

THURSDAY ROUND TABLES: SESSION ONE

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Jason Chernock

Meeting Date: 04-29-2010

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Please record the notes from your easel pad below. The subject headings correspond with the discussion guide and facilitator support sheet. Do not use bullet points. If there was an item that you circled or starred because a lot of people were interested in the comment, please **bold** it.

1- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

- A. That Decatur has become a walk-able community, especially around the Decatur Square
- B. There are opportunity to participate and volunteer include volunteering with city government, the school strategic planning process and the many city festivals
- C. Decatur is environmentally conscious
 - a. Participants specifically cited the pay-as-you-throw recycling program, community gardens, and the farmers market as good examples of this
- D. Dog parks were cited as another community success
- E. The schools are “real community schools” and have a diverse student population
 - a. The baccalaureate program and strong parental involvement were also cited as specific examples of positives within the school
- F. Decatur is “21st Century minded”, meaning that the city uses a variety of modern technology to enhance itself such as blogs, the city wi-fi and by providing access to information in a variety of ways
- G. There are lots of things to do and places to go, **and not just on the Decatur Square**
 - a. Specifically, participants cited the book festival, beer festival, wine festival and 4th of July bike parade as good things to do
- H. The city has an abundance of independent merchants and non-chain restaurants
- I. Decatur is a safe community

- a. Specific examples of this are the pedestrian crossings and kid-friendly parks, events where you meet your neighbors (such as this planning process), an “accessible” police force with a “good presence” on bikes and in schools whether they are on or off duty
- J. Decatur has density downtown, resulting in more housing being placed downtown and more people “out”

The Stories we tell when talking about Decatur

- A. I tell people to come over and walk to the restaurants with me
- B. I tell people that I walk home from the bars
- C. I’m taking my kids to the parks that each have something unique
- D. I live two blocks from MARTA
- E. Everywhere I go I can take a great walk
- F. I talk about the overall diversity in the city, and that Decatur is one of the only cities in Georgia that has a non-discrimination policy that includes transgender people

“Our community problems.”

- A. Traffic and noise from traffic
 - a. Specifically, people speed on Clairmont and Ponce too much
- B. There are proposals to over-develop the single-family home neighborhoods
 - a. Specific example cited of a development proposal near the old train depot that dragged out for 2 years. According to this participant, the city did not understand the role of density in this area.
- C. Concern about a lack of ability to continue being able to afford to live in the city for both the elderly today and people’s children in the future
 - a. Taxes are very high and unaffordable for some residents
 - b. A challenge here is to balance out the needs of different groups, those with and without children
 - c. In relation to this, there is a need for workforce housing, and the city needs to understand how it compares in affordability to similar cities

- D. Empty commercial space needs to be filled in
 - E. There needs to be easier access to city statues for residents who want to look them up
- 2- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

- A. We are inspired by Decatur’s unique character and architecture
- B. Decatur has a great personality and great energy downtown
- C. Decatur has a little bit of everything.

“We want Decatur to be...”

- D. We want more walking and bike paths in the city
- E. To see a car free zone in the center of town
- F. We want more places to walk **to** throughout the city; meaning we need more destinations besides just downtown and more options for entertainment
- G. To see the West side of Ponce as a controlled traffic zone similar to the East side of Ponce
- H. To have mixed income housing, including rental units throughout the city
- I. Encourage more commercial business space so that more people can work in the city and we’re not just a bedroom community
- J. To see all surface parking lots **gone**
- K. To have a Decatur city trolley bus that takes you to the different shops and restaurants
- L. The city should look into incentive programs to keep people shopping locally
 - a. One participant suggested printing Decatur bucks, which would be subsidies from the city to make up the cost differential between shopping at a chain store and an independent merchant
- M. Create a municipal compost site
 - a. Something said that Athens, GA has something similar to look at and compare
- N. Encourage more community gardening

- a. To key principles of this were that gardens should be city promoted but neighborhood supported, and provide affordable and accessible fresh food for all
 - O. Maintain the independent business community in town
 - P. Maintain and grow community events
- “Decatur, a city where ___”
- A. “Life thrives”
 - B. “You live, work, learn and plan”
 - C. “Mayberry meets Berkley”
 - D. “Small town dream lives on”
 - E. “You know your neighbor”**
 - F. “Mr. Rogers would feel comfortable”
 - G. “There is always something interesting happening”
 - H. “We communicate and cooperate”
 - I. “There is no wrong side of the tracks and all the different groups work together”

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Kyle Williams
Meeting Date: Thursday, April 29
Time: 7:00 p.m -9:00 p.m.

