

The Legacy of
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
and
Sweet Auburn

Proposals For The National Historical Park

Sweet Auburn, the Training Ground.

Here Was a Time ... a Place ... a Man Like No Other.

On January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King, Jr., was born to a prominent Baptist family in their home on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta.

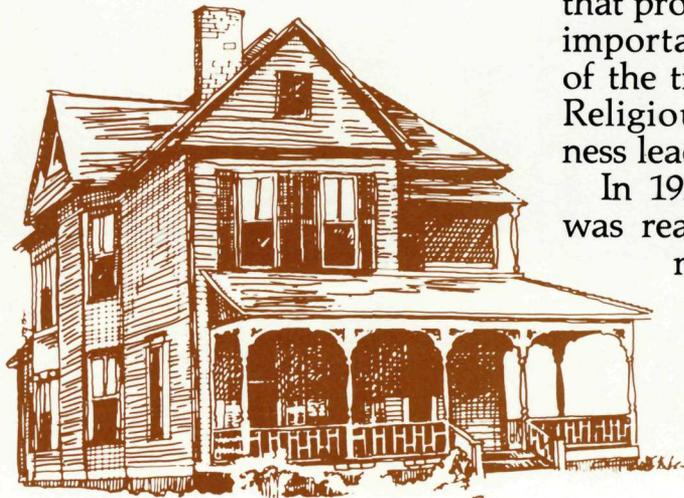
The fact that the birth took place on Auburn Avenue was perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the history of the American Civil Rights Movement.

The young Martin was to develop in an atmosphere unlike any that existed anywhere else in the world. The Auburn Ave-

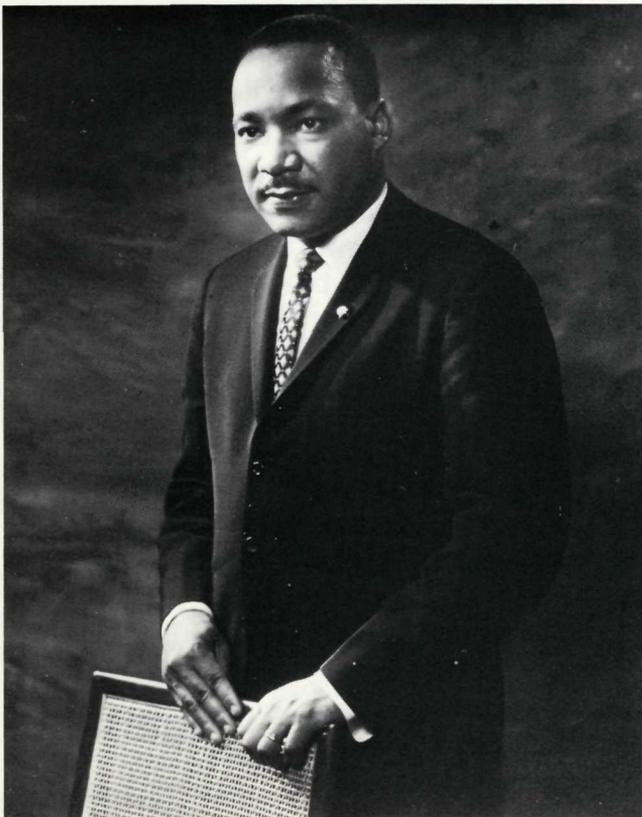
nue neighborhood — Sweet Auburn, as it came to be called — was a rare island of Black economic power, political and social growth, and increasing civil rights awareness.

At a time when Jim Crow segregation was at its strongest, Sweet Auburn had already become a training ground that produced many of the important Black leaders of the time. Civic leaders. Religious leaders. Business leaders.

In 1929, Sweet Auburn was ready to produce its most famous leader of all.



Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birth Home



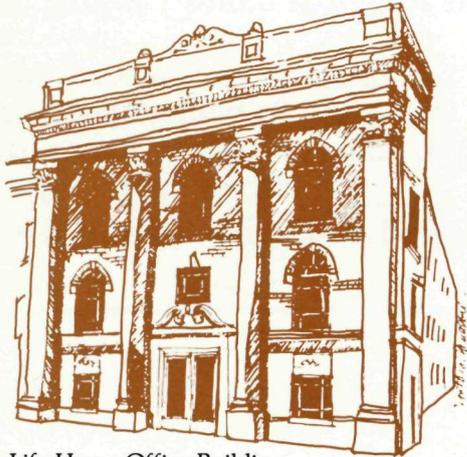
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. / courtesy of S.C.L.C.



March on Washington, 1963 / courtesy of National Archives



"Shotgun" Row Houses on Auburn Avenue



Atlanta Life Home Office Building

Now, years after the turbulence, the anguish, the victories, and the final tragedy, the neighborhood remains. In many ways, it remains as it was when King grew up here.

