“High-lanta” – Unaffordable housing is not so hot!

By Justin Babino

Metro Atlanta’s most serious challenge is quality affordable housing. While we’ve experienced legal and social paradigm shifts, social inequality is still present in terms of housing in Atlanta. The shortage of middle-class housing in the City of Atlanta and affordable housing shortages in some of the northern suburbs contributes to and worsens other problems in our city. For example, the lack of quality affordable housing is a contributing factor to education, employment, and health disparities for working families, particularly minority families. Furthermore, my real estate experiences helped me deduce that the lack of affordable housing contributes to homelessness in our city, particularly after the sub-prime housing mortgage crisis that led to a financial crisis and subsequent recession.

According to the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, the trend is that “there is little housing that middle-class residents can afford in the core of the Atlanta region, and almost no housing that low-income working families can afford in the job rich areas.” Wealthy and rich neighborhoods are served with superior infrastructure and amenities while poor communities do not enjoy fully the city in all capacities. While the City of Atlanta currently has one initiative like the BeltLine Affordable Housing Advisory Board, it’s simply not enough to address the rising price tag on housing for the entire city.

The affordable housing issue should be strategically addressed using an interdisciplinary approach for the entire metro region. This approach means learning how to analyze and solve pressing land use, environmental law, zoning law, and policy issues. Further utilizing an interdisciplinary approach means experts in various fields (i.e. housing, law, government, transportation, businesses, banking, health care, environmental, etc.) have to work on cross-functional teams. Another important aspect to strategically addressing this metro Atlanta challenge calls for community participation. This in turn could result in metro Atlanta producing a community visioning guide which calls for the metropolis to consider: where we are now, where are we going, where do we want to be, and how do we get there? The community visioning guide ultimately can be used as a tool for communities, coalitions, and local decision makers to identify factors associated with the lack of affordable housing in our city with hopes of engaging stakeholders to help remedy the disparities.
Justin Babino is a native of Lafayette, LA and is a second year law student at Georgia State University’s College of Law. Justin graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Georgia State University in 2007 with cum laude honors. He currently serves as a graduate assistant to Ronald Mazique, J.D., the Senior Coordinator for Judicial Affairs in the Office of the Dean of Students. He is also a student member in the Atlanta Bar Association Real Estate Section, for students interested commercial and residential real estate transactions, environmental, and international law issues. Further, Justin is a member of the Urban Fellows Program and is working to obtain a Certificate in Environmental and Land Use Law. Recently, Justin was appointed by Atlanta Public Schools to the Atlanta BeltLine Affordable Housing Advisory Board. In that role, he makes recommendations to the Atlanta Development Authority and City of Atlanta officials on affordable housing policies and coordinates with other affordable housing efforts throughout the City of Atlanta. Justin is also a licensed real estate professional and prior to attending law school, he was a Realtor with Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate. In the spring of 2014, Justin participated in Emory University’s Rollins School of Public Health 9th annual Break the Cycle (BTC) conference. BTC is a collaborative interdisciplinary research and training program to cultivate leadership in children’s environmental health disparities. Justin’s research evaluated in-home intervention strategies to mitigate asthma rates in disadvantaged populations in Atlanta. Justin joined Urban Fellows because he is particularly interested in community development for moderate and low-income neighborhoods.