Please record the notes from your easel pad below. The subject headings correspond with the discussion guide and facilitator support sheet. Do not use bullet points. If there was an item that you circled or starred because a lot of people were interested in the comment, please **bold** it.

- 1- **Where are we now?**
- “Our community successes.”**
- Berkley meets Mayberry
- Social and Political Diversity

Voice in Government

Responsive Government

Viable, Interesting, Locally-Owned and Diversity of Businesses

Sustainable

Find it all here, convenience, compact

Active streets

Nice aesthetics

Sense of community, one big neighborhood

Walkable, can leave car in driveway

Accessibility to MARTA

Civic engagement and events form community

Pubs, Churches, Schools within 1 mile

Accessible neighborhood greenspace, parks and dogparks

Diversity of families

Respect

Cradle to Grave

Recycling program

Volunteer coordinator employed by City

Schools, special education outreach and programs

“Our community problems.”

Success breeds unsustainable numbers – events, festivals, restaurants overcrowded with non-Decatur visitors that choke out locals

Decatur is a “defined space,” managing and balancing the space and the competing interests of preservation and development

No density within the central city core

No variety and diversity of housing stock

Genetrification and squeezing out folks out of Decatur

Lack of information as to available parking

City's website is not user friendly, updated and accurate – difficult to find information, minutes not updated and current, information outdated

Wireless internet is not effective or useable

Parking inventory is not clear

Rec Center (Web Track – on-line pay system) does not work and is the hardest system to use, pay on-line

Technology lags behind

City promotes events well, but does not promote/educate on what is going on in government

2- **Where do we want to go?**

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

A model for racial justice – Decatur remains segregated

Ability to bicycle safely to Farmers' Market

Locally grown food

Pedestrian friendly downtown core

A leader in recycling and waste management/disposal

Connectivity of bike and walking paths

Leader in traffic management (i.e., bikes, parking, movement of traffic through City and rail)

More folks working in Decatur that live in Decatur

Awareness and use of changes in business – the evolution of how we work (more work from home)

Respect, promotion and recognition of historic neighborhoods

Formal tree replacement program that is proactive, caring, protective and replaces tree

A working stormwater plan that eliminates current flooding issues of streets, Winnona Park Elementary

Naturalization of existing concrete streams

Increase of active, passive greenspace, including use of flood plain properties

Use of economic incentives to encourage green building

A designated City Employee/Official charged with connecting groups, coordinating issues/programs, a neutral/mediator

Full use of resources – for example, the High School Auditorium should be used every night by by folks outside the school; athletic fields; Agnes Scot; Boys & Girls Club

Workable group internet

Open City Hall should be more of a forum

Residential/Neighborhood representative on the Downtown Development Association

Greater cooperation/efficiency/communication between City Hall and City Schools

Access to affordable, safe housing for all stages of life

More vibrant business district, business outside core Ponce corridor/square, businesses fill “dry” stagnant

Greater role of City in growing, linking employment and jobs, a City career center

Fully educate all kids with access to employment opportunities

Retain, promote ethnic diversity

Unbundling of parking spaces from residential uses – disagreement and split that parking minimums should remain

Balance of zoning ordinance to respect/protect not just single property, but surrounding neighborhood

Codified height transition zoning between residential and commercial

“Decatur, a city where ___”

Cradle to Grave

Live, Work, Play

Come as You Are

Setting the Standard for Small, Urban Cities

Change is What Southern Looks Like

We Do the New South Better

Residents are Engaged

We have a cultural center – music, entertainment

Children/Everyone can thrive

You can check out but never leave

I have a voice

Finch 04-29-2010 2 p.m.