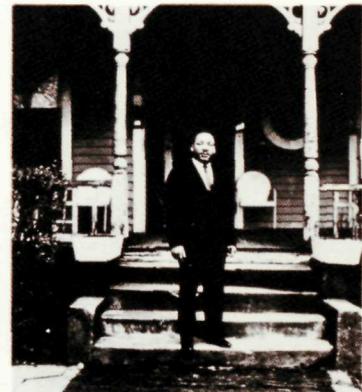
In this neighborhood, for the first time, there is the opportunity to preserve the environment that fostered and influenced not only one of history's great leaders but also one of history's great social movements.

Here then is the world as young Martin Luther King, Jr., found it during the early years of his life.



Rucker Building

Forced by the Jim Crow movement and the race riots of 1906 to pull back within legally defined geographic limits, the Black community of Sweet Auburn could look only to itself for its power. It attained a level of economic and social growth that seems, under the circumstances, almost miraculous.



Far down Auburn from the King birthplace, almost in the white central business district, stood the Atlanta Life Insurance Company Building, early home of the largest Black-controlled stockholder life insurance company in America.

Just this side of it stood the three story Rucker Building, Atlanta's first Black-owned office building, completed in 1906 by barber and realtor Henry Rucker. Rucker had been appointed Collector of Internal Revenue in Georgia by President McKinley in 1897.

Along with Rucker, other Black-owned office buildings on and near Auburn Avenue furnished space for professionals and businessmen during the key growth period of Sweet Auburn. The Odd Fellows Build-



ing and Auditorium, built in 1913, provided not only needed office space but something even more valuable — a facility for large meetings — at a time when Blacks were denied the right to rent space in Atlanta's Municipal Auditorium.



Odd Fellows Building

Here in the Odd Fellows Building, along with the businesses, were the Atlanta office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League southern field office, and the home of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Little wonder, then, that another Auburn institution grew out of the Odd Fellows Building — the Gate City Drug Store, an informal gathering spot owned by Atlanta's first Black pharmacist. Here at the lunch counter, over lunch or coffee, Sweet Auburn's Black businessmen and social leaders could debate their future



Butler Street
YMCA

while youngsters like the youthful Martin Luther King could see for themselves the energy and determination of Black leadership.

Farther down the avenue stood the Top Hat Club which changed its name in 1950 to the Royal Peacock Club. A cultural center for the community, this club provided a showcase of local talent as well as an elegant setting for Black performers of national standing. Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Gladys Knight are only a few of the many who performed in Sweet Auburn.



Prince Hall Masons Building

Across the avenue, in the Herndon Building, were the offices of the Atlanta Urban League and the Atlanta School of Social Work. Alonzo Herndon, who designed and constructed the building five years before King was born, had been one of the 29 charter members of the Niagara Movement, the first modern civil rights organization to demand full voting rights for Blacks and immediate abolition of segregation.



Herndon Building

Just off Auburn on Butler Street was the Butler YMCA, which was and is still a key element in the formation of thousands of Auburn area youngsters including Vernon Jordan, Whitney Young and Martin Luther King, Jr. During the early 1930's citizenship classes were held here by leaders of the NAACP and other groups. Here, when King was 20, the Atlanta Negro Voters League would be formed. And here was the home of the famous Hungry Club, an inexpensive luncheon speaker's club that has been host to hundreds of local, national, and international leaders.

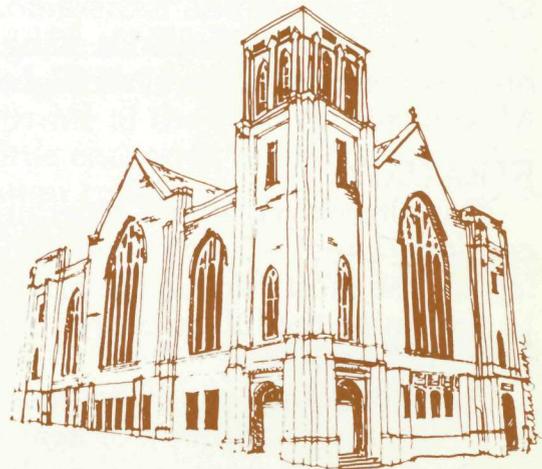
Two blocks closer to the King home, on Auburn, was the Prince Hall Masonic Building, constructed in 1937. It housed WERD, the first Black-owned and operated radio station in the United States. And, in 1960, it was to become the home of the national office of Dr. King's own Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which had been organized only three years earlier in the Alexander Building.



Big Bethel A.M.E. Church

Alongside the businesses and the civic organizations, there was yet another important element of life in Sweet Auburn — the churches. For decades, during the darkest days of segregation, they furnished the primary meeting places and training grounds for Black leaders.

