

HILL COMMUNITY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

A Guide for Development, Future
Infrastructure and Community Services
within the Hill Community Neighborhood.

Authored by the City of Duluth, Department of Planning
& Development with acknowledgement and
appreciation to the residents of the Hill Community.

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BACKGROUND & HISTORY



The Neighborhood

The area known as the Hill Community is an established mostly residential neighborhood with some structures dating back to as far as 1878. Located near the heart of downtown Duluth and on Buford Highway it has been a long standing integral part of the City of Duluth for generations. When previous capital improvement plans were made in the area and when it was defined by the *Duluth 2030* Character Area component, the neighborhood boundaries were established to along the outer edge of and contain all parcels fronting certain streets. These streets are Church Street, Washington Street, Donaville Street, Dogwood Street, Jones Street and Apartment Drive. Beyond the described properties, certain properties bordering the stated streets yet fronting Buford Highway are also included in the neighborhood.

The Hill Community is made up of 54 housing units that are 46% owner occupied. The average age of all structures in the neighborhood is 40.5 years. That number is somewhat skewed by the presence of two historical structures (Mt. Ararat Church and the Strickland House) that pre-date the majority of neighborhood structures by a significant amount. The average household size in the neighborhood is 2.55 persons with an average time at residence of 29.2 years.

Background

The Hill Community has many capital improvement projects either completed or proposed. These include the Church Street drainage, road and sidewalk project completed in 2008 and similar proposed improvements for Dogwood, Donaville, and Jones Streets. These projects will provide safer sidewalks for pedestrian use and wider roads to help vehicular flow and improve safety. The proximity of the neighborhood means it is included in many of the long range plans Duluth has for its city. It is a part of the Buford Highway Corridor study, the Duluth 2030 plan, the Parks Master Plan, and the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) study. Sample projects under consideration include a newly renovated and improved Church Street Park and the extension of Dogwood Street that would connect the neighborhood to Duluth Highway (Hwy. 120) as specified in the 2011 Update to the LCI Plan.

PURPOSE & PROCESS



Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish a plan upon which the community will grow, develop and improve in the coming years. The plan establishes a boundary for the neighborhood and illustrates its history. The plan also describes the character of the neighborhood through demographics, public opinion and qualitative factors. The document then sets forth goals that have been identified by the residents and stakeholders of the neighborhood. The intent of the planning process is for a set of projects and other initiatives to be developed that might further the goals identified within the plan.

Three (3) public meetings were held in the neighborhood during 2011, on May 26, August 18 and November 3. The first two meetings were a combination of information presentation and public workshops. The final meeting in November was a presentation of this plan document.

Relationship to Comprehensive Plan

The Community Agenda of the *Duluth 2030* Comprehensive Plan sets forth a guide for the future development and redevelopment of and in the City of Duluth over a long range planning horizon of twenty (20) years. As a part of this guide, the document describes certain character areas that are meant to define distinct areas of the city and aid in the implementation of the citywide vision that was established as a part of the comprehensive plan community visioning process. During this process, the City was divided into different areas by the land development patterns that had occurred and were likely to occur in each area. These areas are known as Character Areas in the Comprehensive Plan.

The Hill Community Neighborhood is identified in this document as being one of the City's Targeted Community Development Character Areas. This character area is defined as corresponding with Duluth's originally settled residential blocks outside of the historic town center. The residential nature and established infrastructure patterns make the Targeted Community Development Character Areas prime for Neighborhood Planning efforts.

PURPOSE & PROCESS



The neighborhood planning process began in May of 2011 when City of Duluth staff began preliminary work and research on the Hill Community Neighborhood. The first community workshop for the preparation of this plan was held on May 26, 2011 and hosted by Friendship Baptist Church. This was the first of three community workshops and meetings to be held throughout the preparation of the neighborhood plan.

This meeting was attended by nineteen (19) people and functioned as a kick-off and introduction to the process as well as a workshop to gather preliminary information necessary for beginning the planning process.



The second of the neighborhood planning workshops was held on August 18, 2011. This meeting drew thirty (30) participants and was also held within the community at Friendship Baptist Church. This workshop focused on reporting the results of the May 26 workshop and the staff research, data and findings.

The neighborhood was also presented with a list of projects and initiatives that residents and stakeholders were asked to place a priority on. Further and detailed information can be found in the implementation section of this report.



STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

A common tool to assist in guiding communities through the identification of the unique features and elements and problems facing the area is a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis defines a community's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats so that goals for action may be drafted. This tool was used with great success at the first public workshop held in May 2011. The results of this community analysis are shown in Figure 1.

STRENGTHS

Stability
Churches
Church Street Park
Location of Neighborhood
History
Active Neighbors who Know Each Other

WEAKNESSES

Lack of Sewer Service
Perception (Internal & External)
Poor Transportation Infrastructure
Poor Access From Major Roads
Lack of Sufficient Public Lighting
Insufficient/Ineffective Stormwater Infrastructure

OPPORTUNITIES

Church Street Park (Opportunity to Upgrade)
New/Infill Housing
Introduction of Sewer Service
Outreach of Churches
Grant Funds
History / Mr. Ararat Church Site

THREATS

Vacant & Substandard Buildings
Lack of Connectivity
Drug Activity
Lack of Sewer Service
Condition of Infrastructure

Figure 1, Results of SWAT analysis.

