

Decatur: A City Where Planning Makes a Difference

Introduction

Over the past ten years a lot has changed around Decatur, including the people who live here. We've seen an internet savvy generation come of age, looking for—and expecting to find—ways to participate in city government, online. In response, we're using this **2010 Strategic Plan Update** to try out something new: a dedicated and interactive project website. In addition to a series of face-to-face Round Tables, we'll post information here, in real time, for your review and discussion.

Your first question is probably “What’s this got to do with me?” The answer: Plenty.

Ten years ago, over 500 Decatur residents came together to set the course for the first decade in this century, and the resulting **Strategic Plan** laid out the roadmap for some of our greatest success stories. It influenced our priorities, our infrastructure decisions, our approach to growth, the services and programs offered by city government, and the ease with which we're able to come together, consider options, and plan.

In the last Decatur Round Tables and Ten-year Plan, 80% of the intended results were reached. In short, the **Strategic Plan** has guided the decisions that affect all of us on a daily basis.

Now, ten years later, it's time to ask the question, "Where to next?" We need your help to find out.

What are the Decatur Round Tables?

The process starts with residents joining small groups that will meet three times from May to early June. Each group will have the opportunity to consider the future of Decatur: How it could look, and how it could function. In these conversations we will think about what we need to preserve as we work toward our new ten-year plan, and we'll consider what needs to be changed or created as we move forward.

All of the ideas and decisions from the small groups will be sorted and written up in reports that will be available to the entire community. A final report will be written over the summer, with additional opportunities for citizen feedback to make sure it portrays the ideas and viewpoints that emerged from the Round Table process.

In the late summer and the fall, the information in this report will inform the work of the planning team and the citizens that will develop the formal ten-year plan for the City of Decatur.

Session 1: Envisioning the future

Introduction to the discussion—Plenary (10 minutes)

Welcome

Overview of the process

Please turn off or mute your cell phone.

Thinking about Decatur—Small groups (100 minutes)

Setting the ground rules (5 minutes)

Setting a few ground rules will help the discussion run more smoothly. Here is a list of examples. Do these ground rules seem helpful? Are there others you want to add?

Listen with respect.

Each person gets a chance to talk.

One person talks at a time.

Speak for yourself, and not as the representative of any group.

Help the facilitator keep things on track.

Outside of the group we will not quote what is said in the group.

Keep cell phones muted or off.

Listen to understand before responding.

The role of the facilitator: (2 minutes)

- To act neutral. (The facilitator must not join the conversation.)
- To make sure the group stays focused and has a fair and productive conversation.

Introductions (13 minutes)

Please tell us your name and answer the following two questions:

- Where did you grow up?
- Why did you come today?

Note: Pause to allow participants to read and to think before starting the discussion.

1- Where are we now? (35 minutes)

Please discuss the following questions:

- How do you talk about the gifts (good things) or successes in this community?
What stories do you tell?
- How do you talk about the problems in this community? What stories do you tell?

2 – Where do we want to go? (45 minutes)

- What kind of community would inspire you?
- When you think about what you hope Decatur can be, what kinds of stories might you tell? What will Decatur look like and be?
- How do you want Decatur to be known? Please complete the phrase: “Decatur, is

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a city where _____.”

Wrap-up and review of the process (10 minutes)

- 1- Any suggestions about the group process for next week? What worked well?
- 2- How valuable is this discussion and what can make it even better?



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Session 2: Exploring our stories and the issues they raise

Note: Consider posting key easel sheets from the last week to stimulate Session 2 if it works at your location.

In the first session, we told our stories about Decatur. We also talked about what we hoped for the future of our city.

All of the ideas from the small groups were sorted and summarized so we can see what we agree is working and what needs to be improved or changed. In this second session, the groups will zero in on particular issues that are important to the community.

Decatur is almost 200 years old

For Decatur to remain strong and vibrant, it has to manage its growth while it supports and maintains the assets, benefits and qualities that provide the quality of life our residents value. To stay strong over the years, the city must find the right balance between its commercial, higher density residential, and residential neighborhood districts. Deciding where these districts fit into the city and how they connect to one another is a decision we have to make together.

As some of our residents grow older, and as singles and young families move in, there is a need for a range of housing that is affordable for different groups of people in different stages of life.

Our growth creates opportunities and challenges for our maintaining a healthy environment, healthy life styles, and transportation around the city.

Note: Use the facts sheets you have been given to inform or stimulate your discussion of changes the city will face in the future.

Introduction to the discussion—Plenary (10 minutes)

Welcome

Review Session 1 and answer questions.

