PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THROUGH DESIGN
INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL EQUITY AND ACTIVE DESIGN

Held on May 19, 2014, at the recently opened New School University Center constructed with Active Design principles, FitCity 9 brought together new City leadership and experts on health equity, affordable housing, and community engagement. At the first FitCity conference under the new mayoral administration, participants were excited by the progress made, inspired by new possibilities and directions, and challenged to achieve more in Active Design and health equity.

Many of the strategies presented in the Active Design Guidelines and supplements have been implemented in New York City and beyond, giving residents more access to active living, nutritious food, and healthy sociability. Building on the publication of the Active Design Guide for Community Groups and Affordable Design for Affordable Housing, and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's collaboration with the Partnership for a Healthier NYC to bring Active Design principles to communities throughout NYC, health equity took its rightful place center stage at FitCity 9.

Housing quality, nutrition, safe streets, transport options, and gathering places for meaningful community activities are all interconnected. These components of social equity, as the FitCity 9 speakers explored from a wide range of perspectives, are also indispensable elements of Active Design in the broadest and most progressive sense of the term.

This publication includes highlights from the event’s presentations and speakers’ remarks.

Introduction:
Elizabeth J. Garland, MD, MS, Associate Professor, Departments of Preventive Medicine and Pediatrics, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai
"Minority neighborhoods are less likely to have recreational facilities; body mass index increases as the number of recreational facilities decrease."

By the year 2030, over half of American adults and a third of American children could be obese. Lower socioeconomic status correlates with higher obesity rates. The rise in obesity is partially due to decreased physical activity.

Stair climbing, walking to work, and using active transportation can help address high levels of sedentary time. At Arbor House in the South Bronx, Garland and her colleagues have been studying the impacts of Active Design on residents. Participants in focus groups report that the on-site gym, beautiful outdoor spaces, and appealing stairs make them want to be healthy. Garland introduced Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder and President of PolicyLink, who spoke to this issue on a national scale.

Keynote:
Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder and President, PolicyLink
"Where you live determines whether you have access to a good school and whether there are job opportunities or a public transit system that can connect you to a job. Where you live determines whether you are lucky enough to have value in your community. It also determines your ability to eat a healthy diet. Where you live makes a difference in your health and your ability to be healthy."

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home. Where you live even determines how long you live and how well you live.”

Angela Glover Blackwell emphasized the need to lead all health work with an equity lens so that all people are able to walk out of their front doors on to streets that support health, well-being, and physical activity. Currently, people with lower incomes are more likely to live in housing and neighborhoods with exposure to environmental hazards, such as exhaust from diesel trucks. People with lower incomes are also more likely to live in neighborhoods that are disconnected from transit that provides access to jobs. Groups around the country are exploring ways to develop transit-oriented housing where the housing remains affordable. This is an opportunity to work with developers and designers to bring in an equity lens from the beginning of a project.

A fit city is a stable, healthy, and livable city for all: where all people can be physically active and have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, but also one in which children start school ready to learn. It is one where workers make family-supporting wages, and where jobs are accessible to all. Blackwell told the audience that they must bring a new urgency to equity; it cannot be the last thing we consider. They have to lead with equity because when projects lead with equity, they get it right for everyone.

In order to create fit cities, developers and designers must think intentionally about equity impacts at the front end of planning processes.

— Glover Blackwell
**Moderator:** Rick Bell, FAIA, Executive Director, AIA New York Chapter

“Conferences in and of themselves, if they do not lead to something else like the Active Design Guidelines or changes in projects and policies, are only as good as the discussion.”

The New York City agencies and departments represented at FitCity have all contributed to achievements in promoting and incorporating Active Design. The new mayoral administration provides an opportunity to advance Active Design goals along with the new priority programs, projects, and policies. The conversation among the Commissioners emphasized the need for the City’s agencies to continue to work together and to find ways to incorporate Active Design elements in order to help each agency reach its priority goals.

**Mary Bassett,** Commissioner, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

“The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) values working with other City agencies because they have the tools to change the environment in which people live and enable them to lead healthier lives.”

