Fort McPherson Community
COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN
Executive Summary

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Acknowledgements

Georgia Stand-Up and the Ford Foundation provided the inspiration, the opportunity, and the support essential to conduct this Fort McPherson studio. The students, the studio professor, and the School of City and Regional Planning thank Georgia Stand-Up, its Policy Institute, and neighborhood leaders for identifying the need, supporting the work in all its aspects, and following through to influence a fairer, more community-focused outcome for this military base closing process. The School could not have undertaken this activity without the generous financial support of the Ford Foundation and, in equal measure, its moral support for considering this effort worthwhile.

The studio program at the School calls upon Masters of City and Regional Planning students to find their way to apply their classroom and other work experience to a real world situation. In this case, the client was the community, with Georgia Stand-Up assuring the communication and continuity between the community work and the student work. The neighborhoods and businesses surrounding the base that are being directly impacted by the closing deserve the same consideration in conceptualizing, planning, and developing the assets provided by the base as any other interest, and the studio work is dedicated to making that case.

The materials presented here incorporate countless hours of community meetings, field trips, focused topical discussions, conversations, surveys, and data gathering across all of the community-identified issue areas. The goal is to synthesize community aspirations, needs, and priorities with technical and procedural information and requirements to advance community interests as a baseline factor in the interactions between government and private forces that will shape the base’s redevelopment future.

This is student work and so reflects the effort of many hands and minds as the learning experiences were conducted and interpreted through their varying lenses. As a whole and in its eight sections this report intends to help guide what must be an ongoing effort to assure that the community benefits from this massive public initiative. Thus Community Benefit Agreements relating to jobs, housing and greenspace, required approval processes like planning and zoning, prioritization of infrastructure capital projects, the use of tax allocation district financing, and gaining a seat at the table where the decisions are being made should all include formalized citizen guidance.
Overview

Fort McPherson army base is situated in the South Atlanta area and borders East Point. It connects two MARTA rail transit stations and is bordered by three arterial streets. After being targeted for closure in 2005 under the federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program, there have been several ongoing efforts to determine how the base will be redeveloped for future use after the army departs in 2011. Beyond the walls are low density, mostly single family neighborhoods with a diversity of people and a rich history intertwined with the base. At present these neighborhoods are facing stresses brought on by the base closing and speculation over its future on one hand and on the other by the real estate collapse, with foreclosures, derelict absentee owners, and boarded up homes with damage evident on nearly every block. The neighborhoods have strengths to build upon, some attractive to speculators, yet are challenged by uncertainties that range from displacement and gentrification to further deterioration and disinvestment. In Atlanta, these neighborhoods, mostly African-American, with a wide range of incomes from low to high, lie in Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU) S, R, and X, and in Wards A and B of the city of East Point.

Language in the Local Redevelopment Authority’s (LRA) vision and principle statements seem to embrace benefit to the local community as core values with such language as: on the vision side, “Economically uplift surrounding communities...;” or “Enhance community services and promote life-long learning;” or “Develop through collaborative process;” or on the principle side, “Provide connections to the surrounding neighborhoods;” or “Develop with respect to the local community;” or “Create a place for everyone.” Yet their actual work has ignored community needs, priorities, and aspirations. Their sole focus has been how to maximize the redevelopment of the base, an inward directed effort that perpetuates the base property as an island, whose relevance is city or region wide, not support for the community in whose midst it resides. Responding to growing community concern, Georgia StandUp, a community based think tank and action organization, spearheaded the move to create a community-driven plan to build community benefits into any base redevelopment strategy. Convening diverse representatives and elected officials from all the affected communities, Georgia StandUp, supported by Georgia Tech’s School of City and Regional Planning studios, have conducted a thorough analysis of the problems and opportunities, resulting in this action plan. Its goal is to facilitate a partnership relationship with the LRA resources are tapped to support community improvement objectives while also boosting the timely transformation of the base property into a fully integrated contributor to the overall communities’ positive futures.

Yet there is a long way to go. In a nutshell, the question that needs to be addressed is why shouldn’t this publicly controlled and funded development initiative bend its effort toward improving the larger community that sits all around it? This action plan identifies issues and opportunities and proposes actions to do just that. It suggests a cohesive vision and usable framework for the communities to use in influencing the many approval steps that lie before the LRA in its quest for redevelopment. The work, summarized from the full report in this executive summary, addresses that interim plan; land use, zoning, and urban design; transportation; jobs and economic development; housing; parks and environment; culture, history, and education; and public health and public safety.