Please turn off or mute your cell phone.

Discussing the issues—Small groups (95 minutes)

Introductions (5 minutes)

- Welcome new members and ask them to introduce themselves.
- Answer this question: “In the first session, what did someone in your small group say or do that moved you or that stimulated new ideas in some way?”

Review the fact sheets and then respond to the following questions (85 minutes)

Note: Pause to allow participants to read and to think before starting the discussion.

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1 – Think about Session 1 and about how the city has developed and grown. How do we sustain this city? How do we preserve the things we appreciate?

2 – *How* do we preserve and improve our natural environment? How do we protect our air, water and green space?

3 – How do you get from place to place in Decatur, now? What might change in how we travel about in the next ten years?

4 – When you think about the overall environment of our city (our public gatherings, our festivals and cultural life) what is most important to you?

5– Who are the people who will need housing in Decatur in twenty years? What kind of housing do you think they will they need?

6– In terms of “healthy living,” what would make the most positive difference for the residents of our city? What activities, programs, or changes in the things we build could make a difference?

Note: Ask the group to identify the themes from Session 2. What were some of the things we seemed to have a lot of energy in discussing? What ideas or topics stood out for you? (5 minutes)

Wrap-up and review of the process (15 minutes)

- 1- Any suggestions about the group process for next week? What worked well? How can we do even better?
- 2- This is the beginning of a longer process. What one thing will you do to ensure that your thoughts are reflected in the final strategic plan?

Session 3: Connecting to the community and sharing our gifts

In the second session, we considered how to create a city with balanced growth and the ability to maintain the things we value in Decatur. And we talked about choices we face about transportation and housing in the future. We also began to think about the things that are important to us: things that make Decatur a vibrant community.

In this session, we will look at the quality of our lives, how healthy our environment is, and how many opportunities we have to enjoy recreation, community events, green space, and active living. Finally, we will look at how our places of worship, schools, universities and authorities work together for the best interest of the entire community.

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How do we talk to each other, build community relationships, and make decisions together?

The city has to balance the competing needs of the many groups that make up the Decatur community. It is a challenge to find common ground among diverse groups of people with different needs, but we know it can be done. There are many ways to create good communication and to build on a rich diversity of people, interests, and opinions.

Introduction to the discussion—Plenary (10 minutes)

Welcome

Overview of what has happened so far

Please turn off or mute your cell phone.

Discussing the Issues—Small groups (90 minutes)

Review Session 2 and answer questions.

What doubts or reservations do you have about what has been discussed so far?

1. *Communication & common ground: How well are we connected?* *(40 minutes)*

- In this process, we are having productive conversations and making important decisions together. What are some other Decatur ways to build and maintain common ground, even on difficult issues where we can't reach agreement?
- How can we get people involved in public life?—What can we do to encourage all kinds of people to volunteer in the community and serve on community boards and commissions?
- How can the city and its citizens communicate with each other effectively?
- How do we create ways for citizens to better communicate with each other? How can we take advantage of the internet and foster other healthy conversations?
- Who is missing out on this conversation? How can we get them involved?

Note: Ask the group, if there is time, to name the areas where may have the greatest opportunity for agreement and disagreement.

2. *Contributions: What can I do as an individual, with groups and organizations, and with institutions in the city?* *(45 minutes)*

Change happens when community members agree to take ownership and to work for change at different levels. Consider the following levels of change and make a list of what can be done at each of these levels.

- **Individual change.** What could one person do to make progress on a particular issue?
- **Organizational change.** What are the many types of formal and informal organizations? How could these organizations and other groups of citizens make a difference?

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- **Institutional change.** How could our institutions like schools, religious congregations, governmental authorities and others make a difference? What kind of partnerships can the City create with partner institutions?

Thinking over what we have done and how the conversations could affect our commitments?

What gifts or talents can you offer to the community? What commitments are you willing to make to the remainder of this process? How can you help make our story come true?

Are there particular ways that you could see yourself working on particular issues and changes?

Note: (5 minutes)

Remind the group that the planning phase, starting at the end of summer, will provide opportunities for citizens to engage with planning professionals to work on the ten-year plan? Citizens can volunteer for more detailed focus groups on issues like transportation, housing, and zoning.

Next steps in the process (20 minutes)

Thank you & wrap-up

How will citizens be able to influence the decisions that will be made in the more detailed planning phase that starts at the end of the summer?

By participating in the Round Table discussions, you have played an important role in shaping the future of our wonderful city. Thank you! The ideas and values you have expressed will be collected and summarized, helping to inform the city planning process and the 2010 update of the Decatur Strategic Plan.

