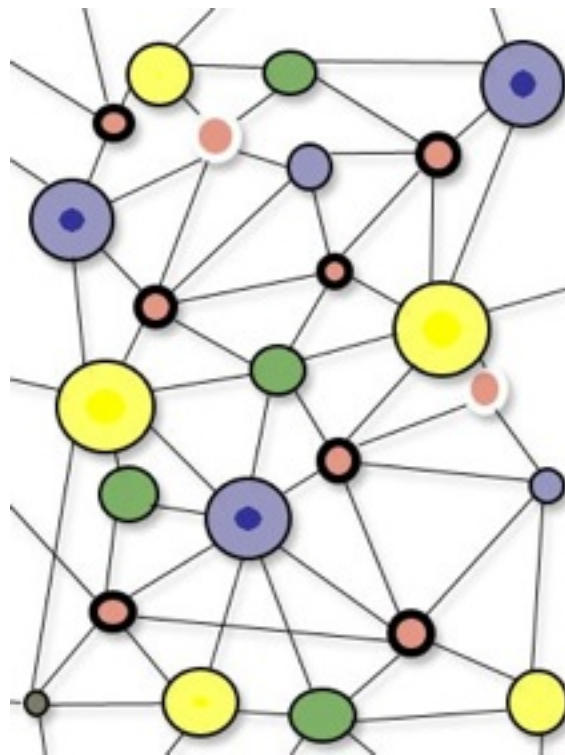


# A Design waiting for it's Moment

*The History of the Conflict and Conflict Resolution which ultimately became Freedom Park and Freedom Parkway, and catalyzed a two decade growth spurt for Atlanta's Eastside*



Adaptive System Design Issues in a Complex World

Fall 2014

*“that is what the pattern language is -- belongs to the ninety percent of our feeling where our feelings are all the same”*

Christopher Alexander  
*A Pattern Language*

## Freedom Park and Freedom Parkway

### The Outcome

A 207 acre park symbolizing Freedom, dedicated in 2000, with a meandering parkway running through it. The Park knit together Atlanta’s Eastside, galvanized hundreds of millions of dollars of investment around the park, revitalized the neighborhoods around it and helped cement the notion that “Freedom”, one of the



great words in the English language, had a proud center in Atlanta.

The Park was a connector. It did more than connect neighborhoods; It connected black and white; and most importantly, it connected iconically two of Atlanta’s great freedom fighters, Nobel-Prize winning President Jimmy Carter, a principal leaders of the global Human Rights Movement, and Nobel-Prize winning Martin Luther King Junior, a principal leader of the global Civil Rights Movement. The

Presidential Library of President Carter and the Birth Home and Museum of Dr. King were “connected” by Freedom Park.

### The Angst

It was 1989 and the Federal Judge was annoyed. He was annoyed at the City of Atlanta, the State of Georgia, and the neighborhoods around Inman Park. His annoyance was understandable. For twenty years, the citizens of Atlanta had stood by patiently as complex litigation had wound its way through federal courts. Held hostage by this litigation was one hundred acres of prime real estate in downtown Atlanta. The acreage had deteriorated over that time: what was originally pristine residential property had become a vast wasteland - littered and unsafe. The State had bought the land in the sixties by eminent domain in order to build an eight-lane highway that would connect Atlanta to Decatur. Because of the litigation, as well as neighborhood protests led by CAUTION, the land had become home to crack addicts. Anyone who dared to walk through the land told stories about the drug paraphernalia, the beer cans, and detritus of urban civilization evident there.

In response to the State, the neighborhoods, with uncharacteristic strength, had uniformly and loudly said “hell no!” to the idea of a huge highway. And political leaders took note. Young Mayor Maynard Jackson’s war cry was: “Elephants will roost in trees before the State builds that road.”

To compound matters, Atlanta was designated as the home of the Carter Presidential Library, and the land chosen for the Library sat squarely in the middle of the acreage. Atlanta was also the birthplace of Martin Luther King Junior, and his birth home and church were adjacent to the acreage. Pressure was intense.