Commissioner Bassett’s priority is to achieve equity in health for people of all races and incomes in this city. Dr. Bassett wants all New Yorkers to have long, healthy lives. The strategies in the Active Design Guidelines and supplements, including the Active Design Guide for Community Groups, are not just guidelines, they are policies that are being implemented. The DOHMH is proud of the successes achieved in partnership with other agencies, including the creation of bike lanes in Brownsville, Brooklyn in collaboration with the NYC Department of Transportation and the development and expansion of the Shape Up program with the Parks Department.

**Dr. Feniosky A. Peña-Mora,** Commissioner, NYC Department of Design and Construction

“It can be as simple as a playground in a park in which kids can play, grandparents can garden, and parents can run on a track. There is no single kind of prototypical user.”

Commissioner Peña-Mora said that when experts discuss an issue and put their best intentions forward, the collaboration can create a set of significant successes, such as the Active Design Guidelines. The NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC) seeks to understand how the implementation of these guidelines works and how these design elements are used by different populations. NYC is very diverse, and the City has to consider what people value, what people respect, what the culture fosters, and how that actually works in a space. Peña-Mora looks forward to exploring how City agencies can work toward making Active Design apply to the needs of every generation.

**Donna Corrado,** Commissioner, NYC Department for the Aging

“Seniors can become more physically fit by participating in exercise and healthy living activities to combat the chronic illnesses many of them face as they get older. These activities allow them to feel part of their local communities, thus preventing social isolation and depression.”
Seniors, many of whom spend prolonged amounts of time in their homes, are more physically fit when participating in exercise and healthy living activities that combat chronic illnesses. Making public spaces safe, accessible, and attractive also helps seniors stay active and engaged with their communities. The New York City Department of Transportation pedestrian safety initiatives and Mayor de Blasio’s Vision Zero initiative, for example, help all New Yorkers—particularly seniors who are vulnerable to pedestrian crashes. The Department for the Aging’s work with the Parks Department to provide activities for seniors has also helped seniors participate in their communities. These initiatives make life easier and public spaces more accessible for the city’s growing senior population.

Victor Calise, Commissioner, Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities
“The de Blasio administration is thinking about the vulnerable populations, and people with disabilities must be part of the conversation.”

About 800,000 people, or 10% of the population, are living with disabilities in New York City, and the landscape of the city greatly impacts people with disabilities. The Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) is working with other City agencies to go beyond the required codes and standards under the ADA guidelines to provide opportunities for active living for people with disabilities. For example, they worked with the Parks Department on playground designs to include one ADA-compliant ramp and another steeper and non-compliant ramp to challenge children with disabilities who do not necessarily need the ADA ramp. People with disabilities are going to challenge themselves and adapt to altered surroundings, but we have to build with them in mind.

Robert Garafola, Deputy Commissioner for Management, Budget and Public Programs, NYC Departments of Parks and Recreation
“We are engaging kids to get them active, involved, and away from the computer and the TV. We want them doing fitness, sports, or just walking.”

The Parks Department has 1,000 playgrounds and 2,000 parks throughout the city, and they are working on making them accessible to everyone. Deputy Commissioner Garafola highlighted the Schoolyard to Playground program in partnership with Trust for Public Land that has opened up 227 schoolyards as playgrounds since 2007. Parks also works closely with community boards, organizations, and associations to make facilities accessible to the largest, most diverse groups of people possible.

Jon Orcutt, Policy Director, NYC Department of Transportation
“Every open space in the city, every city street, is part of a social fabric. We want to use as much space as we can for social gathering places, economic activity, and artistic expression.”

The NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) has programs for everything from public seating to new public spaces to redefining streets to be greener and more efficient by encouraging walking, cycling, and faster bus service. With the Mayor’s mandate that DOT focus on traffic safety, DOT will slow traffic speeds, create more room for pedestrians, and design inclusive spaces for New Yorkers of all groups and abilities.

NYC is very diverse, very heterogeneous, and the City has to consider what people value, what people respect, what the culture fosters, and how that actually works in a space.

