

VHCA PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION REPORT

PROJECT: Ponce and Ponce Redevelopment

Formal Neighborhood and VHCA Engagements

All presentations found on VaHi.org

- March 1, 2023- neighborhood Zoom presentation
- February 13, 2023- VHCA Board presentation
- January 9, 2023- VHCA Board presentation
- December 14, 2022- neighborhood presentation at VaHi Church
- November 16, 2022- neighborhood presentation at VaHi Church
- November 7, 2022- cocktails and conversation at Bookhouse
- November 3, 2022- neighborhood Zoom presentation
- October 15, 2022- coffee and conversation in a St Charles neighbor's yard
- September 22, 2022- neighborhood Zoom presentation

Project Vocabulary

ABI = Atlanta Beltline Inc., the administrative nonprofit that designs, administers, & maintains the trail, its entry points, etc.

Beltline = most often refers to the trail itself, but can mean the organization (ABI, just above) that runs it. ABI is the group and Beltline is the trail, but in media and popular usage, "Beltline" can mean either.

Beltline Overlay (also 'BL/O') = a formally designated half-mile-side stretch of land paralleling the trail on both sides. A series of public conditions apply to most developments in this area.

Highlands, or 'the Highlands' - a region of Scotland famous for pine forests & taiga mountains. Reportedly a lovely place to visit. However, unless you reside northwest of Loch Lomond surrounded by sheep, you do not "live in the Highlands."

ADoT = The Atlanta Department of Transportation that governs the city's traffic. In the city lexicon: ATLDOT; to everyone else: ADoT

Ponce = Ponce de Leon Avenue; the actual road itself. (But nothing else named Ponce)

Ponce Place - Ponce Place, which bisects the project near Ponce and runs northward to Virginia Ave NE, where the road's name changes to Park Drive. (It leads to Piedmont Park. For 100 years, the home of an APS school; see 'VHE', below.)

Ponce and Ponce = Portman's name for this project

Ponce on Ponce = not Portman's internal name for this project. Some other people call it that, though.

Portman = Portman Holdings, Inc., this project's developers. Founded in Atlanta in 1967 (and still family run.) Designers and builders of major large and medium residential, hotels, and office spaces on three continents.

John Portman, Jr. = the founder of Portman Holdings. Passed away six years ago but remains 'Mr. Portman' internally. Labeled a 'neofuturistic' (you tell us) architect/developer, he is known for (among other things) hotels with multi-story atria and overhead pedestrian bridges. His Regency Hyatt Hotel ('the blue dome') and Peachtree Center are sometimes cited as bellwethers of modern local office design.

VaHi = the conceptual and actual physical neighborhood of Virginia-Highland

VHCA = the half-century old and formally incorporated not-for-profit Virginia hyphen Highland Civic Association,

VHE = the Virginia hyphen Highland Elementary School, which in the fall of 2023 will occupy the old Inman School structure on the northeast corner of Ponce Place & Virginia Ave.

VHCA Planning Committee Recommendation

At its meeting on March 8th, the Virginia-Highland Civic Association Planning Committee recommended that the Board formally support Portman Holdings Ponce and Ponce Mixed-Use Rezoning Application and West & East Site Plans (as conditioned, below), which are about to enter the city's formal processes for rezonings and variances.

Conclusions reached by the VHCA Planning Committee:

1. The Portman project's outcomes are legal and in accord with the city's existing contextual and specific plans for development along Ponce and the Beltline.
2. The willingness of the property owners to sell demonstrates that the area is ready and primed for redevelopment.
3. Existing zoning conflicts that have generated resident dissatisfaction will be reduced or eliminated.
4. Maiden Lane will be dramatically improved.
5. The Portman project developer is stable and sound financially and has a longstanding reputation in this city for rational and thoughtful approaches to architecture and construction.
6. Portman's approach was systematic and informed and included extensive public input and involvement.
7. Having a single competent and rational builder redevelop the entire area provides considerable advantages to the neighborhood.
8. Pedestrian conditions on Ponce Place will be considerably improved.
9. Improved cycling conditions are specifically provided.
10. Construction impacts and traffic disruption will require constant management.

