

Special 24-Page  
Commemorative Issue!

A 30th Anniversary Retrospective



# THE INTERSTATE THAT ALMOST WAS

*I-485 was a full-bore, six-lane interstate that was supposed to barrel through the middle of Morningside. But thirty years ago this Summer, five Morningside women, along with some friends, stopped it dead in its tracks. This is their story.*

Route B,  
the proposed path  
of I-485

**Y**ou've heard it at neighborhood meetings, parties, anyplace in Morningside Lenox Park where people are discussing some apparently intractable problem: "Well, if this neighborhood can stop a freeway, it ought to be able to [fill in with *issue de jour*]."

What freeway? Where? When? Who stopped it? If you ask most residents of Morningside they probably couldn't answer all or possibly any of these questions.

The short answers to the questions are, in order: A) I-485; B) from I-85 at what is now the end of Georgia 400, crossing Peachtree Creek, running through the heart of Morningside and directly over Orme Park, and ending up in a nest of on- and off-ramps just south of Ponce De Leon; C) 1973; D) Mary Davis, Virginia Taylor, Barbara Ray, Adele Northrup, and Virginia Gaddis, along with some very determined friends.

This summer marks the thirtieth anniversary of the defeat of I-485. The occasion affords us the opportunity to revisit some important history of our beloved neighborhood, to ponder what devastation might have been unleashed on Atlanta's intown neighborhoods, and to reflect on what changes came about both in

Morningside and in the city at large as a result of the defeat of I-485.

The story goes back to 1964 (see page 9 for a full chronology of the highway fight). It involves mayors, governors, state and federal bureaucrats, two civic associations both claiming to represent the neighborhood, the defeat of almost an entire city council, and the election of a new mayor. The fight to stop the highway not only obliterated I-485; it helped bring into existence a new way of governing the city and a new power for local city neighborhoods, a power they continue to wield today.

The story starts on page 2.

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# MLPANEWS





# Morningside Lenox Park: The Neighborhood That Killed an Interstate

by Van Hall

Interstate 485 was the highway that was supposed to go right through the middle of Morningside, through Virginia Highland, and through Poncey Highlands.

Only it didn't.

In the Sixties and early Seventies in Atlanta, everybody and anything who had any power whatsoever wanted it. Highway planners and road builders

wanted it. The Atlanta Board of Aldermen, the Chamber of Commerce, Central Atlanta Progress, the Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission, the Atlanta newspapers all endorsed it. Mayors, governors, and state and federal bureaucrats all signed on for it.

ued, only now it accelerated in traditional residential neighborhoods drained by “white flight” and burgeoning suburbs. Neighborhoods like Ansley Park, Morningside, what we now call Virginia Highland (although it had no neighborhood designation then), Inman Park, and Candler Park were faced with declining property values, increasing multi-family housing, and flat or negative population growth.

One city planning document in the early Sixties wrote off the intown neighborhoods, labeling them “decaying” urban areas, saying it would be a waste of city, state, and federal funds to invest in future development there.



**PROPOSED FREEWAYS for ATLANTA (dotted lines).**

From a 1969 highway planning map. Proposed freeways were to be completed by 1983.

wanted it. The Atlanta Board of Aldermen, the Chamber of Commerce, Central Atlanta Progress, the Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission, the Atlanta newspapers all endorsed it. Mayors, governors, and state and federal bureaucrats all signed on for it.

The only ones who didn't want it were the ones with practically no political power at all: intown neighborhood residents and their civic associations. In the middle of the highway and in the midst of the battle to stop it stood one

small neighborhood, Morningside Lenox Park.

The tale of I-485's defeat is one of high drama, remarkable courage, David-vs-Goliath battles, and ultimately, sweet, sweet victory.

### Phase One

To understand how I-485 came about we need to go back to Atlanta during World War II. Housing was in very short supply because no new housing was being built. Homeowners rented out upstairs bedrooms, converted garages to apartments, sub-divided their homes, driven as much by patriotic fervor as by financial necessity. After the war the process contin-

Banks and insurance companies began to “red-line” these neighborhoods. They simply refused to lend money or write policies on intown homes, all quite legal. One city planning document in the early Sixties wrote off the intown neighborhoods, labeling them “decaying” urban areas, saying it would be a waste of city, state, and federal funds to invest in future development there.

By the early Sixties the Atlanta region was faced with two related problems: decaying inner neighborhoods and a screaming need for transportation to the new growth-heady suburbs in Gwinnett, Cobb, DeKalb, and Clayton Counties. The state had constructed three interstates, I-20, I-75 and I-85, and had begun a fourth, I-285. Georgia 400 stopped at I-285 to the north. Planners developed an extensive plan of multi-lane, limited-access highways that criss-crossed the city (see map). MARTA was on the drawing boards, but highways were seen as the primary means of moving bodies.

The transportation plan drew a line from downtown to Stone Mountain, designating what would later be called the Stone Mountain Freeway.

# A 30-Year Retrospective

From the north, from the end of Georgia 400 at I-285, another line was drawn, going due south to Ponce de Leon Avenue. The section between I-85 and what is now the Carter Center was called I-485.

## I-485 Plans Announced

In October 1964 the Georgia Highway Department, or GHD, announced its intention to begin construction of I-485 and unveiled four possible routes. The least expensive and most direct of the four was Route B, starting at I-85 near the South Fork of Peachtree Creek and running south.