Fort McPherson Redevelopment Plan

Still in the throes of the economic downturn, the LRA is amending the redevelopment plan it approved in 2007. That plan anticipated a bio-science based research center/complex sponsored in part by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia as the generator for a mixed use development program through public private partnerships. Using a modified grid street systems with defined anchored blocks, the plan directed high density development to the middle of the east side of the property, while preserving its historic core to the north and Considerable Park and open space activities to the west. Housing developments were to be implemented with the highest densities of core mixed use tapering down to the single family scale at the edges.
The LRA’s most recent planning effort (released in February 2011) calls for about 3-1/2 million square feet of office/research space, 200,000 square feet of retail space, and 1,400 residential units, ranging from single family to multi-family, as well as about 300 units of housing for homeless people.

Figure 1. Rendering from: Fort McPherson Redevelopment Research Park Master Plan and Conceptual Plan. 2011.
The following sections outline the current situation for each area of concern with regards to the development process. It also outlines issues and pressing concerns, opportunities for engagement, participation, and input, and recommendations and suggestions for community action.

## Interim Base Plan

### Current Situation

In order to address not only the future needs of the community but the current needs as well, students are assisting in developing an interim plan for the Base. The interim plan inventories the existing uses on the Fort McPherson Base and in the adjacent communities and recommends possible adaptive reuses of existing facilities. The interim planning work also identifies various physical connection points to the surrounding community. The accompanying inventory map summarizes strategies for redevelopment and their relation to the MARTA stops and the potential for connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods.

### Issues/Opportunities

One of the most pressing concerns from the community is whether the base will remain fenced and gated until the LRA finds tenants that can contribute to promoting a sustainable local economy. Other concerns include whether existing, well-maintained assets will be made available for the residents, and who is responsible for monitoring on-site activity in this interim phase? In response to these concerns, McPherson Action Community Coalition (MACC), Georgia StandUP, and Georgia Tech created a pictorial survey of the base and its features and asked the community members to identify those features they would most like to see made available to the community once it is turned over by the military and before the LRA begins the redevelopment process.

### Alternatives/Choices/Priorities

The latest version of the LRA plan is not encouraging. While they have accepted the need for an interim plan, their first phase fails to propose reopening the gate at Campbellton Road, thus perpetuating the current hostile, concertina-wire isolation of the base from the community. Further, rather than committing to work in any way for community betterment, the current plan dismisses these neighborhoods as playing any engaged role with the base: After extolling the Base’s locational advantages the report states: “...the disadvantage is that the communities surrounding Fort McPherson are severely depressed. Many housing units are empty or boarded up, businesses have closed, and crime is high.” While not inaccurate, it would seem that such a characterization would be a call for action to improve the setting, note a reason for these public resources to turn their back on communities in need. There is then a reference to a “Business Plan,” which “delves much further into the cost and timeline of the phasing effort.” This is a document underway for years now, none of which has been publicly released. And finally, the current phasing plan calls for the demolition of the commissary and the auto skills center, both of which have been identified by the community as assets worth keeping, the commissary to be converted to a grocery in the “food desert” of communities, and the auto skills center as a training facility, perhaps to supplement facilities at Atlanta Tech.
Recommendations
The following structures have been identified by the community for potential use prior to LRA redevelopment: Historic Structures; Quality Housing Units; Quality Office & Administrative Buildings; Educational Facilities; Chapels; Clinic; Pharmacy; Child Development Center; Commissary; Auditorium; Museums; Fire Station; and Recreational Facilities.

Other opportunities for reuse were analyzed and the results favored maintaining quality structures existing on the base with an emphasis on housing, office and administration buildings, community buildings, and recreational facilities. The community also viewed the older and historic buildings as very important features to maintain. Overwhelmingly, the community identified a desire to protect the historic structures on the base as well as utilizing the existing housing stock on site to support community needs. The community also showed interest in making quality office and administrative buildings on the base available to local business. Community use structures, recreation facilities, and health facilities, particularly seeking partnership with the VA, were also identified as potential structures to remain for community use. This input seems not to be reflected so far in the LRA phasing plan.

Land Use, Zoning, and Urban Design

Current Situation
This component of the studio focuses on the arrangement, functionality, and livability of the redeveloped Fort McPherson site, fully integrating it with the surrounding communities. The ultimate goal is to protect and improve neighborhoods, promote walkability, increase transportation efficiency, and economic growth in a way that provides jobs for the existing community members. The Base’s inward orientation isolates it from the surrounding communities. The result of this isolation and failure to engage the communities increases traffic around the perimeter and reduces the quality of accessibility in the area. The latest version of the redevelopment plan continues to focus its attention to the middle of the property, thus setting up a development strategy that diminishes the advantage of the MARTA access with 1/2 to 3/4 mile walking distances. Additionally, the streets surrounding the Base both major and minor do not provide adequate conditions for pedestrian and cyclist.