1 THE PROJECT'S OUTCOMES ARE LEGAL AND IN ACCORD WITH THE CITY'S EXISTING PLANS AND APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT ALONG PONCE AND THE BELTLINE.

The city's Comprehensive Development Plan (the CDP) <https://www.atlcitydesign.com/2021-cdp> supports denser residential and commercial mixed-use redevelopment along Ponce and the Beltline. This plan provides both and is compatible with ABI's affordable housing standards in the Beltline Overlay.

The plan significantly aligns with the neighborhood's 2018 Master Plan Update, and ABI's long-awaited (and in progress) revision of its SubArea 6 Plan.

Commenting on building trends, ABI's Design Director Kevin Burke observed that \$1.8B has already been invested along the Beltline between Ponce and DeKalb Avenues, constituting 26% of all total development dollars within the District. ("Atlanta BeltLine - Its Past and Future To Be".) The Capital City development nearing completion on Drewry is a nearby example immediately to the north.

2 THE WILLINGNESS OF THE PROPERTY OWNERS TO SELL DEMONSTRATES THAT THE AREA IS READY AND PRIMED FOR REDEVELOPMENT.

The parcels that have been assembled have had a successful economic run by almost any standard. In their current form, they are near or have reached the end of their significant economic life. Several have been unoccupied for some time, and one is damaged and needs to be removed and replaced. In order to accommodate new or significantly different uses, most of them will require significant capital investment in the form of repairs or replacement.

The same aging challenges apply to the deterioration of the area's parking resources. Many spaces are unofficially shared during different hours - a generally progressive outcome - but are in very poor repair, both from normal aging and lack of repair. Uneven surfaces, minimalist marking, irregular management, and highly variable levels of use are all factors in the resultant inefficient uses and conflicts.

The relevant parcel owners were receptive to offers of purchase. As events demonstrated, every property owner had been in possession long enough to benefit significantly from real estate appreciation and proved to be willing to consider selling. (Only one asked to retain a share of ownership, and (as we understand)-he was accommodated.)

3 EXISTING ZONING CONFLICTS THAT HAVE GENERATED RESIDENT DISSATISFACTION WILL BE REDUCED OR ELIMINATED.

For much of the last decade, the area's dominant C-1 and I-1 zoning has been in conflict with the constant demand for additional residences along the southern edge of Ponce Place. Among the results is ongoing tension between legal late night bars and nearby residents, who have grown increasingly impatient with noise associated with late-hour commercial closing times. While APD has not logged many formal infractions and bar owners have been generally cooperative, citizen complaints have continued.

The conflict is inherent in the existing arrangement, which has significant entertainment venues adjacent to residential uses.

Potential solutions are unlikely to be implanted on a plot by plot basis; to be effective, large-scale approaches were needed.

4 MAIDEN LANE WILL BE DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED.

The street on the northern edge of the area, Maiden Lane, was abruptly promoted from alley to street by Council decree 20 years ago. It is inadequately lit, irregularly maintained, and a long-popular site of individual alcohol consumption; it also has no sidewalks and has never met the city's minimum width requirements. Widening it on a plot-by-plot basis was never in the cards, partly because the topography that falls away sharply to the immediate south **demands and rewards a larger scale of effort.**

Portman's redesign addresses all these conditions and starts with the donation of part of their own land to the city to widen Maiden to proper standards. It will become a real street, with new sidewalks and curbs and better lights - and maybe even a heart and a brain.

These impacts will become even more apparent if the property owners at the eastern boundary of the new project do not match Portman's improvements. We will ask those owners - whose lot lines extend from Ponce to the existing southern edge of Maiden Lane - to do so, and we hope they will. Even then a design challenge will remain at the residential corner with Bonaventure.

The two nearest internal streets paralleling Maiden are a mix of single and multi-family residential uses, all zoned RG. The multi-family residences owe their existence to infill and their century-old access to historic public transport along Ponce. Their deep lots, the pronounced elevation drop to the south, and the city's required Transitional Height Plane (THP) for adjacent new development (measured from the north side of Maiden Lane) will effectively shield these homes from many of the impacts of the contemplated new apartments on the other side of that road.

