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To: City Council CDHS Committee Members

From: Joshua Humphries, Senior Advisor to the Mayor, Housing

Cc: Andre Dickens, Mayor
Atlanta City Council

Date: April 23, 2023

Re: **Forest Cove Update**



The City's involvement in the relocation of the residents of Forest Cove was one that was voluntarily undertaken given that the City had neither an ownership interest or legal requirement to do so. Additionally, the property was not a property owned or overseen by the Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta. Forest Cove was a multi-family property owned by a private entity in which the owner received Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) from HUD. Based on the Administration's concern for the safety of the residents, the City appropriated funds to effectuate the relocation of the residents and provided funding for rental and utility payments which were to be paid by the property owner which received the HAP payments. Thus, the City does not possess the authority to determine whether residents will be able to return to the property once it is rehabilitated or redeveloped. However, the Mayor and the City have worked continuously with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and the consultants it has engaged to facilitate the return of all residents to the community.

In early 2022, the Mayor worked alongside City Council to allocate funding to enable residents of Forest Cove to relocate to safe and dignified housing whilst Millennia, the property owner, applied for funding to rehabilitate the property. However, following the relocation of residents, HUD elected to abate the housing subsidy contract with Millennia and transfer the housing subsidy directly to the residents. Each resident was issued a Tenant Protection Voucher that enables them to receive subsidized housing anywhere they choose to live. HUD also retained The Leumas Group, a relocation services organization, to manage any subsequent moves needed as a result of the HUD decision to abate the contract. The city has worked with The Leumas Group to ensure a smooth transition and the acceleration of the relocation. However, because The Leumas Group is under a contract with HUD and not the City, the City does not have the authority to impose any requirements on this entity.

With the residents' pathway back to Forest Cove increasingly unclear, the Mayor launched a community-led planning process in 2022 to activate publicly owned land in Thomasville Heights and ensure that new housing is built in the neighborhood that includes housing options for former Forest Cove residents. That plan was adopted in 2023 and the final rezoning of the properties is set to be completed in the next few months. Atlanta Urban Development (AUD), the newly created subsidiary of Atlanta Housing, is leading efforts to put the public land to work to create a healthy, thriving Thomasville Heights. This effort has already begun with AUD's release of the Thomasville Heights phase one Request for Qualifications that has been released. Phase one will consist of rental and for-sale housing, bringing the

first new housing to the neighborhood in over a decade and the first opportunity for Forest Cove residents to return to their neighborhood.

In addition, at the conclusion of the litigation initiated by the property owner, demolition was permitted to move forward on Forest Cove, marking the end of decades of neglect and substandard housing at the site. Asbestos was found in the units, so this must be remediated during demolition. Residents were informed about the asbestos discovery and potential health risks.

We appreciate the involvement of Housing Justice League and their affiliated partners for the advocacy they provided residents during the city-led relocation and their continued support for residents as they work with HUD and Leumas to transition to their final destination.

When the Mayor stepped in to help with the relocation of Forest Cove residents in 2022, he made clear his intentions to create safe, quality housing options in Thomasville Heights for the former residents of Forest Cove that had to endure substandard housing for far too long. The Mayor remains steadfast in his commitment that he will do everything in his legal authority to ensure that all Forest Cove residents that wish to return to Thomasville Heights will have a pathway to do so.