

TUESDAY ROUND TABLES: SESSION ONE

Thompson 04-27-10 9am

Success

Accessible for people with disabilities

Easy to walk around city

Responsive government

Good school system

Strategic Planning process

Forward thinking community

Good basic services like sanitation

People help each other

People get to know each other

Diversity- everyone can live or work or play in city

Motivated by integrity

Lots of diversity in nature

Feels like a unique place with concentration of energy

Strong tax digest

Fiscally responsible government

Diversity of age groups

Accessible government

Places to gather downtown

Dynamic environment where you can sleep, work, plan and shop

Fun for kids

Great services

Town is like an oasis

Focus on independent businesses

Strong independent restaurants

Large tree canopy

Multiple types of birds

Top notch Recreation programs for youth and adults

Problems

Need more shopping for daily needs

Need reasonably priced stores

Tax base is too dependent on residential property

No access to sales tax

DeKalb County employees cause traffic congestion

No housing for people making \$50k or less

Lack of apartments

Hard to maintain diverse housing stock

Seniors lack housing choices

Seniors have to move due to high taxes

Residents have lost houses because of reverse mortgages

Difficult to get from one side of town to another

Aging infrastructure: sidewalks, storm sewers

Weak tree ordinance

Growing school population with constrained school sites

Lack of communication between city and school system on annexation

Westchester school building is underutilized

Determining the appropriate tax rate

Churches take up a lot of property but do not pay taxes

DeKalb County buildings take up a lot of property downtown and don't pay taxes

Vision

Increase amount of protected green space

Never have to drive my car again

Provide safe place to bicycle

Provide for all modes of transportation

Use Suburban Plaza as a trolley/streetcar stop and large parking facility

Use shared minivans to get around town for \$1 per ride

Ban autos from downtown

Use environmental sustainability as driving force for decision making

Make it convenient to shop at farmer's markets everyday

More people living and working downtown

Use density as an incentive to provide affordable housing and greenspace

Find way to measure environmental impact

Fix signal timing

Want dedicated bicycle and scooter lanes on streets

Story

Close Ponce and remove parking on the Square

Double pedestrian traffic

Say "We used to have parking lots"

Grocery store in Oakhurst

Carbon Neutral City

Fiber Internet

No elderly person had to leave city because of taxes

Zoning ordinance based on carbon neutrality

School system meets the needs of every child

Art facility that serves art needs of community

Access to arts on a daily basis

Dance groups able to perform inside the city limits

Collaboration between city and schools to promotes the arts and share space

Created shared religious spaces/facilities instead of each church having their own site

See the local food movement increase

Not just Farm to School, but Farm to Community

Farmer's market open every day

Farms on top of school buildings

Green roofs of every building

Establish unique local codes that allow sustainable buildings

Updated development codes to promote 21st century needs

City Where

Everyone is welcome

There's a festival for that

You can sleep, drink, work, live, shop

You can see every species of bird in the southeast

I'm proud to live

Roof farming capitol of the world

Interesting people are always passing through

It's hell to drive

You park your car and walk

Built for people and not for cars

Schools set an international standard

Cars are at the bottom of the list

Bicyclists and pedestrians have the right of way

Decatur Round Table Conversation

Notes from Tuesday, 2-4PM

at First Christian Church of Decatur

Facilitator: James Brewer-Calvert

WHAT GIFTS AND SUCCESSES DO YOU SHARE?

Love it – a walking city; banks, bars, businesses, food, churches

Must do something about traffic/pedestrian access

Concerts, festivals, come walk downtown

1998 plan that made this possible – communal things to do

Small town feel in a huge metroplex

Homes still sell in this economy

Not many bank-owned signs – we're not in the red

Varied ages in population

Oakhurst resurgence and good schools attracted families

Decatur focus has been on what we can do to help East Lake and Oakhurst

Things get done (despite the Commissioners' reluctance)

Progress can be made

City management does listen

People have input – don't quit – persevere

People keep up their homes

“Buy in” people here are invested

Volunteer opportunities – MLK Day = 1,000 plus!

Wonderful library – GA Center for the book

Decatur Book Festival

Churches share space with community

Not a typical USA suburb -- “Why I move here and why I stayed here”

Cultish? “Hey there goes a Decatur sign! Licence plate! T-shirt!”

Great city services

DCM – DEAM – Hagars House

Community works together to address hunger and homelessness

Urban camping law discourages

Educational opportunities – CTS/Agnes Scott/Emory/DeVry

Access to public transportation – pedicabs!

Share the road – are bike laws observed?

Eclectic nature of downtown merchants

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Keep all the good we previously mentioned.

Maintain strength of being a walking city

But it is mostly in downtown and not outside the immediate area

Concern re. traffic on Commerce St. Sycamore, also

Blinking, countdown light for pedestrians

Pedestrian only in downtown Decatur – no parking at city hall and Brick store

Do a better job of advertising the free parking that is available

Communication (x 3) on parking options

Park and Ride like Emory U. – must be attractive and convenient

- Link Decatur mas transit with other parts of the city
- Disney-like trams with guide
- One day ticket or all year pass
- Link options together

Encourage businesses to come to Decatur; address laws and red tape and codes to bring and support merchants and producers

Need young people and folks of all ages without negating or forcing out senior citizens – property taxes are difficult

ATL metroplex does not appeal to many young families

How can Decatur attract and keep young families?

