

REIMAGINING ACDC TASK FORCE

PROGRAM WORKGROUP PROGRESS REPORT

A synopsis and assessment of the Program Workgroup efforts conducted from August-December 2019 for the Reimagining ACDC Initiative.

March 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Reimagining ACDC Initiative

During May 2019, Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms signed legislation creating a Task Force to reimagine the use of the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) as a vibrant services hub that will restore and strengthen the social and civic life of Atlanta's communities which have been disproportionately harmed by our society's history of over-incarceration and punishment.

The Atlanta City Detention Center, located in the heart of Atlanta at Peachtree Street NW and Memorial Drive SW, is an 11-story, 471,000 square foot active detention and arrest-processing center. The current ACDC facility has the capacity to house approximately 1,300 detainees. However, the average daily population of detainees is currently less than 150 because of Mayor Bottoms' and community-led successful efforts to decriminalize several low-level offenses; launch a pre-arrest diversion initiative; reform municipal cash bail; reduce crime in our city; and end a long-term contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

It is a top priority of Mayor Bottoms to put this underutilized facility to more productive use as a multi-faceted center for wellness and healing, skills-building, economic mobility, and crime prevention for people, families and communities impacted by a history of over-incarceration. By converting this space, the City of Atlanta seeks to invest in people to break the cycle of poverty while at the same time improving public safety practices and opportunities that reduce recidivism and rebuild lives.

The goal is for a fully retrofitted facility to permanently house a diverse set of social service, not-for-profit, recreational and cultural activities. It will also include compatible revenue-generating uses to help make the Center for Equity financially viable and to provide a vibrant, beautiful and welcoming space for the community and the people it will serve. The collective effort to recommend the financial and physical feasibility of converting the ACDC into a Center for Equity, to define the activities within it, and to determine the policy changes needed to support conversion of the facility, is called the Reimagining ACDC Project.

The Task Force

The Reimagining ACDC Task Force is charged with providing recommendations to the Mayor for proposed alternative uses of ACDC, including strategies for the future financial sustainability of any recommended facility and further steps that may be considered for the City to reduce criminal violations that are consistent with public safety. The Task Force is comprised of representatives of local government and 25 residents selected from nominations submitted by the public.

Task Force members divided their work into three key workgroups: Program, Policy, and Building. Workgroups conducted research, brainstormed ideas, and produced preliminary recommendations to inform the work of the larger Task Force. Specifically:

- **The Policy Workgroup** reviewed city ordinances carrying criminal penalties with the objective of recommending amendment or deletion to enhance public safety.
- **The Building Workgroup** analyzed the building capacity for adaptive reuse as a Center for Equity and envisioned design scenarios that could achieve that vision.
- **The Program Workgroup** explored services and activities that could be housed in the building that would best advance well-being consistent with the vision for the Center for Equity.

Robust **community engagement** was conducted concurrently by consultants and staff, including community listening sessions with **25 organizations and agencies** across Atlanta representing a wide span of investment in repurposing the Atlanta City Detention Center and community townhalls reaching **over 400 Atlanta residents**. The data gathered from these sessions greatly informed the Workgroups' work; this engagement and its results are described in the separate *Community Engagement Report*.

This Progress Report

This progress report summarizes the goals of, activities undertaken, and reflections reached by the Program Workgroup between July 2019 and February 2020. The Reimagining ACDC Task Force will continue its work through its final meeting schedule during late April 2020. *The content contained within this report is meant to inform the full Task Force and demonstrate progress achieved to-date*. Finalized recommendations will be provided by May 2020 after the conclusion of the Task Force's legislated remit.

THE PROGRAM WORKGROUP

Goals and Strategies

The Program Workgroup (Workgroup), chaired by Task Force members Bill McGahan of Georgia Works, Marilyn Winn of Women on the Rise, and Bill Hawthorne of the City of Atlanta, was established to explore an array of services and activities that could be housed in the building, which would best advance well-being consistent with the vision of the initiative.