Decatur Strategic Plans Sessions 1

Community Successes

- Good social involvement: Lots of community activity: Book fair, beer/wine, arts events
- Family oriented, see families everywhere, family centered activities
- “Walk able” city
- City Services i.e. School system
- City supports business community
- Efficient and responsible city government
- Citizen participation in community
- “Walkability” is the product of design and infrastructure
- Political leadership and staff
- Good public transportation
- Decatur is safe
- Advantages of a small town in a major metropolitan area

Community Problems

- Relationship with County: multitude of open issues
- Traffic and traffic flow
- Congestion in some areas
- Decatur needs a facelift. Lots of concrete. Landscaping issues
- Blount Plaza: dead space
- Some parts ugly
- Not affordable to live here

- Dangerous intersections
- No sidewalks in some areas
- Decatur Taxes
- Airplane noise

Inspiring Visions of the City

- More bicycle friendly
- Use Public Art bike racks
- Lots more trees-it's hot here
- Enforce pedestrian rules (countdown lights)
- Room for more parks
- Smart commercial growth
- Aesthetically appealing
- Look at Chattanooga
- Make the city look "more take care of"
- Improve trash can appearance
- Green would be really good
- Maintain diversity-age, race and economics
- Affordable housing
- More rental and/or single family options
- Apartments above retail space
- Incentivize development
- Put a pocket park across from DQ
- Plan and prepare for increased growth and density to ensure quality of life
- More pedestrian friendly streets i.e. block cars on weekends

We want Decatur to be a city...

With more "boards": more options for citizen involvement

With more people involved, especially younger people

With a contemporary, revamped website

Where there is a relationship between the city and its citizens

Where it is easier to get involved (i.e. ad hoc meetings, community bulletin boards)

Where there are more urban gardens

Where communication is improved and informal "meet up" groups are common

Where there is a better use of social networking

Where we have neighborhood block captains

That is more green-trees and environmentally green

That is a “LEED” neighborhood community

Decatur is a city where...

- We use solar rays
- Capitalize on rainwater
- Smart street plantings (are everywhere)
- Professional input on landscaping
- There are more pocket parks with shade where people play checkers
- There are more dedicated bike paths (Howard)
- There are wide sidewalks on Ponce so people can walk, ride and bike
- (Check out Portland Oregon street design)
- Building codes and ordinances match the vision
- The process is updated and cleaned up
- In mixed use projects, there’s a plan for incompatibilities (i.e. restaurant/traffic noise in residential areas)
- We use “pedal people” (kids on bikes) to pick up trash
- We recycle all locally-there’s no waste
- We practice sustainability
- We have more farm to school initiatives
- We educate not to litter and pick it up if you see it

Decatur is a city where... (Final phrases and themes)

- Young business is encouraged
- You don’t have to leave
- There’s a diverse and healthy population
- People can work, live and play
- People visit to see how it’s done right
- All is possible
- Public art is encouraged
- There are lots of people friendly, landscaped parks
- Sustainability
- Empty storefronts are full
- Buildings are available for incubating new businesses

Facilitator Name: Mark G. Burnette

Meeting Date: April 29, 2010

Time: 7 – 9 pm

1. Where are we now?

“Our Community Successes.”

Varied Festivals that are community builders

Walkable Downtown with vitality

Maintained local identity

Child Friendly community

Schools are good

Commitment to being a green community

Commitment to encouraging a healthy lifestyle for residents

Good neighborhood parks

Creation of dog parks

Housing types are diversified

City has open and accessible government

Commitment to encouraging economic and racial diversity

Encouraging and supporting locally owned businesses

Preservation of historic structures

Encouraging farmers market and destination restaurants

Creation of sense of public safety

Creation of complete community

Churches, schools, businesses, and government have good synergy

Encouragement and support of sense of community among residents

“Our community problems.”

Lack of safe pedestrian connection between north and south Decatur

Lack of public parking and information on where such parking can be found

Lack of affordable housing

Decreasing racial diversity

Lack of adequate stormwater runoff controls

Lack of enforcement of pedestrian rules on crossing streets

Lack of enforcement of rules for motor vehicles respecting crosswalks

Lack of harmonious design scheme for MARTA plaza and square area

Lack of consistency in directional signage language and abbreviations

Conflict between city government and school system over annexation

2. Where do we want to go?

“We want Decatur to be:”

More clearly defined in public mind (differentiated from Decatur mailing address area)

A city known for tolerance of people with a diversity of lifestyles and values

The best all around city but not necessarily “Number 1”

A place that feels like home

A place where everyone wants to live

Part of the world but its own little place

“Decatur, a city where:”

Public schools are a destination (people want to move and stay here because of the school system)

Natural systems are being restored (recycling water, replacing/increasing tree

canopy, growing food) with the goal of becoming self-sustaining

People come to shop

The small town feel has been maintained

There is no speed limit above 30 mph

Its residents think globally and act locally

Its residents are involved in the community

DECATUR ROUNDTABLES 2010

SESSION 1: ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

Facilitator Name: Fred L. Cavalli

Meeting Date: April 29, 2010

Time: 7:00 pm-9:00 pm

1) Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

- School system
- MARTA
- City, businesses and institutions share space
- Public and private partnerships
- Strong sense of community
- Open-minded, diverse, inclusive
- Recycling
- Accessible and responsible government
- Child friendly activities and festivals
- Rec center activities for children and adults
- Walk-ability

“Our community problems.”