\$ has a lot to do with this.

Great schools and services can be and are expensive.

If we really want diversity we need to recognize that an expensive city may and will impact this.

Diversity is a gift – include all ages, races, sexual orientation, skills...

Concer that we may be growing closer to Virginia Highlands

Housing affordability important

Do you want to contribute to pay \$ in school tax?

How do we address and share the burden/responsibility/joy of public education?

Make it possible for seniors' taxes to be delayed, to go with property sale

Local tax credit for local purchases that benefit Decatur

Shop locally and get relief on property taxes

Address why places of worship do or do not pay local taxes?

In Decatur, 85% homeowners / 15% merchants imbalance of tax payments

Recruit more business to city that bring jobs

Address zero sum mentality – Merchants “fight” incoming/new merchants

Zone properties accordingly – enterprise zones for development

Mixed use pre-approval enables both faster growth and rapid response to new business opportunities

Communicate with neighborhoods

Zone with fluidity based on needs

DECATUR IS A CITY WHERE...

...I like to live and work and play

...for re-creation

...the schools are excellent, the children are safe

...73 year old people can still afford to live

...social engagement is accessible

...positive spontaneous interaction happens, and we have the spaces, places and environment to encourage this phenomena

...I can do everything I need to do in a given day – a self-contained city

...we can find a movie house and a full service bookstore

...it is like a bodega

...parking in downtown is eliminated and pedestrians have total access

...city hall continues to be open to our voices

...we can send a shout out to our great sanitation services

Respectfully submitted,

James Brewer-Calvert

Lynchburg College, Lynchburg Virginia

Ted Katz

How do you talk about the good things (gifts) in the community

Live and work

Community

Education (caring teachers)

Safety (responsive police)

Scale of city - not too big not too small

Tree canopy

Shops/retail

Restaurants

Approachable government

Volunteer Coordinator

Sustainable development

- recycling program
- energy efficient choices
- green citizenry

Active living program

- bike paths
- recreation

Mixed use development

Agnes Scott is an asset to Decatur

Parks are great

Cultural opportunities for kids

- visiting symphony
- arts

Decatur Focus newsletter and city website are great sources of information

How do you talk about the problems in the community

Traffic

- clairmont, church are particularly bad
- pedestrian / cyclists have difficulty

Traffic light engineering and timing is incorrect

Run out of blue recycling bags often

Infill

- large homes, McMansions can dwarf older homes and kill property values

Sidewalks need fixing - not level

Cars sticking out of driveways often block sidewalks

Discontent paying dekalb and decatur tax

City maps don't include some city resources including boys and girls club
Needs to be better communication on taxes and what they are for
Lack of transportation alternatives like a tram system, free bikes, etc.

What kind of community would inspire you?

to be a science/math hub for Atlanta

Diversity

- income level

- age

- ethnicity

- ideas

Tolerance and respect

Safety

Lots of community activities

Environmentally Bold

- Carbon neutrality

- old trees and new trees

Better standards for retailers and restaurants

- better health regulations

Better police presence downtown will lead to more foot traffic

****pedestrian only Ponce on Friday and Saturday nights****

Better retail mix

- bookstore

- movie theater (cinema tavern)

Development for area around parole office

Need more rental units downtown to increase foot traffic

Make Decatur a better draw for businesses

More affordable housing

More post office drop boxes

Emergency phones on the street

In 10 years Decatur is a city where:

we celebrate holidays together

the city sponsors environmental and recycling efforts

we live consciously

- plan

- recycle

- set out to do what will make our lives happier

people who don't live here want to come spend time

we educate our kids

the community is involved in education

we can model environmental stewardship

- farm to school initiatives

we have better access to emergency medical services
we safely walk and ride bikes, even with kids
we have citywide environmentally sound mosquito control

Brett Duke

Successes

- Downtown renaissance amazing, nice place to hang out
- City staff responsive, user-friendly
- Active living; recreation center, parks
- Walkable; downtown, crosswalks
- Diversity
- Sense of community; interaction, openness, friendliness, involvement, pride of ownership
- Transformation of downtown streetscapes
- City school system
- Low crime rate; responsive police and fire

Important, Mean the Most to Members

- Less restrictive rules for homes – no covenants
- Traffic flow; balance with needs of pedestrians
- Bikeability, walkability
- Public education on rules for cars, bikes, and pedestrians
- Encourage a diverse business climate
- Refine/define what R60 zoning means (as well as other zonings); current ordinances seem arbitrary and subjective; need to define residential zoning more exactly
- Control of city spending; fiscal responsibility
- Light pollution (example: nighttime lighting from Columbia Seminary)
- Noise and quality of life issues