The goals of the Program Workgroup were defined as the following:

1. Define target population(s)
2. Identify program experts and key informants to consult
3. Conduct key informant interviews
4. Generate preliminary programming concepts
5. Explore compatible uses (non-profits, city agencies, private sector, revenue-generating businesses, etc.)
6. Compile top recommendations and present updated programming concepts
7. Generate key recommendations

The Workgroup engaged several strategies to assess these potential services and activities, including:

1. Interviewed local subject matter experts and service providers;
2. Collected inventory on best practice programs and services currently offered to target populations;
3. Summarized needs assessments, research, data, and best practice programs;
4. Identified gaps and opportunities in Atlanta-area program and service offerings;
5. Explored compatible uses; and
6. Formulated preliminary program usage recommendations

These methods and activities produced a diverse set of ambitious programmatic options for the Center for Equity to improve services and supports for vulnerable and disadvantaged

populations, while acknowledging a focus on services for children, youth, and families. Community engagement sessions, town halls, and other activities undertaken by City staff and consulting teams provided further data about the high-priority issue areas and/or services that residents wish to see in a Center for Equity.

The final potential uses for the Center will continue to be refined as greater knowledge about the building, its capacity, and its limitations are further defined. Funding streams and affordability of the service options will play a role in optimizing the space and service impact. The Workgroup believes that the Center can continue to propel the City's public safety efforts forward in a way that enhances community safety and minimizes the collateral harm of arrest and incarceration.

Processes and Data Collection

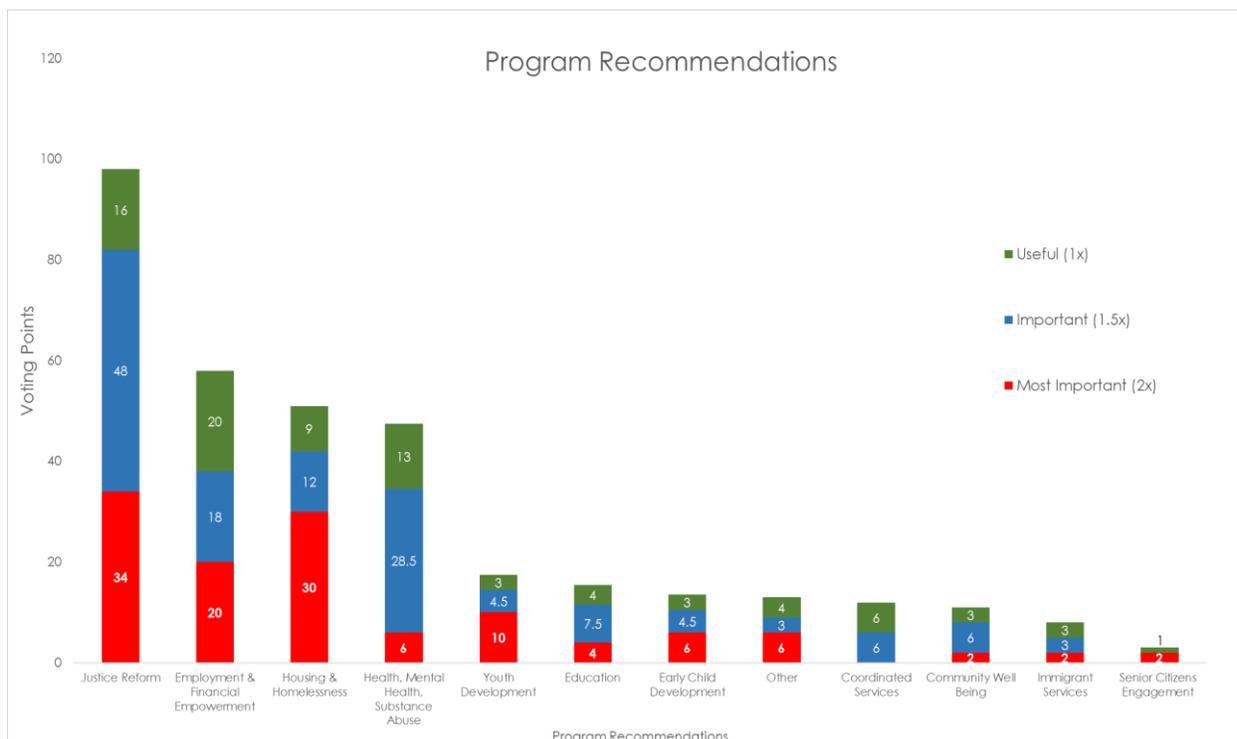
The Program Workgroup met over the course of six months during late 2019 to discuss potential service area recommendations. To build on the community-rooted and evidence-based approaches that birthed the Task Force, the project team utilized a methodical process to narrow thematic program considerations, identify key informants for interviews, and summarize this information for the full Task Force's use.

First, Workgroup members conducted information gathering, thematically grouped this data, and analyzed program categories. To generate a focused set of priorities, the Program Workgroup members reviewed and discussed the newly organized set of program and service options. They then conducted a voting exercise, reviewing the vast number of recommendations and prioritizing the importance of each category through individual voting to identify critical programs and activities.