— Peña-Mora
Moderator:
Sarah Wolf, MPH, RD, Active Design Manager, Active Living Program, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

“While we are building affordable housing, we want to make sure that it is quality and that it provides residents with opportunities for healthy living.”

The de Blasio administration has laid out a comprehensive plan to build and preserve 200,000 affordable units over the coming decade. When designing new buildings or rehabilitating and preserving existing buildings, we must ensure that design promotes the health of residents.

Elyzabeth Gaumer, Director of Research, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development

“A lack of affordable housing has implications for health because making ends meet is a source of chronic stress that is tied to depression and anxiety and can also trigger stress-response mechanisms that increase susceptibility and impair physical health over time.”

Over the last 20 years, the number and the share of renter-occupied households that are rent-burdened, spending more than 30% of household income on rent, has dramatically increased. High rent can drive lower-income households to live in lower-quality housing as part of a series of strategic tradeoffs, and that has direct and indirect implications for health: increasing exposure to indoor hazards, and secondary consequences including missed days of school and work. Gaumer and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) conducted a study comparing households that moved into quality affordable housing through HPD programs versus those that did not. Approximately 20 months after moving into affordable housing, those households were significantly less likely to report being very or extremely worried about money; significantly less likely to have reported delaying health care for financial reasons; marginally less likely to be anxious or depressed; and half as likely to have asthma symptoms in the past year. With this housing-based approach to health, substantial improvements can be made in both the short and long term.

Shampa Chanda, Director, Queens and Staten Island Planning, Division of Planning, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development

“Through transit-oriented development, neighborhood planning, and mixed-use development, we are trying to achieve more economically diverse neighborhoods with diverse affordable housing typologies.”

When HPD issues requests for proposals (RFP) for new construction, it encourages developers to incorporate strategies from the Active Design Guidelines.

Chanda recognized that though it may be easier to incorporate Active Design improvements in new constructions, HPD still wants designers and developers to think creatively and find
Active Transportation:
Bicycle Storage in Existing Buildings
Credit: Blue Sea Development Company (left); Gale's Industry Supply (right)
ways to implement Active Design features into renovations and retrofits. HPD is also working with the DOHMH with assistance from the Center for Active Design to do outreach to affordable housing developers. For the Livonia Avenue Initiative, for example, potential bidders were advised on how to incorporate Active Design elements when retrofitting existing housing.

Colleen Flynn, Director, Green and Healthy Neighborhoods, Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) New York City

“We have learned that the factors that are integral to poverty, such as inadequate education and housing, and food insecurity, are also indicators of poor health, and we see community development as a business of improving health.”

LISC NYC is dedicated to helping revitalize low-income neighborhoods and focuses on preserving existing affordable housing and ensuring that it stays affordable, maintained, and financially viable.

In 2013, LISC started a pilot program to help low-income families live healthier by expanding access to affordable healthy food. LISC also partners with the DOHMH, and the NYC Coalition for a Smoke-Free City on the Two Shades of Green program to promote green and healthy retrofits and property maintenance in existing buildings and to demonstrate how health-driven upgrades have asset-management benefits. The program works with community development corporation (CDC) partners on water and energy conservation, transitioning buildings to green cleaning, including Active Design components in buildings, integrating pest management, and having buildings go smoke-free.

In a 56-unit senior building in South Williamsburg, Brooklyn owned by LISC partner Los Sures, Flynn and team performed a walk-through and met with architects and CDC staff to identify opportunities for Active Design before renovations began. The senior residents of this building now benefit from the Active Design improvements incorporated.

Jack Robbins, AIA, LEED AP, Principal, FXFOWLE Architects

“Atlanta has high obesity and diabetes rates, and the highest are in the outer perimeter of the metropolitan region, due in part to the amount of driving that people do.”

Design can change behavior, which can lead to improved health. It is important to link affordable housing projects and transit systems together. As a New York City architect, much of what Robbins does is export the New York model. For a 120 acre site in downtown Atlanta, the goal was to create a multimodal hub to serve as both a local and regional transportation center that includes trains, buses, and high-speed rail capacity and that also integrates residential and office buildings. New Yorkers take for granted the concept of a place where one can live, work, and have open space and access to transit within a very small area – something that is currently limited in Atlanta but that Robbins is working to promote.
Katie Swenson, Vice President, National Design Initiatives, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

“Community developers must coordinate organizing, transportation access, job access, housing, and local investment in social innovation. We all care about affordable housing, but it is only one piece.”