- Taxes
- We need bike lanes
- Not a variety of stores (many are expensive) (need stores that sell every day things)
- Volume and control of traffic limits walking, biking, etc.

- Overflow parking is not enforced—resident only signs not enforced (commercial/residential conflict)
- On-street parking issue—blocked driveways
- Not enough affordable housing
- Limited housing options (number of unrelated people living together?; garage apartments = restrictive laws)
- Too many laws?
- Too few laws?

2) Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

- Ban motor vehicles on Ponce between Commerce and Church – create pedestrian mall
- Bike lanes and bike parking everywhere
- More independent senior living
- More socio-economic diversity in neighborhoods
- More gender and age diversity also
- Senior living near elementary schools
- Pedestrian cut-throughs
- Create a staff position in city government to act as a liaison between residential and commercial interests. This office should support the residents’ point of view rather than relying upon ad hoc neighborhood organizations
- Harmonious and collaborative development between commercial and residential
- City in the forest
- Arts center
- Clean up sanitary sewers—smells

“We want Decatur to be...”

More diversity in housing—age and socio-economic, and travel methods

- Have a middle class
- Bus, shuttles and/or better connections to other points in Metro-Atlanta
- More pedicabs
- Cleaner and greener
- Work force housing—if you can work in Decatur, you can afford to live in Decatur

“Decatur, a city where _____”

- You can walk to the airport

- We have 100% graduation rate from public high school
- Every child who graduates from Decatur High School goes on to higher education including job training, voc-tec, college, etc.
- You don't need a car
- Gardens are everywhere
- Greener energy sources
- Underground utilities
- More green space, including downtown
- All parking underground
- There are still wild spaces – not developed

Steve Vogel 4/29/2010 2:00 p.m.

Our Community Successes

- Walkable / Bikeable
- Community is interactive with its government
- A diversity of events bring people together
- Needs are met locally
- A vibrant commercial district
- A family / everybody friendly community
- Citizens are allowed to speak their mind
- Good community and government communication
- Parks and gardens
- A community that "pushes the envelope – a trendsetter"
 - Environment
 - Active living
 - Mixed use development
- A community responsive to citizens and neighbors
- MLK service day
- Active neighborhood watches
- A safe community
- Good schools

Community Problems

- instances of *de facto* segregation in some community events
 - Religious
 - Social-economic
 - Family makeup
- A need for more events structured to attract diverse audiences
- Barriers to walkability
 - Railroad
 - Dead end streets
- Vacant houses – code enforcement
- Traffic issues
 - 2nd Avenue
 - Ponce @ rush hour
 - Railroad crossing
 - Traffic light timing
 - Speeding
- Diversity in housing
 - Affordable for all
 - Life cycle
- Affordable taxes
- Storm drainage and flood plains
- Perception of inadequate parking
- Future school capacity and maintaining quality

Inspiring Visions of the City

- More children
- Knowing everyone's neighbor
- More streetscapes
- Path to interconnect areas
- More open space & community gardens
- Community gatherings – parties/dinners
- A business mentoring program

We want Decatur to be

- An inclusive community
- Vibrant
- Sustainable
- A destination
- More easily accessible
- Prosperous
- Solvent
- Stay a City
- Continue forward thinking, especially as regards schools

Decatur, a city where

- Everybody knows your name
- Neighbors help each other
- Everyone feels welcome
- Small businesses want to be and are successful
- You can work, live, and play
- You can raise a family
- You are proud to call home
- You want to live forever
- Dreams come true
- The environment is respected
- The government is responsive

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: P. Gilbert/J. Gregory

Meeting Date: 4/29/10

Time: 7-9pm

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1- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

- variety of things to do: festivals, activities, Oakhurst Garden, volunteer events
- **togetherness, sense of community**
- diversity: age, race, ethnicity
- free cultural programs: lectures at the library, music
- feel safe walking about (safer than previous home in NJ)
- very walkable community, sidewalks most places
- good school system
- neighborhood association brings people together, fosters community pride