Issues/Opportunities
The rezoning process included during redevelopment allows for the opportunity to use SPI Zoning. While not yet incorporated in the City’s effort, the SPI zoning strategy should be considered for areas beyond the base perimeter. The existence of two MARTA stations on either end of the base presents an opportunity for higher density mixed-use development concentrated at those transportation nodes. The existing development strategy proposed by the LRA with its emphasis on the center of the base, raises concern that the LRA has not yet recognized the importance and the opportunity of improving the condition and the access of its perimeter. The scarcity of walkable streetscapes and the resulting need for enhanced livability in the areas also provides an opportunity to implement transportation projects both on and off the base that create multi-modal corridors and increase pedestrian and cyclist connectivity between the two.
**Recommendations**

Based on community input and careful analysis of existing conditions, the urban design and zoning team makes recommendations that can be summarized as follow:

- Adopt an alternative or at least supplementary development strategy centered on higher intensity mixed-use, mixed income transit oriented development around the MARTA stations
- Improve streetscapes
- Increase connectivity and accessibility
- Encourage retail and mixed-use development at nodes along the major corridors
- Identify historical districts, community institutions, and public spaces that should be preserved and accentuated
- As it relates to the SPI zoning, it is essential that the ordinance include, as most SPI ordinances do, provision for a “development review committee,” that includes members from the affected communities.

In order to achieve these ends, the communities and their representatives should press the City and the LRA to consider their necessary Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) and rezoning actions, both already underway separately, in parallel. At the present time, for example, the City is underway with its CDP update for the whole city, and Council member Keisha Lance Bottoms District 11 is pressing forward for comprehensive rezoning of Campbelton Road her district, which abuts Fort McPherson. Yet no such review appears to be underway for the balance of Campbelton Road, from Stanton Road to east of the MARTA underpass, where the crucial areas between the north boundary of the Fort and Oakland City Park and MARTA’s vast parking lots should play a central role in transforming the prospects for the communities around. Meanwhile, the LRA is pressing forward with its CDP/ rezoning process, wholly within its boundaries, with no apparent coordination beyond its fence. These disconnections of process ignore the realities of the interactions and mutual impacts these crucial stabilization and redevelopment opportunities inevitably will have on each other.

**Transportation**

**Current Situation**

The transportation infrastructure serving Fort McPherson and communities around is a mixed bag of great nominal transit access, severe limitations in east-west flow across the MARTA and freight rail corridor, the bounding arterial streets (Lee Street, Campbelton Road, and Langford Parkway) and only a single point of connectivity to the Base, which underscores the historical isolation of the Base and the disconnects this impose on the communities. This study incorporates and updates important planning work from the recent past, including the Oakland City Livable Communities (LCI) study, the Campbelton Road TAD study, the ConnectAtlanta Plan, and the Local Redevelopment Authority’s ongoing planning work (to the extent that is available). Citizen input and feedback included workshops and surveys to gauge needs and priorities from the communities’ perspective, resulting in organizing analysis and recommendations into three overall categories: automobile mobility, access, and safety; transit options and choices and pedestrian and bicycle analysis and suggested improvements.

**Issues/Opportunities**

The LRA redevelopment planning nominally addresses the automobile disconnect issue by recommending various alternatives for connecting to the larger community street network, but their proposed early phases do not appear to act on any of the alternatives. The current transportation system for Fort McPherson lacks the connectivity that is crucial for integration of the base with surrounding communities. In terms of roadway issues, there is a need for intersection improvements that will increase the safety for not only automobile drivers but for pedestrians and cyclists as well.
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The two MARTA stations at Oakland City and Fort McPherson together with connecting bus lines accommodate a significant proportion of the travel requirements for local residents. Yet the communities, more dependent on transit than many, are pressing for a better, finer grained service network. The truly multimodal potential that the area’s two MARTA stations provide is not being realized with the LRA plan concentrating much of its density midway between them instead of around them. On the more day to day level, obstructed pedestrian access to the rail stations hurts their current usability. The sidewalks in place are under maintained reducing their utility due to breaks in access, plant overgrowth, broken concrete, insufficient lighting and mismatched crosswalk curb-cuts at intersections - these all contribute to weak links in the multi modal accessibility of the system. Additionally, neighborhoods that are not within walking distance to MARTA rail or bus stops need alternative transit options that can tie them into the system.

Analysis of the disconnected and often badly broken sidewalk and bicycle system calls out for affirmative steps to improve the condition of these modes. The lack of connectivity for bicycle lanes throughout the neighborhoods surrounding the base is another concern. Often a bicycle path may exist for one or two blocks before ending abruptly. There are many opportunities for increased connectivity and accessibility between Fort McPherson and the surrounding communities. The Connect Atlanta Plan recognizes the prime location of the base and opportunities for economic growth on the area and has included Fort McPherson in its candidate projects. Overall, the emphasis is on establishing full and functional connectivity within the neighborhood, within the Base, and most importantly between the two.

