

WEDNESDAY ROUND TABLES: SESSION ONE

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Thrivikraman, Tushar (Group 37)

Meeting Date: Wednesday, Apr 28, 2010

Time: 7-9 pm

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.”

Small city “in-town”

Neighborhood schools

Downtown - “Charming” not cookie cutter, has uniqueness too it

Funky Restaurants with lots of variety

“Walk-ability” - “car-free”, always people walking around, can recognize people/make new friends, MARTA (Decatur, Avondale, and East Lake stations)

Close to Atlanta

Safety – Quick police response, look out for residents, part of and integral to the community

Diversity – socio-economic, ethnic, racial, residency, age, acceptance of differences

Diversity of entertainment – festivals, music, beach party, organized well, both official and unofficial community gatherings (people camping out for fireworks display on July 4th)

Neighborhood Association – winnona park listserv, events scheduled, helps connect community

Well-kept secret – no interstate

Rec center (Active living) – forms partnerships with schools / community

Library

Variety of shopping choices – Terrific Thursdays in the fall

“Living in Mayberry”

Central area – Decatur Square, compact area, only 4 sq miles with lots of things to do

No high rises

Lots of Trees

“Our community problems.”

Risk of becoming a “mini-buckhead” and Va highlands

Trying to be too many things – chain restaurants

Spilt Identity – want to cultivate artisans / locally owned shops however, rent too high for shops to stay in business, affordability

Affordable real-estate: teachers, service workers, etc can’t afford to live in the city (talking about housing < 200-300K, not “low income housing)

High taxes, burdensome even though gov’t spends it responsibly: drive people away, single w/o kids, seniors

Some houses have no buffer between large commercial buildings, poor planning, reduces land value, etc

Commercial buildings are expensive; require chain restaurants due to high rent
Lack of green space, more parks
No bike paths, routes
Size, expanding too fast, capacity of city. No sense of where it's going to stop
Lack of inexpensive non-chain general store (clothes, office supplies, stuff you would get at Target)
Crosswalks are difficult to see, need to be repainted
No Performing arts Theater / Movie Theater
Traffic- over the past 10 years, increased number of "tourists" / people outside of city.
Better planning for condos (friends visiting etc). Parking (free for residents, charge others) Better road signs, areas not marked clearly, not accessible
Water/Sewer system / general infrastructures (roads/sidewalks) with potholes
Need to sort out priorities, pick what we do well and focus, don't want us to "lose our way,"

2- Where do we want to go?

"Inspiring visions of the city."

Maintaining Diversity- not just typical racial diversity, but diversity of all types, single, seniors, etc

Bike lanes and racks on every street, crosswalks

Focus on quality and improvement (unique character of Decatur), not growth. Grow according to plan and vision

Adequate planning for future of youth. Babies today are teens in 10 years, driving, etc

More green, 100% buy-in from residents and business

Efficiently use of space (annexation?) space by Dairy queen, area by feast, commerce and church, shopping center in Oakhurst

Increased connectivity between neighborhoods, better-connected infrastructure, social events, etc. more unified so that everybody knows what is going on. Better signage to Oakhurst

Maintain character of neighborhood – zoning to control large houses

Expanded & renovate rec center, appeals to seniors, teens, kids

Grow senior citizen resources , more social activities

Continued communication, Decatur Focus, metro blogs, etc

Increased transparency between neighborhoods, Decatur master calendar of events, community info on website, etc

Expanded Recycling program (electronics, Apts/condos) greener business (no Styrofoam)

Decatur-Oakhurst Shuttle

"We want Decatur to be..."

Diverse

Affordable

Exemplify smart growth

Friendly & Welcoming

Vital Downtown

Charming Neighborhoods

Safe

Sustainable: Environment, economic, size/growth

Familiar and Comfortable with Neighbors

Accepting

To have an integrated community, all involved, from different communities

Everyone is connected, through city resources, social resources, infrastructure

“Decatur, a city where ____”

people who live there, love it.

people who visit it, love it.

generation of families thrive

life is clean, green, active, and attractive

the police department is concerned, active, involved, and responsive. Respectful, integral

part of the community, focus on safety.