- animal-friendly; dog parks; get acquainted with people much faster when walking a dog
- City management is very responsive to problems, questions
- **great recycling program**; love not having to sort recyclables; sanitation service will pick up most things; electronics recycling days at the High School
- spring is great here, so much green!
- Decatur manages to maintain unbuilt space, **preserves green space**; Cemetery
- Decatur 101, Citizens Public Safety Academy (*participants weren't sure of official name of the public safety program, at least two had participated*)
- community includes universities, hospitals
- attractive place to retire
- lots of small businesses; **independent restaurants and retailers (as opposed to chains)**
- chickens allowed in City; goat co-op recently organized or about to be
- town square is good; fun, energetic space
- Decatur must offer a lot for kids, see them all over the place
- active Rec Center
- variety of religious institutions, lots of different denominations and faiths
- outdoor eating areas, sidewalk tables
- **festivals**: Arts, Beer, Book , Wine, Beach Party, Easter Egg Hunt, 4th of July, Christmas Tree, Jazz Nights, House Walk [sic], Garden Walk [sic], Old House Fair, Used Book Sale
- Decatur Focus, although sometimes news is outdated by the time it is delivered
- “Our community problems.”
- **taxes are too high**
- community not as diverse as previously, seems to be flattening out, becoming whiter
- challenge: **how to keep economic diversity while maintaining level of services that we have**
- miss having a local newspaper
- **challenging to be a pedestrian in Decatur**; better than it used to be but safety could be improved; need both visual and audible signals at crosswalks

- need better traffic control, better signage; traffic has increased in recent years
- seems that many small businesses have failed, is the City supporting them as well as it could?
- some areas don't feel safe, e.g., around the MARTA station entrance; should ban loitering
- parking is difficult at times; need better information about where parking is available at different times of day; feel parking spaces are there, but don't know where they are
- don't need any more upscale/high-end residential development downtown; contributing to decline in economic diversity in the community; HOWEVER, only affluent can afford to move in? DON'T WANT DECATUR TO BECOME BUCKHEAD
- Need to keep and enforce ordinances limiting building height
- Need more small grocers within walking distance, stocking locally produced foods; City should incentivize that type of small business
- **protect green space** and tree canopy in neighborhoods and downtown; need more trees downtown; City should seek to acquire undeveloped tracts and protect from development
- City should oversee vacant commercial properties to improve safety and community image; can they be torn down if vacant too long?
- Decatur is clean and tidy overall, but still lots of sidewalk litter, especially around the MARTA station
- Skateboarders need to be monitored, kept from terrorizing pedestrians and damaging sidewalk areas (specific mention of Church/Ponce intersection and immediate area); need a skate park – most participants unaware of the one in McKoy Park, and speculated Oakhurst is “too far away”
(Facilitator's note: at least one participant thought Oakhurst was not part of the City of Decatur)
- Need more community involvement by younger people, teens; participants wondered what high school students might have to say at a session like this
- Could establish an Art Park: space young people could use to express their creativity, unstructured, e.g., a wall where they could create graffiti and then photograph it for later exhibition

2- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

- **Make Ponce downtown a pedestrians-only zone**, from Commerce to Commerce, similar to downtown areas in Boulder (CO), Asheville (NC), Burlington (VT); not necessarily permanent, but at certain times or all the time except during emergencies or special situations; could create outdoor seating areas encouraging people to mingle and linger, great for small businesses located there
- modernize the Rec Center
- modernize the firehouse and the police department
- increase salaries for police officers
- produce and/or attract great minds that will go on to have significant positive impacts beyond Decatur; an intellectually active community where not only book clubs thrive but intellectual salons
- **more diverse citizenry than currently**, especially economic and racial; less white than it has become lately; more African-American, Hispanic, Asian residents
- **a model for sustainability** – cultural, economic, environmental; capture rainwater, convert waste to methane, etc.; achieve through partnerships among educational institutions, government, business community, and local residents
- **trolley** to provide transportation around Decatur including to/from Oakhurst; could be public but also could be small private business; use energy-efficient transport, e.g., electric vehicles
- **protect historic buildings**, e.g., Courthouse, Depot, Leon’s, Methodist Chapel; residents need more information about and access to historic properties (*Facilitator’s note: very low awareness among these respondents about availability of venues*)
- preserve character of neighborhoods by restricting “hideous construction” of homes that don’t fit their settings
- **be sensitive to aging community**, a challenge because economic base will change as population retires; protect quality of life by helping/encouraging people to stay healthy; attract younger people to preserve age and life-stage diversity; barter system—overseen or managed by City?—to help people provide for each other; City will need to establish a department to manage these challenges
- increase activities/amenities for seniors, and publicize them!, e.g., group outings
- set up system for matching families and elderly citizens, i.e., “Adopt a Grandparent”

“We want Decatur to be...”

