



## II. INTRODUCTION

Emory Village is the historic commercial center of the Emory University and Druid Hills neighborhoods located at the intersection of North Decatur Road, Oxford Road and Dowman Drive in DeKalb County, northeast of Atlanta. It emerged in the early 20th century to serve the newly relocated University and the surrounding homes of Druid Hills laid out earlier by Frederick Law Olmsted, America's founding landscape architect, and his sons. As the University and the city itself grew, however, the neighborhood commercial center used by students, faculty, and residents alike strained to adjust to the debilitating pressures from this growth and the fast-changing urban conditions of the city.

In recent years, the Village's retail vitality has waned as constantly increasing traffic transformed North Decatur Road, the main street of the Village, into a high-volume barrier separating the University from the Village. It's disjointed physical environment was hurt, too, as the destruction from a 1979 fire. Subsequent disorganized redevelopment fragmented the Village into small shopping islands separated by broad areas of asphalt and intermittent, crumbling sidewalks.

The plan that follows describes a way to reestablish the physical and economic foundations that will permit the Village to prosper again as the center of commerce and community in the area. The new mixed-use environment that the plan envisions will create a pedestrian-oriented commercial neighborhood capable of competing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economic context and simultaneously supporting new residential and retail development catering to a diverse group of users.

**Genesis of this plan.** Deteriorating conditions in the Village have prompted many revitalization initiatives over the years. Traffic and planning

EMORY VILLAGE REVITALIZATION PLAN

For THE ALLIANCE TO IMPROVE EMORY VILLAGE

By PETER DREY + COMPANY

studies were conducted several times in the 1990s, in an effort to find a rational and equitable way to civilize the Village's traffic chaos and reestablish economic vitality. No consensus could be reached among all of the parties, however.

In early 2000, a new effort at replanning the Village was undertaken sponsored by the Urban Land Institute, Atlanta District Council, and the Georgia Tech Urban Design Studio. Leon Eplan, former Atlanta Commissioner of Planning and Community Development, coordinated the ULI's participation, and Georgia Tech's involvement was guided by Professor Randall Roark. This collaborative sponsored four participatory design charrettes involving Village stakeholders that produced broad concepts for Village revitalization integrating the ideas of urban designers, traffic planners, economic development consultants, historic preservationists and, most importantly, the local stakeholders: community residents, University representatives, businesspeople and land owners.

The steering committee formed to manage the ULI/Georgia Tech charette subsequently formalized its role in managing the Village revitalization, and incorporated in 2001 as the ALLIANCE TO IMPROVE EMORY VILLAGE, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit corporation. The Alliance synthesized the ideas and goals developed at the ULI/Georgia Tech workshops into a concise mission statement:

***“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.”***

With funds provided by multiple sources, AIEV commissioned Peter Drey + Company, with a team of consultants, to prepare a plan addressing the goals of the ULI/Georgia Tech concept plan. This document describes the plan.

**Planning process.** The Plan for Emory Village is founded on a shared conviction among AIEV boardmembers and planning team members that wide public participation in the process is essential to ensure a reasonable and effective revitalization program. Furthermore, this public input helps establish a level of acceptance necessary for future implementation of proposed solutions. Consequently, following the example of the ULI/Georgia Tech effort, two Saturday workshops were conducted early in 2002, attended by all of the team's professional consultants, boardmembers and community representatives, at which input on the goals and components of the plan was solicited. The input from the workshops has been recorded and, as much as possible, incorporated into appropriate places in the plan.

The design team worked to integrate as many of the good ideas proposed at the workshops as possible into a workable framework that also performs well according to the professional standards of each of the disciplines involved in developing the plan. The result of this effort is a plan that advocates innovative traffic planning techniques, substantial steps for remodeling the pedestrian environment to improve safety, accessibility and aesthetics, a strategy to rearrange on-street parking and supplement the present off-street parking with additional parking spaces, proposals for new buildings that will add residential and retail uses to the Village, initiatives to improve Peavine Creek and its tributaries within the study area, and improve the environmental performance of the Village overall.

**Livable Center.** Emory Village was one of Atlanta’s first suburban community centers, and the businesses in the Village have supported the expansion of the University and the Druid Hills neighborhoods in their significant growth years from 1900 to the mid-1970s. Around mid-century, however, urban development trends shifted and began to undermine the prosperity of the Village as growth of the suburbs robbed the older city neighborhoods of residents and money. Only recently has this trend diminished, permitting economic vitality to return to the in-town communities around Emory Village.

