress, which co-sponsored the design competition to renovate the two streets, are considering the creation of a special tax district to implement the winning plans.

The additional taxes from such a district would help raise the \$25 million needed to make the improvements by the time Atlanta takes the world stage for the 1996 Olympic Games. That is only one of several ideas under consideration.

The Birmingham firm of Nimrod Long & Associates won first prize for its redesign of Peachtree Street, which includes parks at Pershing Point, Peachtree Point, north of Rhodes Center and near the Garnett MARTA station.

First prize for Auburn Avenue went to Jack Patrick & Associates of Boston. The firm proposes dividing the one-mile corridor into entertainment, employment, research and historical nodes, and restoring the Sweet Auburn trolley.

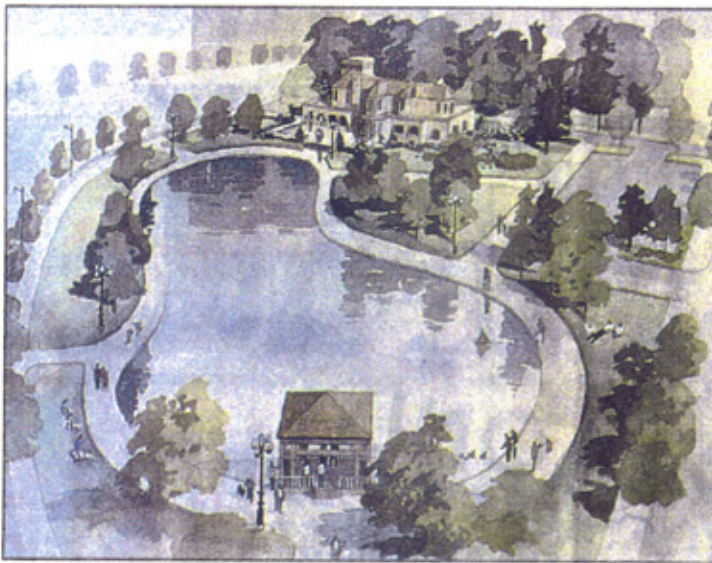
Merchants and property owners on the historic streets say they like the winning designs, but have differing opinions on who should pay for them.

"I would love to see Auburn fixed up, but I don't think the property owners should have to pay for it — the city should," said O.S. Hall Jr., owner of an Auburn Avenue Chevron station. He says he has seen numerous proposals to improve the area, but little action during his 35 years in business.

Auburn Avenue tenants, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet, say they can't afford another penny.

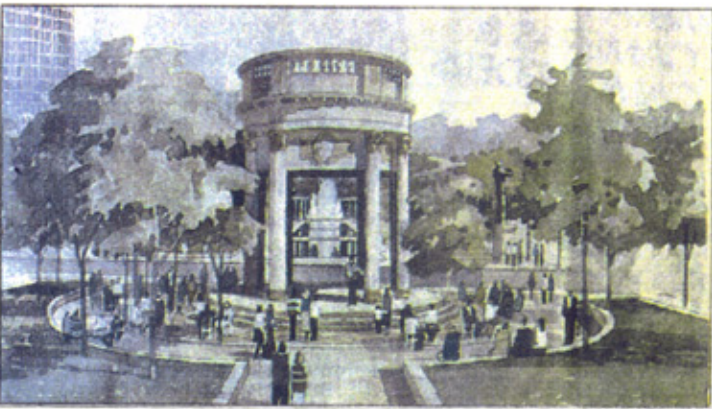
Lenora Clark, whose son, Rick, owns Pal's Cleaners and Laundry on Auburn, said, "People can't hardly afford to keep their businesses open, let alone pay more taxes." The cleaners is closing after 25 years.

However, some Peachtree property owners say they wouldn't mind paying more taxes to attract business. Jay Wyper, a 191 Peachtree developer and president of the Atlanta Downtown Partnership, says there is "broad-based" support to help pay for Peachtree Street renovations.