Community Problems

- High taxes; people struggling to pay, some are leaving the city due to high taxes
- Lack of bike paths; biking is dangerous in places
- Better utilization of school facilities; move administration offices and use schools for students.
- Better support needed for children with ADHD and other special needs
- Schools lack of responsiveness to citizens' needs/desires
- Help for businesses to assure success
- Incubation and stewardship for business community
- Speeding, lack of traffic law enforcement
- Control and balance development (i.e. condos and infill housing)
- Affordable housing
- Preserving neighborhood integrity
- Cities dependence on outside funding sources (i.e. county, state, federal funds)
- Top levels of city government becoming more insulated and detached from citizens; failing to listen

Inspiring Visions of the City

- No ugly, empty places/lots. Instead, vibrant parks or active businesses in these areas
- Easy to use a bike as a primary form of transportation; alternative transportation Mecca
- Decatur transit system
- Walkable community, wider sidewalks
- Encourage ground floor retail in developments
- Railroad crossings that don't require trains to blow horns

- Maintain city hall downtown; keep it accessible
- Maintain items on our success list
- Maintain accessibility of city officials and services
- Friendly, open, neighborly; encourage neighbor interaction
- Diversity
- Maintain small town feel; no tall buildings
- Stay family friendly
- Smart growth and development; attractive architecture; street-level businesses with residential above
- Promote free parking in decks and lots
- Pedestrian only zones; parking on periphery and walkable, attractive areas in interior
- Coolest place in Georgia

We Want Decatur to Be

- The coolest place in Georgia
- A place where people walk around, everything is accessible
- A place with a broadly diverse population
- An easy place to live
- Everything you need is in walking distance
- A place with more parks and greenspaces; connected greenspaces, a greenway belt
- High citizen involvement
- A place where city government is responsive and listens to residents before approving changes
- A place where bond issues are voted on in general elections; a city that takes on large issues through referenda
- Accessible government
- A place where taxes are spent more effectively; maximum bang for the buck

In Ten Years, I Want to be Able to Say, “Decatur is a City Where...”

- It's the coolest place in Georgia
- You can walk or bike anywhere safely
- There are lots of good restaurants
- There is no crime
- People want to live here; you can be yourself
- A wide variety of people live here
- There are lots of good parks, lots of greenspace
- The government listens and responds
- We have clean air and water
- An environmentally friendly city
- Home values are high
- You can afford to live here
- The city is attractive
- You can live in a postcard-like setting
- People send their kids to school in their own neighborhood

Notes from Swanson, 4/27/10, 2pm, Group 9

OUR COMMUNITY SUCCESSES

SCHOOLS. Discussion included academic success, the notion of neighborhood schools, and the recent efforts at healthier foods / local farm to school.

PUBLIC SAFETY. Excellent police and fire service. Emphasized was the feeling of a safe environment throughout the city.

PARKS, GREENSPACE, POOLS. Comments included an appreciation for the emphasis the City places on these items, how well they are kept up, run and the recent improvements to them.

RESPONSIVE CITY PERSONNEL. This included both elected officials and City staff. There was a favorable discussion on how effective previous City planning has been, and the commitment by City personnel to honoring the planning process.

CITY SIZE / SCALE. This was a pretty generalized area of discussion surrounding the “comfortable” size, scale and layout of the City, with the downtown area, neighborhoods and alternate business / retail areas (Oakhurst).

WALKABILITY. In addition to the acknowledgement of being able to walk to most things in the City by most residents, this discussion ventured into the friendliness and support for alternative (not cars or trucks) transportation like bicycles and scooters.

TRASH AMNESTY DAY. This started as an appreciation for super trash day, but also included the efforts at both routine and electronics recycling.

EVENTS AND FESTIVALS. This topic not only included the group participant’s appreciation for them, but also the favorable exposure the City receives from them, and how well they are run.

CARE FOR SENIORS. As in the City’s respect for, and embracement of, its senior residents.

SENSE OF HISTORY. The conversation here was wide ranging and included the specialty interests of several of the group members. Included was mention of the Decatur 101 course, the historic nature of the Beacon Hill / Oakhurst district, and the cemetery.

RETAIL MIX. An appreciation for the diverse and eclectic variety of retail shops in the downtown area.

VOLUNTEERISM. This encompassed both the efforts of the citizens in service, as well as the staff support the City gives in organizing the volunteers.

GOOD HOUSING AUTHORITY. Pretty much just a statement as we moved on to the next topic.

OUR COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

TRAFFIC. Widespread discussion included signaling problems (especially at South Candler and College), congestion, the balance of vehicle (cars and trucks) traffic flow versus pedestrian crossings and alternative vehicle (like bicycles, etc.) right of ways, and the lack of traffic calming measures on some streets.

ANNEXATION. A mixed conversation noting the desire for obtaining more commercial tax properties but recognizing possible negative impact on the capacity of the school system. Included was a comment in favor of annexing the residential area on the south side near Midway.

GREENSPACE, RECREATION LIMITATIONS. Little additional property available for these functions.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING. This was a big issue for the group. It was summed up with the term “gentrification” and the expressed concern that the City is losing its diversity. Additional thoughts included concerns over losing the character of the residential neighborhoods, and the fact that the City is not attracting young African Americans.