Can call it “home” – long-term

All generation live together

Proud of local government

Intentional identity

We are carbon neutral

Wrap up and review

Large room, difficult to hear and distracting

Get other teams ideas, posters, and results

Phrasing of questions were strange, more direct questions, some were redundant

Joy Provost 28

Ground Rules

- Listen With Respect
- Each person gets a chance to talk
- One person talks at a time
- Speak for yourself, and not as a representative of any group
- Help the facilitator keep things on track
- Outside the group, we will not quote what is said in the group
- Keep cell phones muted or off
- Listen to understand before responding

Our community successes...

- Small town feel
- Diverse business community
 - Urban environment in small town
- Accessible gather places
 - Square
- People on the streets
- Attractive school systems
- Continue to attract new residents, diversity that works
- Strong sense of community, active participation, neighbors know each other

- Friendly place
- Volunteering
- Location
- Past strategic plan worked, hold zoning
- Pet friendly

Our community problems...

- Separate city gov't and city school systems
 - Shared resource opportunity
 - Communication could be better
- No trailers at schools
- Congestion of traffic
 - Traffic light timing
 - Rail crossings, underpasses? Ped xing
- More bike racks available
- Zoning has gaps that impact charm, concerns about high density

Inspiring visions of the City...

- Art house theatre, live theatre, movies on the square
- Broaden community arts programs – community theatre
- Encouraging bicycle commuting, other forms of commuting
 - Address those commuting to Decatur
- Get people to work and stay in Decatur
- Transportation arteries are unclogged
- Expand tree planting programs
 - Landscaping that make commercial district attractive
 - Streetscaping like Church Street
- On street sidewalk dining – European style, slows down traffic

We want Decatur to be...

- A City without speed bumps
- A City that encourage active living
 - Young adult programs included
 - Leagues with community partners
- Continue to get citizens involved
 - Continue communication with citizens
- Dialog between police & young people is improved
- Continue to be green
 - Improved natural green space
 - Less engineered green space

- Commercial recycling program – small business
- Preserve green space not “develop” green space
- Communication between community groups & City & between groups
- Increased small business
- Increased activities in arts
- Alternatives to post office down town
- Improved access to courthouse & parking deck

Decatur, a City where _____...

- Where active living is a way of life
- Small town but cosmopolitan
- A city where I am free to be me, expressive, diverse
- There is no dress code

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Steve Provost

Meeting Date: April 28, 2010

Time: 7 – 9 PM

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.

3- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

Neighborhood progressive dinners (16 one!!) -- Neighborly

Agnes Scott - hospitality

Lots of gardens (Woodlands, Oakhurst) Parks, Greenspace

Neighborhoods remain same for 25 years

Walkability, a walking city

School system, well run, planned, good education

Moved here for the **schools**

Like having our own school system

Impressed with the dog parks

Decatur has character, is distinguishable, mom and pop stores

Events!

Volunteer opportunities

Churches – a denomination on each corner. – all great -- host events – part of the community

Can raise chickens (and goats!)

Fresh blood in Oakhurst, have their own festivals, young energy

Eddies Attic – great music, not expensive, local and renown acts

Transportation system – buses, marta -- train in downtown

Restaurants -- come a long way, 27 of them in walking distance

Police Department is really good

Grocery Store – thankful for Kroger downtown

Library

Post Office

“Our community problems.”

Grocery store – have to drive outside area for full size grocery store

Traffic – no reason for speeding on Ponce --need to eliminate major traffic in city (it’s good that some streets have been narrowed)

Too much traffic generated by the Post Office

Decatur is a victim of it’s own success --there’s an “I’ve got mine now you go away” attitude

High home prices leads to a feeling of entitlement

Green Space – too small at the schools --Glenlake Park, money should have been spent buying more green space

Want more trails, soft surface rather than paved

Focus more on specific Boards (community Boards)

Cars drive over sidewalks – too many curb cuts, don’t feel safe

Police –want more interaction with them. Want quarterly public meetings

Need a decent hotel in the city

More bike facilities, lanes, paths

Railroad crossings

Reduce crime

Parking- accessible and affordable

Inappropriate to have a college on the Square (DeVry – students get in fights)

Have become selfish, entitled –need more caring about the other guy –lower income and elderly being driven out of city by high costs

4- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

“We want Decatur to be...”