Alternatives/Choices/Priorities

Major priorities for the Fort McPherson Community include the following:

- For automobile access and safety: increase connectivity between base and surrounding neighborhoods and improve intersections for safety and mobility, more specifically, roadways and intersections that need improvements, traffic control, signalization, and management methods that can improve safety for all modes and better balance the use of right-of-way for these modes as well as favoring access to major destination points.

- For transit: further study and incorporation of alternative transit options, such as better use of the MARTA train stations, better circulating systems for feeder transit, lighting, pedestrian crossing, and other safety upgrades.

- For pedestrian and bike network: maintaining and improving sidewalks and establishing a workable biking network, with priorities to be established by the LRA with the community to achieve connectivity to the existing (and quite beautiful) base pathway system.
The extent to which each of these priorities is pursued depends on numerous variable circumstances as well as the community’s level of engagement. For example, a major intersection improvement could be achieved at Campbellton Road at the presently closed base entrance through roundabout construction, as suggested in the LRA plan; yet this is not identified as a Phase One priority. Improved lane markings and visibility can be achieved, but again needs to be given priority. Operationally, the creation of a Transportation Management Association that includes community participation as part of the development program could oversee development of transportation assets to maximize benefits of transit options.

**Recommendations/Suggestions**
The large number of issues facing the transportation system in and around Fort McPherson has resulted in an equally large number of possible solutions to those problems. The alternatives listed above are a small sample of the many ideas put forth in the transportation section of the final report. Recommending or suggesting any specific projects at this point relies less on a specific solution’s effectiveness and more on cooperative approach for balancing community and base redevelopment needs with financial resources and project feasibility. On this point, for example, the report suggests that funding for necessary transit improvements incorporate a blend of Tax Allocation District (TAD) funds, Community Improvement (CID) funds, a Transportation Management Association (TMA) implementation structure, as matches for City and federal funding for the future. Thus, even as the LRA is contemplating its range of development strategies, it should take steps to commit to partner across its boundaries in providing for a TMA, a CID, and using TAD funds to fully integrate its future with that of the larger community.

Altogether, the Base redevelopment offers the opportunity and calls out for truly innovative and collaborative approaches for integrating transportation with jobs and housing strategies in ways that incorporate community needs into a balanced overall redevelopment strategy.

**Jobs and Economic Development**

**Current Situation**
The neighborhoods surrounding Fort McPherson face similar struggles to many other mixed-income communities across the country. The effects of the residential real-estate crisis, lack of stable employment opportunities; and lack of other opportunities for economic growth are prevalent all over, and certainly in the Fort McPherson area. The base closing is exacerbating these problems. Initially, plans for the Base redevelopment called for a bioscience park to fill the void left by the base closure. However, the degree to which the economy declined and the effect that the slide had on all aspects of the Georgia economy renders that original plan less likely. The new economic reality allows the local economy a second chance of being heard and a second chance at developing an economic strategy that can address their job and income needs.

**Issues/Opportunities**
Demographic analysis confirms income and job disparities that afflict much of the nearby communities. As pointed out in the discussion of the current LRA plan above, the BRAC process identified criteria that should be met that seem to favor greater coordination in meeting community as well as City needs and priorities.

To meet some of these criteria, any kind of partnership between the community and the LRA would be welcome. As an example, there are at least three economic development tools that offer the communities, the City, and the LRA the opportunity to collaborate on job-generating economic development strategies. At the present time, these do not seem to be particularly coordinated or cooperatively planned. The communities and the Base lie in the City-designated federal Opportunity Zone, giving business access to employment tax incentives and other benefits. They also lie in
the area recently awarded an EPA/HUD Brownfield study grant to develop applications for future Brownfield funding. Finally, the Campbellton Road Tax Allocation District provides the opportunity for co-funding major new infrastructure improvements between the LRA and the City. While the LRA has been considering these potential funds as “theirs,” reflecting the potential that much of the tax increment generated may come from Base redevelopment, this resource should be co-planned and co-committed to balance Base redevelopment needs with community infrastructure improvement needs.

The community has strongly expressed the need to eliminate barriers that prevent entry into the workforce and the lack of incentives and resources needed to develop and effective development and training program. Specific barriers include lack of education, lack of work history, child care, transportation, health conditions, substance-abuse, ex-offenders, homelessness, language barriers and disabilities. Another significant barrier is soft skills- such a deficiency can hinder even the brightest young people.

**Alternatives/Choices/Priorities**

After extensive community outreach and an in depth examination of the issues, four areas have been identified as priorities that need to be addressed in some way. These areas include increasing the local community’s access to capital and financial resources, fostering and developing truly comprehensive workforce development resources, increasing the access that local residents have to sustainable green jobs across the vertical employment “ladder”, and drafting and implementing an effective community benefits agreement (CBA) that ensures that any development keeps the local community’s interests in mind.