Within months of the GHD announcement Morningside residents organized the Morningside Lenox Park Association (MLPA) to fight the highway. Other neigh-

interneceine battle of dueling routes and dueling neighbors. The MLPA hired consultants, who proposed a fifth path through the neighborhood, Route E, running further to the west than Route B, closer to Piedmont and Monroe.

The alternate route was developed by Leon Eplan, who at the time was working for a private consulting firm. He would later serve two terms as Commissioner of Planning for the City of Atlanta under Maynard Jackson.

“Our plan for Route E was the first time in the history of the country where the affected citizens themselves had gone through an independent analysis of a planned highway and had come up with an alternate plan,” said Eplan. “With Route E we tried to downgrade



Photo: Van Hall

**RETURNING TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.** Four of the five women who played pivotal roles in stopping I-485 return to the site of what had been the State Highway Department's Relocation Office, located on East Rock Spring Road. From left to right, Virginia Taylor, Adele Northrup, Mary Davis, and Barbara Ray. The sign Ms. Davis is pointing to was “removed” by Ms. Northrup from the premises in 1971. The site is now occupied by a restored highway house.

borhoods in the path of I-485 either did not organize against the highway or took no visible notice. The MLPA was the only thing that stood in the way of I-485.

There were other groups organizing, most notably the BOND organization in Inman Park and Candler Park, formed to fight the “red-lining” practice by financial institutions. But at this point none of the intown neighborhoods, save Morningside, made an effort to stop the interstate.

Very quickly the fight against the highway in Morningside devolved into an

the road from a superhighway. We tried to integrate the interstate with existing local roads, to allow for more local access and more integration with the local neighborhood. Unfortunately, the highway department wasn't interested in slowing things down. They wanted more speed.”

## Dueling Civic Associations

A second group of Morningside residents, those in the path of Route E, responded with a second civic group, the Morningside-Monroe Civic Association

## I-485: A Chronology

### PHASE I

- **1964.** Georgia Highway Department (GHD) announces plans to build I-485.
- **May 4, 1965.** The Morningside Lenox Park Association is formed to oppose the highway.
- **June 1965.** The MLPA hires consulting traffic planners who suggest a fifth alternate, Route E. The new route is further to the west than the other four, closely paralleling Piedmont and Monroe.
- **July 9, 1965.** A breakaway group of residents who live in the path of proposed Route E form the Morningside Monroe Civic Association to fight the new route.
- **February 9, 1966.** The GHD announces its selection of Route B as the final route. Two hours after GHD's announcement, Gov. Carl Sanders orders the state agency to make another route study.
- **May 24, 1966.** GHD announces results of third study, re-confirming Route B.
- **June 7, 1966.** The Atlanta Board of Aldermen vote 10-5 to accept Route B.
- **July 16, 1966.** The U.S. Bureau of Public Roads approves GHD's request to build Route B of I-485. GHD immediately begins condemnation and razing proceedings.
- **October 1966.** MLPA files suit in Fulton Superior Court to stop the interstate.
- **June 1967.** MLPA's lawsuit is denied. The decision is appealed. The appeal is denied.
- **1967-1970.** MLPA holds a series of meetings with GHD to

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## I-485 Retrospective (continued from previous page)

(MMCA). It began to lobby hard for Route B.

For the next 12 months both groups vied with each other and the GHD for approval of their respective proposed routes. It was a messy piece of business, pitting neighbor against neighbor. The MMCA retained Atlanta Mayor Emeritus William Hartsfield, a resident of Morningside, to represent them. At one point the MMCA boasted a larger membership than the MLPA.

The GHD produced three studies recommending Route B. On July 16, 1966, the U.S. Department of Public Roads approved Route B.

Its battle won, the MMCA disbanded.

After the approval of Route B it was mostly a downhill slide for the anti-highway forces. With no political allies, a depleted war chest, and no judicial or legislative precedents to help them, the leadership of the MLPA took one last stand and in October 1966 filed a lawsuit to stop the highway. The suit was denied, appealed, and, in June 1967, lost on appeal. The fight against I-485 was dead in the dirt.

### Dirty Tricks

In July 1969 the GHD started property acquisition north of Ponce de Leon, condemning houses in the path of the highway. Here the tricks got dirty.

The GHD sent out land agents to inspect homes within the 300-foot right-of-way. The agents would inform the mostly elderly residents that their homes were substandard and required substantial investment to bring them up to code. Many residents panicked and accepted much less than market value for their homes.

Other houses both in and out of the right-of-way were bought up by real-estate speculators, who tore the homes down and consolidated them into larger parcels of land for re-sale to the state. When residents moved out of their condemned houses, the GHD did not maintain the properties, letting the houses fall into disrepair and grass and weeds to grow. The houses were vandalized; fires started by vagrants broke out.

Morningside real estate prices began to fall. This made it more difficult for those who did settle with the state to find affordable housing elsewhere. The MLPA, citing new federal legislation, asked the GHD to set up a fund to give displaced homeowners up to an additional \$5,000 to help them to purchase new homes.



Photo Courtesy Mary Davis

Mary Davis stands in front of a condemned highway house, circa 1971

The GHD set up an office on East Rock Spring Road to facilitate condemnation proceedings. By 1970, the GHD had acquired over 1,000 parcels of land and had razed 300 residences. Morningside was beginning to look like an actual battlefield.

The MLPA attempted to make the best of a very bad situation. It met with the GHD to gain design accommodations. Primary among these was to depress the interstate below street grade.