The judge’s annoyance was understandable for another reason. On September 18, 1990, Atlanta was announced as the host of the 1996 Summer Olympics. From that point forward, the pressure was on: How would those drug-infested acres look to a worldwide television audience?

The Judge had had enough. He had to bring this twenty year litigation to a close. But how?

### The Muddle

How to proceed under such pressure? How should the six months be spent? Where should the teams start? Could there be a quick resolution? Would the negotiation sputter and die?

### The Toil

The Federal Judge decided to appoint a Federal Mediator. In February, 1991, he called the parties together and announced his decision to appoint the mediator; He then made it clear to all that they had six months to find a settlement. Failing to agree, the judge made it clear that he would decide, and ominously warned “the only assurance I can give you is that none of you will be happy with what I decide.”

And so began the high stakes federal mediation. CAUTION, the coalition of neighborhoods that had fought the road, agreed that Kathy Bradshaw, then President of The Inman Park Neighborhood Association, would lead the neighborhood’s team. The President of the Georgia Department of Transportation, Hal Rives, was appointed by newly elected Governor Zell Miller to lead the State team. The Mayor appointed John Reid, his Chief Administrative Officer, and Leon Eplan, Commissioner of Planning and Development, to lead their negotiating team.

Negotiations proceeded with intensity for five months. Neither side budged. The neighborhoods and the City said “No road - at all. Make it a park.” The State said “Highway”. City negotiators were being faithful to Mayor Maynard Jackson’s pledge - and Reid and Eplan fervently believed that a highway would forever divide the city rather than unite it. On one side of the highway would be the black neighborhoods - to the south. On the other side would be the white neighborhoods - to the North. This had been a city stereotype for far too long, and Eplan and Reid were committed to changing that.

During this stalemate period, Reid was delighted that Eplan, was pushing his staff hard. They were furiously working on a plan that involved a “meandering” road together with a Parkway that would connect the neighborhoods, but would also connect the King Center to the Carter Center. As Eplan finalized his thinking about what the road and park should look like, he asked Reid, in August, 1991, what Reid’s thinking might be about a name for the project.

John Reid had just completed a project called “Freedom Walk”, which encouraged tourism in the old Fourth Ward and Auburn Avenue, the home of Martin Luther King Junior and the original black business community. He was convinced that Martin Luther King and Atlanta had every right to claim heritage as the home of civil rights “freedom”.

So when Eplan asked, Reid answered “How about Freedom Park and Freedom Parkway?”. Eplan liked the idea and thus the City team had a plan - notwithstanding that the negotiations had stalled - in a summer stalemate.

Then, a miracle happened. In August, 1991, Governor Miller had also had enough. Time was running out - on the mediation and on getting Georgia ready for the Olympics. The Governor fired Hal Rives in August, 1991, and immediately appointed Wayne Shackleford as his new Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation. This decision changed everything.

The day after his appointment, Shackleford came to see John Reid in the Mayor’s Office of City Hall. John was anxious to hear from the new appointee. “The Governor’s marching orders to me are to settle this dispute. What will it take to settle? Reid answered: “You need to say that you support a ‘meandering’ road.” Shackleford was stunned. “That’s all?”

And so - in the next session on that same day - Shackleford spoke first. “The Governor and I support a meandering road.” The group was at first dumbfounded and then all present remember the elation that immediately followed.

An agreement had been reached. The Group agreed to call the Governor and the Mayor immediately, and to have each of their Press Offices assemble metropolitan Atlanta press for an on-site press conference.

### Lessons for a Life Devoted to Patterns and Systems

Reid noted in August, 1991, that the connector pattern was alive and well during these negotiations. Each neighborhood could be conceptualized as a module of a greater system of communities - as a vital system module. The Carter Center and the King Center could as well. Decatur too. If any one of these modules were disconnected, or ignored, the negotiation would likely fail. The only way forward in this very complex negotiation was to see the entire space as a massive opportunity to add value, great value, to the entire network of communities and neighborhoods in East Atlanta.

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