

A photograph of a large, ornate brick archway gate. The gate is made of red brick and features a large central arch and two smaller side arches. A person is walking through the central archway. The background shows a street with trees and a clear blue sky.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# OUTSIDE THE GATES



## OUTSIDE THE GATES

### Importance

Oakland Cemetery is in the heart of Atlanta surrounded by communities that are historic and changing. In particular, new development surrounding Oakland is introducing more residents, services, and restaurants/stores. With physical and demographic trends impacting Oakland, there is an opportunity to identify new stakeholders, manage increases in visitation, and influence development. Historic Oakland Foundation (HOF) has an Outside the Gates Committee which monitors and advocates for quality growth and change around the cemetery.

### Existing Conditions

Oakland sits in the northern part of the Grant Park community. It is bounded by two major roadways, an intermodal rail facility, and a MARTA train station with planned Transit Oriented Development. The cemetery is at the terminus of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, an increasingly prominent corridor that has

seen change over time and will be the focus of infrastructure improvements.

Oakland sits at the eastern end of the proposed Capitol Greenway, a linear park between Oakland Cemetery and the Georgia Capitol. The Capitol Greenway vision, developed over 20 years ago, is a part of Special Public Interest 21 (SPI-21) overlay zone that includes additional regulations for floor area ratio, building height, parking, etc. Acquisition of park land is partially complete and remains ongoing.

For years, Memorial Drive was defined by its industrial land uses and architecture, often serving as a boundary between neighborhoods. Prior to the 2008 Recession, there was increasing interest to redevelop the corridor. Oakland Park and The Jane represent two such developments. Beginning in 2013, renewed interest once again came to Memorial Drive. There are now multiple developments near the cemetery that will impact pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic patterns, will yield potentially more visitors to Oakland, and will

further change the urban form of the corridor. Nearby parcels remain in flux, and HOF continues to work with local partners such as MARTA and developers to promote quality development. Other key elements and projects along the corridor include:

- 27 new developments totaling 2,716 residential units and 604,337 sq. feet of commercial space.
- MARTA and Place Properties/HJ Russell are developing the MARTA parking lot. They are working with HOF and the city to create a complementary design that does not detract from the cemetery's beauty.

## OUTSIDE THE GATES

- Students from the Georgia Tech Urban Planning program developed a master plan for the Memorial Drive corridor with support from council member Natalyn Archibong.
- Since the Memorial Drive plan, Central Atlanta Progress is helping support the development of the Memorial Drive Alliance and a potential new Community Improvement District (CID). The CID would be a self-taxing district supporting safety, beautification, and transportation improvements.
- The Atlanta Regional Commission has funded a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grant to finalize the Memorial Drive plan so that projects become eligible for future funding. The Memorial Drive Alliance is the sponsor.
- The City of Atlanta is planning for improvements along Boulevard. This project will improve pedestrian safety with the hope of wider sidewalks and a HAWK (High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk Beacon) signal for pedestrians at Carroll Street.
- The City of Atlanta is implementing a federal earmark grant for streetscapes along Memorial Drive west of the cemetery.
- The Atlanta BeltLine is studying two streetcar expansion routes. The routes are currently in environmental review. One route includes a streetcar coming southbound on Grant Street west of the cemetery and then eastbound on Memorial.
- Park Pride completed a vision plan for the Friends of Capitol Greenway in March of 2017. This plan outlines a cohesive vision for the park. Invest Atlanta and the city are currently working to acquire the remaining parcels.