“At one point, the plan for Line B showed an interchange at East Rock Spring,” said Chuck Robisch, president of the MLPA from 1969 to 1971. “We got them to take it off the plan.”

“It was difficult balancing the conflicting views of board members regarding the road,” he said. “Some of us wanted to go ahead and get it out of the way as expeditiously as possible with minimum damage to the neighborhood.” Others like Nick Lambros and Sidney Marcus were still opposed to it and thought the best action was to try to stop it.

One of the sticking points was Orme Park, a small sliver of parkland a block south of Amsterdam Avenue. Plans called for an elevated highway, complete with tree-trunk-sized pylons, to cross in the middle of the park. During a neighborhood meeting a GHD official said they could make the concrete pylons more tree-like by painting them green. One neighbor, Adele Northrup, asked the official if “my concrete children can play under your concrete trees.” The official’s reply was not recorded.

### PHASE II

Sid and Mary Davis and their small children moved into Morningside in 1967, attracted by the convenience of the intown neighborhood and its affordable real estate. He was an economist teaching at Atlanta University. She was raising their two



Photo: Van Hall

Chuck Robisch, President of the MLPA, 1969-1971.

“It was difficult balancing the conflicting views of board members regarding the road. Some of us wanted to go ahead and get it out of the way as expeditiously as possible with minimum damage to the neighborhood.”

daughters and active in liberal political causes. She volunteered for a number of groups, including the League of Women Voters. At League meetings she met other like-minded women, among them Virginia Gaddis and Adele Northrup, both residents of Morningside.

Virginia Gaddis, who moved to the neighborhood with her husband in 1969, was involved in school desegregation issues and a variety of environmental concerns.

Barbara Ray and her husband, Dale, had moved into the neighborhood in 1967. She was working on a degree in Urban Studies at Georgia

to our communities, in addition to bringing up our children.”

### Meetings and Research

“We began to meet among ourselves,” said Barbara Ray, “to talk about how to stop the highway.” In 1970 Sid Davis began to research the new federal National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), that, among other things, mandated that an Environmental Impact Study be done on any federally-funded project that adversely

During a neighborhood meeting a GDOT official said they could make the concrete pylons over Orme Park more tree-like by painting them green. One neighbor, Adele Northrup, asked the official if “my concrete children can play under your concrete trees.”



Photo: Van Hall

Adele Northrup, Member of the Political Action Committee

State. “My friend Virginia Gaddis came to my house one day and said we had to stop the highway,” said Ray. “Then she dragged me off to a meeting at Mary Davis’ home.”

Adele Northrup moved with her husband, Ernie, from Augusta, where she had been active in anti-war protests at Fort Gordon.

The new, younger families moving into Morningside were called the “blue jean elite.” They encountered a bit of culture clash with the older residents.

Morningside had been a liberal island in a traditionally conservative city. More than half the population was Jewish, a population that had been a traditional bloc of FDR’s New Deal, and it had withstood the aggressive real estate blockbusting techniques that had driven much of the city’s white flight and destroyed other intown neighborhoods. But its attitude toward women’s political activity was conventional: that was something women didn’t indulge in. Early in the highway fight, one Morningside housewife told Davis that she could better spend her time “volunteering for the USO than fighting the highway.”

“The women’s movement was just beginning,” said Davis. “We were college-trained, liberal-minded activists trying to figure out how we could contribute

affected neighborhoods. The GHD maintained that I-485 was exempt because it was begun before NEPA was enacted.

Virginia Taylor grew up in Morningside and had returned to live there with her husband and children. She met Sid Davis at a highway route-selection meeting. “He got up and said that NEPA was in effect and that I-485 was not in compliance,” she said. “He also pointed out that a recent Supreme Court decision [the 1969 Memphis, Tennessee, Overton Park ruling] had established the ‘prudent and feasible alternatives’ doctrine for Interstate construction, which also cast the future of I-485 in doubt. I introduced myself after the meeting.”

At some point, the group christened themselves the Political Action Committee (PAC). “Our first problem was to convince the neighborhood that the highway could be stopped,” said Barbara Ray, who is now Associate Professor Emeritus of Urban Studies at

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## I-485 CHRONOLOGY

(Continued from page 3)

gain design changes in the highway to lessen impact on the neighborhood.

### Meanwhile, Two Legal Milestones

- **May 29, 1969.** Congress passes the National Environmental Policy Act.
- **December 1969.** The Supreme Court of the U.S. enjoins the Tennessee DOT to stop construction of I-240, which would have run through the middle of Overton Park, a 342-acre city park in Memphis, TN.

### PHASE 2

- **January 1971.** Morningside residents Mary Davis, Virginia Taylor, Barbara Ray, Adele Northrup, Virginia Gaddis, and others begin gathering petitions to stop the highway.
- **February 1971.** The group of petitioners organize themselves as the Political Action Committee (PAC). They raise funds to hire a lawyer, Michael Padnos.
- **May 25, 1971.** The MLPA approves the PAC’s request to authorize Padnos to file suit.
- **June 22, 1971.** District Judge Charles A. Moye rules on the MLPA suit and issues a preliminary injunction against the GHD to cease all new condemnation and razing procedures of I-485 property until GHD files an environmental impact study, as required by the NEPA legislation.
- **August 2, 1971.** The Atlanta Board of Aldermen votes 9 to 6 to defeat a resolution against the highway.
- **September, 1971.** Mary Davis, Virginia Taylor, and Barbara Ray, along with several

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# Atlanta, Yes! I-485, No!