The area was home to Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, which grew out of the first church for Africans in Atlanta. There was the Wheat Street Baptist Church, whose pastor, William Holmes Borders, was active during the 1940's voter drives and participated in the marches against segregation in the 1950's and 1960's.



Wheat Street Baptist Church

And, finally, there was Ebenezer Baptist Church. Here, the Reverend Alfred Daniel Williams spoke out from his pulpit to set a new and bold direction for his church. He announced that "at (that) moment the church dedicated itself to the advancement of black people and support of every righteous and social movement." The year was 1929. It was the year of the birth of Rev. Williams' grandson, Martin Luther King, Jr.



Ebenezer Baptist Church

These buildings still stand. They and 300 other historic structures remain as testament to the determination and success of Black Americans under the most trying conditions. In many cases, the buildings still house the dynamic organizations and institutions that made them famous. They are here now, for the inspiration and education that all Americans can derive from them... the physical and spiritual environment that produced Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement he led.

"Auburn is not just a street; it is an institution with influence and power not only among Georgians but American Negroes everywhere. It is the heart of Negro big business, a result of Negro cooperation and evidence of Negro possibility. It has an ideal to which it aspires, a code by which it lives and a genius on which it thrives."

The "Atlanta Independent", February 1926



Freedom Hall Complex

Under Congressional direction, the National Park Service is currently preparing a General Management Plan to guide the development and visitor use of the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site and Preservation District. It includes the National Historic Site — the King birthplace and surrounding block, Ebenezer Baptist Church, the Freedom Hall Complex including the memorial gravesite, and other structures. It may also include buildings or entire areas of Sweet Auburn and the Old Fourth Ward (Preservation District) depending on the direction chosen for the park.

Four alternative directions are suggested. After consideration and comments by all interested groups and individuals, the NPS will choose one or a combination of alternatives to serve as a basis for the park's General Management Plan.

Regardless of the alternative finally selected to serve as the basis for the draft General Management Plan, several basic interpretive themes or stories will be explained for visitors. They are **The Life and Legacy of Dr. King**, **Dr. King in the Context of a Prosperous Black Neighborhood**, and **The Evolution of the Civil Rights Movement: The Struggle for Equality**.

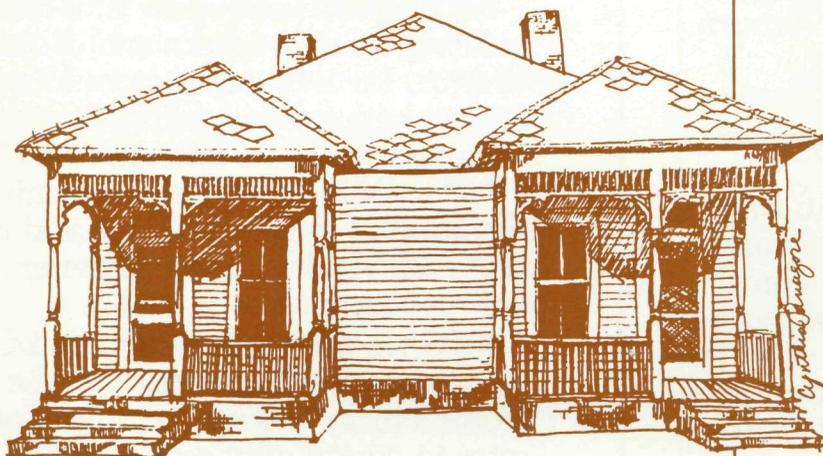


National Park Service Ranger with Tour Group



Interior of Big Bethel

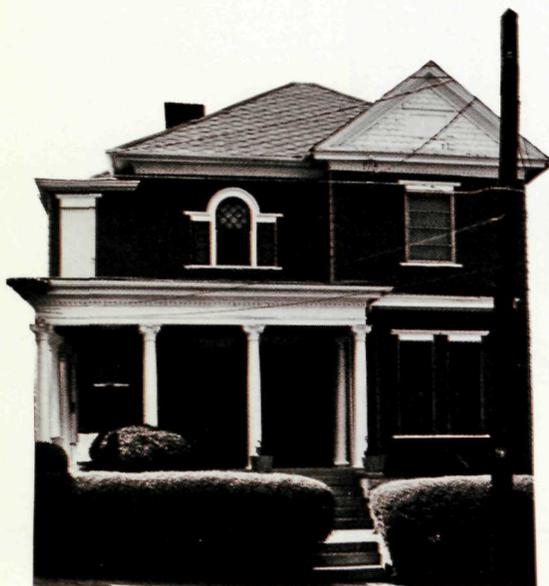
The methods used to tell the story will differ, depending on the focus of the particular alternative and whether historic structures directly related to the themes are likely to be available for a first-hand look. The titles given to the four alternatives are an indication of the proposed emphasis.