Second, Workgroup members needed to refine the overarching theme for the reimagined ACDC and its intended program outcomes through a series of community stakeholder discussions. To further build on an evidenced-based approach, Workgroup Leads developed a key informant interview questionnaire designed to deeply understand strengths and gaps in existing services and document the services' effectiveness.

Those results were tabulated and presented to the Workgroup at subsequent meetings, as shown in the following chart.

Figure 1. Program Workgroup Voting Results of Top Program Priorities



Workgroup members decided that the top categories of programs and services were: justice reform, workforce development and employment, financial empowerment, housing, and behavioral health.

Third, the Workgroup brainstormed with local leaders and stakeholders relevant to each of these high-priority categories, and they directed staff and consultants to conduct in-depth, key informant interviews of community stakeholders to provide a comprehensive needs assessment. These interviews provided a more complete sense of the state of practice, service gaps and opportunities in Atlanta. Interviews were completed by Workgroup members, City staff, and consultants to the Task Force. The findings from those interviews were reported to the Workgroup for review and discussion. The reflections shared in this document are rooted in these conversations. More detailed notes of these key informant interviews are contained in the Appendix of this document.

MEETING DATES

The Program Workgroup met to deliberate on these dates:

The Program Workgroup met on:

- August 13, 2019
- September 9, 2019
- September 24, 2019
- November 19, 2019
- December 5, 2019

The full Task Force worked on and/or reviewed programmatic recommendations during meetings on:

- July 16, 2019
- September 10, 2019
- October 29, 2019
- December 10, 2019

Subject matter experts, service providers, and other key stakeholders were invited to participate in informational interviews grouped by topic. These interviews occurred on:

- Behavioral health interviews: September 11 and October 29, 2019
- Housing-related interviews: October 29, 2019
- Justice reform interviews: October 30, 2019
- Homelessness-related interviews: November 19, 2019
- Workforce development and employment-related interviews: November 19, 2019
- Financial empowerment interviews: December 5, 2019

STAKEHOLDERS' REFLECTIONS

Workgroup members found a reassuring consistency in the feedback received from the stakeholder interviews. There was generally great enthusiasm for the proposal to convert the jail into a Center for Equity, and stakeholders believed in its potential to generate a transformative impact on the community.

The overarching desire among most stakeholders was to see the facility used as a multi-service center that could bring a holistic and client-centered approach to the work. Many suggested that the facility would ideally function as a drop-in center, serving a range of health, wellness and well-being needs. They also envisioned a drop-off center for first responders as a service venue providing appropriate alternatives to arrest, hospitalization, or spending a night on the street. In time, the facility could provide further momentum to reversing the path of arrest and incarceration as the only option to respond to behaviors, replacing that with services and supports commensurate to the challenges faced.

Interviewees also considered the context of how the city, county and additional justice agencies address public safety. Their recommendations included an array of alternative service approaches, with attention to maximizing diversions away from punitive justice enforcement for offenses that do not pose a risk to public safety.

The second prevalent theme in their feedback was creating housing opportunities in a range of forms. Be it quality, affordable housing, supportive housing, sobering beds, shelter beds, safe-haven beds, or crisis-intervention beds for people experiencing a behavioral health episode that does not require hospitalization, there was a consistent refrain: Atlanta needs more affordable, safe places for vulnerable people to sleep and live with appropriate supervision and support.