Georgia State. "I remember going door-to-door saying, 'Hold on, don't sell anything!'"

Taylor, Ray, Davis, Northrup, and Gaddis began a petition drive. "We literally put our kids in strollers and went door-to-door gathering signatures," said Ray. In early 1971 the PAC began to strategize how to stop the highway. They began to raise money. Virginia Gaddis and Adele Northrup organized a series of well-publicized "485 Phooey Fairs" in Piedmont Park; Sid Davis printed up a number of "Atlanta Yes, I-485 No!" bumper stickers.

"We decided we needed a lawyer," said Mary Davis. "Somebody recommended Michael Padnos, a young attorney with interest in environmental litigation. He agreed to take the case if we could raise money, get the MLPA's endorsement, and gather 600

and lost. We were skeptical."

Northrup told them she was working with a group that wanted to fight the highway using the new NEPA legislation. They agreed to meet with Padnos to see what he had to offer.

On March 25, 1971, at a community-wide meeting sponsored by the MLPA, there was a debate about whether to commit the association to a second fight against the highway and whether to allocate more funds to it. A large portion of the board was opposed to further involvement. But after extended and voluble comments from the floor, board member Sidney Marcus rallied the board and it voted to retain attorney Padnos. The board also pledged sufficient funds to cover initial expenses. Contributions were collected on the spot.

On May 20 the MLPA agreed to file suit against the GHD and created a board-level committee of the MLPA to oversee the suit. On June 9 Padnos filed suit against the GHD on behalf of the MLPA. "That brought the renegade PAC members into the association," said Ray.

### Judge Issues Stop Order

On June 22, 1971, District Judge Charles A. Moye ruled on the MLPA suit and issued a stop order against the GHD to cease all new condemnation and razing procedures of I-485 property. He further ruled that the GHD must file an environmental impact study as required by the NEPA legislation.

The highway was stopped, at least for the moment, but only for the moment. "Judge Moye's decision bought us time," said Taylor. The fight now became political.

"The first thing we decided was that we needed to run anti-highway activists for the MLPA board elections," said Taylor. "In September 1971 we put up Barbara Ray, Mary Davis, John Busby, and my mother, Anne Smith." After the election they and other activism-minded board members formed a sizeable minority of the board of the MLPA.

The area just south of Morningside proved a particular problem. It had no name, not like a neighborhood name. A pro-highway group with close ties to the GHD were calling themselves the Highland-Virginia Civic Association and claiming to speak for the neighborhood.

A second group, opposed to the highway, had formed in Fall 1971, calling itself the Virginia Highland Civic Association. Its first chair, Joe Drolet, remembers the PAC activists from Morningside. "They were the first group outside the neighborhood to contact us," said Drolet, "That started our first coalition, which we then extended southward to include Inman Park and Candler Park."

"We needed to raise money, and we needed to use the non-profit tax status of the MLPA to raise it. Our other battle was to stop the state from tearing down houses."

signatures."

"We needed to raise money, and we needed to use the non-profit tax status of the MLPA to raise it," Davis said. "Our other battle was to stop the state from tearing down houses." At the time, the MLPA had agreed to allow the GHD to tear down condemned highway houses to eliminate the many untended, vacant houses in the neighborhood that stood as crime and fire hazards.

"I went to the MLPA at Mary's suggestion," said Northrup. The MLPA was not receptive, at least not at first, to overtures from this new group of activists.

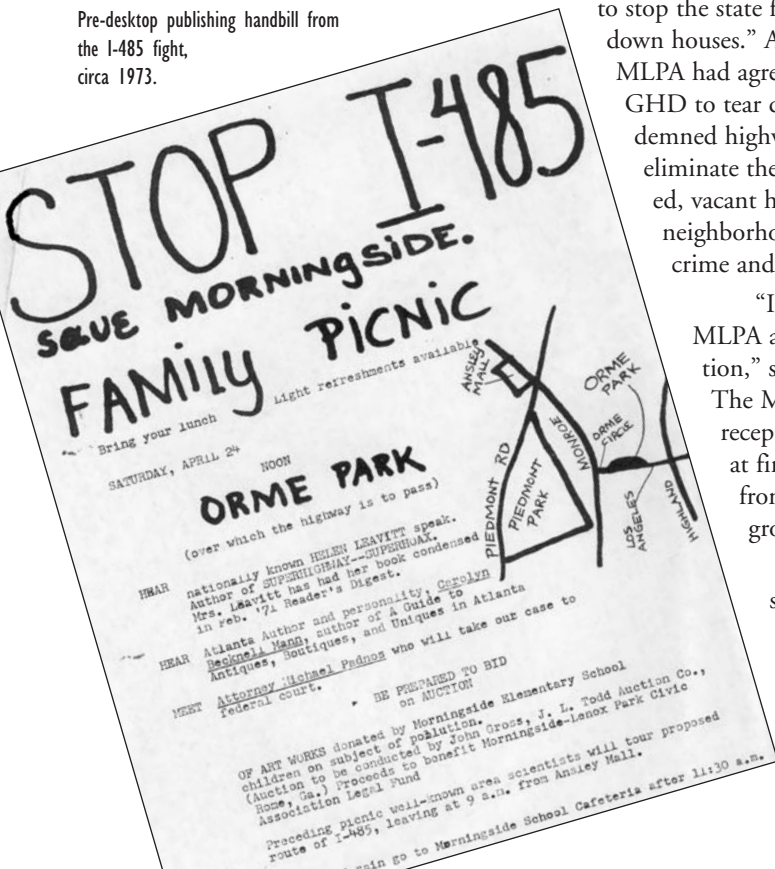
"We had spent a lot of money already," said Robisch. "We had fought hard



Photo: Van Hall

Mary Davis, Member of the Political Action Committee

Pre-desktop publishing handbill from the I-485 fight, circa 1973.