Architectural Styles
Typical of the Preservation District



Urban Wall Art of Auburn Avenue
Amos Johnson, Verna Parks, Nathan Hoskins 1976



While all of the alternatives center on the educational and inspirational elements of the Historic Site, each has its own special incentives and opportunities. Alternatives 1 and 2, have ample opportunities for new business and construction unrelated to the park. Alternative 3 provides widespread preservation and rehabilitation incentives, in an informative atmosphere that concentrates on Dr. King and the Sweet Auburn area. Alternative 4 provides the greatest potential for tourism and related industries.

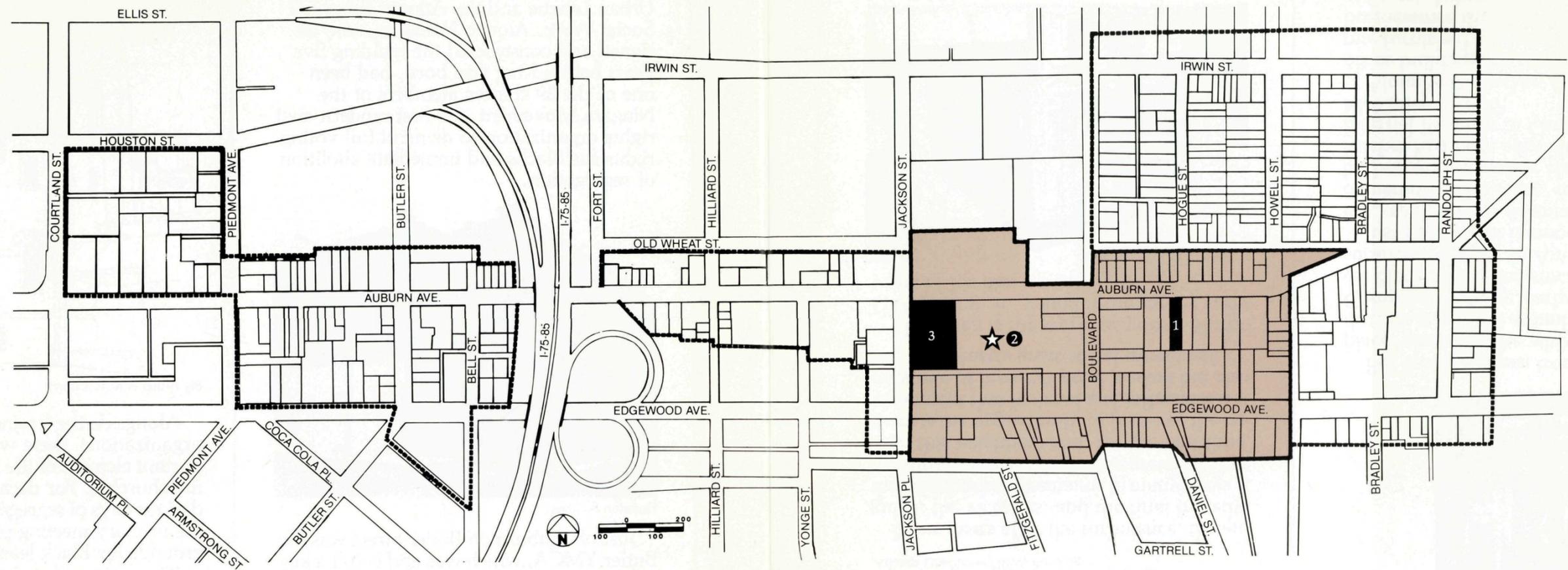
Congress also required the preparation of a development plan for the Preservation District and the area surrounding the park. This plan, called the Advisory Commission Study, will be prepared under the direction of the park's Advisory Commission and will set a course for the General Management Plan. It is the intent of Congress and the National Park Service that the NPS, City of Atlanta, and others work together through these two plans and their implementation to foster the preservation and revitalization of this nationally significant neighborhood. The selection of one or a combination of the alternatives will help the City set a direction for the Advisory Commission Study. The Advisory Commission Study will serve as a vehicle for City of Atlanta participation in the National Park Service planning process. Through this study, the City has an opportunity to play a significant role in shaping the future of the park and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Comments and opinions on the alternatives are solicited from all interested parties — property owners, tenant residents, social and government organizations, businessmen, community leaders and other individuals and groups with an interest in the future of the area and the park.

Comments should be expressed at meetings scheduled for this purpose or may be mailed to:

**National Park Service
522 Auburn Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30312**

ALTERNATIVE 1



"Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."

GOALS:

To focus on the life of Dr. King and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

STRATEGY:

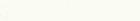
This alternative would generally be a continuation of existing conditions, relying for the most part on the private sector to determine the future course of the neighborhood.