Swenson shared a portion of a speech that Enterprise Community Partners founder Jim Rouse gave to the Seedco Foundation in 1988 in New York: “We can’t just settle for doing some housing, finding some jobs or building some human support systems. We must do it all: decent housing in decent neighborhoods for everyone.” Enterprise developed around financing and supporting housing developers and building housing but is now considering the bigger issues. Enterprise has a design department, a green department, a transit oriented development department, and various financing streams. By collaborating with one another, they understand how their shared inputs can lead to improved outcomes.

With the Affordable Care Act and the creation of ACOs, we see that the financial incentive for keeping people well is overtaking the financial incentive for sending them to the hospital. If ACO profits are tied to recruiting healthy patients and keeping their populations healthy, they are the stakeholders in building active, healthy, joyful communities.

— Zusman
Pathways to Neighborhood Impact
Credit: Enterprise Community Partners

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| LAND USE | | | | |
| preseration of historic | | | | |
| mixed use development | | | | |
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| TRANSPORT + CIRCULATION | | | | |
| multi-use trails | | | | |
| bike lanes, bike stations | | | | |
| water taxi / shuttle / car share | | | | |

| NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES | | | | |
| community garden | | | | |
| farmers market | | | | |
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| HOUSING / BUILDING | | | | |
| preservation of historic | | | | |
| multi-generational housing | | | | |
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| small living units | | | | |
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| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | | | | |
| geothermal | | | | |
| smart grid | | | | |
| gray water system | | | | |
| storm water infiltration | | | | |
| blue streets | | | | |
| open green space/parks | | | | |
| wetland improvements | | | | |

| PROGRAM + SERVICES | | | | |
| festivals/concerts | | | | |
| health/wellness center | | | | |
| day care | | | | |

FITCITY 9
STREETS AND THE PUBLIC REALM

Moderator:
Wendy Feuer, Assistant Commissioner of Design, Art & Wayfinding, NYC Department of Transportation
“The New York City Department of Transportation is reforming the form of the city by extending curbs, making it safer to walk, putting seats in the city, and creating bike lanes and related infrastructure.”

Feuer spoke to the need to ensure that all communities are engaged. While we all may want the same principles, we may have different perspectives on priorities and the class issues inherent when making changes in communities. The panelists gave testimony to the need for active transportation systems and community input, as well as the challenges they encounter.

Edie Zusman, MD, FACS, MBA, Medical Director, Neuroscience, Sutter Health East Bay Neuroscience Institute, Eden Medical Center
“If Accountable Care Organizations’ profits are tied to recruiting healthy patients and keeping their populations healthy, they are the stakeholders in building active, healthy, joyful communities.”

Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) are a relatively new model of health insurance in which individuals are covered by a capitated, or set, annual rate for access to an integrated health system instead of paying the health system for each healthcare visit. This model aligns incentives so that the health system’s bottom line depends on keeping members healthy rather than providing health care after the fact.

With the Affordable Care Act and the creation of ACOs, Zusman has seen that the financial incentive for keeping people well is overtaking the financial incentive for sending them to the hospital. In addition, many ACOs and current health systems are not-for-profit and have community-benefit dollars, so they are required to contribute to projects with larger community benefits. These could include outdoor gyms and public plazas, for example. This is an opportunity for Active Design to align with health systems.

Cecil D. Corbin-Mark,
Deputy Director/Director of Policy Initiatives, WE ACT for Environmental Justice
“If we support communities, we will ultimately harness the expertise of those people who are most impacted by the policies and practices that have left us unhealthy.”