SCHOOL ISSUES. The specific focus here had to do with capacity.

WE COULD BE GREENER. Though City administered building efforts are providing an emphasis in this area, greater effort can be made with respect to our school buildings, codes, construction incentives, etc.

BIKE PATHS. More of them in more places.

RAILROAD RIGHT OF WAY. It was noted that having the CSX line through the heart of the City presented a unique series of problems like safety issues with kids crossing the tracks, while also limiting the City’s options because of federal rail regulations.

OAKHURST EMPTY LOT. There was an expressed desire for suitable development of the Oakhurst former grocery store property now occupied by Navo Church.

Facilitator note: With discussion running behind schedule, the group chose to have a general conversation under the final heading, skipping over the “inspiring visions” and “we want Decatur to be” flip chart pages and include them under the single “Decatur, a City...” heading.

DECATUR: A CITY...

where I can afford to live.

where little has changed in the last ten years.

where families can live, work and play without leaving the City.

where vacant lots are green, not paved.

that is carbon neutral.

for all stages of life. (This sentence refers to ages, babies to elderly.)

of thoughtful expansion.

of greater diversity in every way (specifically mentioning age, race, economic, and political).

PARKING LOT

During the discussion concerning community successes, the group ventured off on the topic of exploring ideas for having the senior members of our City and communities share their knowledge, experiences and history with younger and newer citizens. While not re-visiting this topic during Session 1, it will fit nicely into the conversations of Session 3.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT SESSION

Try to be in the same room, comfortable and conducive to discussion.

Snacks and beverages would be nice.

Better time management and keeping on track is desired; we'll add a timekeeper element to the next session.

Nathan Soldat

Where are we now?

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

- Getting Around: good local transit system, very walkable, great new crosswalks
- Community in general: laid back, many interconnections, strong sense of community, pride, diversity, publications like the Decatur Focus and blogs allow community connections, safe, it feels like a place to be and Atlanta doesn't feel that way, Atlanta is a place to work and Decatur is a place to live, vibrant, feeling of a small town-like Mayberry, comfortably laid back
- Active Community: full of passion, many people volunteer, strong city center, strong desire to stay in Decatur, independent business owners, many festivals that bring money into the community, Decatur Business Association-very involved with programming and strong community links
- Government: responsive, accessible, accountable, the recreation department has great programming with substantive learning and structured programs
- Spaces: community gardens, backyard gardens, ability to raise chickens, dog parks, ability to eat/shop downtown, local business, quality restaurants, few chain businesses

How do you talk about the problems in this community? What stories do you tell?

- Loss of Diversity: loss of or not enough diversity (economic, racial, age, sexual, housing stock), much diversity being lost because Decatur is becoming unaffordable, related to

housing stock we need more apartments in downtown/Oakhurst, loss of diversity was also a topic of discussion 10 years ago

- Taxes: many people are being priced out by taxes, some people with kids feel they can't afford to pay the taxes when 67% of the money goes to the school system, difficult tax burden on the older population even before age 80, need more commercial tax base, need to bring in more commercial business, potential business owners are deterred by taxes in the City of Decatur, annexation made sense in the area between Decatur and Avondale Estates—why was it tabled?, commercial properties may be undervalued by DeKalb County
- Neighborhoods: concern that neighborhoods abutting the commercial core need to learn how to interact and transition with that core because it is not as if they are 10 blocks from that core
- City Schools of Decatur(CSD) and the City of Decatur: major disconnect, lack of communication, need to work together and plan together, parents leaving the community because of the schools, CSD has a lack of sustainability, CSD needs a long range strategic plan, trailers are a problem, a lot of money is being spent on the schools but we are not getting enough out of that money
- Physical Amenities: major walking routes need more trash cans, need dog mess clean up posts, need more lighting for safety in residential neighborhoods and that lighting should be lower to the street, surface lots need more trees and also mechanisms to fund such upgrades, need more dog parks and community spaces
- Safety: dogs in parks where kids are need to stay out of play areas, owners need to be more responsible with their dogs, the increase in traffic has lead to safety concerns, need more bike and pedestrian safety on Adams Street and College Avenue
- Parking: there is enough parking but people don't know about it, we need to raise awareness about shared parking, we need a comprehensive parking plan, there are safety concerns when it comes to parking in park garages/ramps/decks(GRD's), parking GRD's need "way finding" signs to help locate your vehicle or to get out of the parking GRD on foot, there needs to be physical connections between parking GRD and to major destinations, parking GRD's need more lighting, parking GRD's need to be branded with art or possible a color (ex. If I say I parked in the yellow deck, everyone should know where that is), parking GRD's are too dreary, there are many opportunities for public art on parking GRD's, Ponce de Leon Avenue should be closed during the evening and traffic re-routed on Commerce Drive, we need a tunnel or bridge to get over busy streets
- Theater: missing enough live theater

Where do we want to go?

What kind of community would inspire you?

A community that.....