A place to age and stay

A diverse city --affordable housing –students –retired persons –working people

A beautiful downtown

Close off traffic in downtown one day per week

A populated downtown

Open spaces –more walking spaces, --more bikable space

The businesses of today to still be here 10 – 20 years from now
Efficient spending by city to improve tax structure for businesses
Organic markets, gardens, and animals
Open to the arts –incentives to help those (artistic, creative) endeavors --the city as a center for creativity

Be able to walk --to Little Five Points, to Avondale

Trolley

Golf carts

Alternative transportation

Outdoor **places to interact**

A GREEN city

More front porches --people outside talking to neighbors --relationships

Encourage neighborhood associations –neighborhood events

Open spaces to have neighborhood events/gatherings

Friendly, open city --say hi to your neighbors

Organized Neighborhood Planning Units

“Decatur, a City Where... _____”

You can wander endlessly

Easy to meet people

You can run

The outdoor beckons

People who want to live here can afford to live here

Where culture thrives

People are connected --emotionally –spiritually –businessly

People feel heard and connected

Diversity is embraced

You remember your childhood kindly

Small businesses have the opportunity to thrive

The **school system** is a vital part of the community

Citizens have a good relationship with city officials

People can get around --free transportation zone downtown --trolley

Oakhurst and downtown are connected

“Themes”:

City of friendly neighbors

Transportation

Green

Citizenship / Stewardship

The arts

Business

Gov't/Police/Fire

Walking

Vitality

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Stephanie DiLorio

Meeting Date: 4-28-2010

Time: 9 am

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1- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

School system has good performance and reputation, support from the city.

Schools are small and located in neighborhoods, making walking to school possible for many students

Growth and development in Decatur have been accomplished with minimal negative impact on the quality of life

Decatur has city center that people can walk to from nearly every neighborhood

Decatur has a small town feel; it is a progressive and welcoming community

Decatur has locally-owned, independent business that embody community spirit

City officials and city service staff are approachable, involved and engaged, which facilitates quick response and changes

An involved and engaged community results in active volunteerism, committed and vigilant neighborhood associations to keep City accountable, well-kept neighborhoods

The community shops locally

Level of community involvement gives the city broad appeal to people of different ages and lifestyles and creates a sense of stability and safety

Government has made some good green decisions and considers sustainability in decision making process

Decatur has nice green spaces, such as well-kept parks, and excellent festivals

Decatur is fortunate to have large employers in or nearby the city and MARTA access to Atlanta

Decatur is often ahead of the curve, for example affordable housing and streetscapes, and seeks out grant money to implement new ideas

Churches, non-profits, and businesses cooperate with each other and often share resources, such as parking spaces, meeting spaces

Decatur offers good value (ROI) for taxes

“Our community problems.”

Very few bike lanes and bike paths

Little support for starting independently owned businesses

High taxes put Decatur in danger of pricing people/populations with fewer resources

Concern about long-term financial viability of the City

Decatur’s preservation codes aren’t strict enough; there are too many code variances and inconsistent enforcement of codes; review of codes needed

Decatur lacks some important amenities (i.e. grocery stores on the South Side, movie theater)
Few nightlife options downtown aside from eating and drinking
Financial profits and bigger is better mentality seems to guide new development; New development often doesn't match the aesthetic or ethos of Decatur
Decatur doesn't provide enough housing and access for people with disabilities
Risk of becoming a homogenous community (i.e. only (white) people with wealth live in Decatur)
Decatur hasn't properly considered the negative impact of annexation on the community
School board and the City don't seem to be on the same page; there needs to be agreement over long-term planning and better communication

2- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

Decatur has an outstanding professional theater company

Decatur has a pedestrian area (i.e. remove parking between E. Court Sq. and N.

McDonough

Decatur has a big green space—Central Park

Decatur is a friendly place to move through without driving; There are fewer cars and more transportation alternatives such as a trolley, safe bike routes, shady places for people to walk

Decatur has very close ties with Agnes Scott and Emory and medical centers; Decatur leverages the talent in the universities and medical centers to make the city a better, healthier place (i.e. cooperative projects allowing Decatur to be a testing ground for ideas and research; opportunities for students to participate and study community life; programs promoting healthcare and healthy lifestyle, quality of life)

“We want Decatur to be...”

