

## **Atlanta: Local Initiative Combines with National Support**

### **By Tom Karson**

For over a decade the Atlanta – North Georgia Labor Council has had a reputation as an activist council engaged in innovative coalition building. Looking to build on this work and learning from the power building experiences in California and elsewhere, the Council founded the non-profit Georgia Stand-Up in 2005. The new organization immediately leaped into coalition work around Atlanta’s massive new economic development initiative – the BeltLine Project. This paper looks at how local leadership was able to combine seeds laid by prior work with national support to produce a dynamic example of the new second generation of regional power building.

On first take, metropolitan Atlanta might seem like a difficult place for labor to pursue an innovative power building agenda. Suburban Cobb County gave the nation Newt Gingrich and his “Republican Revolution” and union density in Georgia has fallen to 5%, down from 6.4% in 2004<sup>1</sup>. Yet today, labor and community activists in Atlanta are building upon their record of successful coalition work. And they are taking lessons from power building efforts in California and elsewhere that have won substantial community benefits for working families. Their efforts are headlined by the initial success of Georgia Stand-Up, the new non-profit “think and act” tank created by the Atlanta - North Georgia Labor Council led by Charlie Flemming. Atlanta is an instructive story of how local leaders are taking advantage of national support to create a strategy for building regional power.

### **The Atlanta Context**

The economic restructuring of the last three decades has made places like metropolitan Atlanta battlegrounds for building a progressive future. As the flower of the New South, Atlanta boasts fourteen headquarters of Fortune 500 companies, which

places it only behind New York and Houston in this measure of economic importance. Home town giants include Home Depot, UPS, Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines, and Bell South (recently merged with AT&T). Georgia Pacific and many other companies with growing multi-national ambitions have moved their headquarters to Atlanta in the past ten years.<sup>2</sup> The transportation sector is strong with the international airport rated as the busiest in the world and the port of Savannah nearby does most of its container business with China.

Reflecting the region's business investment population continues to grow. The metro area is now listed as the 9th largest in the United States, with a population approaching 5 million. The Atlanta area grew by 38.4% between 1990 and 2000, trailing only Phoenix in growth among the nation's largest metro areas. When it reaches an expected 7 million by 2030, the Atlanta metro area will total well over half the population in the state.<sup>3</sup>

Along with its national prominence, Atlanta is dealing with issues of sprawl - growth in the region has not been uniform. The population of the city of Atlanta itself, currently just over 400,000, is still recovering from losses to suburban white flight that was in full swing in the mid-1980s. Comparing the City to the metropolitan area, the median household income in the city is about \$14,000 less than the metro area figure.<sup>4</sup> And the racial percentages are nearly reversed with over 60% African American and 34% White in the city, and nearly 64% White and about 30% African American in the metro area. Metro area Asian population is reported just above 4% and Hispanic or Latino at nearly 8% and growing fast.<sup>5</sup> However, unlike other top metropolitan areas like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston, domestic migration has outstripped the influx

of international migration. Today the city's African-American majority and unique civil rights history provides a positive environment for progressive coalition work.

While the city has shared in the South's racial polarization and violence, a rising black middle-class was successfully incorporated into the city's leadership circles in the decades after World War II. As described by author Clarence Stone in his groundbreaking study of Atlanta, a bi-racial, business-oriented city government emerged following the black political mobilization of the civil rights era.<sup>6</sup> The character of the city's leadership was shaped by both compromise and conflict with progressive activism, and has led to an African-American lock on the position of mayor since the election of Maynard Jackson in 1973. Thus, today's regional power building work occurs in a context in which city government and business leadership acknowledges the needs of various African American constituencies, while the city's development agenda, at its core, favors the interests of investors and the business class.

### **Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council's Experience in Coalition Building**

Of course labor faced its own internal challenges as civil rights era activists pushed to integrate union leadership, gain the benefits of union membership for African-Americans in the construction trades and contractual rights like plant-wide seniority in the industrial sectors.<sup>7</sup> While a great measure of integration has been won, now local unions in the Atlanta region are facing the same external challenges as others unions around the nation, and further gains are threatened. The closing of Ford and GM auto plants in the region will eliminate a total of 6,000 UAW jobs by 2008. Offshore outsourcing by AT&T has thinned the ranks of Communication Workers.<sup>8</sup> Public sector

unions have had to fight off privatization for years. Several unions – including the UFCW, UNITE-HERE, SEIU, and the flight attendants have undertaken vigorous and often quite contentious organizing campaigns in recent years with only mixed success.

As it stands today the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council's 22-county jurisdiction includes 100,000 union members, but weak affiliation means that only one-third of the area's union membership pays per capita dues to the council, due both to non-affiliated unions and those affiliates not paying 100% per capita. Affiliates include the Machinists, Flight Attendants and Pilots at the airport. The Communication Workers and UAW provide key strength, while Bakers, USW-Paperworkers, and Theater and Stage Employees contribute in the private sector. Affiliated unions representing public sector workers include the Amalgamated Transit Union, that bargains for three separate metro-area bargaining units, and AFSCME and AFT affiliates represent city workers and teachers in a state where there is no general public sector bargaining law. Some Teamsters, UNITE-HERE and UFCW locals remain affiliated, despite the split in the national labor movement. While the building trades, including the IBEW, have done well on their own with the building boom in the city, their leadership is now actively joining with the Labor Council's new initiatives to find ways of serving the interests of more of the city's workers and communities.