5 THE PROJECT DEVELOPER IS STABLE AND SOUND FINANCIALLY AND HAS A LONGSTANDING REPUTATION IN THIS CITY FOR RATIONAL AND THOUGHTFUL APPROACHES TO ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION.

Portman Holdings was founded in Atlanta 70 years ago and has a regional, national, and international reputation on many fronts. While no business is completely immune

from financial peril, there are few companies in the field that can match Portman's record of success and stability.

None of this has blinded anyone to the need to condition many outcomes. The architects on the Planning Committee devoted many hours to creating written standards that ensure the use of as many specific design standards as possible, while leaving the builder the flexibility to react to a variety of conditions that are impossible to fully anticipate. Those conditions are listed at the end of this article - some apply to both buildings. some individually. Many take the form of prohibiting undesired outcomes and practices. If you have questions about them, please contact us.

6 PORTMAN'S APPROACH WAS RATIONAL AND INFORMED AND INCLUDED EXTENSIVE PUBLIC INPUT AND INVOLVEMENT.

To their credit, Portman's staff and legal team were familiar from the onset with the neighborhood's master plans, development history, and planning aspirations. They engaged the community months *before* filing rezoning or variance requests, and they conducted more than a dozen formal and informal sessions with the public, board, and planning committee. Among the outcomes were extensive discussions of goals, ideas, and concepts, as well as access to their professional consultants in traffic and architecture.

7 HAVING A SINGLE COMPETENT AND RATIONAL BUILDER REDEVELOP THE ENTIRE AREA PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE ADVANTAGES TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

Having a single entity undertake the redevelopment in one gulp rather than approaching it parcel by parcel provided significant advantages to the neighborhood in terms of traffic, impact mitigation, and project management.

(1) *Traffic.* Portman's project constitutes a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) and engaged the Georgia Regional Transport Authority (GRTA) in a formal and detailed analysis of the predicted traffic impacts. Ponce de Leon is a state-owned road and managed by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), which joins the city's own Department of Transportation (ADoT) and the Atlanta Beltline Inc. as participants in this complex evaluation and discussion. These are all entities that have strong approaches and preferences (some conflicting) on a number of issues; resolving their varying approaches and emphasis continues to be a significant challenge, not made simpler by additional development that is underway to the immediate south next to Ponce City Market and just east on Ponce.

There are a number of professional opinions about the most desirable approaches in this process and the exact outcomes may be examined and debated for some time. (Nor are future revisions impossible.)

(2) Developing effective mitigation would have been very challenging with multiple developers

One developer acting on a large scale was far more likely to be willing and able to provide traffic mitigation on a scale proportionate to the project than would a series of smaller companies. Coordinating the approaches of multiple developers would have been extremely unwieldy. In any case, it was a moot point; to our knowledge, no other developers approached any of the existing property owners on Ponce.

The outcomes include:

8 PEDESTRIAN CONDITIONS ON PONCE PLACE WILL BE CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED.

Improvements along Ponce Place are especially desirable in light of the existing APS plan to use the historic building as a new elementary school with minimal bus service. A greater pedestrian presence is certain. The changes along Ponce Place mirror those in VHCA's 2018 Master Plan revisions and are especially appropriate given the likely increase in traffic there. Among the possibilities are a proposed raised tablet intersection at Virginia and Ponce Place that will slow traffic 24/7 and allow a scramble pedestrian crossing that is safer for children. As with all future changes in this city, these will require ongoing advocacy and negotiation with ADoT by the Association.

9 IMPROVED CYCLING CONDITIONS ARE SPECIFICALLY PROVIDED.

New bike lanes along St. Charles connect North Highland to the Beltline. First iterated in the Association's 2014 Master Plan, these lanes will be the first in the neighborhood - but not the last, we hope.

10 CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS AND TRAFFIC DISRUPTION ARE INEVITABLE AND WILL REQUIRE CONSTANT MANAGEMENT.