GOALS



At the workshop meeting held on May 26, 2011, the community members and stakeholders who were present were asked to record the neighborhood's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The purpose of this activity was to create an inventory of issues and assets that the participants could then use to create a master list of overall goals for the community.

The group of participants was split into two small working groups. Each group was given the task of formulating a list of goals for the neighborhood. The lists of goals that were obtained were consolidated into a master list of identified goals for the Hill Area Neighborhood. That list is shown in Figure 2.

GOALS (UNRANKED)

- Improve and Create New Major Road Connections
- Create Wider Roads with Improved Surfacing
- Connect the Neighborhood to Sewer Service
- Improve Street Lighting in the Neighborhood
- Install More Sidewalks
- Improve Stormwater Infrastructure
- Increase Police Presence in the Neighborhood
- Create New and Improve Existing Parks & Public Space
- Improve the Quality of Life and Housing in the Neighborhood
- Create an Entryway / Gateway Feature

Figure 2, Unranked, Consolidated List of Goals.

IMPLEMENTATION



The next step in the planning process was to develop strategies for implementation of the community’s goals. Of the ten (10) goals drafted by the community, it was determined that eight (8) of these goals could be addressed through capital projects and two (2) of the goals implemented through City initiatives.

A project list was created and the community was engaged in a visual preference activity during the second public workshop held on August 18, 2011. The community was presented with a project preference map on which each participant placed three green dots on his or her highest priority projects. The community was also presented with a second map, the Target Assistance Areas map. Each participant was given two blue and two yellow dots with the instructions to place each blue dot on the area of the neighborhood perceived to be most in need of police assistance and to place each yellow dot on the area of the neighborhood where he or she had observed the most significant stormwater drainage issues.

The list of implementation projects is shown in Figure 3. Figure 4, on the following page, shows the ranked listing of goals obtained from the project preference map activity. Figure 5, also on the next page, shows the results of the Target Assistance Areas map activity.

Goal	Implementation
Improve and Create New Major Road Connections	Dogwood Street Extension (From 10-Year LCI Update)
Create Wider Roads with Improved Surfacing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church St Phase II Improvements ▪ Washington Street Improvements ▪ Donaville Street Phase III Improvements ▪ Apartment Drive Improvements
Connect the Neighborhood to Sewer Service	Install and Connect Sewer in the Hill Area
Improve Street Lighting in the Neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Donaville Street Lighting Additions/Improvements ▪ Washington Street Lighting Additions/Improvements
Install More Sidewalks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church St Phase II Improvements ▪ Washington Street Improvements ▪ Donaville Street Phase III Improvements ▪ Apartment Drive Improvements
Improve Stormwater Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church St Phase II Improvements ▪ Washington Street Improvements ▪ Donaville Street Phase III Improvements ▪ Apartment Drive Improvements
Increase Police Presence in the Neighborhood	Identify and Increase Patrols for Issue Areas
Create New and Improve Existing Parks and Public Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church Street Park Master Plan Implementation ▪ Creation of Community Space at Mt. Ararat Site
Improve the Quality of Life and Housing the Neighborhood	Individual, project level CDBG Grants.
Create an Entryway Feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church Street Entryway ▪ Donaville Street Entryway ▪ Jones Street Entryway ▪ Dogwood Street Entryway

Figure 3, Implementation Projects linked with Goals.

IMPLEMENTATION



Project	Votes	Rank
Church Street Park Improvements	15	1
Washington Street Phase I	10	T2
Washington Street Phase II	10	T2
Church Street Phase II	7	T4
Donaville Street Phase III	7	T4
Increased Street Lighting	4	6
Apartment Street	3	T7
Gateway Features	3	T7
Dogwood Street Extension	2	9
Sewer Service Connections	1	10
Mt. Ararat Community Space	0	11

Figure 4, Ranked Implementation Projects (By Vote Results)



Figure 5, Target Assistance Areas Activity Results



IMPLEMENTATION | 1 Sewer Service Connections

Since the first neighborhood meeting in this planning process, sewer connections for the neighborhood have come up quite often in all types of elements ranging from weaknesses to opportunities.

Even though the goal and related implementation project did not score as a high priority during voting at the August workshop, the overwhelming opinion of the residents present at the November community meeting was that the installation of sewer service was the most important goal to the vitality of the community. Therefore, this goal is to be given top priority and future eligible funds that are available to the neighborhood should be directed toward its implementation.