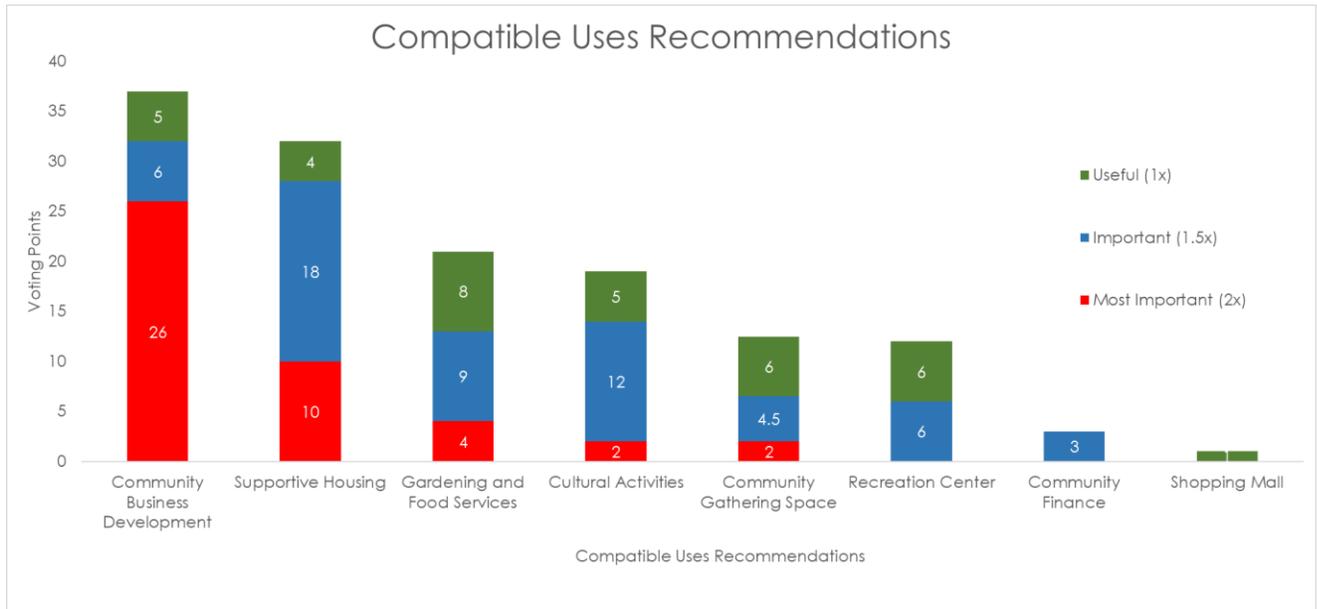
Stakeholders also expressed great excitement about the potential for this facility to become a beacon of community hope and inspiration. They discussed the importance of creating a Center for Equity that could better serve our communities, especially those who have been most directly harmed by practices of mass incarceration and/or from historical disinvestment.

They envisioned creating a space that is bright, cheerful, open and welcoming and offering community spaces of wellness and healing. They discussed providing opportunities for civic engagement and convenings around shared interests, and they desired a facility that emphasizes de-stigmatization of the challenges too-often faced by our most vulnerable communities. Finally, they expressed their desire for the integration of services within a facility oriented toward overall, holistic community health and wellness.

The Task Force recognizes that long-term financial sustainability of this reimagined facility will require also including revenue-generating organizations and services within it. These kinds of revenue-generating activities are defined as **compatible uses**. Interviewees acknowledged that inclusion of these kinds of compatible uses, such as the food service industry, could benefit the project by integrating revenue-producing activities into the building. Stakeholders interviewed also considered the impact these uses would have on long-term sustainability.

Stakeholders identified several compatible uses as “important” or “useful” to include in the Center. The attached chart (Figure 2) indicates the highest-ranked options that were considered. Community Business Development for impacted communities was highly ranked, followed by Supportive Housing, Gardening and Food Services, and Cultural Activities, respectively.

Figure 2. Program Workgroup Voting of Top Compatible Uses



CONCLUSION

Reimagining ACDC Initiative

This report summarizes the great work undertaken by the Workgroup between July 2019 and February 2020. As experts in their respective fields, Workgroup members assessed both the depth and breadth of service offerings throughout the Atlanta area and identified their highest-priority programmatic options for the reimagined ACDC: justice reform, workforce development and employment, financial empowerment, housing, and behavioral health. Interviews with subject matter experts and service providers further refined the Workgroup's understanding of these priorities and the local opportunities and existing gaps within each.

These priorities, too, were reflected in the results of the robust, concurrent community engagement process that is summarized in a separate report. More than 400 residents were engaged during that process, and they, too, identified these topics as some of their highest priorities.

Next Steps

The Reimagining ACDC Task Force will continue its work through its final meeting schedule during late April 2020. Early design scenarios will be presented for the Task Force's consideration in late February 2020. During March and April, Workgroup members will review these scenarios with their fellow Task Force members and refine the included programmatic recommendations and compatible uses as needed. The Task Force's finalized design recommendations will be submitted to the Mayor in May 2020. At this point, Phase One of the Reimagining ACDC project -- preliminary feasibility analysis and conceptual design -- will be complete, and Phase Two, more detailed operational and feasibility analyses, will begin.

Questions?

If you have questions about any information contained within this report or about the Reimagining ACDC initiative, please contact the Reimagining ACDC team at reimaginingacdc@atlantaga.gov.