**Recommendations/Suggestions**

Four priority areas for jobs and economic development strategies have emerged, all directed at removing predictable barriers to job and capital access and favoring community economic development priorities. Increasing a community’s access to capital is never an easy task. The communities surrounding Fort McPherson, however, could greatly benefit from either the founding of a community credit union specifically that caters specifically to community needs or the establishment of a micro-lending institution that would disperse microloans to community residents. Either form could provide workshops to develop financial know-how. The communities need to continue to press for improved access to capital to support entrepreneurial initiatives.

Information about increasing the community’s access to workforce training/development programs has been accomplished in part in the full report, where a list of local resources is put forth that details specific area programs (including the areas of study offered, location of training, and contact information). More importantly, though, access to workforce development and training in anticipation of redevelopment initiative on the Base and elsewhere must focus on the workforce needs and profiles of the immediate communities.

Green jobs are undoubtedly the future. Programs that reflect the growing commitment and funding for the full spectrum of “green” jobs should support community and base deconstruction, rehabilitation, and new construction needs. The economic development section of the final report provides green jobs sectors and types, local training in these sectors and potential future training in these sectors. In support of local business opportunity, student inventoried all business within a two mile radius so that linkages could be made between them and Base maintenance, operations, and development needs.

The communities need to formalize their effort to establish a viable, legally constituted community development entity so that all of the above needs and resources can be negotiated into enforceable Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) between the communities, the LRA, the City, the Atlanta Development Authority, and other development entities. The CBA and/or Community Workforce Agreement (CWA) have the potential to help implementing the above suggestions. A CBA is a legally binding contract between a developer and a legally incorporated community entity.
The communities and students collaborated on a complete study of housing conditions and trends and the generation of housing strategies for the areas surrounding Fort McPherson. This work included a complete inventory of existing housing stock, a thorough review of available program opportunities and initiatives to address problems, and preliminary meetings with City and non-profit agencies geared to acting on the emergent recommendations. Several big picture issues and opportunities emerged.

With the Base closing, the communities face a seemingly contradictory dilemma, which one community member dubbed the “big squeeze.” On the one hand, the neighborhoods have experienced a decline in their housing stock and its value borne of the housing crisis—foreclosures, displacement, abandonment, tax delinquencies, and ensuing blight. On the other, the specter of redevelopment of the Base, with its projection of selling off its “mansions” (grand old houses on Officers row) early in the process, raise concerns about maintaining stability and affordability in the face of gentrification pressures, speculative investment, and other destabilizing real estate and development practices. In this context, the community-guided effort focused on addressing existing housing condition and meeting housing needs, all with the goal of creating stable neighborhoods for the long term.

Current Situation

The communities surrounding the base are home to a mix of working and middle class families. While 34% of residents earn less than $1,200/month — corresponding to an approximate monthly housing budget of $400 — homes of such value are difficult to find. These neighborhoods are located in one of the areas of the country hit hardest by the foreclosure crisis. Much of the housing is deteriorated or has been abandoned by former owners, absentee landlords or real estate investors. Property values have declined in the last several years because of the economic climate, but

Figure 5. Diagram depicting the economic development model that will integrate Green Jobs, Workforce development, Access to Capital, and a Community Benefit Agreements.

Housing

The communities and students collaborated on a complete study of housing conditions and trends and the generation of housing strategies for the areas surrounding Fort McPherson. This work included a complete inventory of existing housing stock, a thorough review of available program opportunities and initiatives to address problems, and preliminary meetings with City and non-profit agencies geared to acting on the emergent recommendations. Several big picture issues and opportunities emerged.

To make progress on the priority suggestions, the community needs to gain better access to the financial and operational tools identifies above.
people continue to be at risk of losing their homes due to foreclosure (see Figure 6, a sample of changes in assessed value in the full report). In addition to the problem of affordability, the risk of foreclosure, and the deterioration of the existing housing stock, residents face problems of blight and unsafe conditions because of the increase in vacant lots and buildings in the neighborhood. Upon mapping the distressed properties of a local Fort McPherson neighborhood a clear picture of the current crisis, in addition to opportunities, begins to emerge.

Issues/Opportunities
Housing issues and opportunities are organized into several categories in the full housing report, including explanations of opportunities to address each item. The first priority centers on addressing the immediate and existing housing conditions through code enforcement efforts and collaboration with the Fulton County Land Bank Authority. Meeting housing needs will entail addressing aging in place, securing housing for the homeless and leveraging community benefits through working with the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA). The review process, zoning decisions and other city processes related to the redevelopment plan is an opportunity to induce the LRA to include provisions for stabilizing the housing situation in surrounding communities.

Creating long-term stability within these neighborhoods is essential for the continued well-being of current residents and possibility of future prosperity. The development of a community land trust offers the potential to both alleviate further decline and assure permanently affordable quality housing. Specialty funding programs can complement the land trust efforts, including taking advantage of Enterprise Community Funds, Atlanta Housing Authority CHDO and HOME Loans, and Neighborhood Stabilization (NSP) Program funds.