This goal was presented at the second community workshop along with financial data regarding the cost to the City and the cost to each property owner within the neighborhood who would be connected to the Gwinnett County Sewer System. Based upon the neighborhood's interest, the City approached the Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources (GDWR) regarding feasibility and the cost of sewer installation. The total cost to design and install sewer for the 28 properties identified by GDWR was quoted at \$1,816,587.49. Of this amount, 2/3 (\$1,211,058.32) would be paid by the GDWR and 1/3 (\$605,529.16) would be the responsibility of the City of Duluth. In addition, there is a connection fee of roughly \$4,200 that would be assessed to each property owner. The connection fee can be repayable over 10 years at 5% interest and added to each water/sewer bill. This would come out to roughly a \$45 / month expense to each property owner in the neighborhood. In addition, 70% of the property owners within the potential service area must sign a petition for service.

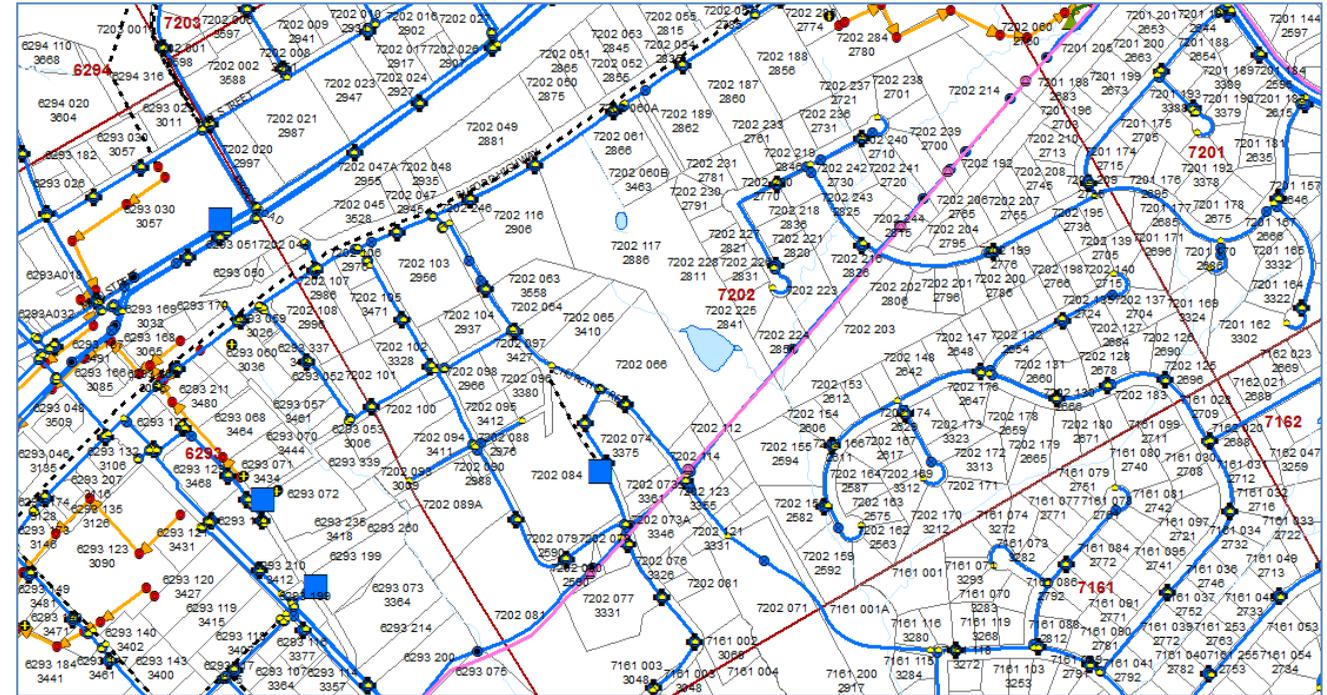


Figure 6, Existing Water (Blue) & Sewer (Orange) Lines in

IMPLEMENTATION | 2 Church Street Park Improvements

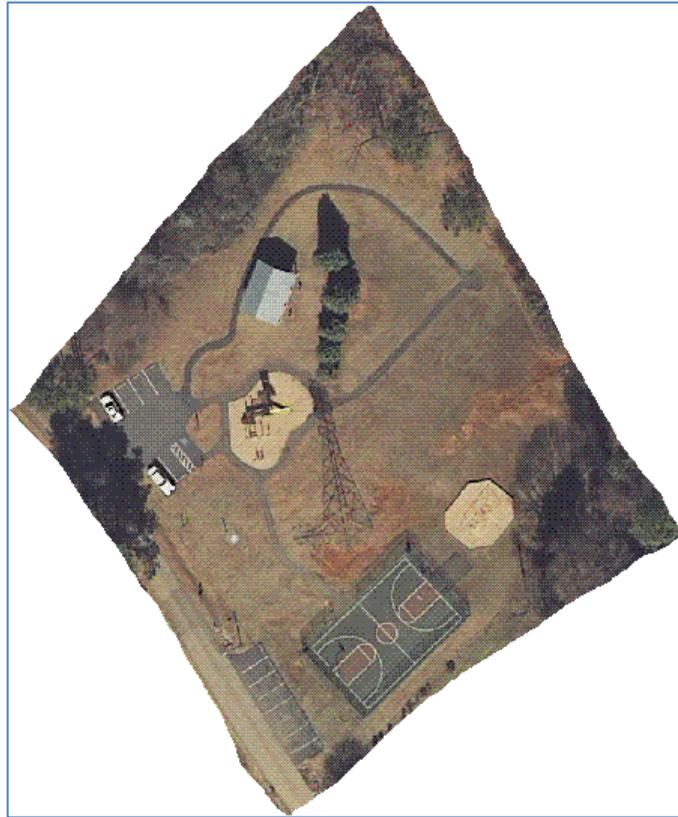


Figure 7, Church Street Park Existing Conditions

Figure 7 above shows the current facilities in the Church Street Park. Residents cited the need for plumbing (bathrooms, water fountain), better maintenance and more picnic/pavilions facilities. While the Church Street Park received the largest number of votes during the initial project preference activity, after sanitary sewer service was established as the top priority, the park is now the second highest priority project for the neighborhood. Park improvements are generally funded through SPLOST allocations.



Figure 8, Church Street Park Master Plan

Figure 8 above is a graphic excerpt from the City's 2007 Parks Master Plan. It became apparent during the community workshops held with the neighborhood that this plan may not reflect the current needs and desires of the neighborhood. In order to implement park improvements, the neighborhood should, under city guidance, form a Park Improvement Committee to work with the City's Parks and Recreation Board toward creating an updated, detailed park plan for Church Street Park.

IMPLEMENTATION | Street Improvements

One of the neighborhood's greatest problem areas has long been rooted in the transportation network that is present. Of the streets serving the Hill Community, none are entirely up to modern day transportation design standards. Portions of Church Street and Washington Street have been improved by the City and funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds. Further street improvements are currently in the design phase and slated for construction in 2012. The list below shows the streets in the Hill Community and their improvement status:

Improvements Completed

- Church Street (Buford Highway to Washington)
- Washington Street (Partial)

Improvements in Design / 2012 Construction

- Donaville Street (Buford Highway to Apartment Drive)
- Jones Street
- Dogwood Street

Improvements Identified in this Plan

- Washington Street (Remainder)
- Donaville Street (Apartment Drive to Washington Street)
- Apartment Drive

All completed and planned street improvements call for standardizing the street widths and surfacing, installation of sidewalks and improvement of the stormwater drainage system. Figure 9 provides an overview of street improvements in the Hill Community Neighborhood.