Those buildings would be preserved which give a minimum representation of Dr. King's life in the community — Birth Home, Freedom Hall, and Ebenezer Baptist Church.

While most property on the Birth Home Block would remain under individual ownership and management, NPS may acquire and rehabilitate a few tenant-

Key to Map Points of Interest

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Birth Home | 17 Atlanta Life |
| 2 Freedom Hall Complex | (Old Home Office) |
| 3 Ebenezer Baptist Church | 18 Rucker Building |
| 4 Birth Home Block | 19 Our Lady of Lourdes |
| 5 Big Bethel A.M.E. Church | 20 Municipal Market |
| 6 Wheat Street Baptist Church | 21 Royal Peacock Club |
| 7 Butler Street YMCA | (Top Hat) |
| 8 Odd Fellows Building | 22 Henry's Grill |
| & Auditorium | 23 Silver Moon Barber Shop |
| 9 Prince Hall Masons Building | 24 Poro Beauty Shop |
| 10 Herndon Building | 25 Walden Building |
| 11 Alexander Building | 26 Mutual Federal Savings |
| 12 Fire Station #6 | & Loan |
| 13 Municipal Market | 27 Haugabrooks Funeral Home |
| Expansion | 28 Wigwam Apartments |
| 14 Charles Harper Home | 29 Alexander Hamilton Home |
| 15 Antoine Graves Home | 30 Hanley's Funeral Home |
| 16 "Shotgun" Row Houses | 31 Sweet Auburn Festival |

- | | |
|--|---|
|  | NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE |
|  | PRESERVATION DISTRICT |
|  | HISTORIC BUILDINGS OF INDIVIDUAL SIGNIFICANCE |
|  | OTHER HISTORIC BUILDINGS |

 KING CENTER VISITOR PROGRAMS

 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE VISITOR PROGRAMS

 KING CENTER / NATIONAL PARK SERVICE VISITOR PROGRAMS

 NPS INFORMATION FACILITY

occupied structures, to be sold or leased at low rates after rehabilitation.

The Birth Home would continue to be operated and maintained by the King Center, with some technical assistance from NPS.

Ebenezer Baptist Church would be preserved, open to visitors under a cooperative agreement with NPS.

The National Park Service would have no involvement in the Preservation District. The commercial and residential neighborhoods would be left to private investors, which may result in continued deterioration of historic structures, demolition and new construction or rehabilitation and adaptive reuse.

Educational and tourist opportunities would be limited to those offered by the King Center. Most of the story would be told through exhibits and audio-visual presentations, with technical assistance by

the NPS.

OPPORTUNITIES:

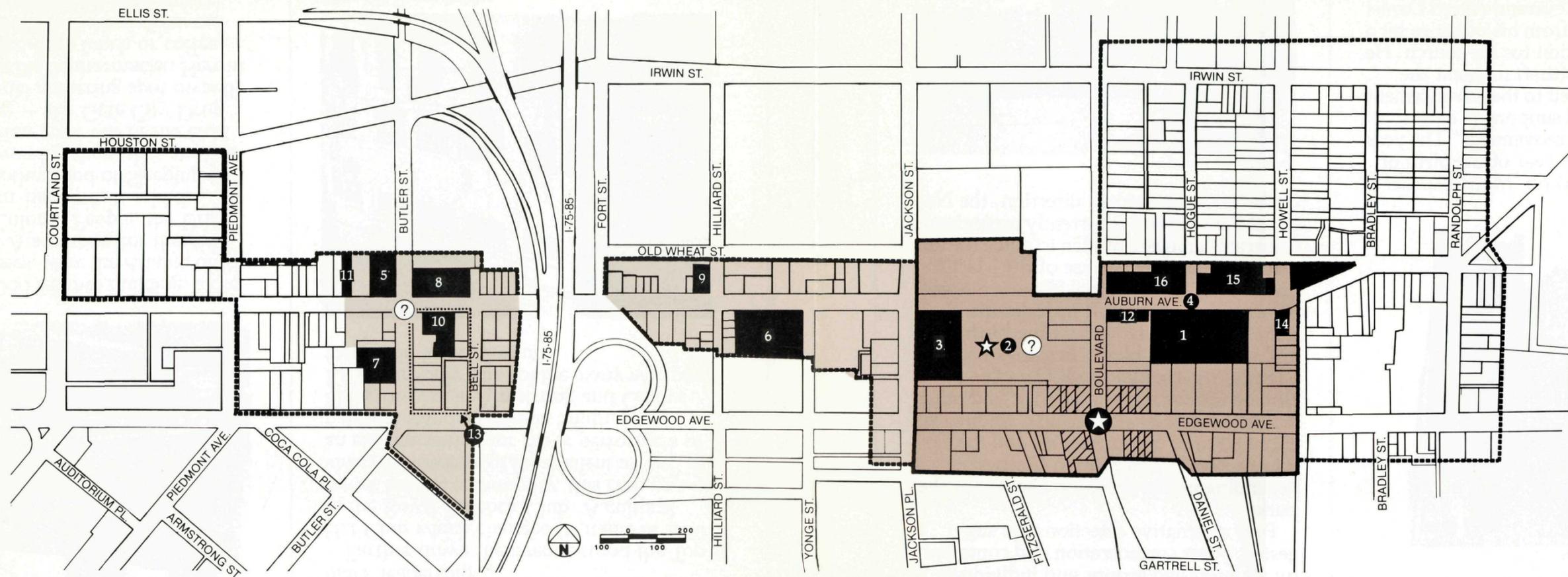
Commercial and business construction would be totally dependent on private initiative, with no assurance of relevance to the theme of the Historic Site.