Facilitator's note: ran short of time, skipped this specific question

“Decatur, a city where ____”

- we want to live
- you feel safe
- everybody wants to be
- you can have a family
- diversity is valued
- we care for each other
- everyone is welcome
- you can live, work, and play
- we will try anything once (to be a better community, e.g., recycling, other sustainability programs)
- we can experience cultural opportunities
- the environment is protected and valued
- you know your neighbors
- you are happy
- you don't need a car
- small businesses flourish
- you live longer
- young and old minds can grow together
- education is for all ages
- education is a priority
- cultural opportunities abound
- we have diversity, environmental stability, and economic stability

- we have safety

Travis Grubb

Our Community Successes:

People are well connected

Walkable

You know your neighbors

Sidewalks

Small school system

Active living / Decatur Rec Center

City can provide all daily needs

Privately owned eateries

Café Style restaurants / outside dining

Strong Police presence

Safe

Festivals/Cultural activities

-book festival, beer festival, beach party

Something for everyone

Always options for activity

Our Community Problems:

Lack of greenspace

- especially in downtown
- need more bathrooms at parks
- need to maximize park space that we do have

Downtown too vertical

- buildings too tall

Design Challenges / Density challenges on square

Connecting neighborhoods to activity centers

Affordable housing

Workforce housing

More Single story housing for seniors

Performance gaps between schools

Need to improve social services

- Many kids fall through the “cracks” / graduating w/o being literate
- need tutoring
- literacy programs for students

Divide/lack of communication between school board, city government & elected officials

Need better access to information about educational programs
Strengthen parent/child relationships among lower performing students

Need to fully use strengths

- better use of rec center
- more after school programs at schools

More youth jobs

Programs for 14-17 age group

Programs for women

Better localized bus service, linking neighborhoods

Overflow parking at library/rec center

Parking on the Square

- more signage directing drivers to parking decks
- free or pay parking?
- More private lots should be made available
- Lack of parking restricts access to businesses

Aging City employees

- will plans get done if these people retire

Empty Retail space

Inspiring Visions of the City:

We are already lucky

More entrepreneurs / locally owned businesses

Small Town

Green City

Racially harmonious

Arts Community

Establish a boutique hotel

Become a cultural/arts destination

Church St developed from ponce to commerce and beyond

Greenspace/park downtown

More parking for business employees

Residents are a family

We want Decatur to be:

A place to live and let live

Mix of ages, races and lifestyles

Tolerant

A place kids can be kids

Full of people who want to know each other

A front porch community (people know their neighbors)
A place with activity options for all

“Decatur, A city where...”

“the character of the neighborhood is made up by the characters in the neighborhood”

“there is a good mix of rural and urban.”

“a small town lost in a city.”

“spontaneous Zen happens.”

“streets are alive and businesses thrive.”

“dogs like it.”

Garrett 04-29-2010 7 pm

1- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

We participate and volunteer to make things happen.

We celebrate books and a variety of events and festivals.

We care and want to be engaged.

Parents care and participate as a community in the schools.

We have a high quality of schools and good results from schools.

Maintaining longevity of connections and relationships throughout our lives.

Martin Luther King Jr. Service Project and tutoring program at the schools.

People are willing to help when they see a need in their community.

Recycling program and waste diversion are a good model.

Walkability makes for a livable community.

Independent businesses thrive and Decatur is conducive to entrepreneurs.

Parks are well maintained and the recreation program through Decatur Recreation department is great.

Cemetery acts as a great addition to the greenspace in Decatur.

Local government is transparent, open door, and these policies lead to an engaged citizenry.

While there is some crime, it is much less than surrounding area, such as Atlanta.

Police respond very quickly to problems.

“Our community problems.”

Restaurants are closed on Sundays.

When I tell others I live in Decatur, they say ‘You can’t there from here’- difficult to get to.

Walkability needs continued improvement in particular in pedestrian cross-walks that don’t work; some intersections are bad (such as Commerce).