All parties know that they will be considerable, especially on the west side of Ponce Place, where - in a constricted space bounded by Ponce, Ponce Place, the Beltline, and an active adjacent business whose access abuts the site - a damaged structure must be

removed and a new office building erected. Under any circumstances - including these - it would and will be difficult and exasperating for all parties.

The east site should proceed far more gracefully; there is a great deal more contained space to work with. But even there, it's impossible to be certain of much except the level of challenges. From a traffic perspective, the impacts are likely to be considerable ... enormous ... a mess and half.

It will require - and reward - planning on a level far beyond what has already been demonstrated. A certain outcome will be variable and increasing levels of traffic on streets to the east, particularly Barnett. Baseline counts will be taken on that street next fall as a prelude - and then we'll need to be as clever and patient as we can.

So why don't these sorts of impacts make this level of construction impossible? The simple answer is that there is no legal basis for such an approach. Extensive traffic mitigation plans will be required and composed, and we can and will be a part of that process. But to the best of our knowledge and belief, this work is completely lawful.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSIDERATIONS

Green = pedestrian & cycling issues

Blue = design conditions

Gold = street mods

Pink = parking

Italics = Building dimensional limits & conditions

Conditions for both Z-22-093 and Z-22-094 93-7-23)

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1. No portion of any structure shall protrude through a height limiting plane beginning 15 feet above the nearest lot line of the protected district and extending inward over the property zoned PDMU at an angle of 45 degrees, provided this transitional height plane shall not extend more than 150 linear feet (measured along the ground) from the protected district up to and into the subject property. As used herein, "protected district" shall mean: (i) R-1 through R-5; (ii) RG-1 and RG-2; (iii) MR-1, MR-2 and MR-MU; and (iv) Landmark, Historic, PD and SPI district subareas having uses and densities predominantly similar to those permitted in the district classifications listed in subsections (i) through (iii). (See diagram at Section 16-29.001(62) – Transitional height plane diagram 2.)

2. The off-street parking requirements for the project provided in Section 16-19B.006 of the PDMU zoning district shall not apply to the property. The off-street parking requirements applicable in the MRC zoning districts, currently provided in Section 16-34.021(3), 16-34.021(5) and 16-34.021(7), shall apply to the property.
3. Building service areas shall be screened from any adjoining public right-of-way. Except for utility facility locations such as transformers, administrative relief shall not be permitted from Section 16-36.016. – Loading areas, loading dock entrances and building mechanical and accessory features. Mechanical equipment shall be located on the roof and in the location least visible from the public right-of-way and will be screened from view if visible from public areas. No air-cooled chillers located at sidewalk level within 50 feet of a public right-of-way.
4. Eating and drinking establishment exhaust hood ventilation shall include scrubbers on grease ducts if discharged through a sidewall.
5. Compliance with minimum and maximum off-street parking requirements may be achieved by evaluating the combined off-street parking required and provided on the properties zoned pursuant to applications Z-22-093 and Z-22-094 in lieu of evaluating off-street parking on a lot by lot basis.
6. New surface parking, if any, shall be located interior to the project and not between the building and the street.
7. Except for spaces reserved for rideshare and delivery drop-offs, on street parking shall not be provided on the adjacent public right-of-way frontages. The project shall provide parking for rideshare and delivery drop-offs.
8. Clearly designated pedestrian paths shall be provided through parking areas to the public sidewalk or building entrance. Paths shall be designated with materials such as paint, elevated crosswalks, or changes in materials.
9. Subject to approval of ATLDOT, the project shall accommodate and implement a widening of Ponce de Leon Place to a four-lane configuration along the property frontage.
10. To create visual interest, the sidewalk level exterior building façade for nonresidential uses shall (i) be differentiated architecturally from the upper levels of the

building, (ii) vary along the building elevation, (iii) not be homogenous, (iv) include changes in texture and (v) vary in depth, height and change of plane.

11. Developer shall request, and - subject to approval and permit by City of Atlanta and ATLDOT - Developer shall execute the following traffic calming and pedestrian safety road improvements:

a. Ponce de Leon Place (north of St. Charles Avenue)

i. Greenwood and Ponce de Leon Place intersection

1. Construct raised crosswalks for east-west crossing movements across Ponce de Leon Place. Reconstruct curb ramps/pedestrian approaches at corner where necessary for accessibility.

