

Community responds positively to Emory Village plans

by Laretta Miller

BASIC INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT

The Alliance to Improve Emory Village (AIEV), Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to the revitalization of Emory Village. The organization grew out of community-wide planning workshops and represents all the stakeholders in Emory Village -- businesses, Emory University, and the Druid Hills neighborhood.

The mission of AIEV is to create a safe, economically viable, walkable, and compact mixed-use community that is compatible with and a resource to Emory University and the surrounding historic neighborhoods.

Our consultant is Peter Drey + Company, an award-winning team of professionals with expertise in such fields as architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, traffic engineering, and financial planning for design and implementation.

The spring issue of the *Druid Hills News* summarized the results of the well-attended community meetings on January 26 and March 9 at the Emory Presbyterian Church. Constructive comments and recommendations at these and earlier meetings came from Druid Hills residents, Emory University representatives, Emory Village merchants and property owners, and State and County political leaders. Our consultants incorporated these in formulating their final recommendations, presented to a standing-room-only assembly at Emory University on the evening of May 30, 2002. At the conclusion, the great majority of those in attendance signified their enthusiasm for the overall plan by raising their hands when asked how many of those present were excited about the proposals they had advanced for improving Emory Village.

Will the enacted recommendations solve every problem? We doubt it. Is this a reason to retire in confusion? Of course not! AIEV's policy, as enunciated by Davis Fox, is to move cautiously, test key proposals, and analyze test results. AIEV is committed to a transparent process. An objective is to increase activity levels in Emory Village, while retaining the rich historic environment. These are some of the results our consultants expect us to see when the plan is implemented –

- ❖ A diverse economy, with more and differing goods and services available
- ❖ A far more inviting streetscape, with ample space for pedestrians and outdoor dining
- ❖ An improved intersection for all forms of traffic – foot, automotive, bicycle, public transit
- ❖ An increase in public space, including a reduction in paved spaces and enhancement of the Peavine Creek area (bridge and recreational sectors)
- ❖ Mixed use – commercial and residential, with addition of living units
- ❖ More efficient use of parking space; addition of decks.

Consultant Peter Drey said the plan’s organizing principles – sound economics, connections with Emory University and Druid Hills, and a “green” environment – would accentuate the great strengths of the Emory Village location. These include “village” scale, a sophisticated user group, a strong market, location and phenomenal views.

As the article in the spring issue detailed, many options were considered for village design and traffic patterns. The approach deemed most effective is a “roundabout” at the main intersection and a modified “road diet” for North Decatur Road. These will slow down traffic without stopping it for long periods (as traffic lights do). North Decatur from Clifton to Lullwater will be narrowed to three lanes from the present four. (A roundabout is already approved for the intersection of North Decatur and Lullwater.) This plan is projected to be the optimum traffic solution, but testing will be required, and the possibility of modification or even deinstallation of changes will exist. Some in the community would like to see the road diet extended toward Clairmont Road; ultimately, DeKalb County will decide if extension of the road diet would be beneficial.

There will be two village areas – a village center and a “village edge” (transitioning to the traditional Druid Hills residential area). A diversity of housing would include smaller apartment units (2-3 levels) in the village center. Pedestrian crosswalks will make the village safer and incorporate features such as ramps for persons with disabilities.

The ultimate goal is civilized urban living in which the advantages gained from changes outweigh any liabilities incurred through these changes. We will never reach “perfection” in the eyes of all stakeholders; some compromises will be necessary. For example, there are concerns on the part of several residents that prohibition of left turns from north Oxford Road eastbound onto North Decatur will cause unwarranted hardships for drivers. Other residents of DHCA’s Division 7 have said they could live with this restriction if the Village is greatly improved and if measures are taken to control cut-through traffic. AIEV will work with DeKalb County, Emory University and DHCA to develop a mechanism for testing the traffic changes in the next phase of the project. AIEV and the consultants will be listening to you as we move forward in the process of improving Emory Village.