- is bicycle and pedestrian friendly
- has affordable homes
- has housing choices
- has a tax structure that keeps long time residents in place
- values and strengthens its diversity

- has homes that meet physical space related needs but are not out of context or scale
- has lots of green space and environment awareness
- has a housing authority (Decatur Housing Authority specifically) that sets a high standard for good design→respect for urban context downtown, employs green building methods, has quality architecture, is not suburban
- has a arts center/facility and continues coordination/partnerships with entities like Eddies Attic and Agnes Scott, the high school auditorium is a great start
- has lot of fine arts
- promotes our cemetery as a destination-not just in death
- a place where you come to live but you find yourself inspired for a life time

How do you want Decatur to be known?

- As a place where everyone is welcome
- Anti-Cobb County
- We welcome diversity
- Communication is open and clear-you don't feel lost-basically you know where you can go to get your questions answered
- Creative: artistically, able to raise chickens, forward thinking, kids have options to do things, open-minded, weird

Decatur is a place where.....?

- The next ten years are on the cutting edge and are moving forward
- I feel safe
- Where your neighbors smile at you
- I feel energized to be involved
- I can make a difference
- City officials are responsive
- Everyone is able and welcome to live
- Everyone can more freely from a transportation standpoint
- I want to live until I die
- You can grow up and grow old
- Business meets the needs of the community-not just high end business
- You can grow old and stay young

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Robyn Tibbetts

Meeting Date: Tuesday 4/27/09

Time: 7-9pm

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.”

Limited commercial zoning

Use of space and people in community (events, variety of activities, volunteer opportunities)

Leadership of COD responsive, inclusive, open for feedback (i.e this process)

Decatur 101

Start of bike routes and facilities

Volunteer program

Schools

Parks and rec- age variety of programs, access to parks, variety of things to do at parks

Always run into someone you know

Unique shops, restaurants and businesses

Feels like a little town big city

Neighborhood associations and their involvement with each other and the community

Quick access to Marta and transportation alternatives

Safety-low crime, walk home from dinner at 11 and not worry, access to police and their responsiveness

Ownership of living here- people take pride, invest interest in city, good people live here

Walkability to places is high. **Square and neighborhood walks**

Good schools

“Our community problems.”

Lack of cooperation and communication between county and city -feeling like the “step child”
,and that Dekalb resents success of Decatur

Lack of sensible plan for annexation, lack of information regarding annexation, lack of
community involvement in the process

Lack of affordable housing, multidementinal, grown kids can't afford to come back at buy here,
elderly has tough time staying no real retirement community,

“sitting” transportation plan- lack of more progress

old zoning codes- aggressive commercial vs. resident, transitional zoning, lack of neighborhood
input in zoning

traffic management (timing, new sidewalk distribution)

airplane noise

City Schools of Decatur administration not like COD- (responsive, feedback, relationship sour)

Partnership between city and school

2- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

Sensible plan for annexation-do it, and include people in communication and process

Build cooperation and communication with Dekalb, and citizens know about the communication

More mutlidemintinal housing, and affordable housing

Utilities built underground, require new developers to put utilities underground

Continue what's good: sustainable choices, long term buy in from businesses

Gold level biking community

Walking trails that connect neighborhoods

Pleasant walk from North to south, vice versa

Connectiong physical space, emotional, and spiritually

Eassy access to better support local buisnesses : example picking up takeout not so easy on
square so likely to leave city for food and other goods..

Downtown parking solution- more

Diverse businesses –local grocery, butcher, and they live in the City not driving in to work

Solar energy- required green building practices with schools and buildings

Feel demographic diversity, maintain it don't lose it-age, race, gender, sexual orientation, economic

Places for seniors and young adults to live.

“true” partnership of schools and city in terms of land sharing, collaboration, performing arts center, providers for events and activities

“incubator” for small businesses. Healthcare, small firms. Software companies, creative/arts

“We want Decatur to be...”

welcoming

green

more diverse and inclusive

caring

well planned- example art/theater integration and connected

genuine, human scale

vital and healthy- economically vital, healthy vital people.. active living

encourage local/home businesses “techno peasantry”

vibrant downtown

enlightened,

encourage “light” development

a place to go and watch a movie

“Decatur, a city where ____”

people care for each other

I make my home

People walk

I want to raise my kids

I know everyone

Im proud to live

We have block parties

I bike

I shop and eat

Spend the weekend without leaving

Live, eat, work, play

Realize our goals

We manage growth and preserve character/history

Have fun

deSilva

04/27/10

2pm Group 7

Our Successes:

- Developing and preserving our green spaces.
- There is a strong sense of community
 - Small town atmosphere with big city amenities
 - We are people orientated
- Easy access to city government
- Good city services
 - Garbage and recycling services
 - Police department
- Open door policy with police department
- Not having to pre-sort our recycling

- Fire department helps with car seats and missing persons
- School System
- Scale and size of the community and the buildings downtown
- Churches are active within the community and will participate in other projects – not just their own events
- Festivals and events
- Marta being a part of the city (3 stations)
- Very walkable city
- Cooperation between Agnes Scott, City of Decatur Schools, and City of Decatur. (i.e. art displays in city library done by school children)
- Agnes Scott is more active with City of Decatur
- Strong non-profit involvement with city
- Having Hagar's House (homeless shelter) in city limits – so close to Marta, etc.
- Strong culture of volunteerism
 - Fundraising
 - Community involvement
- Embracing lower income groups (i.e. Adopt a elderly or low income [child] person at Christmas and provide gifts. Also the local churches collect, sort, and store the gifts.)
- Diversity – we have a strong starting point
 - Age
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Sexual Orientation
- Traffic is not as bad as other metro areas