Little economic revitalization or job creation could be expected in the immediate future.

Costs to the NPS and the City of Atlanta would be very low.



ALTERNATIVE 2



“Dr. King as a Leader”

GOALS:

To focus on the life of Dr. King and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, with preservation of historic structures that influenced his development in the community.

STRATEGY:

The King Center would maintain the Freedom Hall complex as a center for exhibits and presentations, with NPS technical assistance.

NPS would cooperate with Ebenezer Baptist Church in preservation and scheduled visitor use.

NPS would seek to maintain and rehabilitate the historic residential character of the Birth Home Block through acquisition and lease of rental units. NPS would also seek acquisition of the Birth Home from

the King Center (if agreeable) and continue preservation and visitor use.

NPS would acquire a historic building near Boulevard and Edgewood to be used as a Welcome Center for visitors. The



The Mall, Washington, D.C., 1963 / courtesy of National Archives

Center would contain exhibits and other presentations on the park themes.

NPS would provide facade rehabilitation grants to owners of historic property in return for preservation easements.

In the Sweet Auburn Preservation District, NPS, City of Atlanta, and others would seek to protect several key historic structures — Butler Street YMCA, Prince Hall Masons, Odd Fellows, Herndon, Alexander, and others (see map). NPS would open a Park Information Office in one of the historic structures fronting on Auburn. The City would be encouraged to expand current operations of the Municipal Market, incorporating the historic Herndon Building.

Old Fourth Ward residents would be eligible to receive financial / technical assistance through the Housing Code Assistance Program or other means. Because it would not contribute to the theme of the

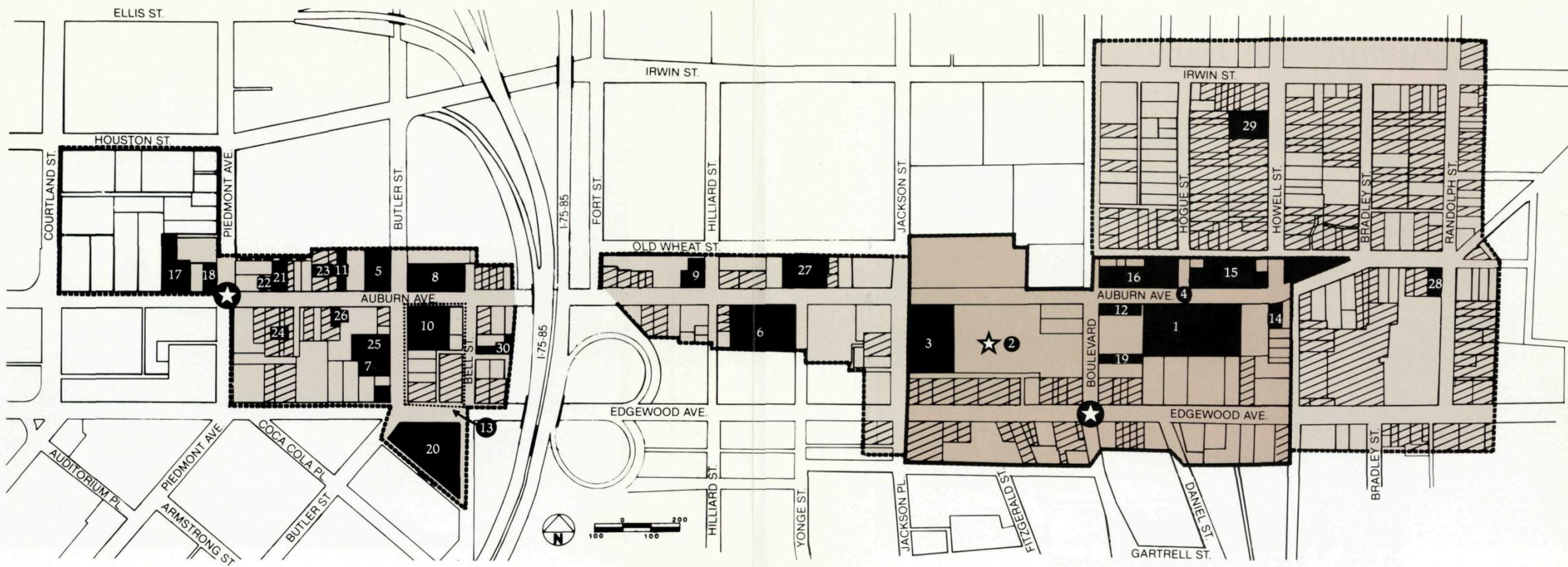
park under this alternative the NPS would not have a role in this area.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Educational and tourism opportunities would be somewhat greater than those already existing. A limited walking tour would be possible, taking in key historic points.