An incubator for businesses, particularly new technology and creative businesses

A place of refreshment and rejuvenation

An attractive destination for tourists and conferences/business meetings/outings

A city that takes what it has and uses it to the best of its potential

A city with a central place to gather that is attractive and used by the community on a daily basis

A green/sustainable town

A model for active living

Self-sufficient

A place that seeks to balance and serve everyone's needs

A city that knows who it is; a city with an identity

A place where people want to be/experience

A place where residents stay

A place with a strong culture (i.e. welcoming, open, friendly) and strong cultural offerings (i.e. great restaurants, entertainment)

Known as the “Portland” (Oregon) of the South

“Decatur, a city where ____”

People can buy almost all of what they need in the city affordably; businesses are diversified (mix of locally owned independent and bigger retailers); community can walk to most of the businesses

The image the city promotes of active living is a reality

People walk to get to where they want to go

Community enjoys use of public facilities, such as the high school and rec center

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Miguel Alandete

Meeting Date: 04-28-2010

Time: Wed. 7-9pm

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1- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

Great schools – great teachers, active parents, walk-able neighborhood schools with lots of resources; **Community Involvement** – evidence of a plan; Community Government is accessible; Public Safety; Responsive City Service Providers (police); Vibrant Downtown; Walk-able Community; Great Restaurants; Great Festivals – in particular the Decatur Book Festival; Concerts on the Square; Farmer’s Market (Decatur); Proximity to the Dekalb Farmers Market; DHS Sports Stadium Complex; Diversity – in age, sexuality, race; People seem to watch out for each other; Decatur Rec; GA Center for the Book – via the library; Agnes Scott; Having 3 MARTA Stops; Our effort to be bike-friendly; **Community leaders** do a great job securing grants; Our leaders have proven to be great advocates for Decatur but we’re proud to see them also involved as leaders regionally and state-wide; Cliff Bus – through emory should be replicated throughout the city; **great activities**

“Our community problems.”

Lack of an affluent Black/Hispanic/Asian middle class; CSX is irresponsible; CSX divides the city and limits walk-ability; Taxes – if too high will price people out of the city; Lack of clear understanding of where the borders of the city lie complicates services for those residents on the fringes of the city borders; Lack of greenspace; Age of

Renfro and DHS and Police Station; Improve bike-ability on Commerce; The relationship between the city and the county should be improved; **Traffic** on College seems to be worse; Bus service is being cut on Ponce (#2 Bus); Pay-as-you-throw seems elitist – we already pay for garbage collection, why do we have to buy the bags?; Lack of recycling for commercial sector; General inconsistency surrounding recycling; Chick-Fil-A dumpster is disgusting; concerns about the City Schools of Decatur being sustainable; Need a vibrant newspaper – could be virtual; Internet service should be improved; City employees can't afford to live here; 1010 Clairmont – needs to be solved; Potential for being too **exclusive** (in a pejorative sense).

2- Where do we want to go?

“ Inspiring visions of the city“

No High-Rises (keep it at 80ft.); More smart development inside the commerce loop and the Devry Campus; less cars; street-scape – continue with plantings, lighting, etc.; Alternative Transportation, i.e. street-car on ponce?; Signage zoning restrictions; safeguard greenspace; pursue historic preservation; retain architectural integrity; do a better job defining borders of the city; a place for public art.

“We want Decatur to be...”

Be known for civic energy efficiency; Leading a **green** movement that affects H2O, Air, Energy-usage, etc.; Maintain a **diverse** community; known as an “ARTS” community; Show creativity in all aspects of life; Embrace new-urbanist ideas; explore whether Downtown Ponce should be pedestrian only; Clean up areas just on the perimeter of downtown but inside the Commerce-Loop; Influence the N.Decatur/Clairmont Rd. area; Inspire other contiguous communities; find a way to embrace those living on the fringes of our borders; continue to be a city where one can grow old; Explore residential solutions for the older population so they can stay in their homes, i.e. transportation services, etc.; Continue to enable volunteerism; make the city more **racially diverse**; need to be sensitive to the socio-economic/racial divide;

“Decatur, a city where ___”

You don't need a car; you want to live, you want to retire; you can find great food/restaurants; you can find family activities; it's a great place to raise a family;

the “arts” thrive; schools thrive; planning and input is valued; local businesses thrive; diversity and vibrancy exist for the benefit of small businesses; we have a diverse population; architectural integrity is valued; New Urbanism is celebrated; it’s easy to consume locally-grown food; it’s easy to get online anywhere; public facilities are used in a variety of ways, i.e. arts, adult education, etc.; people know their neighbors; people feel safe