## OUTSIDE THE GATES



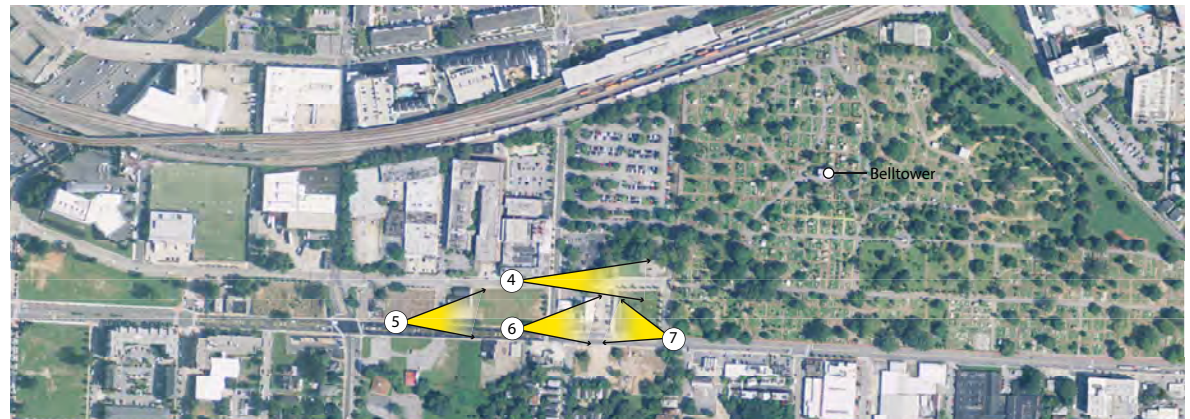
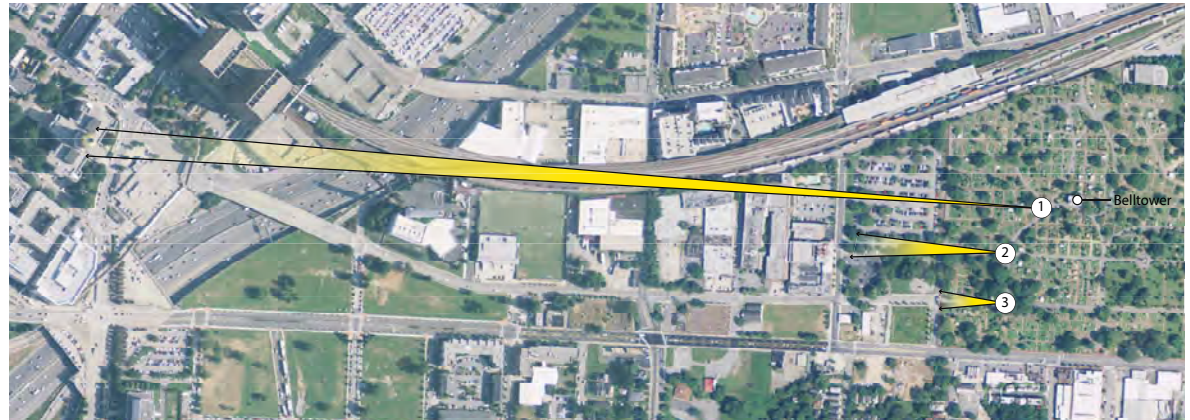
A rendering of the proposed Memorial Park Greenway and major components.

## OUTSIDE THE GATES

### West Gate Design Principles

There are several critical parcels upon which future development would affect the viewshed and entrance to Oakland Cemetery. The Outside the Gates Committee has developed a series of principles outlining the core beliefs for the West Gate area.

1. Maintain west facing viewsheds toward Capitol, which are critical to the integrity and communal value of Oakland Cemetery.
  - Work with Place Properties/HJ Russell to preserve the most valuable viewsheds out of cemetery (view from Margaret Mitchell and Bell Tower).
2. Create a presence for Oakland beyond its west wall.
  - Develop a Visitors Center to greet visitors outside the gate and to reinforce the urban form of Memorial Drive.
  - Investigate the potential to purchase the transmissions shop and convert to the parcel to a park/entrance feature on Memorial Drive.



*Important viewsheds to preserve both into Oakland and west to the Capitol.*

## OUTSIDE THE GATES

3. Make MLK Jr. Drive a multi-modal conduit for cyclists.

- Promote the development of a “complete street” for MLK Jr. Drive, including a multi-use trail on the Capitol Gateway/ south side of MLK Jr. Drive
- Create a pedestrian access on Oakland’s eastern wall.

4. Work with Capital Gateway/Memorial Drive Corridor Alliance to complete Capital Gateway.

- Assert its influence over the eastern end of the Capital Gateway by developing a master plan for the eastern terminus.