Based in West Harlem, WE ACT works in communities across northern Manhattan. Their work is based on the belief that the policies that impact the lives of residents, particularly environmental and environmental-health policies, need to be transformed by engaging the people on the front lines. In 1998, WE ACT heard from residents that the West Harlem waterfront was dangerous and difficult to navigate, and residents wanted that stretch of their neighborhood to be a place where they could get some rest, take their families, and access the water. WE ACT set out to tackle that despair and create tools to help transform that part of the neighborhood; the process started

Community members had the right to be at the table and plan the future of their neighborhoods.
— Corbin-Mark
by conducting outreach and bringing 200 residents to an initial town hall meeting. With a grant secured from the U.S. Department of Energy, WE ACT hired a planner, Mitchell Silver, the current Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, to structure a planning process that would support and value the community.

It took 10 years of organizing, but ultimately, the community achieved their vision because residents were connected to the process. The outcome is what one sees today where 125th Street meets the Hudson River. There is a beautiful walkway and bikeway, green lawns, restored piers, and families enjoying the space.

Michael King, RA, Principal, Nelson\Nygaard
“It is about our kids. A lot of what you see designed is for middle-aged, middle-class people to enjoy. It is not about them; it is about young people.”

Michael King has designed streets for 20 years, working at the intersection of transportation and urban design, with a particular emphasis on pedestrian safety, bicycle facilities, and traffic calming. King pointed out how some simple, obvious, people-based designs of public space are often ignored. Sometimes, it is not difficult, but somehow we find a way not to do it. King challenged the audience to think more about prioritizing pedestrians and their needs when designing the public realm.
Joanna Frank, Executive Director, Center for Active Design

“The Center for Active Design was born at FitCity out of this discussion across professions on how we can achieve the goal of promoting health through design.”

Joanna Frank introduced Martin Dunn who exemplifies how to build in a way that supports health. Dunn Development considers itself a socially conscious, award-winning real estate company. Dunn not only focuses on housing but also the surrounding community, and he is continually aware of how his developments affect their environments.

**Keynote:**
Martin Dunn, President, Dunn Development Corp.

“The tenets of Active Design, using architecture and urban planning to promote physical activity and better health, resonate deeply with me.”

Dunn addressed the role of architects and developers in designing and building quality and healthy permanent housing for the most vulnerable populations: homeless people with...
mental illness, homeless people with HIV/AIDS, people with psychiatric or developmental disabilities coming out of hospitals or nursing homes, adult homes or transitional housing. These vulnerable populations are the people most likely to suffer from obesity and its related chronic diseases. People with serious mental illness die 25 years earlier than the average person, and adults currently or previously diagnosed with depression are 60% more likely to be obese than their non-depressed counterparts.

Dunn discussed how people living in institutional settings often feel stigmatized, isolated, and disconnected from society and family, and how the integration of supportive housing units into regular buildings is beneficial for all. Dunn Development's Navy Green project provides a portion of the site for studio apartments for formerly homeless adults with special needs.

With nearly a whole city block to work with, Dunn pursued a vision for mixed-income mixed-tenure, mixed-use development. According to Dunn, Affordable Designs for Affordable Housing and mixed-use development with the DOHMH and HPD on Affordable Designs for Affordable Housing was not something Dunn is a fan of. His biggest Active Design achievements were not including parking, and putting bike parking in every building, exceeding the amount required by zoning. Dunn also recently broke ground on Livonia Commons, a project to revitalize a desolate former commercial quarter in East New York. While there is extensive lighting on the buildings, Dunn's priority is to get DOT and the MTA to play a role in revitalizing that corridor too. They are designing a comprehensive sidewalk lighting plan to submit to DOT to make the area safer and create a unified look.

Dunn highlighted how developers, City agencies, and designers need to create more integrated housing options and break down the funding barriers between agencies, make the zoning resolution more flexible, have full kitchens, and allow people to have pets. We put the children's play area right next to the supportive-housing building and put market-rate townhouses immediately next to the supportive-housing.

— Dunn
David Burney, FAIA, Associate Professor, Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment, Pratt Institute

“Health equity is at the heart of social equity, and the change requires collaboration, both across government agencies and with the community.”