Gail Vogels

Our community successes

- City involves citizens
- Reputation of schools
- Wonderful restaurants
- Events and festivals
- Proud of reputation
- Walkability of Decatur
- Children can walk safely to schools
- Has its own services: fire, police
- Provides hometown feel
- Proximity to Atlanta
- Green space
- Safe, little crime
- Response time of police
- Progressive: wifi, zip cars
- Mature trees
- Historic character
- Urban character, pedestrian atmosphere, sidewalks
- Diverse population race, age, socio-economic
- Great neighborhoods
- ASC, CTS and Emory anchors our community
- Cultural events the colleges open to the community
- Can live without a car. Can walk everywhere
- Access to MARTA, Cliff Bus allows ability to get to employment and entertainment outside of Decatur

Our Community problems

- Sidewalks that are unusable

- Unkempt lots
- Unhappy with school charter: the internal means for input (SLT) largely ignored by school superintendent
- Disconnect with city commission and school board: 4-5 academy moving to former 5th Ave. school, not walkable or central to community
- Former West Chester School used entirely for school administration—Why?
- More communication from School Administration
- School system always in turmoil
- School board has open discussions then ignores all input
- CSD riding on reputation it no longer deserves
- Needs to be mutual support between city and school district
- Schools impact real estate and business so schools have to continue to be strong
- Success of schools impact success of city
- Negative change in education in schools in the last 20 years: No longer being taught facts, going through the motions over being taught depth of subject matter
- Charter school system perceived as private school. This is not true
- Schools need round table discussions
- Need to avoid urban blight: graffiti and trash
- Infrastructure problems: traffic, poor or no sidewalks, bad intersections—especially Candler and E.College, E. College and Commerce for children walking to school, dangerous railroad crossings for pedestrians
- Improve green space and add to it
- Make lot next to Dairy Queen a green space
- Complete all bike trail connections
- More bike friendly for recreational and commuting bikers
- City government needs to be more open regarding planning and zoning with newer zoning ordinances
- Need more 5 story high buildings to bring in tax revenue

Inspiring Visions of City

- Less paved space: redo parking lots, add trees, improve water drainage, increase permeability
- Keep buildings to 5 stories
- Commercial area of city needs to change so businesses can thrive: tax credits if hire local people, summer jobs for Decatur teenagers, create internships for teenagers
- Get rid of parking lots. Only use MARTA lots and shuttle people into downtown
- Parking lots provide better signage. Decatur residents would not have to pay for parking.
- Move Dekalb courthouse out to jail on Memorial
- Dekalb county should have to pay taxes for services in Decatur
- Dekalb and Decatur address mutual impacted services that exist in city of Decatur
- Need more office space.
- County needs to pay city for services: courthouse

- Bring in more business, more commercial and taxable property
- Provide more jobs for all ages
- More mixed commercial and residential properties
- Keep small town character
- Add quality retirement assisted living communities
- City needs to embrace idea of residents wanting to live here their entire lives
- Address elderly needs: sanitation, recreation, health, housing, pair young and old to assist each other
- Enlarge elderly programs at Decatur Rec
- Create housing opportunities for upcoming Boomers and empty nesters who no longer want to maintain a house
- Maintain restaurants and grocery stores that are affordable for folks on fixed income
- Change Oakhurst zoning so Mom and Pop stores can exist. Create tax incentives for independent shops
- South of Rail Road tracks needs grocery store, pharmacy and hardware store
- Better options for parking—perhaps along commerce perimeter
- Create parking in Maloof building parking lot
- Create a walking green space (an emerald necklace) from Oakhurst garden to Mason Mill Park in Dekalb county

We want Decatur to be . . .

- More parking in less space
- More connected green space
- More friendly for the elderly
- More friendly to innovative small businesses
- Very pedestrian friendly: trees with sidewalks, small town character, but with dense urban use
- Alternative ways to get around city, i.e. cliff bus

Decatur, a city where . . .

