


REGION NEWS
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The grassy fields of Maddox Park across from Bankhead MARTA Station adjacent to Proctor Creek and proposed Proctor Park by Emerald Corridor Foundation

PROCTOR CREEK

DEVELOPING GREENSPACE WITH COMMUNITY

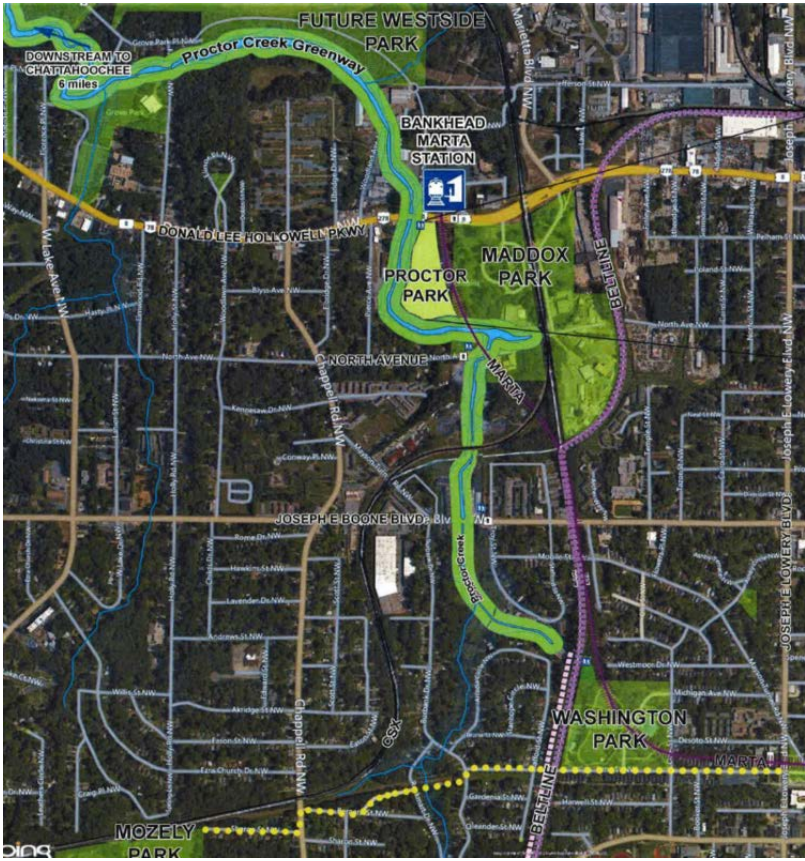
Through The Eyes of Debra Edelson

Executive Director, Emerald Corridor Foundation

ATLANTA --

"Greenspace is a little different. In almost every other kind of service offered to citizens, at some point, some citizens get preferred over others. But when it comes to greenspace, everybody is welcome. It doesn't matter if you make a lot of money or a little money. It doesn't matter if you're young or old. It doesn't matter what your heritage is or your race. No other service is like greenspace." --
Debra Edelson, Executive Director, Emerald Corridor Foundation

This week the Army Corps of Engineers received its matching funds of \$1.5 million dollars from the City of Atlanta to begin hydrology studies of the 300 known tributaries and main spine of Proctor Creek. Therein lies potential green small businesses, green jobs and job training programs, green health initiatives, green affordable housing, and green food development projects. The development of greenspace along the banks of Proctor Creek is rich in economic development potential.



In these two renderings [see above and below], the Emerald Corridor Foundation has created a vision for the future use of land as greenspace close to Northwest Atlanta's Bankhead MARTA mass transit station and the portion of Proctor Creek literally across the street from it. This is a beginning point for the greenspace development they are planning to carry out.

According to Emerald Corridor Foundation's Executive Director Debra Edelson, these drawings or renderings are only a suggested vision -- a vision that has yet to be developed with existing community residents and Proctor Creek stakeholders citywide.



"We are just at the very, very, very beginning of this process," underlines Edelson. "Our job is -- alot -- to listen, observe, watch, and be in the midst."

In an interview with S.E. Region News focused on the Foundation's relationship to community, Edelson shared what "being in the midst" looks like through her eyes, through the world of urban greenspace development. Specifically, Edelson addressed the development of Proctor Park, the first greenspace project the Emerald Corridor Foundation is taking on.



Current conditions of Proctor Creek at the Bankhead MARTA Station

When addressing the overarching goal of urban greenspace -- a way, as she articulated, for a sense of community to be accentuated and sustained -- Edelson acknowledged that sense of community differs from city to city.

In the South, where for some, the church is/was their primary source of community, versus a geographical, physical space, bringing cultural value to a geographical space -- like Proctor Park -- becomes especially important, affirms Edelson.

"Where do we feel healthy and good, embraced and stimulated?" queries Edelson, when asked what has a greenspace be an accomplishment for a community, or for a city.

"Ultimately, the definition of success in a public greenspace lies in the answer to the question, 'Is it loved and used? Do families take their children there?' We can track that behavior over time. It's a very humbling process. We don't want to do it wrong."



Part of this process of developing greenspace, Edelson maintains, is shaped through dialogue and actions with community.