# Phooey Fair Set for Piedmont

I-485 PROTEST

By JEAN TYSON  
More About I-485

Program in parks, people and participation -- not pavement. At least this is the way a group of citizens residing in the Morningside area feel.

The Morningside League Park Association, Inc. isn't happy with the idea of an expressway -- I-485 -- cutting through the middle of Atlanta. Currently the expressway is at a standstill due to a court order and if these citizens responsible for the stay have their way, there will be no more demolition of homes in this area or other areas of the city where the new highway is proposed.

The political action committee of the association has formed up with an idea to hold a Phooey Fair, for Saturday, July 10, at noon, in Piedmont Park.

"We want every citizen in Atlanta to be aware of what is happening," said Carolyn Beckel, a member of the association. "We aren't concerned with just Morningside, but other areas as well. Many think the expressway is going to be put through Morningside. This isn't true."

"People have set back and let a few men decide what we are going to do and where we are going to live. The entire city will feel the impact of this expressway. People all over town are getting mad at the same time and the politicians won't listen to them."



MRS. BARBARA RAY (FRONT) IS AMONG THOSE WORKING TO STOP I-485. Interested Citizens Are Sponsoring a Phooey Fair for Piedmont Park.

Barbara Ray and fellow road warriors protest I-485 in front of a highway department bulldozer in 1971.

its impact was felt on the old Board of Aldermen. In August 1971, in line with previous votes, the Board defeated a resolution opposing the highway, voting 9 to 6. Three months later they reversed themselves when they passed a resolution, offered

While the fight against I-485 was coming to its second boil, there was brewing elsewhere in the city another development not directly related to it, but one which would ultimately have a decisive impact on the defeat of the road.

In early 1972 the state legislature appointed a City of Atlanta Charter Commission. The city's charter, the document that specifies how the city council is elected and how the city does its job, was woefully out of date. Chief among those things needing fixing was the city-wide election for Board of Aldermen seats.

A holdover from Atlanta's segregationist past, city-wide Alderman posts effectively diluted the electoral voice of Atlanta's growing African American population and the city's neighborhoods. Federal courts were striking down similar city charters around the country because they violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The new City Charter Commission began holding hearings preparatory to writing the new charter. Mary Davis served on the Local Government Committee of the

## I-485 CHRONOLOGY

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other PAC members are elected to the MLPA board.

- **November, 1971.** The Atlanta Board of Aldermen vote to rescind the 1966 resolution approving the construction of I-485.
- **September, 1972.** Mary Davis is elected president of the MLPA, along with a majority of anti-road activists board members.
- **March 17, 1973.** Gov. Jimmy Carter signs into law the new charter for the City of Atlanta.
- **Summer-Fall, 1973.** Anti-highway forces campaign for pro-neighborhood candidates in upcoming election.
- **June 19, 1973.** The Board of Aldermen approves a resolution opposing the highway, 15-2. On the same day, the Federal Department of Transportation rejects the GHD's Environmental Impact Study for I-485.
- **December 18, 1973.** The Atlanta Board of Aldermen votes overwhelmingly to shift \$70 million in highway funds designated for I-485 to the coffers of MARTA.
- **1975.** Georgia Governor George Busbee "de-maps" I-485 by instructing the GHD to remove the highway from its long-term transportation plans. I-485 is dead.
- **1985.** Sidney Marcus Park, named for Georgia State Senator and Morningside resident who was instrumental in the highway fight, is dedicated on the site of former I-485 property.

**"We found a map developed by the Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission. It showed not only I-485 and the Stone Mountain Freeway, but a whole host of road widenings all over the city, plans to take what were two-lane roads to four lanes. These included Lenox, LaVista, East Rock Spring and North Morningside."**



Photo: Van Hall

**Barbara Ray**, Member of the Political Action Committee

Commission.

### The New City Charter

To avoid censure from the courts, the new charter would specify a city council consisting primarily of district seats elected from geographically defined sectors of the city. To be elected, council members would have to be responsive to residents of those districts.

Long before the charter took effect, which wouldn't happen until January 1974,

by Morningside resident and Alderman Nick Lambros, rescinding their earlier vote on I-485.

While a noteworthy victory, the vote was a resolution only, simply expressing the opinion of the Board, and did not have the force of law. It did, however, remove one of the commonly-understood underpinnings of

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Federal funding, namely “coordinated” agreement by local officials as a part of the planning process for a federally-funded project. The highway opponents used this fact, and the Board of Aldermen vote, to great political advantage.

In September 1972 Mary Davis was elected president of the MLPA, Adele Northrup secretary, and a majority of anti-road activists as board members.

The MLPA saw that participation from other parts of the city in the road fight was crucial to stopping the highway. “We found a map developed by the Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission,” said Barbara Ray. “It showed not only

I-485 and the Stone Mountain Freeway, but a whole host of arterial road widenings, plans to take what were two-lane roads to four lanes, all over the city. These included Lenox, LaVista, East Rock Spring and

“We went especially to the west side where there were other highways planned [see map, page 8]. There was no city-wide political power for neighborhoods before we started reaching out,” she said. “We created that.”