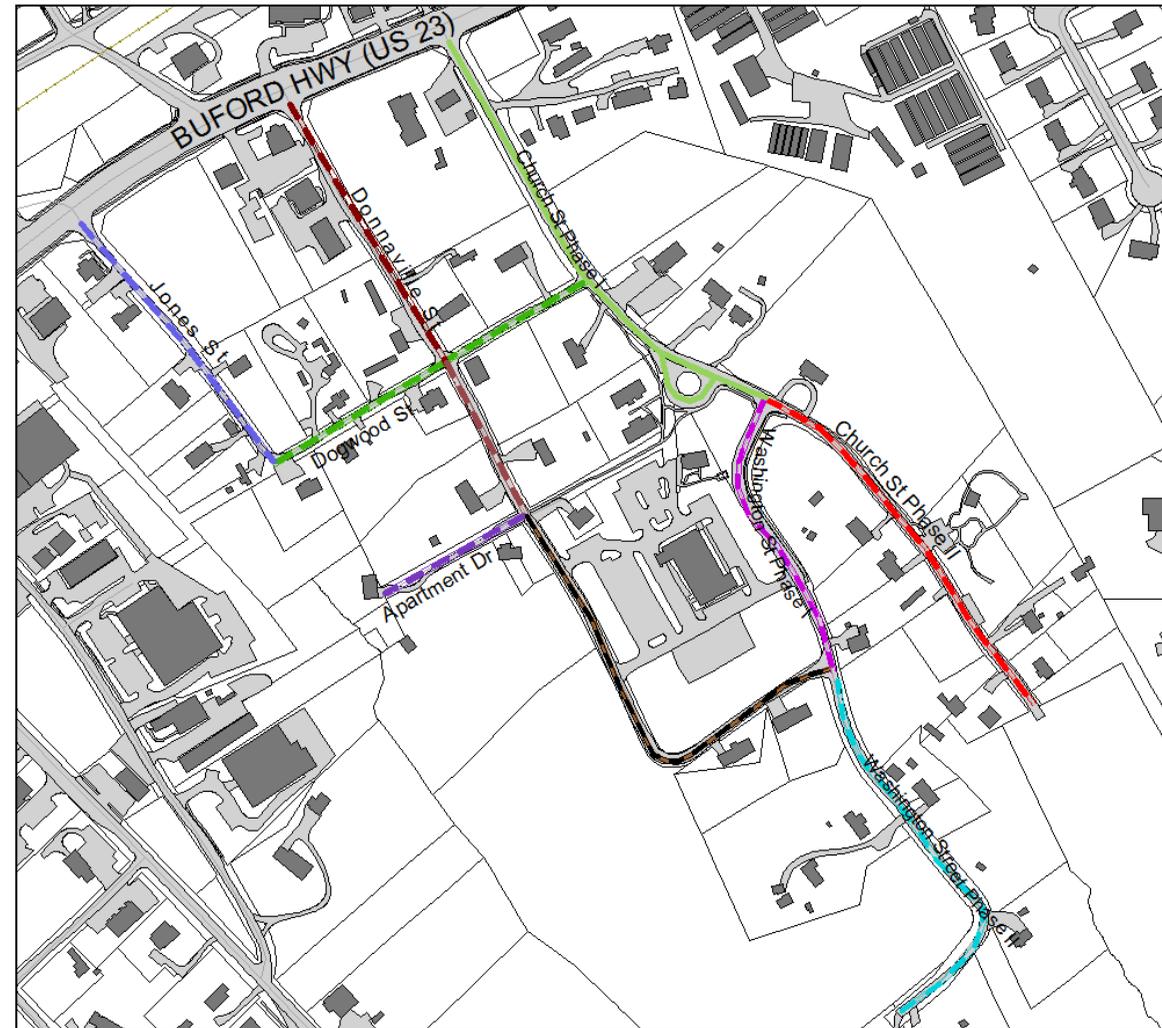


Figure 9, Street Improvement Projects Overview

IMPLEMENTATION | 3 Washington Street Improvements

Washington Street runs from its intersection with Church Street southeast to a point where it terminates as a dead-end street. Washington Street serves predominantly residential land uses but also serves as major frontage and an access point for Friendship Baptist Church.

The Washington Street Improvements project scored very highly during the project preference workshop activity. As the aerial image on this page shows, (Figure 10) much of the street's surfacing and sidewalks have been improved through a combination of work done under CDBG funded improvement projects and development activity at Friendship Baptist Church. As Figure 9 (on the previous page) shows, the Washington Street project is divided into two phases. Much of Phase I has been completed from a surfacing and pedestrian mobility standpoint, but further analysis of the stormwater drainage situation on this phase must now be conducted.

When correlated with the results of the Target Assistance Areas activity (refer to pages 8-9), it appears that the stormwater management along Phase I of this project may be the primary cause