- Citizens, government and businesses coexist
- I feel at home
- People matter
- I see people I know because it is a small town
- There is always something exciting going on
- People feel welcome
- Excellence and compassion reign
- I let my kids walk around town and hang out
- Education provides our children with promising future
- Public schools are valued and supported
- all schools are top quality
- we provide vocational education and well as college prep in our schools

- We think BIG about transportation: become an all electric city (no gas), lessen traffic through downtown, divert traffic around to commerce, install better traffic lights with better timing

Bill Adams

GROUP 27 April 28, 2010
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

GOOD THINGS

- *Being able to walk safely
- *Diversity & strong local leadership
- *Good Neighbors and neighborhood cohesion
- *Opportunities for residents to have an impact-volunteering, planning, etc.
- *Downtown area-accessible on foot, public spaces, business
- *Festivals, Bandstands/Concerts
- *Lots of support for causes
- *Oakhurst Garden & DHS garden
- *Library
- *Cliff bus & MARTA
- *School system
- *Educational level of City residents
- *Pedi cabs
- *Greenspaces, cemetery, Scott Gardens, dog parks
- *Girls & Boys Club
- *REC Center-appeals to all ages
- *South Decatur Community Center
- *Zoning-limits on height, smart growth, good design

PROBLEMS

- *Some minority students & parents to not feel any ownership of the Decatur schools
- *No “voice” for disadvantaged kids in the school system
- *Traffic congestion and signalization
- *Mixed use zoning with incompatible uses
- *Antiquated building codes
- *Don’t want Downtown Decatur to become another Buckhead-noise, congestion
- *Pedestrian “unfriendly” intersections and dangerous intersections

- *Property taxes-reduce age limit on school exemption to 65.
- *Garbage pick up (would like 2x week) and no “pay as you throw”
- *Overly strong influence of the City Manager
- *Lack of bike lanes and safe routes/bike safety for kids
- *Too many restaurants and not enough grocery stores
- *No Senior Center or Drugstore (Oakhurst)
- *No shuttle for seniors

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO? WHAT WOULD INSPIRE YOU?

- *More sustainability-food crops, living wage, more jobs, affordable housing (rentals)
- *Economically mixed neighborhoods
- *Attention to the needs of the homeless
- *Democracy and inclusion in schools
- *Increased and improved connections between schools and the broader community
- *Advocates in schools for kids without one
- *Implementing Smart Growth
- *Ease of access/transportation by foot, bike and shuttle
- *Fewer parking lots
- *Save, preserve and plant trees
- *More options for kids-after school activities/tutoring/activities in parks
- *Dedicated Senior Center
- *Depot as cultural/community center
- *Community building events
- *Movie theater

WHAT SHOULD DECATUR LOOK LIKE AND BE?

- *Small groups can address issues easily, good communication and paths for activism and local problem solving
- *More of what people need (grocery stores, co-ops) right in the City of Decatur-entertainment and services

WHAT STORIES?

- *Walkable and Sustainable
- *Diverse neighborhoods-economically, racially, by age and type of employment
- *Change is possible in Decatur-Community/resident driven initiatives
- *Keep the Family feeling
- *Life cycle housing
- *City Tax Credits for energy efficient existing homes and new construction
- *Community education on alternative housing and energy to ensure acceptance
- *Alternative energy sources in the City
- *Electric car charging stations

*Smaller “smarter”, efficient homes-fewer “McMansions”

WHAT WILL DECATUR LOOK LIKE?

- *Fewer cars/vehicles and less diesel from trucks
- *Access to fresh food and local food
- *Extension service in the community to help create/educate on gardens
- *Development diversity-Keep best of old buildings, not “Disney-fied”
- *Funds in help fix up homes for those with fixed incomes
- *Bike lanes and safe cross walks
- *Tree lined streets
- *Lots of Public art
- *Education on bike safety and rules
- *Restore courthouse square continue the old “look and feel”- no more glass boxes-strong design standards
- *Quality lodging for visitors
- *Free transportation/shuttles between downtown and the neighborhoods
- *YMCA in Downtown and subsidies for “Y” membership

DECATUR IS A CITY WHERE _____.