In fact, a continuing source of strength for Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council over the past decade has been its leadership role in building labor-community coalitions. It has explicitly linked the interests of the building trades, service workers, and community members during its campaigns to gain a share in the benefits of staging the Olympic Games. This tradition reflects the need for coalition work due to the difficulties

of organizing and bargaining in the South, the desire of community members to be allied with the goals of union advocates, as well as the opportunities and infrastructure laid down by Atlanta's vigorous civil rights movement.

The long struggle to secure labor and community benefits during Atlanta's preparations for the 1996 Olympic Games offers a key example that has fed into today's power building. Billed as the first Games to be funded entirely by private money, the \$1.7 billion undertaking promised to create jobs but drive area wages down and exclude union workers. Beginning coalition work in 1993, the Labor Council and the Building Trades gained support from Mayor Maynard Jackson and the Atlanta City Council passed a resolution calling for the estimated 85,000 Olympics jobs to be done with contractors that paid prevailing wage, offered health insurance and pensions, and provided training and a safe workplace. The "privatized" Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG), however, ignored the City's recommendations.<sup>9</sup>

In the end the labor-community coalition had to stage a series of dramatic mobilizations to push their demands, including a turn out of an estimated 10,000 supporters when the Olympic flag arrived in Atlanta. Led by, then Labor Council president, Stuart Acuff and African-American community leaders such as Reverend Joseph E. Lowery, President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and founder of the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, the mass protest received national attention. Finally the coalition found it necessary to occupy ACOG offices to win the right to negotiate for decent wages, benefits and working conditions for local and union workers on the Olympic projects. After the coalition secured a 10% set-aside for job training for community members and a union project labor agreement for the

Olympic Stadium<sup>10</sup>, the victory was capped when newly elected Mayor Bill Campbell appointed Acuff to the ACOG board. As the Olympics Games approached, the Labor Council continued to support the transit workers and IBEW in their battle for decent wages for temporary bus drivers and television technicians.<sup>11</sup>

When Acuff moved on to work for the national AFL-CIO he said in his farewell speech to the CLC, "A whole lot of what we've done would not have been possible without a desire to win that was so strong that we were willing to defy the conventional wisdom, ignore the rules, put the welfare of workers, unions, and the working class above other considerations, commit ourselves to justice, and be audacious. Absent audacity we wouldn't have taken on the Olympics fight."<sup>12</sup>

The battle for labor and community benefits around big projects like the Olympics raised expectations of increased prosperity for everyone, not just for private sector business interests. And the legacy of victory gives in Atlanta legitimacy to continued coalition activity. But while coalition activism delivered real gains, the potential for these projects to revitalize some of the city's low-income neighborhoods was not realized. Some investment in housing for low-income residents and \$76 million in street improvements were delivered, but preparations for the games also displaced African-Americans, moving families to make way for urban spectacle. Harvey Newman, Professor of Policy Studies at Georgia State and a member of the Georgia Stand-Up Academic Advisory Committee, concluded, "The legacy of newly constructed sports venues and the enhanced image of Atlanta as a 'world city' must be tempered by the continuation of a pattern of moving low-income residents to make way for growth. Only the most dedicated efforts by business leaders and city government to work with low-

income citizens after the games will change the legacy of distrust the Olympics have helped to perpetuate."<sup>13</sup> This frustration, caused because of the slippage between promise and reality, has fed directly into current coalition work around the BeltLine and other economic development initiatives in Atlanta's low-income neighborhoods in the Southern portion of the city.

Sensitive to these dynamics, Charlie Flemming continued the Labor Council's coalition tradition when he took over as President from Stuart Acuff in 2000. The council mounted effective mobilizations in support of support national campaigns, including a surprisingly large turnout for their Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride event. The local UAW hall was packed to overflowing as labor, immigrant rights activists and civil rights leaders demonstrated support for what they characterized as an urgent civil rights issue. In 2002, the council also sent 17 busses to the Carolina State Capitol to protest the jailing of Charleston 5 Longshore Workers.

### **Growing Electoral Action**

Having an ear at the City has always been important to coalition work in Atlanta. While the Labor Council engages mainly in traditional political work - coordinating volunteers for neighborhood canvassing and get-out-the-vote campaigns, organizing targeted phone-banking, leafleting, and getting signs put up - it often helps organize affiliates' activities for political work. Because of this labor can offer politicians a pool of experienced activists skilled in working their constituencies and communities. The successful 2000 mayoral campaign of Shirley Franklin revealed the strength of labor's electoral work. Working for the City, Franklin had been a key player in the deals

surrounding Olympic construction projects, and in fact was the key player in negotiations with the Olympic Committee. She had never run for office, however. Asking Charlie Flemming for labor's support early, Franklin secured the Labor Council's endorsement a year before the main endorsing season. During her campaign, Franklin refused to cross a CWA picket line at AT&T offices where a debate had been scheduled. She also gained early support from the black religious community. Franklin acknowledges that she would not have been elected without the support of labor and its community allies the first time around.<sup>14</sup> Her campaign spokesperson commented that, "Labor came out really early, and there were lots of ministers who were on the campaign trail with her and who endorsed from the pulpits - ministers who sat in prayer with her to give her the spiritual strength to do this."<sup>15</sup> The continued legacy of Atlanta's bi-racial governing elite, however, is reflected in Franklin's broad base of support as mayor. Her first campaign collected more than \$3.8 million in campaign donations, and after the election corporate sponsors pitched in half a million dollars for an inaugural weekend celebration. Both Franklin and some other City Councilors have come out of Atlanta's developer community.