"We have to 'intuit' the development of Proctor Park and other greenspace projects over time. Our design drawings are not absolute -- they are just a concept. There are mutual conversations that need to be had. We try our best to marry the value of the community to the space. We are looking for feedback."

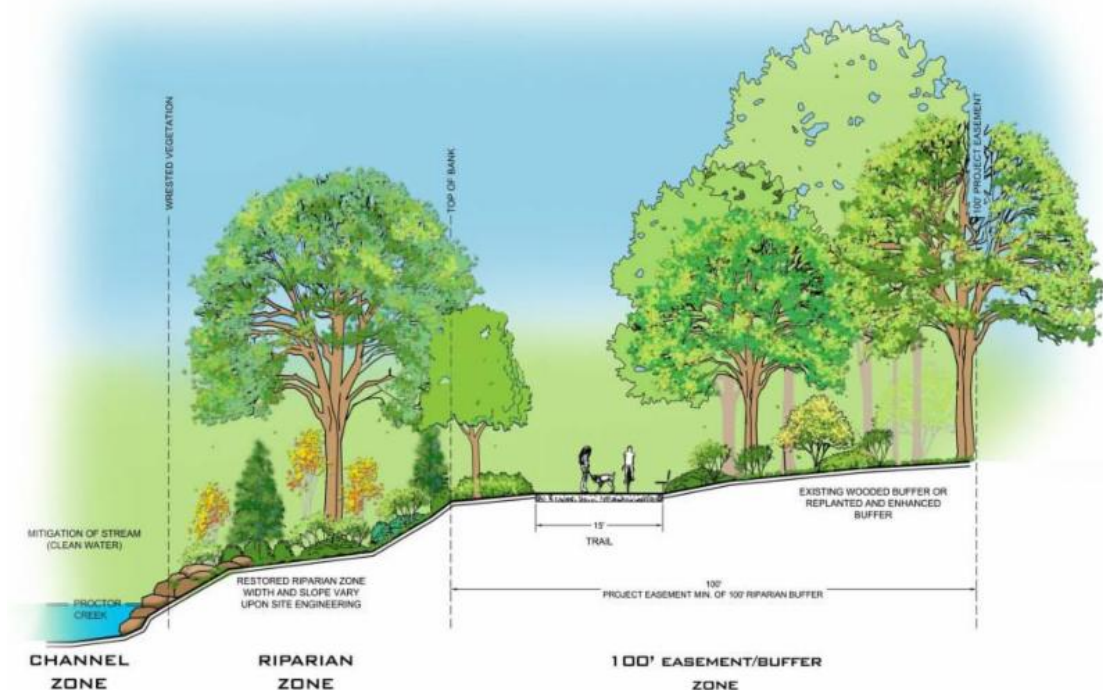
When asked to describe in greater detail what that feedback looks like, Edelson paused to ponder.

"One way is through community engagement, and just asking people," she began. "But sometimes, people don't know -- especially if someone has never been to a natural wetlands park before. I know myself, you could give me a list of 30 things to choose from, and I might pick something out from the list that looks appealing to me. But, when given something in front of me, tangible, in the moment, I could better choose, "Yes, that's what I'd like."

Edelson added, "Here's where civic leadership comes in -- churches, businesses, neighborhood associations -- they often have a sense of what their constituents' needs are, and what they desire.

"Sometimes, you just have to send up a 'trial balloon' and see how it works. Do they[community] show up? Bringing cultural activities, like jazz music, and programming into the space -- is there a synergy? We might, after we take down the kudzu, invite the community onsite and ask them, 'How does it feel now?'"

"We want to build community and value from within -- not from without. We don't win, if we create something that nobody uses or likes."



With greenspace being tied to the urban environmental movement of the 21st century, Edelson is a true practitioner in the value of conservation for a community and a city's well-being on many levels.

"Those who have never had the experience of sitting on the banks of a babbling brook may not know the intrinsic value it brings. We totally believe in the

strength of that meaningful experience. We're sure that kind of experience will manifest over time.

"Green is the tool. And, we're leading with 'the Green'. Green is the deliverable, too."



Green is in step with the changing times for Northwest Atlanta and its community residents, as Executive Director Edelson spelled out the future she sees unfolding:

" Change is coming -- be a part of it."

In response to questions about how current residents do not feel included in the future portrayed on the [Emerald Corridor Foundation's website](#), Edelson urged community residents to become a part of the process.

"We want to be about building and sustaining the capacity of the current community residents to stay and benefit from the development that is happening and will be happening in Northwest Atlanta. Everybody has their eye on Northwest Atlanta.

"Residents have to be engaged, have to be a part of the process -- or it [gentrification] will happen to them. And you won't be happy. It's happened to me and my neighbors where I live."

When asked, specifically, was Emerald Corridor Foundation an advocate of community, Edelson's reply was:

"You can say that. I don't know of many other Foundations that are focused on one thing. Proctor Creek -- this is it. We can't be more in the community -- our doors are open, we pick up our phone.

"It's important to engage -- we together define what this park, this greenspace is. It can't be 'us' and 'them'. There's no win there. We -- everyone -- can own it. Anyone can go there.

"We know we have to prove ourselves," quietly confirmed Edelson, with one more thought to ponder: "I just think it's a process."