Recently, the Atlanta Regional Commission has undertaken a metro-wide program aimed at encouraging *livable centers*—that is, compact, walkable, mixed-use community centers—in the Atlanta region as an alternative to auto-dependent suburbs. Although most of the livable centers identified so far in ARC studies have been in outlying suburbs, Emory Village meets the standards as a livable center and this plan’s goals are consistent with the ARC’s criteria for qualification as an existing livable center. The plan’s recommendations have been developed in line with the ARC policies to permit the Village plan to be grandfathered into the LCI funding process. The goal is to qualify for implementation funding to permit construction of the public space improvements that the plan describes.

Currently, Emory Village is overwhelmed by traffic. North Decatur Road, the main street running through the Village, is an important regional traffic thoroughfare, connecting eastern DeKalb County to Atlanta’s downtown and intown neighborhoods, and providing a gateway to DeKalb County’s largest employment center. The intersection of North Decatur and Oxford Road, the heart of the Village, has become a traffic bottleneck, with long queues during rush hour. Past attempts at adapting the intersection to the ever-increasing traffic volumes has resulted in a Village environment that is hostile to pedestrians. The combined seventeen lanes of the five legged intersection create a sea of asphalt, intimidating those who walk in Emory Village and

encouraging jaywalking. The numerous curb cuts, narrow uneven sidewalks, and poor signalization force walkers into the streets or into their cars.

Finding solutions to these complex traffic and circulation problems is a priority of this project. There is no 'magic pill' to provide a remedy, however. Rather, the Plan recommends a set of incremental improvements that can alleviate vehicular congestion and encourage use of alternative transportation methods through an integrated system of pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit improvements. The design team has investigated several road realignment options, ranging from the minimal to the radical and, from these studies, has developed a design that can be tested in advance and subsequently refined as necessary. To complement the road refinements, the Plan also proposes a new streetscape design with wider sidewalks, better pedestrian signalization, and a more inviting street frontage. This new pedestrian system will be better connected to MARTA and Clifton Transportation Management Association (TMA) buses at new bus stops in the center of the Village. New bicycle lanes will provide bikers with safe routes through the Village. The Village will also be within walking or biking distance from the future commuter rail system planned for the area.

As Emory Village's traffic problems have grown worse, its physical environment has concurrently deteriorated. Although the restaurants, shops, and businesses of the Village provide a wide array of services within a small area, the busy street life that this diversity should support is diminished by fragmentation and deficiencies. The buildings in the Village have become isolated objects along an irregular system of sidewalks. The attractive image of Emory Village from the early and mid 1900s has slowly disappeared, replaced by architecturally and stylistically dissimilar buildings.

This plan envisions a renewed Emory Village that provides a degree of density, diversity, and identity that is fitting for this historic neighborhood center. It is designed to maintain the historic buildings of the Village, and build upon their sense of place through new structures that reflect their scale, organization, and character. They will house a wider range of uses, including residences, shops, and restaurants, all of which will be served by parking facilities designed to be visually and physically unobtrusive. To complement this redeveloped built environment, the Plan proposes that natural features of the environment be reinvigorated as well. Peavine Creek and its tributary will be restored as a park, and views towards the greenscapes of Emory University and the Druid Hills Golf Club will be framed within new Village open spaces.

The users of this new Emory Village will reflect the diversity of the communities that surround Emory Village. Because it is located between Emory University and the Druid Hills neighborhood, and close to the medical

and research facilities in the Clifton Corridor, the Village will attract people from a wide range of age groups, income levels, and ethnicities. As a result, the businesses of the Village will offer an abundance of services, from convenience items for Emory students and staff, to restaurants for business lunchers, to boutique shops for neighborhood residents.

It is these users who are the clients of this project. The AIEV, the community organization formed to direct and oversee Emory Village's revitalization, is made up of the stakeholders in this area -- neighborhood residents, business and property owners, and Emory University representatives. It provides a continuous link between the community and the design team. Moreover, the development of the project has been tailored to maximize community involvement in the design process. The community workshops that have been held, where residents, workers, property owners, Emory staff, and students all have had the chance to voice their questions, concerns, and ideas about Emory Village, provide a model of how the process of implementing the plan can go forward from here.

Community involvement has created a solid plan for the future of Emory Village. It addresses many different, sometimes conflicting, priorities and proposes reasonable solutions that maximize gains while minimizing risks. Most importantly, it is built upon a consensus among the many stakeholders in this important neighborhood, and will extend into the future the productive dialogue fundamental to this plan.

Emory Village's rich context, traditional architecture and strong associations with the adjoining University give it the potential to again become Atlanta's best example of a successful mixed-use community. To reestablish its former role, the Village needs a clear plan for revitalization and a capable management organization that can guide redevelopment. The goal of the Emory Village Revitalization Plan is to restore the Village's vitality and expand its offerings so that it will become a true mixed-use, multi-faceted town center.