Overall, labor and its allies have built a capacity to have a voice, although not control, in the affairs of the Atlanta's African-American majority City Council. The City Council includes champions of worker issues such as Joyce Sheppard, a CWA member with thirty years at Bell South, Ivory Lee Young, and C.T. Martin all of whom represent low-income working communities in Atlanta. At least four other current City Council members are described as worker friendly and the Labor Council has working

relationships with all fifteen council members. In short, when labor and its allies mobilize around specific issues they have a capacity to get a majority for specific votes.

In recent years Labor Council President Charlie Flemming has expanded its electoral work with a new "suburban strategy" to target winnable municipal representation among the metro area's many smaller cities. With no need to mobilize for a runoff election for Mayor Franklin in 2001, the Council was able to take twenty people and put them in East Point, one of Atlanta's suburbs, and get a victory for Greg Fann, a AFSCME local president. He won a position on the East Point City Council in a runoff election after he had finished second in the primary. The Labor Council's strategy has paid off recently as two more labor supported City Council members won seats on the East Point Council. Another suburb, College Park has been identified as a good candidate for extending the Labor Council's "suburban strategy."<sup>16</sup>

### **Drawing Outside Support from Regional Power Building Work**

Because of its own success with coalition building and strategic electoral work, the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council has been open to learning about new regional power building strategies being used by other labor councils around the county. In his position on the national AFL-CIO Central Labor Council advisory board, Charlie Flemming was well aware of "think and do tank" initiatives taking shape around the country, especially those pushed by the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LANNE), at the Center on Policy Initiatives (CPI) in San Diego, and Front Range Economic Strategy Center (FRESC) in Denver. The deputy director from Field Mobilization Bruce Colburn and Lorenzo Scott with the Southern Regional AFL-CIO

were intrigued by these kind of initiatives as one way to revitalize labor and Flemming and other labor council leaders were introduced to the possibility of starting their own 501(c)(3) organizations through AFL-CIO leadership and educational programs.

As a part of a second generation of power building projects, the Atlanta work was able to draw upon support from seasoned national players including AFL-CIO Field Mobilization staff, the Partnership for Working Families and Building Partnerships USA. Cathy Howell, who at the time was AFL-CIO Deputy Director in the Southern Region explains, "We were looking at South Florida, Houston, and Atlanta as possibilities. John Goldstein, then President of the Milwaukee County Labor Council (now National Program Director for the Partnership for Working Families) was enthusiastic about this model for the South, being originally from Florida. Atlanta had a history of an activist labor council and had just come off organizing a very success Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride, so Atlanta really seemed to have enough community base to really put something together that funders would be interested in." <sup>17</sup>

Atlanta ended up getting a lot of attention partly because the Southern Regional AFL-CIO office is located there, and Director Ken Johnson assigned Lorenzo Scott, who was working out of that office, to assist Charlie Flemming and the Labor Council. Scott had worked on a mayoral campaign in Denver where Leslie Moody was heading up the their area labor council. The Front Range Economic Strategy Center was just getting up and running, and Scott saw the real possibility of transplanting some of these innovative programs to the South. Also, the documentation of innovative central labor council activities around the county by the Building Regional Power Research Project helped to demonstrate possibilities and inspire discussion and planning in Atlanta.

## **Founding Georgia Stand-Up**

While examining the needs of the labor movement in the South and in Atlanta, it became evident that the creation of a "think and do" tank could serve a clear purpose. It could provide a way to connect coalition and political work together into a self-conscious, long-term effort to build progressive power for working families. For the Labor Council, Flemming saw that the creation of a 501(c)(3) arm promised to deepen Atlanta's proven labor/community alliances and build capacity by involving more of the grassroots base of both labor and community organizations. It also would create a structure to maintain coalition work between campaigns, hold elected officials accountable, and provide the research necessary to instigate and sustain issue campaigns. Flemming says he got the confidence to "pull the trigger" about three and half years ago when Cathy Howell introduced him to Ann Bastian of the New World Foundation, a funder and supporter of community organizing. Charlie remembers, "We had a nice meeting and Ann was very encouraging. Ann actually said that this was really needed and that there would be a lot of support for it."<sup>18</sup>

The new Georgia Stand-Up organization follows the general model established in California and elsewhere - combining under one roof the capacities to conduct sophisticated research on the region's political and economic realities, develop winnable policy reform agendas, build effective coalitions around specific campaigns, and cultivate long-term alliances among labor and community players. While founding Georgia Stand-Up, key organizers from Atlanta traveled to meet with their counterparts in cities with established "think and do" tanks to draw on their experiences. A Labor Council retreat

also built support for Georgia Stand-Up within the council's executive board and local labor leaders.

Georgia Stand-Up's initial financial support came from the AFL-CIO Union Community Fund, Building Partnerships USA, Fund for Southern Communities, New World Foundation, and the Ottinger Foundation. In-kind donations were received from 9 to 5 Atlanta's Working Women, Atlanta - North Georgia Building Trades, AFL-CIO, Brisbane Institute at Morehouse College and the Partnership for Working Families. There is a long list of organizations providing some kind of support to get Georgia Stand-Up up and running, including the Georgia AFL-CIO.<sup>19</sup>

Lorenzo Scott's continuing support from the Southern AFL-CIO office and Charlie Flemming's work to get coalition partners and local union representatives on the board was vital to launching things on the ground. Doug Polley, Business Manager with the Atlanta North Georgia Building Trades Council, Yolanda Taylor International Representative with AFGE and seasoned political organizer, joined the newly formed board of directors along with Reverend Motley of ABLE/Gamaliel and Cindia Cameron with 9-to-5. Dr. Keith Jennings of the African American Human Rights Foundation, named interim Executive Director of Stand-Up, wrote the original position paper and got things together to incorporate the organization. Dr. Hasan Crockett, professor of political science at Morehouse College with expertise in labor and civil rights history in the South, was another member of the initial Georgia Stand-Up board. In the Spring of 2006 he shifted roles to provide hands-on support in the role of Senior Fellow. Because of the background of people on its board, Georgia Stand-Up has enjoyed deep connections in labor, the community, and political circles since its inception.