Our Challenges:

- Trying to maintain our diversity
 - Economic diversity
 - Elderly population – higher costs, higher taxes more of an issue
- Changing Demographics – increase in number of white / affluent population
- Less neighborly in same neighborhood
- Influx of new residents from outside is leading to a change in the small-town feel / culture
- Achievement gap in school system
 - Need more parental involvement
- City needs a bowling alley (within city limits) that has family friendly amenities (i.e. arcade, toddler play area, etc.)
- City needs a central playhouse / theater with special events venues available for public rental
- Growing traffic challenges
 - Speeds are increasing
 - Volume of traffic increasing
 - Neighborhoods are being used as cut-throughs for other areas
- Taxes
 - Higher taxes are a concern for those on a fixed income

- Balancing our scale (size) and our city services
 - Growing our tax base
 - Concern for all about our rising taxes (not just those on fixed income)
- Development and annexation
- Balancing growth and higher densities vs. (protecting) existing neighborhoods
- Need more housing for disabled residents (Park Trace is not enough)
- Need more senior housing
 - Large rooms
 - Affordable
 - Within easy walking distance to downtown for someone in her 90s
- Addressing traffic along the Clairemont corridor
 - Connecting Decatur to Emory
 - Getting people out of their cars
 - Safety
 - Pollution
 - Preventing accidents (children being hit by vehicles)
- (City is not) pedestrian friendly enough (i.e. the cross-walk in-front of Parkers on Ponce)
 - Need to change our culture – we disobey our own laws (Decatur residents are a big part of the problem in not following the laws to protect pedestrians)
- Shared Parking
 - Build better understanding of our parking decks
 - Shared use – office building and apartment complex
 - Issue of Fidelity Banking sharing parking with church and people crossing 5 lanes of traffic
- Poor community awareness of available parking
- Need more streetlights (particularly near county office buildings)
- Need another post office
- How do we increase locally grown / healthy foods
 - Community gardens
 - Building awareness
 - Creating community gardens
- Healthy eating is a building block for healthy lifestyle
 - Create partnerships between restaurants, schools, and farmers
 - Example: encourage others to follow in the footsteps of Cakes & Ale (who grow their own produce)
- Build a safe environment for kids to walk to school
 - Infrastructure (sidewalks)
 - Safety: traffic and crime
 - We used to have this in Decatur
 - Safe havens along walking routes (Block Parents)
 - Can also improve health
 - Need crossing guards during evening rush hour for those kids who have after school activities
- Encourage more parental participation / more community involvement
- Balance the good and the bad with technology
- Increase broadband coverage (and access)

- Include residents of the housing authority (this is an economic barrier that should be eliminated)
- Attract more tech savvy / creative businesses
- Banning leaf blower (noise / pollution)
- Banning cell phones

Decatur is a City where:

- People come to see where things are done right (we are a model to other communities)
- ALL are welcome
- We grow our own food
- Pedestrians are safe walking everywhere
- It's easy to be healthy and happy
- Volunteers make it happen
- People talk to each other on the street
- You can age in place
- Share parking is embraced and taxes are low
- We love our trees
- We protect our environment
- More people walk than drive
- You are always learning

Ravenberg 04-27-2010 7 pm

Our Community success

- Can ride bikes and walk to school
- Great restaurants
- Can walk to destinations essential to daily life—bank, food, etc.
- Government and citizens actively try to make Decatur a great place to live
- Sense of community—hello on the street, pride in the community, ability to be involved and contribute
- Diversity: welcoming to all
- Attracts people to value Decatur assets
- So many people volunteer
- Small town in a big city (can have cake and eat it, too) small town with big city offerings
- Festivals
- Square offers a physical center
- Takes commitment to environmental sustainability seriously: e.g., recycle program at events

- Great school system: smallness, teachers, volunteers, passionate parents
- Independent retail; not a mall
- Great beer, great music
- You can drink and walk!
- Cultural opportunities
- Higher education in community is a plus: Agnes Scott, Emory
- Parts are great; city invests in them
- General beauty of the city (e.g. parks, Agnes Scott)
- Good tree canopy
- Community gardens: promoting good nutrition community wide
- Feel safe
- Smoke free
- Decatur 101 a great way to introduce new residents to Decatur (should be required!)
- Volunteer citizen commissions that report to the city: active living, environmental sustainability, keenagers, Decatur Gators, activities for kids, city wide baseball
- Decatur Focus—like mailed copy
- Recreation center
- New High School: potential for community to be part of HS events; services there (e.g., weightlifting)
- Access to public transit: MARTA rail
- Access to healthcare
- city investment in low income housing