2. Construct concrete bulb-out islands to protect end of parking lanes.

b. St. Charles Avenue, Greenwood Avenue, Drewry Street, Virginia Circle, and Ponce de Leon Terrace, intersections (typical)

i. Install truck-mountable "medianettes" on southbound and northbound approaches to slow approaching cars OR install raised crosswalks for east-west crossing movements at each intersection.

ii. Provide bulb-outs for parking protection and traffic calming at all intersections. Reconstruct curb ramps/pedestrian approaches at corners as necessary for accessibility.

iii. Pavement marking and signage:

1. Restripe all pavement markings at and between intersections.

2. Restripe or stripe crosswalks at all intersections.

3. Restripe connecting side streets for 100 feet on each approach.

iv. Refresh pedestrian warning signage.

c. Ponce de Leon Place (south of St. Charles Avenue)

i. Provide striped minimum four foot wide bike lanes on either side of Ponce de Leon Place to connect bike infrastructure adjacent to the proposed development with proposed bike infrastructure on St. Charles Avenue.

d. St. Charles Ave (between Ponce de Leon Place and North Highland Avenue)

i. Stripe minimum four foot wide bike lanes on either side of St. Charles Avenue.

ii. Stripe off parking lanes on either side of St. Charles Ave

iii. Stripe minimum ten foot wide lanes for extent of above striping.

iv. Provide “sharrows” and green paint treatment at signalized intersections.

e. Maiden Lane

i. Provide “sharrows” down Maiden Lane from North Highland Avenue to Ponce de Leon Place.

f. Barnett Street

i. Provide a traffic study by a professional engineer that includes traffic counts and recommendations related to a potential implementation of stop signs on Barnett Street between Virginia Avenue and St. Charles Avenue.

12. The open space requirements for the project provided in Section 16-19B.005 of the PDMU zoning district shall not apply to the property. The following open space requirements shall apply to the property:

a. For lots containing only nonresidential use(s), minimum public space on the property shall be 20 percent of the net lot area.

b. For lots containing any residential uses, Minimum usable open space on the property shall be 45 percent of the gross lot area.

c. Compliance with minimum usable open space requirements may be achieved by evaluating the combined usable open space required and provided on the properties zoned pursuant to applications Z-22-093 and Z-22-094 in lieu of evaluating usable open space on a lot by lot basis.

d. A variance from the open space requirements in this condition 12 may be requested from the board of zoning adjustment.

13. The following design guidelines shall apply to buildings with office uses located above the third story of the building:

a. The building shall incorporate a variety of materials, such as, but not limited to, glass, metal, stone and masonry.

- b. Exterior patios or balconies shall be provided for the office use.
 - c. A minimum of 50 percent of the portion of the building façade containing office use shall be vision glazing on the stories above the sidewalk level.
 - d. If any building has more than six floors above sidewalk level, then starting above the sidewalk level the building floor plates shall be stepped back and/or forward so that no more five floors are the same plane on the building facades abutting the public right-of-way.
 - e. Any office building more than six stories in height above sidewalk level shall have not more than four consecutive floors that have an identical exterior facade layout, exclusive of balcony rails or parapets. An exterior facade layout shall be defined as identical if a minimum of 75 percent of its linear footage is aligned with the floor above or below.
 - f. At sidewalk level the building façade shall not exceed 60 feet in length without interruption by at least one of the following architectural features:
 - i. Projection or recess in the wall plane of at least six inches in depth;
 - ii. Change in material, texture or pattern; or
 - iii. Change in the fenestration pattern.
14. Unfinished or unpainted concrete, concrete masonry units, plywood, hard coat stucco and vinyl siding shall not be used as exterior façade materials on buildings.
15. The following design guidelines shall apply to buildings containing residential use:
- a. With the exception of the building façade facing the Maiden Lane frontage, other building facades shall incorporate a variety of articulation techniques to reduce visual mass such as vertical and horizontal banding, material changes, façade plane changes, vertical and horizontal recesses, window composition and design, balconies, or terraces.
 - b. Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS) shall not be used for the first 25 feet of building height above grade on any façade facing either a public right-of-way or a publicly accessible area.
 - c. A minimum of 40 percent of the portion of the building façade containing residential use shall be glazing on the stories above the sidewalk level.

d. A minimum of 50 percent of residential dwellings shall have balconies. e. Internally divided windows shall be prohibited.