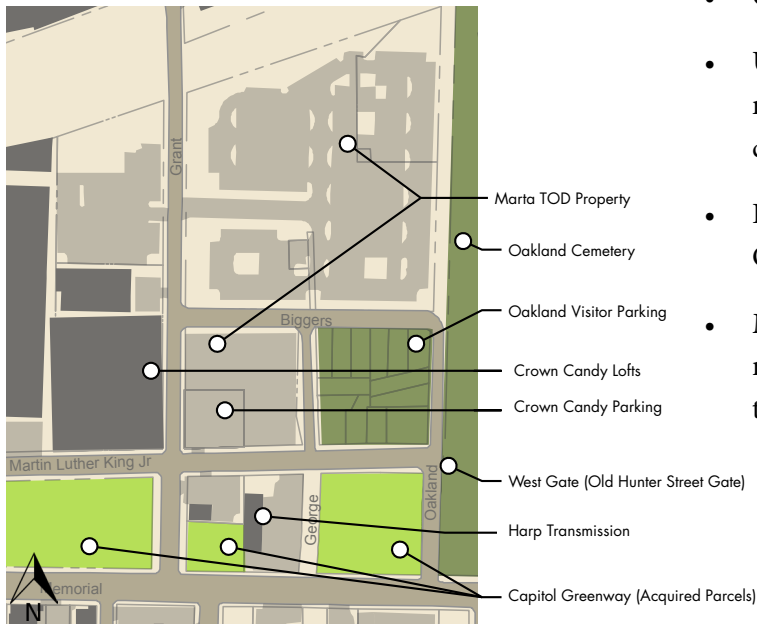
5. Welcome visitors off of Memorial using MLK Jr. Drive as a gateway drive/plaza space.

- Close Oakland Avenue to vehicular traffic.
- Use Grant Street and MLK Jr. Drive as main entrance off Memorial Drive into the cemetery, as opposed to Oakland Avenue.
- Install visible signage to direct visitors into Oakland.
- Maintain parking within a two-block radius of the west gate (manage vehicular traffic within the cemetery).

- Create active/programmed open space outside the West Gate that supports Oakland’s activities.

6. Prioritize pedestrian activity adjacent to the west wall.

- Turn Oakland Avenue into a pedestrian mall.
- Extend the proposed pedestrian plaza to George Street.
- Maintain the configuration of George Street to reinforce the urban street grid.
- Work with Place Properties/HJ Russell, MARTA, and the City of Atlanta to develop an access management plan for vehicles that shifts ingress and egress away from the west wall of Oakland.