Our community problems

- Traffic lights (e.g., College/McDonough and Candler/College/Trinity need left hand turn arrows)
- Traffic volume downtown
- Speeding on Church Street; intersection at Church/Forkner
- 25 mph in smaller neighborhoods still too high (not safe for kids); should be 15 or 20
- Parking meters too expensive and quarters a hassle; keeps people away from businesses
- Would like to close Ponce De Leon to vehicle traffic between Commerce and Church (permanently or on certain days, e.g., Sundays)
- Few/not enough places to lock bikes
- Taxes: don't want them to go up any more; high taxes limit diversity and aging-in-place

- Need stronger requirements for affordable housing
- City schools too top heavy in management taking focus away from teachers and students; not seeing the value in the many layers (too many); “overthinking it”
- City government should be a little tighter or taxes will keep going up
- Retail mix may not be sustainable; community needs to think about what they will support and encourage independents; perhaps more non-retail and/or professional services?
- Lack of affordable housing for workforce
- Don’t have a diverse middle class and African American population is decreasing; solution is not easy
- Falling behind other communities on promoting bike transportation; don’t have bike lanes
- Need a new tagline; current one is the worst
- Need a boutique hotel
- Concern: heard that marijuana is easily for sale on the square daily between 3 pm and 5 pm.

Inspiring visions of the city

- Show the region that it is possible to tackle social justice issues (grow diversity) while being green, etc. (and the other progressive things we like about Decatur)
- Breadth of [a more complete and pervasive] city [meaning citizen] understanding and support for housing authority priorities
- Less friction between school administration and parents; more trust, more cooperation, more transparency
- City Schools of Decatur 101 program
- A community with more walkers, more bike riders, farmers’ market on the square, parks connected with trails
- Completion of sidewalks on every street (process has intimidated residents)
- Safer bike riding: same city commitment as for pedestrians
- Government with a role in designing community to fight chronic disease (due to lifestyle)
- [Community where] people don’t drive their kids to school
- Electric busses; “no idling” policies
- Volunteerism in a broader program, one designed to connect people in relationships: mentors, literacy, seniors with children, professional, social
- Not afraid to become more dense downtown; get more creative; supports businesses

We want Decatur to be...

[did not discuss this question separately from vision question]

Decatur, a city where_____

- You don't ever need or want to leave
- There is innovation AND preservation
- You live your life
- Sustainability is a way of life
- You want to raise your family

Nicole Cohen

Our Community Successes

- Community involvement
 - Participation
 - Neighborhood associations
 - Schools
 - Commissions
 - Strategic Plan
 - Volunteer opportunities (coordinated well)
 - Decatur 101
 - Festivals
- Attractions
 - Festivals
 - Food/Restaurants
 - Bars
 - Farmer's Market
- Good Size – best of both worlds; suburban mentality in the city; urban vibe with a small town attitude
- Identity – sense of place, community, positive association, branding, unique (not suburban sameness)
- Arty – diversity, different, not homogenous
- Relatively well-governed – transparent, non-political, accessibility, open City Hall, responsive, accountable
- Schools
- Dog Park
- Safe – can walk around most places
- Public transportation – accessible, MARTA

- Pedestrian-friendly – basic needs met in the city limits and can get there by walking
- Satisfactory green space (could be better)
- Attractive to families
- County seat – courthouse
- Good job of bringing commercial in downtown
- 2 downtowns (Decatur square and Oakhurst)
- Rainy day fund – fiscally responsible
- Decatur blogs – social media

Our Community Problems

- Taxes are high, services are great. Need to expand tax base. Told different things would need to happen to lower taxes (e.g., new condos would help), but they haven't gone down. Now told need more businesses to share tax burden and lower for residents.
- Paramedics are limited – DeKalb County might have to step in for certain things that the City of Decatur paramedics cannot do.
- Develop Commercial opportunities and property. 1 or 2 landlords in particular are problems (e.g., Vision Properties). Expand East. Develop Big H.
- Need to focus on non-downtown property. Vacant lots. City is not proactive enough, needs to take initiative (will act when issues are brought to their attention, but citizens would like to see proactive action).
- City needs to follow their own guidelines for development – some things happened too quickly, no resident input.
- Antiquated zoning laws – e.g., autos were more important 40 years ago when zoning laws were drafted, now restaurants need a waiver to get parking. Too many variances are needed. Just change zoning laws to avoid numerous, repetitive variances.
- Oakhurst sidewalks – need more, and the current ones are in disrepair
- Some basics are missing from downtown (especially Oakhurst)
 - All-hours grocery store
 - Chain clothing store (e.g., Gap, Chicos)
 - Bakery
 - Liquor store
- Green space/Environmental issues
 - Community garden
 - Utilizing space that is available (e.g., flood zone that cannot be built on anyway), walking trail
 - Water in creeks polluted – Alkaline and sewer leaking
 - Drainage/flood issues
 - When presented the idea for community garden, got run around, sent to endless officials