for the high score and desired high priority on the pursuance of this project. It should be noted that Friendship Baptist Church is currently in the process of obtaining permits to expand the existing church facilities along Washington Street. Inherent in this permitting process will be the addition of new stormwater detention and improvement of existing facilities. This will be taken into consideration when analyzing stormwater infrastructure in the area. Phase II of the project has not been designed or funded, but the neighborhood has placed a high priority on this project. Further work on this project may be funded through CDBG applications and continue the work begun with Church Street and ongoing with Donaville, Jones and Dogwood Streets.



Figure 10, Washington Street

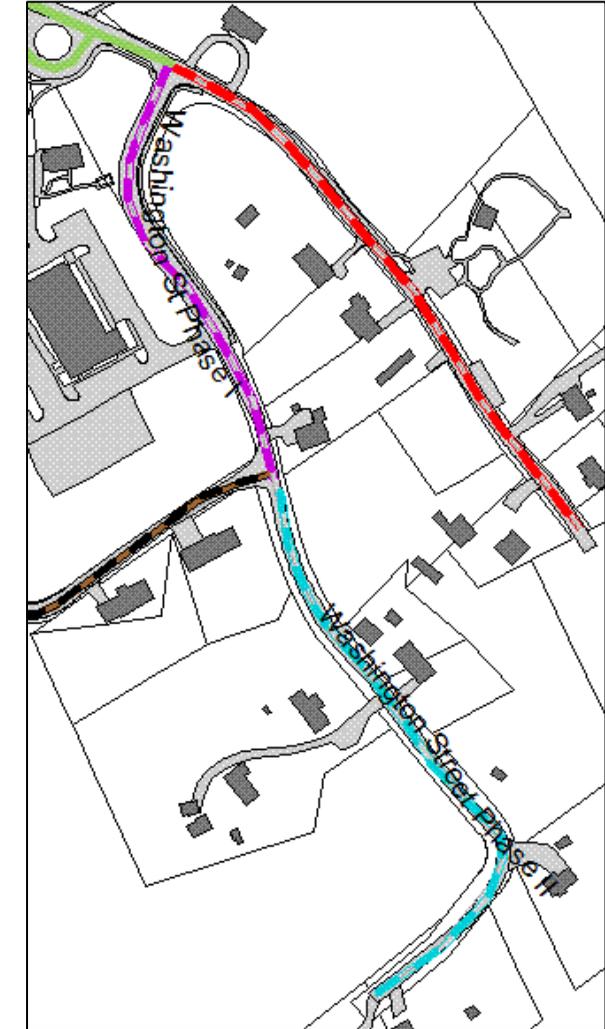


Figure 11, Washington Street, Improvement Plan

IMPLEMENTATION | 4 Church Street Improvements



Church Street runs from its intersection with Buford Highway southeast to a point where it terminates as a dead-end street. Church Street serves predominantly residential land uses but also serves as major frontage and an access point for Mr. Carmel and Friendship Baptist Churches as well as the Church Street Park.