The fortunate choices of Georgia Stand-Up's initial full-time staff members further contributed to the new organization's ability to leap into a leadership role around regional economic development questions. In March of 2005 Melissa Conrad was hired as Georgia Stand-Up's first employee when she took on the position of Researcher and Project Organizer. She was pegged as a good candidate because of her work with the Women's Policy Group and the Georgia Working Families Coalition, which she had taken up as part of an internship for her Masters program in Social Work at the University of Georgia. As additional funds were pieced together, Deborah Scott was hired to take on the role of Executive Director. Deborah was familiar with the ideas behind Georgia Stand-Up through the work of her husband Lorenzo Scott.

In hiring Deborah Scott, Georgia Stand-Up brought onboard a seasoned community and political organizer with a wealth of contacts and goodwill. A student activist at Clark College in the 1980's, she joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), was active in the antiapartheid movement, and learned political and protest strategies under Rev. Joseph E. Lowery. Since graduation she has taken on responsibility for voter registration campaigns in Georgia and on a national stage. She has both insider legislative experience and solid work experience inside city government. As an International Representative for SEIU, she specialized in political campaign management and Get-Out-the-Vote strategies for elections in several southern states. She has also been an active participant in Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council activities serving as political chair and she helped organize the historic Immigrant Freedom Ride stop in Atlanta. More recently she started her own business as a private political consultant and has managed campaigns for progressive candidates and served as the

GOTV coordinator for Orange County, Florida for Kerry. In short, Scott brought to Georgia Stand-Up extensive experience both in protest politics and political work, and a knowledge of the workings of government.<sup>20</sup>

### **The BeltLine Project**

In the fall of 2005, with both Scott and Conrad on staff, and a board rooted in rich community and labor connections, Georgia Stand-Up was positioned well to seize upon a major opportunity when Atlanta's BeltLine Project came up to the City Council for authorization. The BeltLine is a visionary plan which aims to turn a 22-mile stretch of railroad right-of-way that circles Atlanta's central city into a commuter rail and parks corridor. It promises to shape the city's commercial and residential growth for decades, connecting 45 neighborhoods, and provide a more livable city environment, even as population density grows. The BeltLine Tax Allocation District (TAD) recently created by the City Council is projected to raise \$1.7 billion through the year 2030. With an additional chunk of money coming from private sources and grants, the project promises to create 30,000 permanent new jobs, 48,000 year-long construction jobs, twenty-two miles of public transit, 33 miles of bike and walking trails connecting 40 parks and attractions, almost 1,300 acres of new green space, and over 5,600 affordable workforce housing units.<sup>21</sup>

The BeltLine Project, which was conceived as a student design project by Ryan Gravel in the late 1990s, grew in the city's imagination for some time. Mayor Shirley Franklin took up the cause wholeheartedly in 2004 and began feasibility and funding studies in 2004, involving the Atlanta Development Authority and MARTA, the

Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. A partnership city government, private developers and civic leaders took shape to guide the project.<sup>22</sup>

But, like many large scale and corporate-oriented redevelopment projects that do not include significant labor or low-income community representation, the BeltLine Project was looking like it was going to support urban gentrification and create mostly low-wage, non-union jobs. As authorization of the tax allocation district for the BeltLine was about to be voted on by the City Council in the fall of 2005, Deborah Scott had been in her position for only a month. If Georgia Stand Up was going to fight for inclusion of community benefits language it would need to play quick catch-up.

Drawing on the Community Benefits Agreement work pioneered in California,<sup>23</sup> Scott and Conrad were able to quickly draft an amendment for inclusion into the BeltLine Tax Allocation District proposal - which set the boundaries, authorized tax and bond funding and authorized the Atlanta Development Authority to implement the BeltLine Plan. In private discussions with City Council members, Georgia Stand-Up was able to draw on the fact that most of the council members had sought and received endorsement from the Labor Council for upcoming elections. In fact the elections were scheduled for the day following the vote on the BeltLine TAD! As part of the endorsement process the Labor Council had asked candidates if they would support the concept of 'community benefits agreements, and all endorsed candidates said yes. Doors were also open because many council members also knew Scott personally from her time working for the city.

Stand-Up's last-minute policy recommendations and one-on-one meetings with City Council members succeeded in passage of an as an amendment containing

community benefits language by the Atlanta City Council on November 7, 2005 on a 12 to 3 vote.<sup>24</sup> The amendment requires that the BeltLine project "reflect through development agreements or funding agreements...certain community benefit principles" such as prevailing wages for workers, first source hiring, and apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.<sup>25</sup> The language also opens the door to integrating additional community benefit principles, which may include affordable housing and family support projects such as provisions to provide affordable space for day care and non-profit organizations as the BeltLine projects unfolds.