Alternatives/Choices/Priorities
Through a series of community meetings and feedback sessions, priorities for improving housing in and around Fort McPherson were identified:

- Maintain housing affordability after Fort McPherson redevelopment; stabilize the housing values in the surrounding area
- Provide training and education on purchasing and renovating foreclosed and vacant homes
- Set up a community land trust; Identify homes for redevelopment vs. homes for demolition
- Develop a united Southwest front and organization (CLT/CHDO)
- Investigate the potential for the Lilly R. Campbell House tenant association (current residents) to purchase their building.

See the full report for more detail. Many of the approaches require organization, infrastructure, and technical expertise or assistance at the local level (such as the creation of a Community Development Corporation with CHDO status). The creation of this infrastructure and provision of technical assistance may be useful to include in a Community Benefits Agreement with the LRA for Fort McPherson, in recognition of the reality that the redevelopment of the base
The neighborhoods surrounding Ft. McPherson currently enjoy a reasonable green environment, including access to greenspace in the form of Oakland City Park, the Outdoor Activity Center, and other park spaces. The area also has large amounts of tree cover and stream segments relative to other communities within Metro Atlanta, which provide benefits both environmental and aesthetic. Ft. McPherson itself is also home to ample amounts of greenspace and natural landscapes in the form of streams and ponds, a set of wooded trails, a golf course, gardens, and other features. While residents and visitors of Ft. McPherson are able to enjoy these, residents of the surrounding communities are blocked from access.

Although it may not seem so at first, the redevelopment process of the base itself provides the local community with a unique opportunity: to become an example of environmentally sustainable development. One of the major desires expressed by local residents during community meetings is to have any development/redevelopment on or around Ft. McPherson’s campus be based on environmentally sound principles. This strongly held community conviction will allow green-solutions to take priority in solving additional environmental related issues in the community. Such issues include Oakland City Park rehabilitation, increasing the level of connectivity between the area’s environmental resources, and stormwater management technologies.

As a top priority, the rehabilitation of Oakland City Park, and the rehabilitation of the recreation center as the Rev. James Orange Center could be coordinated with Mayor Kasim Reed’s Center of Hope Initiative. These centers could grow to include such community benefits as urban, extending tree canopy coverage, increased connectivity, both natural and recreational playgrounds and others. Utilization of the already existing assets on the Base provide the opportunity to greatly increase the connectivity between the Base’s natural resources and

Figure 7. Preliminary site use analysis around the Arkwright School Building, shown as gray and 1. Crop Rotation Area, 2. Greenhouse, 3. Parking lot converted to education gardens, 4. Weekly farmer’s market area, and 5. Street food kitchen incubator.
and the previously excluded outside community, is on the of the issues the community has identified as a priority. Stormwater management is a problem that exists throughout the Atlanta Metro area, and given the community’s desire for a more sustainable neighborhood, Ft. McPherson and the surrounding areas should make it a priority to address stormwater issues using some of the latest and most environmentally sound tools for stormwater management. Rain barrels, rain gardens, bio-swales and permeable pavements are all economically friendly way to address stormwater management issues.

Recommendations/Suggestions
Following on the above, the specific action steps put forward by the community include:

- Proceed with the Oakland City Park and Reverend James Orange Recreation Center, working with the City’s Parks and Recreation Center, the Mayor’s office, and engaging the LRA for support in connecting the park to the Base’s pathway system.
- Monitor the LRA phasing and development strategy to assure that actions taken are consistent with the community’s and the Base’s vision for a green development.
- Establish measures and criteria to include in assessing environmentally responsible deconstruction, development, and redevelopment, both on the base and in the surrounding communities.
- Working with the Atlanta Development Authority, flesh out and implement the conversion of the abandon Arkwright School as an urban agriculture center.
- Incorporate a stormwater management program both in the community and the base that takes advantage of the extensive creek system and “day lights “the creeks as feasible, using their water courses as segments in the greenway trail system.
- Join with the Restoration Advisory Board, which was established in 2005 by the Army to oversee issues related to the Base closing. It is important to gain from their wisdom and work to extend their area of concern to the broader community, possibly even the area designated in the recently awarded EPA HUD Brownfield grant to the City.
Education, History and Culture

Current Situation
Throughout the community engagement process, issues of education, history and culture represented an undercurrent of concern. There is a lot of pride and a lot of accomplishment in these communities often not recognized or appreciated by the usual forces that drive urban development and redevelopment. For example, the residents of Oakland City took pains to get their neighborhood listed as a Historic District. The Base itself has an interesting history of interaction with the communities and with Atlanta. Its buildings and recreational facilities offer the potential to mark these relationships and to enrich both the quality of public education and cultural offerings.