The Church Street Phase II Improvement project received the same score as the Donaville Street Phase III improvement on the project preference activity. As the aerial image in Figure 13 shows, much of the street's surfacing and sidewalks have been improved through a combination of work done under CDBG funded improvement projects and development activity at Friendship Baptist Church. Phase one of the Church Street Improvement project was completed in 2009 and added sidewalks, proper surfacing and improved stormwater facilities to the street. Further work on this project may be funded through future CDBG applications and would continue the work begun with Church Street and ongoing with Donaville, Jones and Dogwood Streets.

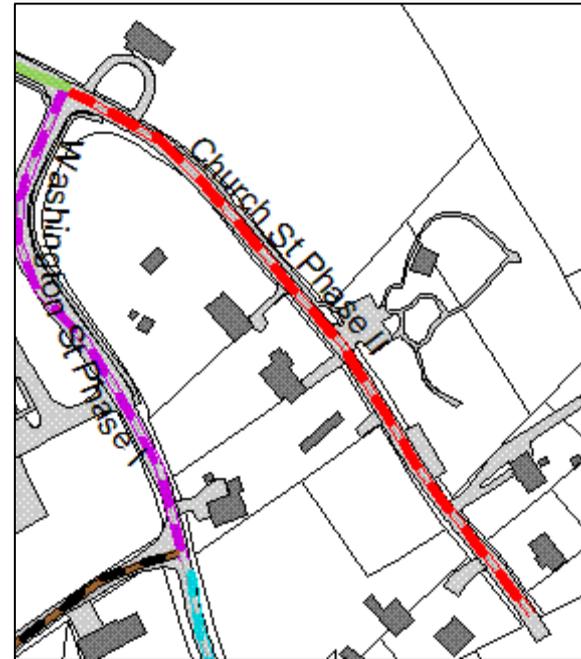


Figure 12, Church Street, Phase II



Figure 13, Church Street, Phase II

IMPLEMENTATION | 5 Donaville Street Improvements

Donaville Street runs from its intersection with Buford Highway southeast and then west to a point where it intersects Washington Street. Donaville Street serves predominantly residential land uses but also serves as major frontage and an access point for Friendship Baptist Church.

Phases I and II of the Donaville Street Project are currently financed for construction through the Community Development Block Grant program. These two phases, which run from Buford Highway to Apartment Drive collectively, are in the design phase and are to begin construction in 6-8 months. Phase III of Donaville Street shown in Figure 14, is the phase being identified by this goal and implementation project.

Further work on this project may be funded through future CDBG applications and would continue the work begun with Church Street and ongoing with Donaville, Jones and Dogwood Streets

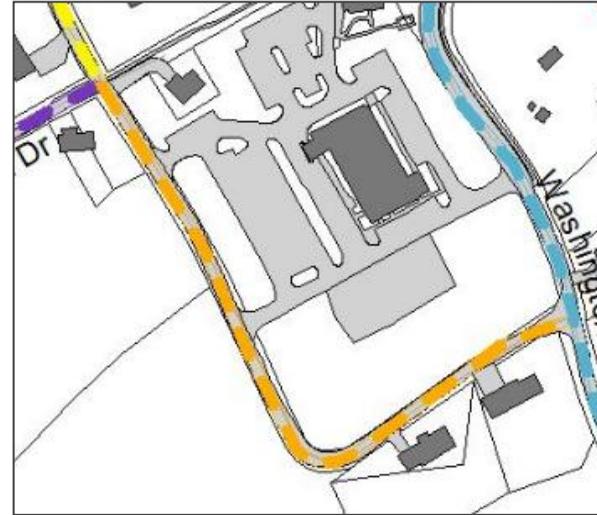


Figure 14, Donaville Street, Phase III



Figure 15, Donaville Street, Phase III

IMPLEMENTATION | 6 Increased Street Lighting



During the initial public workshop, a lack of sufficient public lighting was identified as a weakness of the area. Subsequently, improved street lighting was formulated as a goal and implementation project. Through further study of the lighting conditions of the area, key areas lacking sufficient lighting were identified along Donaville Street and Washington Street. A map of all street lighting fixtures can be seen in Figure 16.

The Washington Street area receives a substantial amount of supplemental lighting from the fronting Friendship Baptist Church and its associated parking areas. City staff met with representatives from Georgia Power to discuss current lighting and opportunities for improvement. It was determined that the area most devoid of public lighting (Donaville Street, Buford Highway to Dogwood Street) can and will be improved in conjunction with the Donaville Street improvement project that is to begin construction in spring of 2012.



Figure 16, Street Lighting Fixtures in the Neighborhood

IMPLEMENTATION | 7 Apartment Drive Improvements

Apartment Drive runs from its intersection with Donaville Street southwest to its terminus. The road currently serves two residences.