While the CBA language itself does not mandate any specific contracts, the Atlanta win does provide a legal framework for Georgia Stand-Up and the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council to build coalitions that foster progressive regional power building in Atlanta. In other cities, winning and enforcing specific CBA contract language has involved protracted campaigns requiring broad coalitions and committed partners. As an ambitious three decade-long undertaking, the BeltLine itself will unfold through a number development projects in different neighborhoods that will involve various developers. Each will require negotiation of specific community benefits. In addition, Georgia Stand-Up is becoming involved in other development projects that are being proposed. Since the BeltLine got the go ahead, four new Tax Allocation Districts have been proposed. All four of these TADs are targeting development in commercial corridors that cut through the Southside of Atlanta and along the edges of many of the lowest income and historically African-American neighborhoods. For example, Fort McPherson - a military base slated for closure - is in close proximity to the airport and seems primed for quick development.

Continual engagement and mobilization will be necessary to keep the interests of workers and neighborhoods on the table however development unfolds. Georgia Stand-Up and the Labor Council have focused their efforts on two levels - working with other organizations advocating on BeltLine issues, and at the grass-roots level, educating and organizing community members for effective action.

The need for education and advocacy at the neighborhood is clear, as is the need to keep channels of communication open between stakeholder groups. The first community BeltLine survey put out by the city's Development Authority - the "Community Engagement Tool-kit" - was posted a web site and included quite a complex assortment of questions, which did not necessarily educate respondents as to the consequences of their survey choices. Georgia Stand-Up stepped in and developed a "help sheet" for respondents, which resulted in over 300 individually completed surveys. They also organized a community input session attended by over 40 labor, community, faith, and neighborhood leaders in order to achieve consensus on the survey questions. The Sierra Club, advocating for light rail public transit, also put in a lot of effort, including door-knocking and putting up yard signs, to getting people to complete the survey and attend subsequent public hearings. Because the "Community Engagement Tool-kit" survey was an attempt by the Atlanta Development Authority to sort out priorities for the project, there was a real need for stakeholders to discuss among themselves their priorities and potential trade offs as they mobilized supporters. A group advocating for parks and trails may not see the need to insist on light rail over bus service along the BeltLine, or hold "good paying jobs" as a high priority. As money begins to flow, the potential for any coalition to fracture is great.

As stakeholder organizations saw the need to work together and try to iron out issues before going public, a group called the BeltLine Network was formed. Organizations in the Network advocate for diverse goals including affordable housing, parks, public art, historic preservation, and trails, and include church groups (that are close to the lives of people) in African American neighborhoods. The Network holds regular meetings and has set up information sharing to make sure advocate and interest group organizations are well informed and have a way to work out issues among themselves. According to Deborah Scott, the original composition of the BeltLine Network was not very diverse. "There were only two or three African-Americans in the room before we started organizing our Stand-Up Alliance members and invited them to the Network meetings," Deborah explains. "We are bringing a different voice, and we are bringing labor into the room. And Georgia Stand-Up is taking on the role of a mediator on many of the community issues where priorities may conflict."

One issue that the Network has worked on is making recommendations for the composition of the City's BeltLine TAD Advisory Committee, which has been set up as the official city structure to take public input and make recommendations on BeltLine issues. Both Deborah Scott and Doug Polley with the Building Trades Council were nominated to sit on the Committee and will be representing labor and worker issues respectively. While the BeltLine TAD Advisory Committee only has advisory functions, these appointments acknowledge official recognition of labor's role in BeltLine planning.

At the grassroots, Atlanta's system of 24 NPU's (neighborhood planning units) is integrated into the structure of city government. It is on this level that Georgia Stand-Up is focusing much of its energy. Each NPU meets monthly, takes up questions of zoning

and land use changes and other community issues, and serves in an advisory role to zoning commission and City Council decision making. Each NPU has a number of smaller neighborhood associations within its boundaries that interact with the NPU. Georgia Stand-Up is selecting a few Neighborhood Planning Units that are along the BeltLine, and near other potential development projects, for education and leadership development. Three neighborhoods that Georgia Stand-Up is focusing on are Capitol View, English Avenue, and Pittsburgh, all in South Atlanta, all over 90% African-American, where residents are a majority women, and where nearly forty percent of all residents live below the poverty level.<sup>26</sup>

Georgia Stand-Up's role here is to put the leaders in these neighborhoods in a position that they can be well informed on development issues. This will enable them to mobilize their constituency around community needs, and negotiate for community benefits as contracts for specific developments are written up between the city and developers. The ultimate goal here is the crafting and inclusion of specific provisions in enforceable development contracts. These provisions will specify what residents in each NPU will get out of the development process. Contracts may specify payment of prevailing wage during construction and for newly created permanent jobs, and mandate the use of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. Other benefits may be formulated in alliance with community groups. The Community Benefits Agreement language in the BeltLine TAD funding ordinance that Georgia Stand-Up drafted and got approved, provides the framework for negotiation and winning binding commitments out of these efforts.

## **Building a Long-Term Alliance through the Policy Institute for Civic Leadership**

Georgia Stand-Up was founded to help move labor-community coalitions beyond individual campaigns toward a long-term alliance for a progressive transformation of the city. Organizing around the BeltLine and other development projects promises to further the work of labor and community groups around questions of long-term city and neighborhood futures. The need for a good understanding of regional economic, social and political issues is crucial to success. With assistance from Building Partnerships, led by former South Bay Labor Council President Amy Dean, Georgia Stand-Up piloted a new Policy Institute for Civic Leadership in early 2006. The civic leadership institute model, first developed in San Jose, is a mechanism for building a diverse cadre of regional labor, community, and political leaders whose experience cuts across race, class, constituency and issue boundaries and who work to develop a common vision for building progressive power at the regional level.