Panke Bradley Miller, Atlanta’s first woman member of the Board of Aldermen and a member of BOND in Candler Park, remembers clearly Morningside’s role in developing this network of neighborhoods. “I would give all credit to the MLPA for perceiving that the fight against I-485 would be greatly improved by a coalition of other neighborhoods. Their perception of this key political fact was the single most critical element of the defeat of the highway.”

In late 1972 PAC members helped organize a formal group, the Atlanta Coalition on Transportation Crisis, consisting of groups opposed to the highways planned throughout the city.

They began to support anti-road candidates in city, state, and federal elections and to campaign actively for them. These included Nick Lambros, a Morningside resident who sat on the Board of Aldermen and Andrew Young, up for the U.S. Congress. By mid-1972 there was also jockeying in place for the ‘73 mayor’s race.

Maynard Jackson, the city’s vice-mayor, was making considerable waves as a viable candidate in both the black and white communities. Jackson was clearly in the anti-road camp. “Maynard understood the power of neighborhoods and was able to cut into the white vote on the issue of the highway,” said Taylor. The road warriors peeled off their old “Atlanta Yes, I-485 No!” bumper stickers and replaced them with ones that read “Maynard Yes! I-485 No!”

Their efforts were not always well received by established politicians. “We met with our Georgia state Senator, who would not endorse our stance on the highway,” said Davis. “The Senator said, ‘If you don’t like my position, then elect somebody else.’ And we did.” The anti-highway network of neighborhoods recruited and campaigned for the Senator’s opponent, Todd Evans, who was elected.

In March 1973 Governor Jimmy Carter signed Atlanta’s new City Charter into law, including an “Environmental Bill of Rights” authored by Adele Northrup. New district-based City Council seats would be elected in November on the basis of the new charter, which would take effect January 1, 1974. The impact of this impending change was immediate and palpable. Politicians who had not seen the light before were suddenly dazzled by its brilliance. Positions changed, votes changed, campaign platforms changed.



Photo: Van Hall

**Virginia Taylor**, Member of the Political Action Committee

“Maynard understood the power of neighborhoods and was able to cut into the white vote on the issue of the highway.”



Photo: Courtesy Mary Davis

Maynard Jackson addresses an anti-highway rally in Orme Park during the 1973 election for Mayor.

North Morningside.”

**Reaching Out Across the City**

PAC members began taking the map to neighborhood groups in other parts of the city. “We started going to other neighborhoods to build a network,” said Taylor. “After Virginia Highland, we went to Buckhead, the BOND area, Reynoldstown, the west side. Our strategy was to try anything and everything. If there was a hearing, if there was a meeting, we went to it. The City Charter Commission, budget hearings, anything.”

“We had to organize neighborhood by neighborhood,” said Davis. “We would call people we knew to start up neighborhood groups.



## The One-Two Punch

And finally, and suddenly, it was all over. The fight against I-485, a road on the map for nine years and dug partially into the dirt for five, came to an end on a sunny day in June, the 19th, nearly five months before the 1973 election. It was a one-two punch that did it in.

The first punch happened in Atlanta. Aldermen Nick Lambros and Cecil Turner offered a resolution to oppose construction of I-485. (Turner, a Morningside resident and longtime proponent of the highway, switched his position at the last moment to co-sponsor the resolution.) The measure was approved decisively, 15-2. Later that day, Mayor Sam Massell, sitting in Manuel's Tavern one block from the southern terminus of I-485, declared the bar a "temporary city hall" and signed the resolution as a celebration was in progress.

The second punch came from Washington on the same day. The Federal Department of Transportation rejected the GHD Environmental Impact Study for I-485. The Federal DOT rejected the study, in part, because it failed to consider alternative modes of transportation in the region and failed to take into account the impact on affected neighborhoods.

While the action of the Board of Aldermen and the Federal DOT rejection did not put a stake through the heart of I-485, they effectively dealt the highway a blow from which it would never recover. The stake came later.

