

FOR HOLLAND, DOWNTOWN IS A WALK IN THE PARK

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A few weeks ago, Cooper Holland was scrolling through e-mail on her BlackBerry and sipping coffee at Fleurs de Lis, a new restaurant in the lobby of the Healey Building, where Holland has lived the past two years.

When her commute from Duluth to downtown began to take its toll in 1995, Holland, special projects manager at [Central Atlanta Progress](#) (CAP), moved downtown. Since then, she's not only seen a lot of changes, she's contributed to them.

"I always tell people that downtown Atlanta is a place you can move to and make a difference," Holland said.

She should know. In 1997, Holland started the Downtown Neighborhood Association, heading it for five years. She's been on as many as six boards at one time and has volunteered on numerous task forces, including Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin's Cultural Task Force, the Woodruff Park Task Force and the Vending Task Force.

"I finally decided that it's really better to focus on one thing," Holland said.

That one thing? Right now, it's Woodruff Park.

When on the park's task force, Holland felt hopeless on occasion; she worried that Woodruff Park would just stagnate. That all changed last April when she attended a Park Pride rally and came away from the event "a born-again park person."

Holland approached A.J. Robinson, president of CAP, and told him she believed one person could change things and that she was one of those people. Given her commitment to downtown and her impassioned plea, Robinson let Holland take on the park as a special project.

"She lives where she works," said Dave Wardell, vice president of operations and public safety for CAP and the Atlanta Downtown Development District. "She's very caring and very high energy ... "

Most of what Holland has to overcome in terms of building a team to redevelop Woodruff Park has been the perception that it's been tried before and failed, so what's the point of trying again. Holland is realistic about the park's issues, but does not believe they're insurmountable. The one she hears the most about is the number of homeless people who populate the park.

"Homelessness is an issue, but it's an issue all over downtown," she said.

An improvement close to Holland's heart is the half-acre of Woodruff Park that's been cleared to become a dog park. In fact, Holland would like to rename the park "Woodruff Bark Park," in honor of the neighborhood dogs, including Jenny, Holland's 15-year-old female lab that died last year.

According to Diane Harnell-Cohen, Atlanta city parks commissioner, \$110,000 has been allotted for park improvements. In addition, consultant Daniel Biederman, who has advised public and private partners in downtown areas across the country, has been enlisted to help create a road map for Woodruff Park.

Improvements are already evident at Woodruff Park. Wi-Fi Internet access is now available, and a recent overhaul of the park's electrical system allows for hosting sizeable events in the park. Tables and chairs will be added to give the chess and card players a place to play. Infrastructure improvements, such as paving and fountain replacement, are slated to begin this year. [Post Properties Inc.](#) has been enlisted to landscape the park. Also, Holland is working to add art in the park and has met with city officials about hosting a children's art project, such as creating mosaics.

With these improvements and more on the way, Holland believes Woodruff Park can become a destination where events happen nightly, where people plan to meet, walk their dogs, grab a coffee, watch a movie or catch a free concert.