- *All are welcome and comfortable
- *Everybody is friendly
- *We care
- *We have everything we need
- *We can count on each other
- *Meets all our needs
- *Its easy to be healthy
- *Everyone is respected
- *There are as many trees as residents
- *Where communities are interconnected
- *Citizens are empowered
- *The car is not king

PLUS/DELTA

- Groups need to meet in separate rooms
- +Balanced input
- +Nice group size encourages speaking
- +Helpful handouts

+Group's Gender balance

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Haqqa Bolling

Meeting Date: 4-28-10

Time: 7pm-9pm

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I would probably bold almost everything, this group was quite excited and interested in just about every idea put on the table

1- Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

school system

walkability

having a voice

easy access to public transportation

personal attention from police and fire

community activities: arts, entertainment, festivals, restaurants

organic market

farm-to-school

community gardens

diversity of student population, intentionally integrating schools

homogenizing high school classes: differentiated learning

neighborhoods are diverse across many differences: age, lifestyle, economic, racial, with and without children, etc.

located conveniently: 25 minutes to everywhere

nurturing: i.e. invitation to Global Village School

people from all over the world: attracted by CDC, higher ed, Brickstore, Twains

“Our community problems.”

skateboarders in public/common places : downtown, schools – harming marble, paint, etc.

development and code issues

business opportunities (increase tax base) vs. quality of life

lack of clarity/info about parking options (booted in CVS parking lot)

inefficient energy use: i.e. no solar for new school construction projects

cycling and walking transportation: need for bike paths/lanes, current bike parking

doesn't work, need for sidewalks

sharing city – school facilities: Decatur Ballet’s difficult relationship with DHS
performing arts facility
poor customer service at city hall: an experience of rude – incompetent treatment by city hall staff
not enough ethnic diversity
rat problem: eating gardens
animal control understaffed: loose wild dogs
private schools often left out of the conversation, they’re part of the city too

2- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”
mutual respect of all walks of life
not have to own a car
public temporary art
own center for the arts facility
leader in sustainable food
less surface parking
top 10 for storm water management
top 10 for reducing carbon footprint
prepared for all types of disasters
physically fit citizens and city employees
safety – kids can travel safely
energy neutral transportation system

“We want Decatur to be...”
multinational
electric trolleys for neighborhood to neighborhood transportation-tying N. and S. together
bike lanes on all streets
narrower streets for traffic calming
farms – csa, cooking classes, fresh foods for food pantries for the needy
real food in all of our schools – cut back on waste
national leader in healthy food for kids
convert surface parking lots to community gardens and other green space and meaningful retail
carousel at Christmas time
outdoor amphitheatre
public performance art
shade on Marta plaza
screen on the green
building community by working on something together, on projects
public spaces for games, hanging out – bocci ball, chess, shuffle board, conversation
more affordable housing - people who work in the city able to afford to buy a home in the city
elderly residents being able to stay in the community

MLK day of service for the elderly more often through the year
self contained condo for adults w/out children – pool, health club, etc.
golf carts

“Decatur, a city where ____”
everyone is fit
everyone is welcome
everyone knows their neighbor
anyone can ride a bicycle
you get a world class education
you live in a carbon neutral environment
you can be who you want to be
fresh food is locally grown and available to all citizens
it has foot in past and eye on the future
we can co-exist with wildlife

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Mickey Baskett

Meeting Date: 04-28-2010

Time: 9 am

Where are we now?

“Our community successes.”

City Government - very helpful, goes beyond

Pay-as-you-Throw - far ahead of other communities, special to Decatur

Recycling

Volunteer coordinator

Community Discussion Groups; i.e. Elizabeth Wilson’s monthly discussion group;
neighborhood groups. These promote civic engagement

Opportunities for involvement

Small Town Feel

Schools - quality, neighborhood, parent involvement; tax structure allows everyone
(people without children, seniors, and businesses) to share the burden of the costs

Perception that everyone works together for the good of the community. Government,
businesses and citizens all realize they have a vested interest to keep the city what they
want it to be

Festivals and Concerts-on-the-Square - festivals benefit the non profits and can not
benefit a for profit business.

Walkable

Little Town/Big Services

Safe

Marta

Police and Fire - community oriented service

Business district support of schools and other aspects of city

Diversity

“Our community problems.”

Taxes - high. Decatur is soon becoming unaffordable to middle class

Lack of annexation - fewer people have to pay higher services

Gentrification - causes lack of diversity; high taxes; unaffordable to live here; people having to leave homes

Traffic/Parking

Growth - growth is not always good; even if it is “smart” growth

Festivals - becoming too many, too large

Attitudes of racism, classism, snobbish

1- Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

Affordable housing

Keeping diversity - balance the gentrification/diversity

Schools - keeping the stability and quality with proper planning

Community tool bank - folks could borrow tools free to work on their homes

Better partnership between schools and city government -- too much division and lack of cooperation. Each has their own agenda.