Need more and additional commitment to LEED/Energy Efficient buildings in the city (Fire House 2 is good but we've missed other opportunities)
Taxes are too high which cause lower income residents to lose their homes
Teachers, police, public service employees can't afford to live here – need more workforce housing.
Need more affordable housing.
Pollution and traffic are regional problems but affect Decatur.
Affordable housing needs to be updated and of better quality.
High rise buildings downtown are simply ugly.
Difficult to ride bikes, especially with children.
Missing the Christmas tree lighting on top of Fidelity Building (it was a true community event)
Traffic is too fast for walking and biking.
Tough to choose a beer parlor!

2- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

The city has shut down traffic for one day a week for biking and walking.
City has turned some parts of downtown into sitting/greenspace pedestrian malls, central town model.
No children have fallen through the cracks; the community has a high priority for every child succeeding – ‘it takes a village’
City has combined the elementary schools into 2 schools and built 2 larger elementary schools.
Decatur has become a model for Green Community.
Decatur has more celebrations like the Beach Party.
The city needs a balanced amount of walkable, green, model city while at the same time maintaining its grit, diversity (income, race, socioeconomic, education, etc).
Decatur is a place where everyone knows your name.
Decatur is a city where you can leave your doors unlocked like we did years ago.
Decatur is financially stable in every aspect- schools, city administration, etc.
We can work in Decatur (as well as live and play)
Note the sign on the city limits: “Decatur is a place for homes, schools and churches” and this should include businesses and commerce as well.
We have diversified taxes through commercial employment.
Providing incentives for business or for greening homes: tax reductions at intervals of living in Decatur.
We continue to get great service for taxes we pay.

“We want Decatur to be ...”

Cultural richness that is tangible e.g., all the cities I love- Paris, e.g., the city is walkable, dynamic, pedestrian mall, visually interesting, it never sleeps.
We want to bring out the richness of culture through increased availability of the visual arts.
Decatur is a model city in terms of housing, traffic, education, jobs, environment, greenspace.
Decatur continues to be innovative and first- it is not afraid to try things that might work.

“Decatur, where it’s greater”.

We are the tide that lifts all ships- everybody comes, schools, housing, cultural

We don’t leave anyone behind – we are a city that is ‘Too busy to hate”

Everyone joins together to get things done e.g. slowing traffic on a particular street called for a community effort that was very connectional and they even had a ‘Speed Bump Party’ when their speed bump was installed.

Where we leave things out in front of our house and people pick them up for re-use.

“Decatur, a city where ____.”

It is a safe place to live.

I am proud to be a member of the community.

You can own your own business.

All people feel welcome.

The community as a whole is valued.

A thriving commerce and community, working together where the commercial and residential balance allows both to prosper.

Where we live play and WORK.

Where the internet is free and trains within Decatur are free.

The children love the schools and there are great teachers and sports and other activities.

We collaborate with neighbors such as Emory and Clarkston with their international community.

Greater Decatur includes the area outside Decatur- and we should know and appreciate what is going on there.

We make movies.

Our stories are told.

The President wants to come to see how communities happen!

There is a Trader Joe’s* (or equivalent)

Roundtable Session

April 29, 2010

Group 39

Kevin Spears, Facilitator

Where are we now?

Community Successes

Decatur is not just walkable – it is functionally walkable. You can walk to places you need to go – shops, restaurants, the post office, the library.

The walk-to-school programs are great.

City officials are accessible and responsive. When you email or call, they often reply the same day.

Police and fire are responsive, attentive and available.

Police are proactive about communicating to the community.

Public works is responsive. I called about a dead raccoon and they arrived in ten minutes. Where else does that happen?

If you petition for speed bumps, speed limit signs etc, the city provides them quickly.

The city schools are excellent. This brings a lot of people to Decatur.

- High test scores and excellent academics
- The schools are small
- There is a great community feel in the schools.
- International Baccalaureate program
- School are officials are responsive – they seek input and make changes based on what they hear.
- The schools host community events

Even the private schools are community-minded.

The arts have a strong presence in the city.

- Galleries
- Music on the Square

- Festivals
- Nonprofits and businesses devoted to art

Great events

The book festival

The library

Great parks in Decatur

- Love the dog parks
- The parks are well maintained, kept up
- The parks are well used
- There isn't a crime problem.

Great recreation opportunities for children and youth

We have a lower crime rate than many intown areas.

It is safe to walk around at night.

Police are responsive when you report a suspicious person or situation.