While there are an adequate number of school facilities surrounding Fort McPherson, including three high schools and the student to teacher ratio in the community’s schools is relatively low (16:1) when compared to the national average (18.5:1), there is concern about the quality of education provided. On the Base itself, there are two post-secondary institutions, a branch of Central Michigan University and St. Leo University. And Atlanta Tech and Atlanta Metro colleges are close enough to engage the Base redevelopment process in training for future employment.

Culture is rich in the community surrounding Fort McPherson with music, dance, and the arts leading the way, particularly at the Gilbert House and in Perkerson Park to the east of the Base. Reuse of one or more the historic structures on the base could complement, expand, and bring closer a culture center for the immediate community.

Finally, the history of the areas in and around Fort McPherson reflects the history of the south from the Civil War to the present, with all of its uneven progress toward equity. Oakland City Park, located on northeast of the Base, has had its history documented by Georgia State University in 2000 as part of the process to make it a historic district. Meanwhile, Fort McPherson- named for the Union General who prevailed in the Battle of Atlanta, but was subsequently killed- was the key military installation overseeing post-Civil War Reconstruction efforts.

Issues/Opportunities
Low test scores and underperforming local schools were issues repeatedly expressed during community meetings and feedback sessions. The negative aspects of the area schools, while significantly troubling, also provide the unique opportunity to change something radically in an effort to change the downward trend in educational standards in the area. The LRA plan calls for a new elementary school along its Campbellton Road border, yet the LRA working in conjunction with existing schools to prepare nearby young people to compete for jobs over the course of the Base redevelopment might be more useful. With Atlanta Tech, Atlanta Metro, as well as the on-base colleges, Georgia Trade-UP, and the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency, the LRA could spearhead job readiness and job training program as part of a Community Workforce Agreement (CWA).

Of the profusion of elegant historic buildings on the base, which include a museum and a community theater, certainly there is the opportunity to transition these facilities into a cooperative community/LRA arrangement toward the goal of Base/community integration. Publicly recognizing the area’s historical significance is important. Past work already completed by Georgia State University and by the LRA itself provides an opportunity for the possible institutionalization of the area’s historic significance.
Alternatives/Choices/Priorities
Of the three areas covered in this section, the community has repeatedly expressed heightened importance on the issues surrounding the local community’s education system – making it a clear community priority. Unfortunately, given funding realities, few choices are available. The community has expressed a desire to invest more heavily in the so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects – areas that lead to high-demand jobs later in life. Culturally speaking, the community has expressed repeated desires to have some sort of central performing arts space and/or culture center on the site of the base itself. And finally, historically speaking, ensuring that the histories behind the fort and the local community are maintained for future generations is an expressed community concern.

Recommendations/Suggestions
For any of the opportunities and alternatives to reach fruition, a special effort and ongoing commitment from community members will be necessary. Funding for all of these, school enhancement, training programs, cultural initiatives and the idea of a history museum will be hard to come by, yet if the LRA, city agencies, and non-profits could be brought together, progress could be achieved. Depending on the level of interest and priority of individuals in the community any one or all of these could get on a path toward realization.

Next steps for each would be to draft a plan of attack, a business plan that identifies the program, the resources necessary and potential sources of people and funding necessary. The good news is that the physical space needs already exist on the base, in quite distinguished form. These assets themselves might be attractive to potential funders in these areas of interest.

Public Health and Public Safety
Current Situation
A major concern for all communities in transition – especially those with populations that contain low- to moderate-income segments – is access to community health resources. For neighborhoods such as those surrounding Fort McPherson, what truly defines community health is access to things such as urgent care centers and clinics, substance abuse and nutrition centers, and public health and social capital.

While the community currently is generally well served by health care facilities, it lacks many of the community health support systems. The Health Policy Center housed by Georgia State University conducted a “Rapid Health Impact Assessment” for Fort McPherson, funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and intended to be a model for assessing other base closures. Among other findings were a lack of connectivity that could induce and promote active living habits, obstacles to good nutrition like a lack of grocery stores with fresh meat and produce, and other public health deficiencies.
Similarly, when it comes to public safety, not all needs are being met. Community residents and businesses have repeatedly raised crime and lesser public safety issues as a foremost priority. While there is a pretty good understanding of the current situation, along with affirmative steps on the part of some neighborhoods to deal with it, there is much anxiety about how the Base closing will affect the equation. Studio research and community information point out that presently the Military Police plus private security control public safety issues on the Base, with the Atlanta Fire Department responsible for fire protection and response.