Limited historic preservation would be possible in the Sweet Auburn area, with some grants available to existing property owners under certain conditions.

NPS costs would be low to moderate.



“Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement As Seen In Sweet Auburn”

GOALS:

To focus on the life and work of Dr. King within the context of a broader struggle for equality as seen in the Sweet Auburn community.

To express the influence of the Sweet Auburn experience on Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement.

Development of the park would focus on an attempt to recreate the lively and varied spirit of the entire historic community as it was when Dr. King was growing up. A mix of building uses would be encouraged including social service organizations, community businesses and visitor services.

STRATEGY:

King Center would continue to tell the King story in exhibits at Freedom Hall, with assistance by NPS.

NPS Welcome Center on Edgewood Avenue would contain exhibits and programs on Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement.

NPS would lease space in a historic building on the western end of Auburn Avenue, for a Sweet Auburn History Center, with exhibits telling the story of the community and its influence on Dr. King.

NPS would assist the King Center in preservation of the Birth Home and the Ebenezer Baptist Church in preservation of that structure.

NPS would acquire and rehabilitate tenant-occupied structures on the Birth Home Block, leasing them back at low rates to community residents.

NPS, the City of Atlanta, and a community-based development corporation, would cooperate to aid in protecting all historic structures.

The city would be encouraged to establish a business and technology center to aid existing and new businesses in the area. In addition, the City would expand the area and the scope of goods offered at the Municipal Market.

New construction would be permitted only on vacant land and in place of non-historic structures.

For Sweet Auburn and Old Fourth Ward residences, the City of Atlanta and NPS would provide financial and technical assistance and facade rehabilitation grants. A community-based development corporation would work with the City in developing strategies for compatible new construction and rehabilitation.

OPPORTUNITIES:

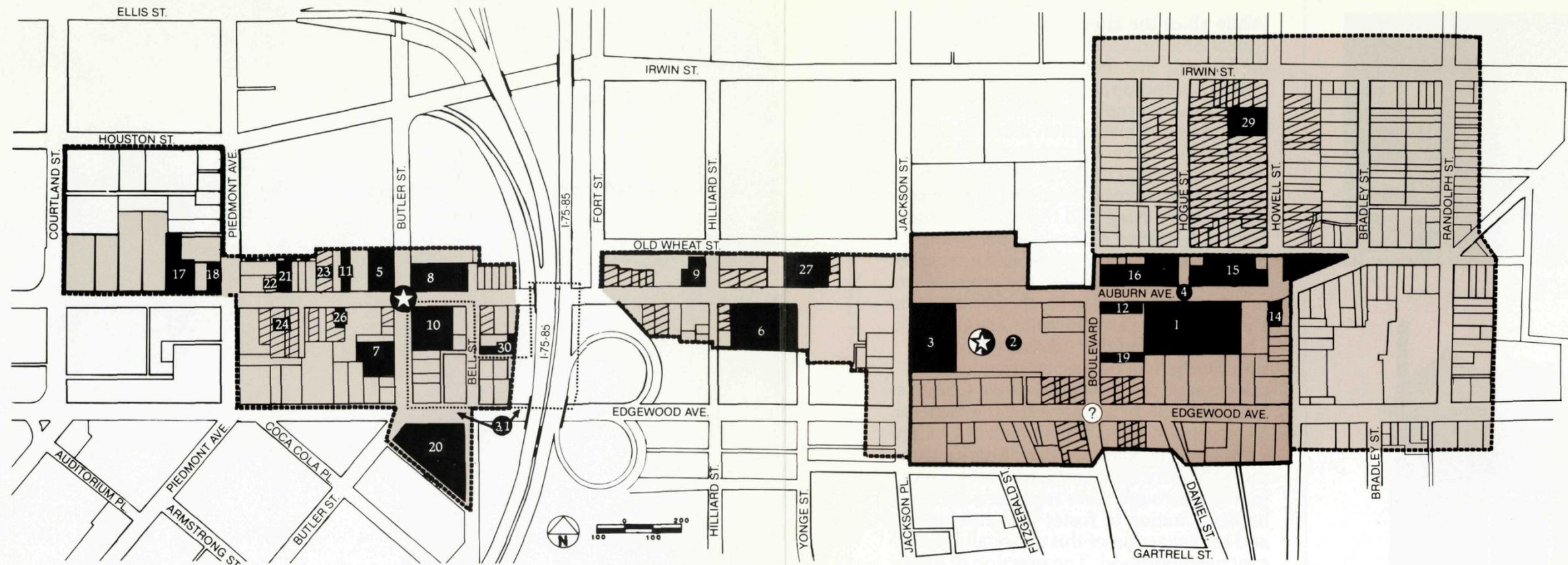
The entire Sweet Auburn area would become a potential educational and inspirational experience, through walking tours, exhibits, and presentations — not only at Freedom Hall and the Birth Home, but at various historic structures within the area and at the NPS Welcome Center and Sweet Auburn History Center.