16. The developer shall support legislation requiring all transportation impact fees generated from this development will be allocated to measures to mitigate traffic and promote pedestrian and bicyclist safety as recommended by the Virginia-Highland Civic Association within the vicinity of the project.

Conditions for Z-22-093 only

1. *The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan entitled _____ prepared by Kimley-Horn dated _____ and stamped received by the Office of Zoning and Development on _____. Minor changes to the approved site plan may be authorized by the Director of the Office of Zoning and Development in accordance with Section 16-02.003(7).*

2. *The maximum building square footage developed on the property shall not exceed 413,000 square feet. Office square footage shall not exceed 310,000 square feet. Residential square footage shall not exceed 400,000 square feet. In the event residential square footage is proposed, office square footage shall not exceed 50,000 square feet.*

3. *The maximum building height on the property shall be 190 feet.*

4. The development shall incorporate a minimum 10-foot wide publicly accessible pedestrian connection located exterior to the building providing a connection between Ponce de Leon Place and the BeltLine. The owner or operator of the property may limit whether bicyclists can ride their bicycles through this connection in lieu of walking bicycles through it.

5. *The development shall include a visual element, such as a plaque or a display, commemorating the history of the property.*

Conditions for Z-22-094 only

1. *The property shall be developed in accordance with the site plan entitled _____ prepared by Kimley-Horn dated _____ and stamped received by the Office of Zoning and Development on _____. Minor changes*

to the approved site plan may be authorized by the Director of the Office of Zoning and Development in accordance with Section 16-02.003(7).

2. The maximum building square footage developed on the property shall not exceed 650,000 square feet. Office square footage shall not exceed 160,000 square feet. Residential square footage shall not exceed 625,000 square feet. In the event residential square footage proposed exceeds 550,000 square feet, office square footage shall not exceed 50,000 square feet.

3. The maximum building height on the property is 160 feet.

4. Publicly accessible open space nodes aggregating a minimum of 3,600 square feet shall be provided within the development, exclusive of outdoor dining areas controlled by the tenant. The publicly accessible open space nodes satisfying this condition shall not exceed two nodes and shall be adjacent to or accessible by sidewalk from the public right-of-way. At least 70 percent of any publicly accessible open space node satisfying this condition shall have a minimum dimension of 20 feet by 20 feet.

5. The following design guidelines shall apply to buildings containing residential use:

a. A variety of façade treatments and articulation, changes of plan, variations in materials and other means of articulation shall be incorporated on the Maiden Lane fronting elevation to provide visual interest along the length of the building and reduce the perceived mass as viewed from the public realm. The width of any unbroken facade plane on the Maiden Lane frontage may not exceed the building height.

b. The façade shall be designed to provide or create the appearance of providing variations in the façade with color and design differentiations such as variation in plane, step backs and balconies.

c. Nonresidential use shall be permitted at the corner of Maiden Lane and Ponce de Leon Place; provided, however, direct access to Maiden Lane from sidewalk level nonresidential use shall be prohibited. Outdoor seating for nonresidential use on Maiden Lane shall be prohibited.

d. The residential units located at sidewalk level on the Maiden Lane frontage shall have individual unit entrances on Maiden Lane unless existing topographical considerations render this requirement unreasonable as determined by the Director of the Office of Zoning and Development.

- e. Individual residential unit entrances along Maiden Lane shall be recessed a minimum of two feet from the sidewalk level façade wall.
- f. A minimum of 40 percent of the unglazed building façade should be brick, granite, stone, cast stone or similar on the Maiden Lane frontage elevation.
- g. Windows installed in brick, granite, stone, cast stone or similar on the Maiden Lane frontage elevation shall be recessed from the exterior wall at least one inch to provide visible depth and shadow on the façade.