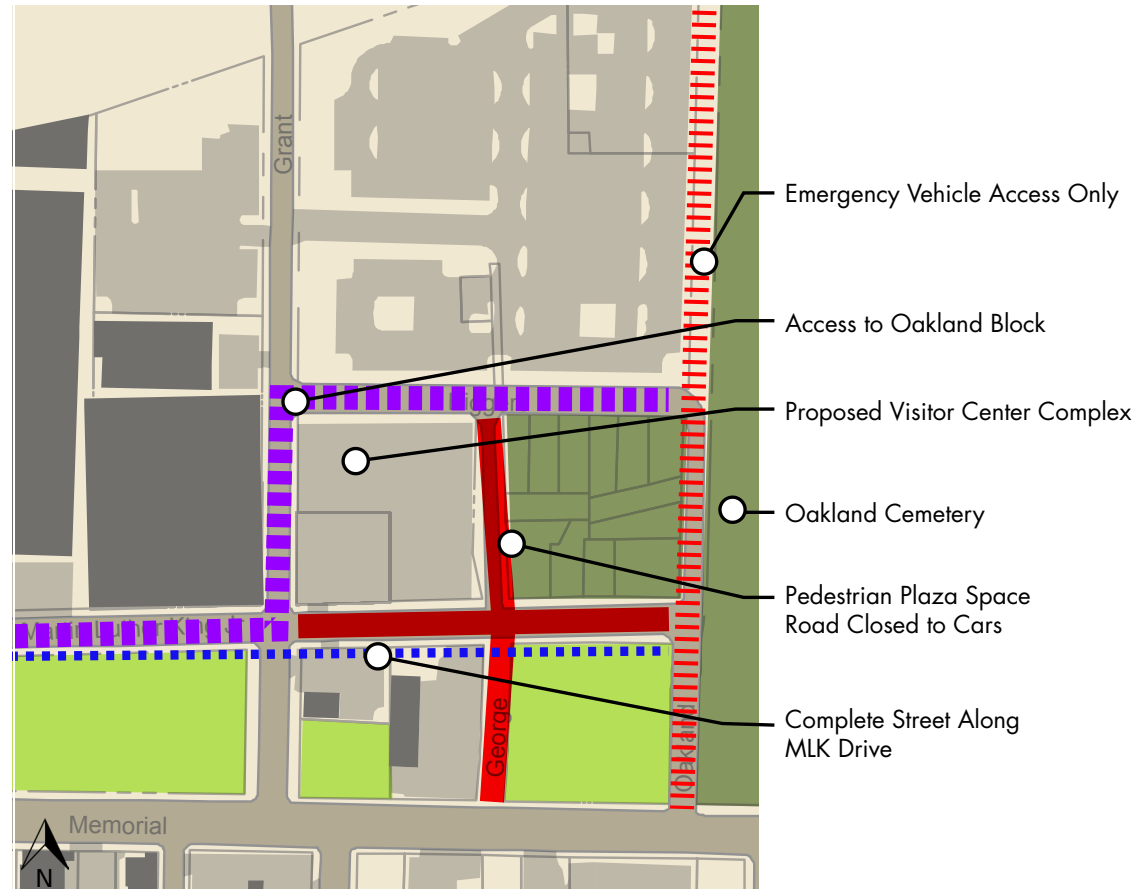


Current ownership and land use near Memorial Drive and Oakland.

## OUTSIDE THE GATES

### Four Block Development

Most critical to preserving the viewshed and visitor experience to Oakland is the four-block area west of the main entrance. Two of the four parcels nearest the cemetery are owned by the city. The other two remain in private ownership, but future development plans remain in flux. The northwest block (owned currently by Crown Candy and Walton) represents an ideal location for a future Visitors Center and parking area. The goal would be to remove cars beyond Grant Street and on Oakland Avenue (except for emergency vehicles) to create a pedestrian-friendly environment and new gateway for the cemetery. The southwest parcel (with the former Harp Transmission building) is part of the Capitol Greenway Plan and should be redeveloped as open space.



*Proposed access changes for vehicles and pedestrians west of the Hunter St gate. Vehicular circulation on MLK Drive (shown in dashed violet) would not extend east of Grant Street. Pedestrian plaza space (shown in red) on George St. and MLK Drive east of Grant would create cohesive space on the four blocks outside the gates.*

## OUTSIDE THE GATES



*A design concept showing one potential Visitors Center layout with plaza and greenspace for gatherings and events. This layout preserves views east as one approaches Oakland's Hunter St. Gate and views west toward the Capitol.*

## OUTSIDE THE GATES



*A new vision for MLK Jr. Drive as a complete street.*

### Martin Luther King Jr. Drive

The City of Atlanta has committed to improving MLK Jr. Drive in the City of Atlanta. Currently plans are underway for the road from downtown to the western boundary of the city. Future plans call for MLK to be a complete street – a road that has equitable opportunities for all modes of transportation. This would help connect downtown to Oakland and beyond, and further reinforce the main gate at Oakland as a landmark viewshed to preserve.

## OUTSIDE THE GATES

### Boulevard

The west side of Boulevard adjacent to Oakland is narrow, offers a poor pedestrian experience, and does not meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required codes in certain areas. HOF should continue to work with the city to widen the sidewalks and improve the Carroll Street/Boulevard and the Memorial Drive/Boulevard intersections. If an East Gate is constructed at the corner of Boulevard and Memorial, wider sidewalks will be needed.



*A design concept showing Boulevard with safer, wide sidewalks, and a pedestrian-friendly entrance and gathering space for visitors from the east.*



*View south at Boulevard and Memorial Drive. The narrow sidewalks with no trees create a poor pedestrian experience, with only utility lines between pedestrians and traffic.*

## OUTSIDE THE GATES

### Memorial Drive

Memorial Drive is a four-lane corridor that is restricted by the Oakland wall on the north side of the road. The limited space results in a four-foot sidewalk adjacent to a corridor where automobile traffic can travel at a high rate of speed. This is a barrier for pedestrians and discourages visitors to Oakland originating from Cabbagetown and elsewhere. Furthermore, there are limited crossing locations that are safe and well-marked, putting pedestrians at risk as they attempt to reach the Old Fair Street Gate across from Six Feed Under. The proposed recommendation is the removal of the northernmost westbound lane, creating a three lane road with middle turn lane and one travel lane in either direction. The pedestrian space would increase to fourteen feet and can be transformed into a sidepath allowing for pedestrian and bicycle travel. This would also create a new image of Oakland's Memorial Drive face. This plan is feasible based on projected travel demand and changing modes in transportation.



*Cross-sections of Memorial Drive showing existing conditions above and proposed changes below. The proposed changes create a safer and more enjoyable pedestrian environment.*

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