It is planned that some intersection improvements will benefit Apartment Drive when they are installed as a part of the Donaville Street project, Phases I and II.

Further work on this project, including surfacing and stormwater analysis and/or improvement may be funded through future CDBG applications to continue the work begun with Church Street and ongoing with Donaville, Jones and Dogwood Streets

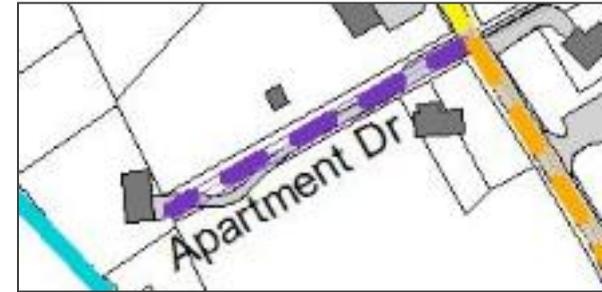


Figure 17, Apartment Drive, Street Improvement Plan



Figure 18, Apartment Drive, Aerial View

IMPLEMENTATION | 8 Gateway Features



Figure 19, Examples of Gateway Features

Gateway features ranging from identifying signage to unique landscaping installations could enhance the community and further promote the sense of continuity in the area. When this implementation project was presented to the community, it was shown as an installation at community entrances (as shown in figure 20):

- Church Street & Buford Highway
- Donaville Street & Buford Highway
- Jones Street & Buford Highway
- Dogwood Extension & Neighborhood Boundary

This project received three (3) votes during the project preference activity. Therefore, the project is ranked eighth among all implementation projects. However, the installation of gateway features could be done incrementally or only at some suggested locations and at a much lower cost than some of the more highly ranked projects. Based upon this, it is recommended to explore the installation of said features when funding becomes available.

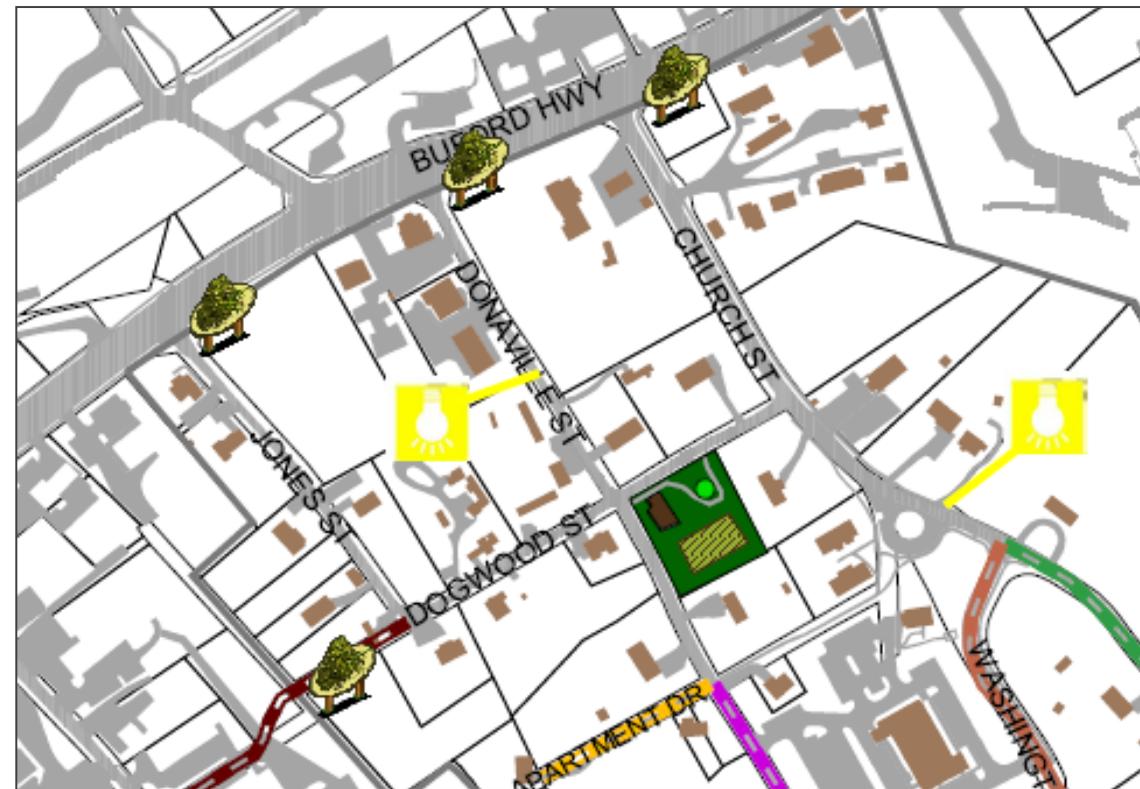


Figure 20, Proposed Gateway Feature Locations

IMPLEMENTATION | 9 Dogwood Street Extension

The Dogwood Street Extension is a project that was initially conceived during the City's 10-year Update to the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Plan completed in 2011. During the Hill Community planning process, improving and creating new major road connections was adopted as a community goal. With the idea for the Dogwood Street Extension already conceptualized, it was a natural choice for an implementation project.