During Stand-Up's first Policy Institute, participants met one morning a week for three hours, over six weeks. Topics covered included Building Civic Capacity, New Labor and the New Economy, Regional History, Race, Power and Politics, Public Finance and Subsidies, and New Organizing Strategies. Charlie Flemming and Deborah Scott hosted the program. Labor leaders from the Atlanta North Georgia Building Trades Council, and the Southern Regional Office of the AFL-CIO, local progressive academics, and non-profit policy groups also presented. Government presenters included an economist from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and a regional economic development official. By creating deeper lasting relationships among progressive leaders, Georgia Stand-Up is building a capacity for work on community benefit campaigns and Labor

Council activities that deal with a variety of issues, including housing affordability, workers' rights, women's issues, environmental justice, transportation justice, public health concerns, and faith-based organizing.

Georgia Stand-Up and the Labor Council did a lot of groundwork to pull off two successful Institutes held in 2006, with many key people given personal invitations to attend. Among the fifty participants who have attended are Joyce Sheperd - District 12 Representative on the Atlanta City Council, Representative Able Mable Thomas - District 55 of the Georgia House of Representatives, Walter Andrews - President of CWA Local 3204, Ernie Brooks - President of ATU Local 732, Donna Tyler - Executive Director of Community Alliance of Metropolitan Parkway, Deacon Dana Williams - Board Chair of Georgia ACORN, and Roy Craft - Executive Director of the Regional Council of Churches. Ola Reynolds - Chair of Neighborhood Planning Unit G and Tracy Bates - Executive Director of the English Avenue CDC contributed their street level experience dealing with housing and development issues in their neighborhoods. Unions with representatives attending included ATU, CWA, Painters, Atlanta North Georgia Building Trades Council, Unite/HERE!, UFCW, BCTGM, and AFGE.<sup>27</sup> Several community development corporations as well as women's and Latino groups sent staff to the trainings and leaders of several neighborhood organizations and NPU's participated as well.

"Alumni sessions" are already being planned to keep participants active in the study group. The idea is to raise the stature of labor and community leaders in the city by educating them about how the regional economy works and to explore ways that a working-family urban agenda can promote economic justice.

State Representative Able Mable Thomas, who was part of the second Institute said in her final evaluation of the class, "Georgia Stand-Up is one of the best empowerment initiatives to come around in a long time. It not only helps citizens and community leaders understand the issues, but it motivates them to act upon the issues."

Anna Swinson, who attended as a Sierra Club representative explains how beneficial Policy Institute was for her from both a personal and for her organization.

I was moving into a neighborhood in the south part of the BeltLine District, Capitol View, and at the Leadership Institute I saw this whole different side of things. We looked at issues of gentrification, community benefits principles, and how funding sources like our Tax Allocation District have worked nationally. While Sierra Club is always eager to work with communities of color and people that don't look like your typical Sierra Club member, it's not very easy for us to do that because you can't just march into a neighborhood and say that we are here to save you! Through the Policy Institute we learned that there are already groups in these neighborhoods that are quite capable of taking care of themselves. And the Georgia Stand-Up Alliance was a great way for me to meet a ton of people that were already leaders of the neighborhood or community organizations in the south part of Atlanta, who were very interested in the BeltLine and very concerned about our issues too."<sup>28</sup>

### **The Georgia Stand-Up Alliance**

The "Georgia Stand-Up Alliance" has grown out of the Policy Institute and is holding regular meetings of BeltLine stakeholders from their target area. Here Georgia Stand-Up is extending its educational work and preparing people to make specific CBA proposals when the time comes. Deborah Scott is also is organizing the alliance for potential mobilization. "Part of our strength is that we are a network of networks," explains Scott. "We need to start organizing our neighborhoods now, because at some point there is going to be a principle, and we will have to say to our elected officials and developers, 'You are going to do this, or we're going to shut the city down!' Right? Or we can go and say, 'Lets go down to City Hall and celebrate our elected leaders for doing

the right thing!’ It is our responsibility to educate our communities. We need to assist them in developing smart policies for working communities, and we need help them hold the city and public officials accountable.”<sup>29</sup>

One Alliance meeting held at the IBEW Hall near downtown, in the fall of 2006, attracted representatives from Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership, the Historic West End, Lakewood Heights, English Avenue CDC. Also attending were representatives from Concerned Black Clergy, Georgia Department of Labor, BKS - a real estate development firm that works with non-profits, 9to5 National Association of Working Women, Sierra Club, SW Parks Association, and the Atlanta North Georgia Building Trades Council, among others.

Georgia Stand-Up is working to prepare this network of leaders to educate their own constituencies and also to encourage them to get more people involved in the city's many BeltLine planning meetings. “They expect Concerned Black Clergy and Rev. Lowery's People's Agenda to be at some of these meetings, to raise some hell, but if we don't have anybody standing behind them, we decrease our value,” Scott explained to the Alliance. While each group has to organize its own members, the Georgia Stand-Up Alliance helps make sure that activists are educated and informed on the issues and have discussed the consequences of different actions with other advocate groups.