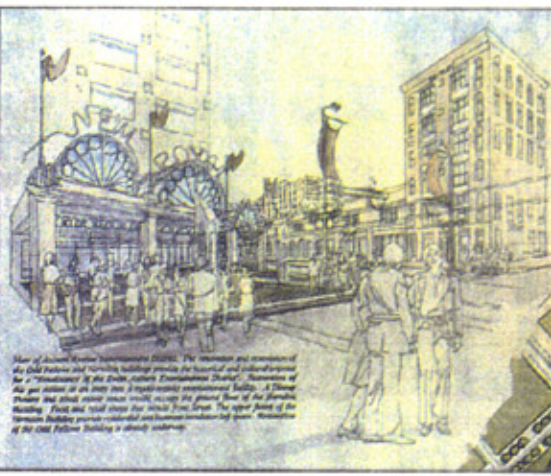
Getting people back on the street by using a series of parks like this one at Peachtree

Point is the goal of Nimrod Long & Associates' winning plan.



A beaux-arts pavilion would anchor the north end of Woodruff Park, which would take

on a formal, classical look. The design calls for reflecting pools in the Downtown park.

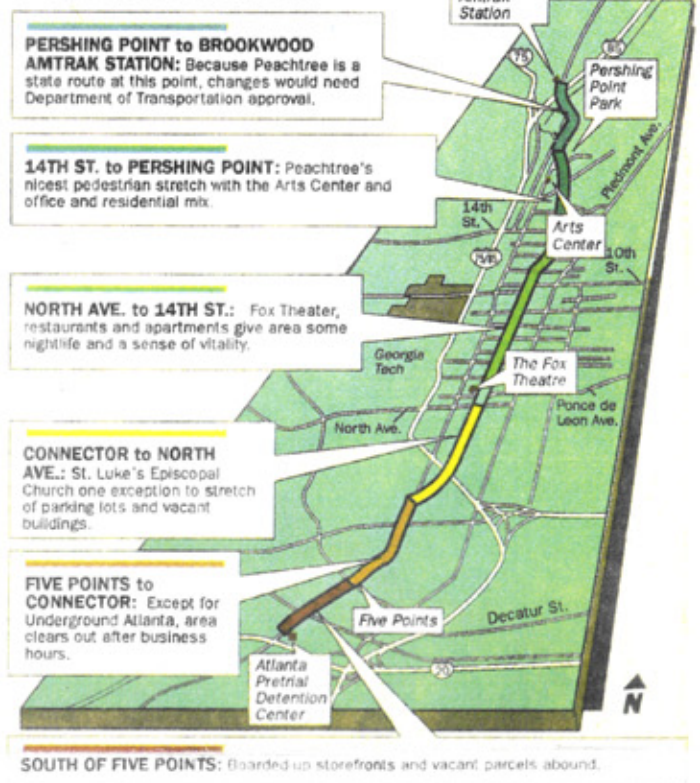


A renaissance of Sweet Auburn's entertainment district is envisioned in Patrick & Associates' winning plan for Auburn Avenue, with a trolley to carry tourists along the historic thoroughfare.



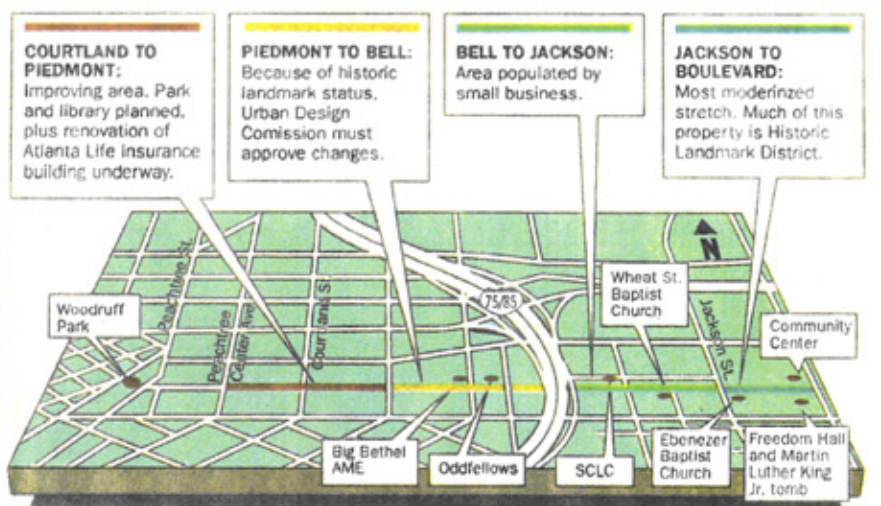
"The framework for a great Peachtree Street is there."
Nimrod Long III

The highs and lows of Peachtree Street



John Amoss/Staff

Auburn Avenue looks for new life



Ken Mowry/Staff

Designs for Peachtree, Auburn Avenue head in right direction

By Catherine Fox
Visual Arts Critic

The winning designs for Peachtree Street and Auburn Avenue evoke both high hopes for a new future for these important streets and concerns about the details and even the possibility of their implementation.