As can be seen in Figure 22, the Dogwood Street Extension would create a new section of road from the current intersection of Dogwood Street and Jones Street, across Howell Street and connecting the neighborhood to Highway 120 (Duluth Highway). By this, the project would create a new major road connection and an additional point of ingress and egress for the neighborhood. As a project identified in the LCI plan, funding would be available through the LCI program. This project received two (2) votes during the project preference activity and a project ranking of 9th among other projects identified in the plan. However, implementation could occur sooner as a unique funding source could be utilized and could occur during the implementation of the LCI plan itself.



Figure 21, From 10-Year LCI Update, Probable Street Section



Figure 22, Proposed Route of Dogwood Extension

Mt. Ararat Church is the oldest building within the neighborhood. The 1,664 square foot church building was constructed in 1878 and is no longer in active use. The structure represents an important historical element to the neighborhood. During the planning process, it was discovered that community members care for the lot, maintain a garden on site and often use the site for gatherings.

Based upon the current utilization and the historical and social importance of the site, it was thought that the exploration of implementing this site as a an additional community space for the neighborhood would be an effective way to implement the Create New and Improve Existing Parks and Public Facilities goal. The site is privately owned and any such effort would require city or community ownership. This implementation project idea received no votes during the project preference activity but remains in the plan as the 10th ranked implementation goal.



Figure 24, Conceptual Site Plan, Mt. Ararat Community Space



Figure 23, Mt. Ararat Church Building

Two (2) goals were formulated throughout this planning process that were recognized as important but are not tied to any single implementation project. Both of those goals were realized as a result of the Target Assistance Areas activity (Figure 25) conducted at the August community workshop. The goals are as follows:

Increase Police Presence in the Neighborhood

The concentration of blue dots shown in Figure 25 gives a clear illustration of where the neighborhood feels that an increased police presence is necessary. City of Duluth Planning Staff will advise the Police Department to increase patrols to the end of Church Street.

Improve Stormwater Infrastructure

The yellow dots shown in Figure 25 illustrate where the residents of the neighborhood perceive stormwater issues. Most of these are tied to in progress or planned street improvement projects. When these projects are completed, the stormwater conditions will be improved. The concentration of yellow dots along Washington Street will be improved as the Friendship Baptist Church completes the implementation of its master plan, which includes improved stormwater facilities.



Figure 25, Target Assistance Areas-Results

IMPLEMENTATION | Neighborhood Work Program



Description	Implementation Time Frame	Possible Funding Sources
Sewer Service Connections	Short Term	CDBG, General Fund, County Financial Assistance
Church Street Park Improvements	2012 (Committee & Planning)	SPLOST, CDBG
Washington Street Improvements	2013-2014	CDBG, SPLOST
Church Street Phase II Improvements	2015-2016	CDBG, SPLOST
Donaville Street Phase III Improvements	2017-2018	CDBG, SPLOST
Increased Street Lighting	2012	CDBG, General Fund
Apartment Drive Improvements	2019-2020	CDBG, SPLOST
Gateway Features	Long Term	Not Yet Identified
Dogwood Street Extension	Long Term	LCI, SPLOST
Mt. Ararat Community Space	Long Term	Not Yet Identified

CONCLUSIONS



Summary

In conclusion, the Hill Community is a viable and culture-rich neighborhood within the vibrant City of Duluth. The neighborhood is a unique community composed of long-time residents who have a great stake in the future of the Hill. Many of the goals established in this plan are aimed at adding a level of vibrancy to the study area as can be seen in many other areas of the City. Several of the goals established in this plan focus on promoting the economic well-being of the neighborhood while others aim to provide a level of infrastructure and safety that will aid the residents and further establish the Hill Community as an integral part of the City of Duluth. In order to do so, steps must be taken to begin the implementation of this plan.

Next Steps

The Neighborhood Work Program found on page 22 of this report serves as a road map for what will be done and generally when it will be done. Moving forward, the next logical steps in the neighborhood planning process would begin with intensive investigation into different routes of funding that may aid in the installation of sewer in the neighborhood. Realization of this goal will require a level of coordination between the City of Duluth and Gwinnett County in order to clarify all costs involved and all options currently available. In addition, a Church Street Park committee has been proposed. At least one member of the community is already scheduled to meet with the City's Parks & Recreation Department to begin a dialogue about the appropriate development of Church Street Park. It is also recommended that the City of Duluth planning staff and the residents and stakeholders of the Hill Community engage in a plan update meeting at least annually to report on implementation. With the above mentioned next steps and the currently in-progress road, sidewalk and drainage improvements, it is clear that steps are already being taken to implement some elements of this plan. As time progresses and more implementation steps are taken, the partnership of the residents of the Hill Community and the City of Duluth can improve the neighborhood and ensure its viability for years to come.