Building alliances around neighborhood development has also required the Georgia Stand-Up Alliance to negotiate through differing priorities. Georgia Stand-Up's basic issues are living wage and pre-apprenticeship programs - for other issues they just want what the communities want, and can facilitate discussion and decision making.<sup>30</sup> Yet those issues are many. They include affordable housing. Nathaniel Smith with the

Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership explained at the Alliance meeting that as property values go up, developers must be required to allocate a certain percentage of their units to affordable housing or else people will be forced out of their neighborhoods. Currently, there are only voluntary guidelines for developers in Atlanta. At one Alliance meeting some people expressed concerns about development in the 12<sup>th</sup> district where there is the need to protect remaining green space and traditional single-family homes. Others raised questions about access to parking.<sup>31</sup> Another participant challenged the group to integrate the needs of the most needy, homeless, elderly, disabled persons into the planning process. Because there are many other organizations and planning groups taking an active role lobbying around the BeltLine project it is crucial that Georgia Stand-Up provide a continuing forum for alliance members to express their needs and concerns while also producing targeted organizing priorities. Stand-Up can also draw on its capacity to do research and "power analysis."

### **Research and other Projects**

While the BeltLine Project represents a central organizing opportunity for Georgia Stand-Up, in its brief history it has also engaged in other coalition and support work, often drawing upon its capacity to do policy research. With technical support from Karla Zombro of SCOPE/AGENDA (Strategic Concepts and Organizing and Policy Education) in Los Angeles, Georgia Stand-Up has helped UNITE-HERE with research and a power analysis to support a hotel employee organizing.<sup>32</sup> A series of research projects targeting neighborhoods within the Alliance and other areas facing development is also underway. This research aims to better inform neighborhood leaders about the

assets and needs of their communities and to assist them in making policy recommendations to elected officials. A "Community Participatory Research Program" component will be included where Stand-Up will work with community leaders to design and implement surveys that will both gather needed information and be used as an organizing tool as well. Other Stand-Up activities have included working with 9to5 National Association of Working Women to found the Georgia Working Families Coalition, which supports public policy to help working parents balance work and home responsibilities. In 2005, Georgia Stand-Up also trained over 260 student, parents, teachers, and advocates to rally for the Time for Schools Act Capitol Education Day in 2005 which aimed to provide parental leave for school activities.

## **Conclusion**

Because Georgia Stand-Up and the level of power building work it represents is quite new, an evaluation of the work is difficult. For example, at the time of this writing, October 2006, Deborah Scott had been executive director for only one year. The recent work described here offers a potential that will require time to realize.

A few observations about the process can be made, however. This kind of work in Atlanta, as elsewhere, has involved fostering buy-in to coalition work by labor representatives, as well as maintaining traditional alliances among local unions. Large turnouts for national labor campaigns have demonstrated the Labor Council's continuing potential in this area. Turnout for Stand-Up activities among labor and community leadership has been impressive, while its large-scale turnout ability remains to be tested. Stand-Up recognizes the continuing need to cultivate coalition partners ability to turn out

more than just their leadership when interests intersect. Along these lines, Ernie Brooks, President of Transit Union Local 732, noted the success of a recent street event where Sierra Club members and ATU rank-and-file came together in a creative “Choo Choo” demonstration of support for a light rail alternative for the BeltLine.

The ability to turn labor issues into community issues that spotlight social needs or economic disparity is becoming necessary for almost any kind of organizing. It is Stand-Up's hope that the deep coalitions and economic education they are cultivating among Atlanta's progressive leadership will bring more quick victories. In any case, Stand-Ups growing interest and ability to support strategic research and build grass-root support for community benefits in vulnerable communities should serve them well when they find it necessary to instigate popular support.

Successful leadership transition is crucial in this work as well, especially when personalities can drive much of the emotional work needed for organizing. The camaraderie that Charlie Flemming generates in his dealings with local union leaders is widening the Labor Council's influence, notably the buy-in of the Trades and other union that are not naturally oriented toward community organizing. This is significant even though it has not yet extended beyond the leadership level. Flemming has worked hard to draw on the talents and experience of area union representatives who can actively contribute expertise, like board member Yolanda Taylor out of AFGE, who is specialist in organizing membership for political action. It helps too, to have the Labor Council and Georgia Stand-Up housed together with several local unions and progressive non-profits, in the large IBEW building near downtown. That fact is, Charlie Flemming has picked up the sword he was left and is broadening its heft, drawing upon and building a

wide network of supporters to carry labor's work forward during very challenging times. It is a testament to the promise of regional power building work that talented and experienced activists like Deborah Scott are taking up its challenges as well. And boding well for the future, Charlie and Deborah have not been shy about mentoring young activists, as Georgia Stand-Up employs several part-time interns.

Working in the political environment of the Bible Belt means that cultural differences and opposing allegiances among local union leadership and members must be overcome. Some leadership may see the virtues of alliances with immigrant communities, for example, while others may view the immigrants themselves as a problem. Some leaders and members may question the value of working on “neighborhood issues” such as the BeltLine, when traditional union organizing is a do or die priority. But clearly a key to success, in Atlanta and elsewhere, is the ability of power building leaders to engage not just labor’s “left” but also its “right” and involve not just leadership but also membership. As labor and community issues have been legitimately cast in the light of civil rights, social morality and religious duty in Atlanta, these kinds of differences have proven to be surmountable.

Much of motivation for Georgia Stand-Up's activities draws strength from Atlanta's civil rights traditions and the personal experience of activists. Board member Tanya Wallace, National Field Director with WAND and a former organizer for UNITE, brings a life-long concern for women's issues to Stand-Up. Doug Polley, the area Building Trades business manager took up the sheet metal trade when he came of age and won security for himself and his family. While the union trades in Atlanta keep over

1000 apprentices, Polley is working to extend that kind of promise through his involvement with Georgia Stand-Up, serving as Vice President for External Affairs.