Nobody who values urban life would argue with the basic goal of Nimrod Long and Associates' winning Peachtree proposal: to get people back on the street. The crux of the Birmingham team's idea is a series of seven parks at strategic points along the four-mile stretch from Brookwood to the Garnett transit station. These are intended not only to finesse some difficult areas, such as where the expressway cuts across Peachtree north of Downtown, but, more importantly, to function as "outdoor rooms," magnets for pedestrians.

Greenery and water aren't enough. The team proposes careful and ongoing programming — live entertainment, street vendors and the like — to attract people and maintain the density of population that would prevent the parks from being taken over by undesirables.

The plan, probably the most fully detailed of the entrants, has given careful consideration to the visual impact of the street. New street furniture (lamps and signage), paving on broadened sidewalks, underground utilities and more trees please the eye and provide continuity to what is a

COMMENTARY

series of discontinuous districts. The team recommends a design-review board that would encourage appropriate infill, such as ground-level retail and office space.

In-town housing

It's easier to get people out on the street when they live nearby. The competition required proposals for in-town housing, and Nimrod Long looked to Battery Park City in New York as a model for developing the L.J. Hooker tract. It set up a neighborhood whose infrastructure — tree-lined streets, parks — would encourage private developers to buy parcels for different kinds of housing. South Downtown is a harder nut to crack. The team proposes lower-income, high-rise living, hoping to attract the population of government works and Georgia State University.

In the main, I like this proposal. Atlanta needs more public spaces — if they can be programmed and maintained. However, they don't all necessarily have to be parks. Some of the imagery, however, gives me pause. The detailing seems to veer toward the nostalgic, though Mr. Long assures me that it is designed to blend comfortably with both modern and historic structures. Certain ideas, such as large granite benches as logos

on bridges, could be embarrassingly hokey.

The one thing that seems absolutely wrong is the plan for Woodruff Park. It is conceived as a formal, axial arrangement of reflecting pools terminating in a beaux-arts pavilion. Its formality and classical architecture are at odds with the park's context and the way it functions. It needs water, but it needs more shade, seating and gathering space than this plan allows.

A heyday recalled

If looking backward is a dangerous mode for Peachtree Street's redesign, it is a good starting point for Auburn Avenue. Since it no longer has the residential population to support it as a business district, Patrick & Associates' plan to emphasize the history of Sweet Auburn as a tourist attraction is realistic.

The Boston firm proposes reinstating a trolley car, which would take visitors from a cluster of cultural institutions — the Apex Museum and soon-to-be-built research library — past a revived entertainment/business district around the Royal Peacock and down to the Martin Luther King Jr. Center. The idea is that boutiques and service retail would grow in response to tourist traffic, turning the street into a mini-Underground.

Including Edgewood Avenue — designated as the main through route in the proposal — is an

important aspect of this thoughtful plan. So is healing the wound created by the expressway by putting a market and police and fire substations underneath. The firm has also included suggestions for generating business and jobs.

Money, zoning needed

It's important to remember that these proposals are just beginnings. Finding the money is only one obstacle. The budgeted \$25 million is the minimum needed; it doesn't cover putting utilities underground or building proposed parks, for example.

The city is going to have to impose more stringent zoning regulations to encourage residential construction. It is going to have to make a greater commitment to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, which presumably would be responsible for maintenance and programming for the new parks. Property owners are going to have to work together, for instance, in creating the alley parking off Auburn that Patrick & Associates proposes.

As competition juror Barbara Faga says, the proposals require a great deal of public consensus. Years of piecemeal improvements should convince us of the importance of having carefully conceived and all-encompassing plans. Now we need the money and, just as important, the will to implement them.