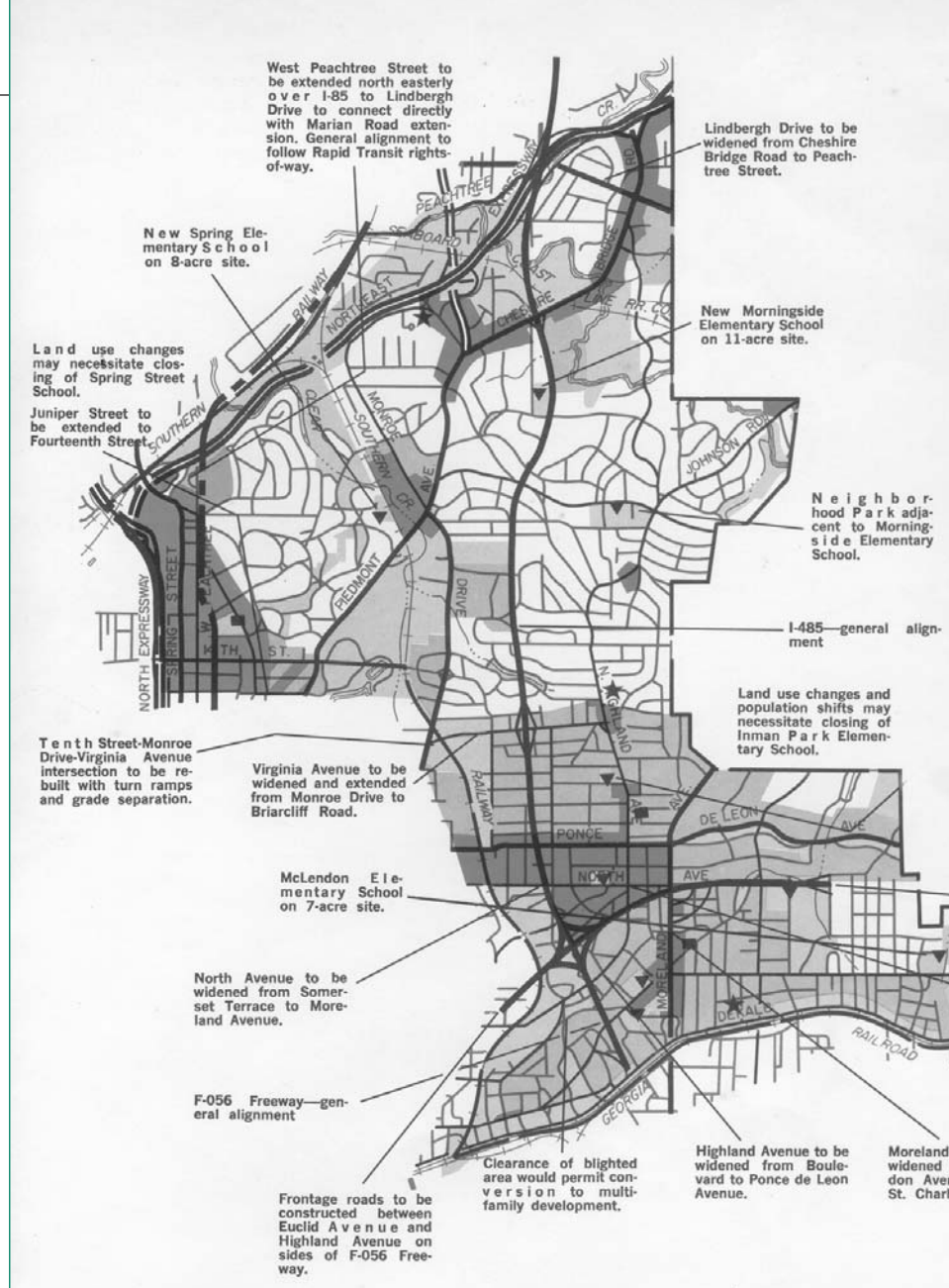
## Election Day

Election day came on November 6 and delivered no surprises. Maynard Jackson was elected the city's first black mayor by a broad coalition of black voters on the west side and white, anti-road activists on the east and north. A majority of pro-neighborhood, anti-road candidates were elected to the new City Council.

On December 18, 1973, in one of its last official actions, the old Board of Aldermen voted to approve a shift of \$70 million in highway funds designated for I-485 to the coffers of MARTA.

And on January 1, 1974, the city's new charter put in place the Neighborhood Planning Unit system, creating neighborhood NPUs throughout the city, including Morningside's NPU-F. For the first time in the history of the City of Atlanta, neighborhoods had an effective say in the zoning and planning actions of city government.

The road was stopped cold. Money to build it was put elsewhere. It had become a political anathema. But it wasn't dead. I-485 remained on GHD planning maps for another year. The death of the troublesome beast didn't come until after George



Busbee was elected Governor of Georgia in 1974 with the help of the Atlanta neighborhood coalition. In 1975, at the request of the coalition, he ordered the Georgia Highway Department to remove, or "de-map", the highway from its planning documents. I-485 was finally dead and gone.

## Taking Back the Land

The highway may have been dead, but the job wasn't over. What about all the highway land the GHD had purchased, all \$18 million of it? What to do about the Stone Mountain Freeway? That was far from dead.

The fight to stop the Stone Mountain Freeway is not, properly speaking, part of the Morningside story. Suffice it to say that it went on for another two decades, involved the new mayor, Maynard Jackson; another mayor, Andrew Young; and an ex-President, Jimmy Carter.

## Paving Paradise

I-485 wasn't the only thing planners had in mind for Morningside. From a 1970 City of Atlanta planning document, the following:

- 1) Tear down Morningside School and move to Wellbourne in the flood plain of Peachtree Creek and directly adjacent to I-485,
- 2) Tear down Inman School to accommodate the
- 3) Widening of Virginia Avenue all the way to Briarcliff.

Note the I-485 interchange on Virginia, on the site of what is now John Howell Park.

In computing available green-space for the area, the planners included two private clubs, Ansley Golf Club and Druid Hills Golf Club.

(Continued on page 16)

**MORE ROAD WARRIORS**

The fight against I-485 in Morningside Lenox Park involved many more residents than those mentioned in this retrospective article. The following is a partial list of those Morningside activists not mentioned who spent their time, energy and money to defeat I-485:

**1965-1970**

- Ted Frankel
- Richard Freeman
- Ed Garrard
- Al Keuttner
- Dan Lyons, Sr.
- Carl Oliver

**1970-1975**

- John & Catherine Arrington
- Carolyn Becknell Mann
- Aaron & Bonnie Bertrand
- Lamar Clements
- Rebecca Davis
- Van & Martha Hall
- Ange Hinrichs
- Roy & Angela Ionnedies
- Julian Jacobs
- Howard Jones
- Bruce Lindeman
- Jim & Pat Lindskoog
- Andy & Jane Lipscomb
- Alex Milt
- John Myer
- Claire & Bill Oppenheim
- Lou Penuguy
- Bege Vellala

Although it was not stopped, it became a shadow of what the GHD planners had in mind. With a new neighborhood coalition, CAUTION, and others fighting tooth and nail, it was pared down to what we now call Freedom Parkway. With the energy, planning, and leadership of Maynard Jackson, both in and out of office, the remaining land along the Freeway path became that jewel in the crown of downtown Atlanta, Freedom Park.