- More fully-utilized city property (e.g., schools – let community use) – better coordination needed between schools and city
- Traffic
 - Hard to cross train tracks – lights at tracks are impossible, not coordinated, only a few places to cross
 - Scott Blvd. – too high speed, not pedestrian-friendly, dangerous to cross; too slow with heavy traffic
 - Jefferson and Ansley – people roll through stop sign
 - Too many crossing guards at Renfro and Decatur – difficult to drive, have waited 30 minutes
 - Close Ponce to vehicle traffic between Church and Commerce (European model) – turn parking in front of BrickStore to green space, expand restaurant patios
- More seating in downtown (e.g., MARTA plaza – possible model: Colony Square entrance to Ansley Park)
- Be fiscally responsible, don't need to do everything, use restraint (e.g., Oakhurst firehouse over budget)

Inspiring Visions of the City

- Great schools
- Good dog parks
- Good infill – smart development, resolve eyesores, find good tenants
- Art scene
 - Theater
 - Performance art
 - Provide space for arts
 - Amphitheatre space to be used for movies and concerts (why go to Piedmont Park for Screen on the Green, gazebo not ideal stage for concerts)
 - Movie theater
- Continuum of care for older citizens – housing, healthcare
- Safety – especially at night, Oakhurst
- Diversity of housing so working class, older citizens, etc. can be here (don't want to turn into Highlands)
- Expanding houses well to blend in with rest of neighborhood
- Partner with Emory and Agnes Scott – branding (similar to Stanford/Palo Alto)
- Continue being a movie locale
- Technology – Google project
- Better communication/cooperation with DeKalb County – shouldn't resolve differences in court (e.g., HOST litigation, zoning issues).
- Better communication with City of Atlanta and other neighboring towns
- Environmental leader

- Programs
- Building codes
- Energy usage
- Clean water
- Maintain/increase diversity
- Manageable size of city – not too big, controlled growth
- More refugee services – education, basic services

Decatur, a city where...

- People are safe/secure
- People are environmentally conscious (greenest city in the Southeast)
- The schools are great
- Entertainment destination
- Where you don't have to leave unless you really want to
- Emory is
- Trains don't blow their horns
- Fiscally sound (City)
- The taxes are low and the services are high
- Community is involved
- Where things get done
- Where you can walk/cycle everywhere
- Green spaces are plentiful
- Technology and the arts (and the people who use them) prosper

Allison Trendell

Our Community Successes

- Teamwork – individual working together
- Where neighbors are friends
- There are 66 houses in my neighborhood, I know 55 of those families
- Great school system

- Neighborhood parks are a success
- Walkable city with a neighborhood feel
- Vibrant downtown with festivals, events, concerts and community events
- Effective Downtown Development Authority – resourceful in finding funding for community projects
- RECYCLE
- Environmentally aware community
- Having pathways (bikes)
- Approachable and helpful city government (blogging)
- 3 MARTA stations within city limits
- Small town feel
- Generations of families staying in Decatur

Our Community Challenges

- Everyday commodities not available (printer toner)
- Fear of becoming homogenous
- Builders (developers) find city difficult to work with
- Expensive parking meters
- Taxes may drive people out of the community
- Tax level can affect diversity (ethnic, age, socio-economic level)
- Aging infrastructure (sewers)
- Rush hour traffic
- Balancing vehicular, pedestrian and bike traffic
- Inconsistencies with building permits (sidewalks)

Inspiring Visions of the City

- Plant trees
- Multiple parks, fields
- Buy the Devry space and make green space and high school track
- Put sidewalks on streets that don't have them
- Organize more venues for performing arts (movies, music, authors)
- Organize event communication better (incl. county events, etc – challenge, too many blogs to visit to get info on events)
- Integration between city and community groups (i.e. more Eddy & Agnes type events)
- Bike lanes throughout the city
- Kids feel safe walking around town
- Info kiosk in the city: smartboard/electronic

- Decatur Events – “there’s an app for that” – (something downloadable for people who visit or live in Decatur)
- Temporary office space (i.e. to rent by the day)
- Sister City programs – help other communities (i.e. Burkina Faso partnership)
- Recognize & value everyone in community
- More volunteer days
- What if the Methodist Children’s Home was part of the community

We Want Decatur To Be...

- Leadership is (continues to be) thoughtful, diligent & progressive
- Small town (everybody knows your name)
- Skyscraperless
- Diverse
- Annexed to achieve balance with residential/commercial property
- Accommodates children at all education ranges of ability/disability
- Accommodating to aging population
- Beautiful streetscapes (not like Church St. before Ponce)
- Kids return to community when they are grown
- Broad in business base – corporate jobs not just shops & restaurants

Decatur Is A City Where...

- Atlanta isn’t
- **Everyone wants to be**
- You can connect the dots – networking digitally and personally
- Decatur is a network
- That is totally wireless with reliable connection
- You are free to walk
- You feel at home
- Lively
- Safe and help is close by
- There are homes, schools and places of worship
- Where people want to and afford to stay, live and retire
- Green & Active
- Know your government by their name
- Great one-of-a-kind shops
- **Individuality / Unique / Sense of Community Pride & Responsibility**
- **Volunteerism**

- There is a Trader Joe's
- **Live, Work & Play**
- Everyone is Welcome & Comfortable