There is a spirit of cooperation in the community.

Example: churches offer their sanctuaries as venues for the book festival.

Churches in Decatur are good about participating in civic events and even host their own events for the city.

Example: First Baptist hosted an electronics recycling event.

The proximity of Agnes Scott and Emory is a real advantage – the cultural events they offer.

The neighborhoods have their own personality, sense of identity and cohesiveness.

There are ample public transportation options.

The friendly, welcoming, small town feel

Diversity of many kinds – not just race

Same sex couples are welcome and integrated into the community.

Decatur blogs are a great source of city information – they take the place of a Decatur newspaper.

Community Problems

City officials started a process for discussing infill houses. Then suddenly they passed a lot of ordinances out of the blue. It seemed to circumvent the process they had proposed. It was disconnected from community input and seemed like it was done in the dark of night.

In some instances, the zoning laws are too vague. Situations arise for which no clear guidance exists.

Example: the situation with Peer Support & Wellness in Decatur Heights. Even the Zoning Board expressed discontent with inadequate guidance in the ordinances.

Sometimes city officials close off communication with citizens on an issue because they say they are not required to solicit community input on that issue.

There are a few traffic chokepoints caused by the city's traffic calming strategies.

Specifically – the section of West Ponce near the post office and Church Street near Glenlake Park.

The intersection at McDonough/Howard/College at the railroad tracks is a mess – a tragedy waiting to happen – especially with a school so close to it. The light is confusing and the signage is inadequate.

There are not enough bike lanes in the city.

Decatur is not nearly as bike-able as it is walkable.

I would rather my child walk than ride a bike in Decatur.

There are a lot of potholes.

And some of the potholes seem to get worse as the city tries to fix them.

The cost of housing is a problem.

There is no way that our family could live here if we hadn't moved in 16 years ago.

Teachers cannot afford to live here.

There is a lack of affordable housing for low and middle income families.

The property taxes are high.

(But the group agreed that the benefits of living in Decatur are worth the cost)

Do the regular events (beer festival, arts festival etc) cost the city more than they generate in increased business and other related revenues?

Some events create problems and annoyances for residents – parking problems, traffic.

People coming to events from outside Decatur often don't show respect for the place and the people who live here.

There aren't enough tennis facilities. You have to drive to Glenlake to get the key for the Oakhurst courts.

The sign-up process for recreation programs is plagued with problems.

Where do we want to go?

Inspiring Visions

An ideal mix of local businesses and national chains (for affordable basics – shoes, household goods, sports equipment).

It would be great if I never had to go to Lenox Mall to buy stuff.

More greenspaces closer to the Square

Lots of places for people to be outside and interacting

People are out of their cars for everything they do – shopping, eating, playing

More outdoor seating at restaurants, cafes, parks

More informal interaction in public places – book discussions, other gatherings

The south side of the old courthouse is more inviting, drawing people there on a daily basis.

On the Square there is more public activity to draw people there on a regular basis – more than just restaurants and bars– e.g., farmers market, vendors, performers.

You know that when you show up on the Square there will always be something going on.

More shade on the plaza above the MARTA station

We want Decatur to be . . .

A leader in smart growth, sustainability, healthy lifestyle – an example that people look to.

A mecca for culture, literature, arts and music

A place that attracts innovators and creative types

Protected as a brand/name

Negative example: the recent Taste of Decatur situation

Beautiful – full of colorful trees, flower, natural habitat

Minimally intrusive to the rights of property owners while maintaining smart growth

Continue in its embrace of diversity

Not just high income residents

Mixed in socio-economic levels and diverse lifestyles

Still open-minded

Not exclusive

A place where residents know each other and interact

Community-focused and defined by its neighborhoods

Interconnected for news and information – both lo-tech and hi-tech media

Decatur is a city where . . .

. . . people gather

. . . people want to hang out

. . . there is always something to see or do in our public areas

. . . a place with lots of art in public

. . . life is fun

. . . I can catch a trolley (i.e., move around the city without a car but still easily and quickly)

. . . people are involved . . . in the city, in the schools.

. . . I can see a movie

. . . there is more to do than eat and drink

. . . there is more traditional theater

. . . I can do all of my shopping

. . . big-box stores have their place alongside our local businesses

. . . you never need to leave

. . . people say, “Hmm, yes, I have vaguely heard of Atlanta.”

. . . people can live through their whole life (i.e., into retirement and old age).