The Atlanta story also speaks to the challenges of sustaining long-term relationships with coalition partners, as momentum of real victories is built upon. Community Benefits Agreement organizing is showing itself to be a powerful way to stitch together many elements of labor/community activism in Atlanta. Representatives from diverse organizations are coming together and enjoying it, eager to find ways to build more effective power for their progressive agendas. In recruiting for the first Policy Institute, organizers had hoped to get maybe twenty people, but they actually got thirty – many, too, were top leadership of the organizations that they represented.

The energy that has greeted the formation and activities of Georgia Stand-Up clearly points to the ready interest of labor, community, and political leaders to join in an innovative process that promises to institutionalize progressive change and real grassroots power. Evaluation will come with time as Georgia Stand-Up expects to count its success, in part, by the number of contractual community benefits won as the BeltLine Project and other development projects proceed. Hopefully, in the coming years, researchers will find plenty of evidence to speak to the success of the transfer of this new model of regional power building to the New South.

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### **Interviews conducted**

Tracy Bates, Executive Director, English Avenue CDC, 8/18/06

Ernie Brooks, President, ATU Local 732, 11/16/06

Melissa Conrad, Researcher and Project Organizer, Georgia Stand-Up, 8/10/06

Hassan Crockett, Moorehouse College and Senior Fellow, Georgia Stand-Up, 9/31/06

Charlie Flemming, President, Atlanta - North Georgia Labor Council, 7/14/06

Cathy Howell, National Organizers Alliance, 9/1/06

Doug Polley, Atlanta North Georgia Building Trades Council, 8/11/06

Deborah Scott, Executive Director, Georgia Stand-Up, 8/11/06

Lorenzo Scott, Southern Regional AFL-CIO, 4/15/06

Anna Swinson, Sierra Club, 8/15/06

Yolanda Taylor, International Representative, AFGE, 8/10/06

Tanya Wallace, National Field Director, WAND, 8/10/06

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members in 2005," January 20, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Fortune 500 website: <http://money.cnn.com>, October 2, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> A. Hart, "ARC Projects Huge Growth for Outlying Counties," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 12, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce website: <http://www.metroatlantachamber.com>, "A Look at Atlanta," October 2, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> City of Atlanta website: <http://www.atlantaga.gov>, "2004 CDP: Demographics," October 2, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Hasan Crockett.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Luke, "Crowd at Marietta Facility Protests AT&T Job Cuts," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 22, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart Acuff, "The Atlanta Labor Council: Building Power Through Mirroring the Membership," in Immanuel Ness and Stuart Eimer, eds. *Central Labor Councils and the Revival of American Unionism*, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> E. Press, "Working People in Atlanta and the Summer Olympics," *The Nation*, July 29-August 5, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> R. Greer, "Olympic-related Labor Disputes Brewing," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 13, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> S. Acuff, "Farewell Speech," *The New Opinion*, February 2000.

<sup>13</sup> H. Newman, "Neighborhood impacts of Atlanta's Olympic Games," *Community Development Journal*, April 1999.

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- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Charlie Flemming.
- <sup>15</sup> D. Suggs, "Labor Leads Off Mayor's Debut," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 4, 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Charlie Flemming.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Cathy Howell.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Charlie Flemming.
- <sup>19</sup> Georgia Stand-Up, "New Directions Newsletter," March 2006.
- <sup>20</sup> Scott worked as the first legislative assistant for State Representative Nan Orrock Orrock. Now State Senator, Orrock has been a progressive voice in the state legislature for 20 years. Scott's resume includes the positions of organizer with the Voter Education Project, Deputy Director and National Field Director of Project Vote, Democratic National Committee Clinton presidential campaign. Assistant to the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation and Cultural Affairs for the Atlanta City Council for seven years. She served briefly as interim Director of the Atlanta's Bureau of Cultural Affairs.
- <sup>21</sup> Atlanta BeltLine Project website: <http://www.BeltLinecommunity.com>. "Plan of Work for 2006-2010 Budget," May 31, 2006.
- <sup>22</sup> BeltLine Partnership website: <http://www.BeltLine.org/what/index.shtml>
- <sup>23</sup> Julian Gross, Greg Leroy and Madeline Janis-Aparicio, *Community Benefits Agreements, Making Development Projects Accountable*, Good Jobs First and the California Partnership for Working Families, 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> City of Atlanta website: <http://apps.atlantaga.gov/citycouncil/2005/minutes/fcm1107a.htm>, "Atlanta City Council Action/Minutes," November 07, 2005. The amendment reads: "Prevailing wages for workers; a "first source" hiring system to target job opportunities for residents of impacted low income "BeltLine" neighborhoods; establishment and usage of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for workers of impacted BeltLine neighborhoods. A more complete list of such principles and a community benefit policy shall be developed with community input and included within the agreements to be approved by City Council."  
<http://apps.atlantaga.gov/citycouncil/2005/minutes/fcm1107a.htm>
- <sup>25</sup> Atlanta City Council Action/Minutes
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with and contributions from Melissa Conrad.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Melissa Conrad.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Anna Swenson.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Deborah Scott.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with Deborah Scott.
- <sup>31</sup> Georgia Stand-Up Alliance Meeting, IBEW Hall, August 11, 2006.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Melissa Conrad.