

Historically, communities of color and marginalized communities in south and southeast Atlanta and by proximity unincorporated southwest DeKalb County have been used as an environmental dumping ground. And the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County are the principal responsible parties and willing and active participants.

The Old Prison Farm and Intrenchment Creek Park debacles are just the latest chapters in a long history of injustices where both municipalities have perpetuated, ignored, and otherwise purposely failed to protect communities of color and marginalized communities or even acknowledge that fairness is lacking and necessary.

In each instance, Atlanta Police Foundation and Blackhall saw an opportunity to take advantage of a multi decades-long history of environmental injustice and community disinvestment perpetuated by Atlanta and DeKalb – and seized it. In gambling terms, they placed a huge bet, well aware that history was on their side, and won.

In a letter to the Arthur Blank Foundation in 2002, CEO Vernon Jones touted that “Intrenchment Creek has been part of the County’s greenspace plans for several years. This 136 acre site was identified both as much-needed open space for park land as well as for protection of an important tributary to the South River. The County recognizes that this property is highly sought after by developers for both industrial use as well as housing development. Given its location on Intrenchment Creek and the shortage of expansive greenspace property remaining in this area, the County considers this site to be extremely important.”

A similar testimonial was made by the Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and Atlanta City Council regarding the importance of the Old Prison Farm site as recorded in the Atlanta City Design, Aspiring to the Beloved Community adopted, unanimously, into the Atlanta City Charter in November 2017.

As much as I would like to blame the Atlanta Police Foundation and Ryan Millsap (Blackhall) for these two sad messes, in reality, both developers took advantage of Atlanta and DeKalb’s willingness to renege on the promises made to vulnerable communities that stood to gain from a combined 450-acre investment in a better quality of life that could also serve as the epicenter of sustainable economic and community revitalization.

Both municipalities could have said no to these destructive proposals and the ensuing debacles would never have happened. Both can say no now and the planned devastation will end! Signaling the first step towards realizing a much needed and long-denied more Equitable Atlanta and DeKalb County.

Meanwhile, while we wait for this egregious wrong to be made right, the diverse leadership of the two largest and most diverse municipalities in the state stand as the most flagrant violators of the human rights of marginalized and vulnerable communities to enjoy a safe, prosperous, and healthy living environment.

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