But what of the highway land left in Morningside? The highway may have been stopped for good, but in 1974 the neighborhood still looked like a battlefield. It was still in danger of further deterioration. Much of the land within the path of the highway was held by GHD, which was certainly not inclined to do Morningside any favors. What was not held by the state was owned for the most part by land speculators or others who had no vested interest in the future of the neighborhood.

Mary Davis set up an MLPA committee to work with a group of Georgia Tech graduate students to develop a working process for the return of the highway land to the neighborhood.

One of the very large stumbling blocks was forgiveness of \$16.2 million in Federal funds that was supposed to be returned to the U.S. Treasury. Most of that was settled by Federal legislative actions and rulings that allowed the city to use some of the land for other public uses. These became Sidney Marcus Park, John Howell Park, and Freedom Park.

There was litigation about who had the right to re-purchase the highway property. Did the previous owners have first dibs? (It turns out they did, but only if they sold their property to the state as part of the condemnation process.) There were fights about the zoning of the highway land, with MLPA fighting hard to make sure it remained single-family residential.

“We finally began to negotiate with the GHD to sell the property to private buyers,” said Davis. “When they turned over the deeds, that was when it was really, really, over. When they gave up ownership of the land, there was nothing else they could do.”

**Dispositions**

Barbara Ray received her doctorate in Urban Studies in 1975 and recently retired from the university as Associate Professor Emeritus. She still lives in Morningside.

In 1976 Virginia Gaddis moved to Washington, D.C., where she still resides.

Virginia Taylor went to law school, passed the bar in 1977, and is now an internationally-recognized trademark and copyright lawyer. She still lives in Morningside.

Mary Davis was elected to the Atlanta City Council in 1978. She served on the Council until 1998. She still lives in Morningside.

The most important legacy of the death of the road and those who hastened it was a tectonic shift in the way power is expressed within the city.

Adele Northrup began a landscaping company that she operated for 20 years. She now runs a bed and breakfast inn in Virginia Highland.

**What It All Means**

When the dust finally settled, when the dirt was filled back in, when the “Condemned”

signs came down, and the “For Sale” signs went up, what did the death of I-485 mean in the larger history of the city?

For Morningside it meant more than just no road. It meant new homes, new parks, new growth.

For the city it ushered in a period of re-birth in its urban core, a renaissance that still surges thirty years later.

But the most important legacy of the death of the road and those who hastened it was its contribution to a tectonic shift in the way power is expressed within the city.

The rise to power of the black community was a pre-existing trend that was a reflection of political as well as population shifts within the city and the nation as a whole. And the City Charter was, among other things, a reflection of that trend. The net effect was a simultaneous rise to power of the city’s black and white neighborhoods.

But without the armature of organization provided by the anti-highway coalition stretching across the city in 1973 and 1974, the shifts in power that occurred in the Seventies and Eighties would have been expressed in vastly different ways.

Thirty years later, Sam Massell assessed the political impact of the highway coalition this way: “The highway fight had a tremendous impact on not only Atlanta’s land-use policy,” he said. “It ultimately shifted the weight of power in the city. Today we see the neighborhoods having more political strength and savvy than the business community.”

Neighborhoods now have the power to rule the city. And that is the legacy of that small band of

dedicated Morningside road warriors, who put their children in strollers and went door to door gathering 600 signatures.

We owe them a debt of gratitude.

**Postscript:** *In August 25, 2000, Harold Dye, a 1973 candidate for mayor who campaigned on a pro-highway platform, wrote an article in the Atlanta Business Chronicle. In it he resurrected the proposal to construct I-485 through Morningside and Virginia Highland as an alternative to further MARTA construction. The editors received a large number of phone calls, emails, and letters in protest.*

**Acknowledgements**

The editors would like to thank the following people for generously sharing their I-485 archives: Mary Davis, Adele Northrup, Barbara Ray, Chuck and Helena Robisch, Joe Drolet, and Dan Lyons, Jr.

In addition to those listed above, the editors also interviewed Judge Charles A. Moye, Panke Bradley Miller, Sam Massell, Virginia Taylor, Leon Eplan, and Virginia Gaddis. 🍷

**I-485 Archive Established at Atlanta History Center**

**A**s a result of documents uncovered during research into this article, the Atlanta History Center has established an archive of I-485 materials, including printed matter, photographs, maps, audio-visual materials, etc.

If you have any material relating to the fight against I-485 that you would like to contribute to the archive, please email Van Hall at [hallconsulting@bellsouth.net](mailto:hallconsulting@bellsouth.net). or call him at 404-876-2520.

The MLPA has established a fund to continue the work of archiving I-485 materials. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to the fund, make your check payable to the Morningside Lenox Park Association and mail it to:

**MLPA I-485 Archive Fund**

MLPA, Box P.O. Box 8156  
Atlanta, GA 31106

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