New and existing businesses may receive financial and technical aid.

Owners of historic buildings would be eligible for facade rehabilitation grants in return for preservation easements.

Financial aid and low-cost loans may be available for rehabilitation through the community-based development corporation and the City of Atlanta.

The area would be considerably more attractive to visitors, from school children to visiting conventioners and tourists.



"Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement"

GOALS:

To expand the theme to cover the national struggle for equality, through the life of Dr. King and the evolution and aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement.

To focus not only on Dr. King but other leaders and historic events of the Sweet Auburn area. To recreate "Life in Sweet Auburn" as representative of an atmosphere that produced Civil Rights leaders.

To develop the park as a major tourist attraction for Atlanta, focusing on the Auburn Avenue corridor.

STRATEGY:

The Freedom Hall complex would be the center of Park Service and King Center in-

terpretation activities in the National Historic Site. The NPS would establish an information center on Edgewood.

NPS would lease the Birth Home and take responsibility for operation. NPS would acquire tenant-occupied Birth Home Block homes for rehabilitation and low-cost rental to current tenants.

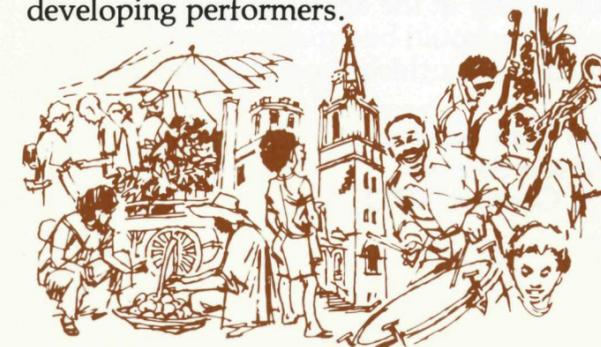
NPS would cooperate with Ebenezer Baptist Church in visitor use and preservation.

NPS, City of Atlanta, and the community-based development corporation would cooperate in protecting historic structures on Howell and Hogue Streets and Auburn Avenue.

Sweet Auburn would be emphasized as a locale for history-related attractions such as a National Civil Rights Museum, an Afro-American history museum, and a Gospel Music Hall of Fame. A permanent

Sweet Auburn Festival incorporating the Herndon Building, the Municipal Market, the area under the expanded downtown connector, and additional space on that block could be developed.

The Festival would include shopping and attractions relating to the heritage, culture, art, food and crafts of the Sweet Auburn community and the South in general. The famous Royal Peacock Club (or Top Hat) could be revitalized and re-opened as a showcase for famous as well as developing performers.



NPS would open and staff a Sweet Auburn History Center for visitors.

In addition to preservation activities, a community-based development corporation could participate in new construction ventures.

OPPORTUNITIES:

This alternative, more than any of the others, would provide the City of Atlanta with a powerful attraction to draw tourists and conventioners to the city.

Walking tours and exhibits would offer educational and inspirational messages to students and visitors.

The range of attractions in this alternative presents several opportunities to investors and developers — the Sweet Auburn Festival, as well as other attractions. Potential for job creation is also highest in this alternative.

Message from the Mayor



ANDREW YOUNG
MAYOR

CITY OF ATLANTA

We have been presented with a wonderful opportunity to have a National Historical Park in downtown Atlanta. The National Park Service has developed several alternative plans for creating a park in the area where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was born and where he worked and served as a minister. The historical significance of his life and movement, and of the entire "Sweet Auburn" Avenue area, is of interest to people all over the world.

I am pleased that our City has this prospect which offers a major economic, educational and cultural attraction anchored on one end by downtown and on the other by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

I encourage the people of Atlanta to become involved in moving this project forward and helping to define the basic direction of what will be "Atlanta's Downtown National Park."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Andrew Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end. Below the signature, the name "Andrew Young" is printed in a small, plain font.

Andrew Young