David Burney highlighted two themes from the conference: the idea that health equity is at the heart of all forms of social equity and the theme of collaboration across City agencies and with communities. In a discussion led by Rick Bell, leaders of several City agencies highlighted their work to create quality spaces that encourage physical activity but more importantly meet the needs of the diverse groups in NYC across incomes, ages, geographic locations, and cultures. Angela Glover Blackwell underscored that by meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, we meet the needs of all. The Housing and Community Development panel emphasized the importance of quality affordable housing for health and the need to connect housing to sustainable neighborhood integration. Panelists in the Streets and the Public Realm panel touched on the importance of community engagement in the planning process, good design and the needs and opportunities for innovative funding streams. Martin Dunn finished on an inspiring note calling for the integration of supportive housing into regular housing to address physical and mental health with quality design and amenities, which are also beneficial to the health of the general population. Burney ended the day by echoing the call to action of many of the other presenters for participants to collaborate to implement Active Design strategies in an equitable way throughout NYC.

DAY 2 OF FITCITY:
The second day of the FitCity 9 conference created the opportunity for participants to discuss the issues raised during the panels and presentations on the first day. The half-day gathering included a variety of roundtable conversations and hands-on workshops related to the intersection of Active Design, affordable housing, and transportation access in all of New York City’s five boroughs. James Rojas, urban planner, community activist, and artist, led interactive health workshops that inspired participants to share ideas on how to increase physical activity in NYC and give people a new way to examine their communities’ physical forms.

40% to 60% of individuals with schizophrenia and 55% to 68% of people with bipolar disorder are overweight or obese.
Adults currently or previously diagnosed with depression are 60% more likely to be obese than their non-depressed counterparts.

— Dunn

CLOSING SUMMARY

40% to 60% of individuals with schizophrenia and 55% to 68% of people with bipolar disorder are overweight or obese. Adults currently or previously diagnosed with depression are 60% more likely to be obese than their non-depressed counterparts.

— Dunn
Initiatives related to healthy aging involving New York City agencies under Age Friendly NYC program, including community and civic participation, housing, public spaces and transportation, and health and social services: 59²

Amount of NYC’s acreage that is park land, as absolute area and in proportion: 29,000 acres, 14%³

Number of residents gaining neighborhood access to fresh produce through Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative: 450,000⁴

Mileage in NYC’s bicycling network as of May 2014: 900⁴

People with disabilities living in NYC, as absolute number and as proportion: 800,000, 10%⁵

Schoolyards converted to playgrounds in NYC since 2007: 227⁶

Number of NYC households paying over 30% of income toward housing, 2011: 1,090,136 (52%)⁷
Number of NYC households paying over half of gross income toward housing (severely rent-burdened):

335,149 (17%) in 1991;
632,275 (30%) in 2011.

Likelihood that rent-burdened or severely rent-burdened affordable-housing applicants in NYC (currently paying 30-49% or >50% of income toward rent, respectively) have delayed health care in the past year, relative to those not rent-burdened: prevalence,

29.4% and odds ratio, 1.61 times (30-49% group);
36.5% and 2.22 times (>50% group).

Increased likelihood of obesity for every additional 30 minutes spent in a car per day:

3%.

Reduction in incidence of cardiovascular disease and diabetes when median amount of daily walking and bicycling increased from four to 22 minutes:

14%.

Greater likelihood of obesity in adults currently or previously diagnosed with depression than in non-depressed counterparts:

60%.

Sources:
1. Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder and President, PolicyLink
2. Donna Corrado, Commissioner, NYC Department for the Aging
3. Robert Garofala, Deputy Commissioner for Management, Budget and Public Programs, NYC Departments of Parks and Recreation
4. Jon Orcutt, Policy Director, NYC Department of Transportation
5. Victor Calise, Commissioner, Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities
6. Robert Garofala
7. Elyzabeth Gaumer, Director of Research, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (absolute numbers); U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census (percentage of households)
8. Jack Robbins, citing Strategies for Metropolitan Atlanta’s Regional Transportation and Air Quality (SMARTRAQ) study by Lawrence Frank et al. at Georgia Tech (American Journal of Preventive Medicine 2004; 27: 87-96)
10. Martin Dunn, President, Dunn Development
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Martin Dunn, President, Dunn Development Corp.
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James Rojas, urban planner, community activist, and artist