The neighborhoods surrounding Ft. McPherson experience public safety issues as a result of violence and property crime, lack of adequate lighting and safe design (such as sidewalk accessibility), vacancy and blight in the neighborhood, and lack of adequate social services. Vacant and abandoned houses, drug addiction and mental health issues and lack of access to meaningful job opportunities all contribute to crime and a lack of safety and security for neighborhood residents. There is lack of street lighting in the community and people feel unsafe on sidewalks, at bus stops and MARTA stations, in residential and commercial areas as a result.

**Issues/Opportunities**

Although the base is scheduled to close, there is a sizable medical facility on the site in the form of a VA clinic, which not only will remain but has plans to expand. Exploring the possibility of some amount of shared use of the VA clinic, as apparently has happened at the Presidio in San Francisco, could fulfill the communities' facilities needs for years to come.

The local community has expressed concern over alcohol and tobacco related issues, as well as concerns regarding rates of obesity. Addressing concerns in each of those areas allows the community the opportunity to put forward innovative programs dealing with problems that affect all Americans.

The facilities for housing the police functions on the Base are intact, and the communications capabilities at the Base are unsurpassed. So, if and as the fences come down between the Base and the communities, how will the public safety transition be managed and by whom? The goal is to tap these resources to improve conditions in the community as a benefit of the base closing.

There are a number of more nitty-gritty public safety issues in the communities surrounding Fort McPherson. For example, between January and October 23rd, 2009 there were 3 homicides near the MARTA line and its stations. The numbers indicate the dire public safety issues near transit, a transportation mode that the community heavily relies on. Additionally, Residential burglaries appear to occur at neighborhoods close to the MARTA line, both east and west of the transit line. Meanwhile, assault crimes are shown to be relatively high along DeLowe Drive between Campbellton Road and Lakewood Freeway.

**Alternatives/Choices/Priorities**

As mentioned about the VA facility presents the community with a wonderful set of alternatives, ranging from an integrated health facilities network to a significant job generator, easing the painful transition of job loss at the Base. As no interim plan has been put forward by the LRA as of yet, the community can may be able to persuade the LRA to prioritize connectivity with its walking trail and recreation assets, thus contributing to the solution of the active living deficit identified in the Health Impact Assessment (HIA).

A number of areas related to public safety should be areas of concern and action. These areas include issues related to community policing and the new Atlanta Police Department (APD) administration, fire station improvements and replacements, lighting infrastructure, and unemployment and lack of services.
Recommendations/Suggestions
There are a number of steps that community leaders and committees might undertake, like:
- After researching more fully the precedents, initiate conversations with the VA about some shared use scenarios as well as establishing a job training and first source hiring program
- Continue to press the LRA to come up with an interim plan that explicitly commits to opening the base trail and other recreational facilities to community use
- Work to assure that other recommendations of the HIA are incorporated to the extent applicable in the City’s CDP update and the rezoning processes. Their recommendations should guide the philosophy as well as the development and redevelopment strategies for the LRA
- On the public safety side, build and strengthen the partnership with the APD’s new Community Oriented Policing Division
- Implement a Neighborhood Watch Program.

Moving Forward

The next steps for the community are to consolidate its gains so far and to move forward on meeting other identified targets. Thus, the establishment of a Community Engagement Committee advisory to the LRA represents a step in the direction of a more fairly guided community process for current and future base planning and development. Similarly, the first glimmerings emanating from the LRA that some sort of interim plan needs to be put forward responds to community insistence that the “here and now” needs to be addressed. So far, though, the LRA’s phased planning approach continues to leave out major community concerns, and so as the Community Engagement Committee begins to meet, their agenda should prioritize the communities’ needs in answering the questions about what comes next as well as in the longer view.

The Comprehensive Development Plan update for the City is underway, and the communities continue to press for integrating that effort with the Fort McPherson CDP update that is going forward concurrently. Thus community involvement in the CDP and rezoning processes is essential, the more so since the CDP updates will provide the policy frameworks for rezoning the Fort Mac property and incorporating several others of the issues raised in this document and in the full report. At the same time, this engagement should lead to scrutiny of other necessary approvals, like for Tax Allocation District and other public and private funding agreements. In all of these, identifying and detailing where and how Community Benefits Agreements (CBA) can be negotiated will provide some assurance that the redevelopment serves not just the LRA and its investors but also the communities most affected.

The goal for the communities is to work toward becoming a positive partner in Fort McPherson’s redevelopment. The basis for this partnership is community support for obtaining the many remaining approvals in the base planning, design, permitting, and development processes while the LRA works affirmatively to apply its resources toward meeting community needs and priorities to improve the community in the interests of both neighbors and the LRA. The vehicle for building the partnership requires widespread community support for creating a non-profit legal entity that has the organization, capability, and stature to enter into agreements, like CBAs. The vision and principles enunciated in the LRA plan speak glowingly of the opportunity for such positive outcomes, yet their work to date is disappointing in its omission of strategies to follow through on the promise. The communities have begun to realize some positive gains through their involvement, and now is the time to build on these and press on.