Sharing of resources - i.e. using school buildings after hours for community events; sharing parking lots

“We want Decatur to be...”

More walkable

Have less traffic/better flow of traffic

Less people driving/fewer cars

Better crossings -- streets and RR

Where there is less testing in schools and an opportunity for discovery

An expanded active living center - with the proposed expansion plan implemented; with strong leadership; central to city activities; more accessible

A city with a R.R. passenger service

A city with affordable housing - more workforce houses so that the people who work here can afford to live here. Make sure that the housing stays affordable with accountability and city commitment -- more public discussion

A city with alternative energy sources - so that we can provide some of our own energy

“Decatur, a city where ____”

Every child has equal opportunities to fulfill their potential

Everything I need is within walking distance -

- healthcare
- groceries (Trader Joes)
- churches

We have yearly discussions among citizens - town hall meeting style

Everyone is involved in the community

There is technology access for all - training sessions to educate seniors and underprivileged how to use technology; free or inexpensive equipment for those in need; use of school's computers after hours by citizens.

“Seniors” and “taxes” are compatible

Seniors are engaged in the community - acknowledging value of seniors and what they can bring to the community

There are more services for seniors (evaluate and centralize resources to make the accessible)

Greenspace is accessible to all - more casual areas for sitting and “hanging” out.

There are adequate services and resources for early childhood development

Everyone has and uses bikes

We grow all our food for our citizens - no one has to go to bed hungry; food is affordable

Social and emergency services are available to all

Dana Calleja

Where are we now?

Gifts

- Walkability
- We like that we have a transparent, honest government
- We appreciate the visibility of the government in that the officials are accessible and attend community functions
- We have the feel of a small town within a big city
- We like the progressive philosophy of much of the community
- We appreciate our vibrant downtown with different business, restaurants, shops
- We like that Decatur is kid-friendly
- Decatur has a sense of nature – green spaces, parks natural areas
- Historic preservation is important in Decatur
- Activities are available for a multitude of generations
- We celebrate diversity in Decatur – we don't just accept it! Racial, Age, Lifestyle, Health, Income
- Planned growth has made Decatur great
- We are learning from our past
- We feel safe in Decatur
- We have confidence in our Public Safety and Public Works employees
- We appreciate that the city is a good employer and retains employees and the employees seem happy in their jobs and are pleasant for the public to deal with; they seem happy in their jobs

- Education is important in Decatur. We have high goals for our educational system, diversity is important in our education system, we have a commitment to succeed in our goals and the school system is a representational microcosm of the city values
- There is good cooperation between the city government, the business association and the community.

Problems

- We face financial challenges in the city – we have high taxes and they are getting higher
- Our small size is sometimes a liability in that we can't always realize economies of scale/size
- Physical development in the city places stress on the infrastructure and on nature/trees
- The state of our roads is not good. Perhaps we need to build stronger relationships with the county and the Department of Transportation to address this.
- We are a small voice in a large county. It's hard for us to get the county to do things for us.
- We're different from the more conservative areas surrounding us
- Airplane noise
- Air, water and noise pollution is too high
- Water conservation is not as important as it should be
- Parking requirements/code results in an impact on development
- We are concerned about our physical safety in the parking decks (perhaps have patrols?)
- We have residential parking issues especially on residential streets close to shops
- There is a lack of support for walking/biking/running. We need to be more exercise friendly.
- We need to work on adapting to being a truly urban area.

Where do you want to go?

Inspiring Visions for Decatur

- Pedestrians, cyclists and cars can all share roads and obey all rules/laws
- A city where different parts (Oakhurst, Glendale, etc) are connected by a path of walkways without impacting greenspace
- Our parks are prioritized and wild greenspace is increased

- We invest in active living
- We are able to maintain our economic diversity
- We have passive and active greenspaces (some as parks, some as wild areas) and we sustain what we already have
- We invest in shared parking – including encouraging alternate transportation options like public shuttles along the lines of expansion of the Cliff bus (adopting similar for Decatur)
- We have wider sidewalks and narrower streets to encourage walking/running/cycling and slower car speeds

Decatur is a city where...

- You can live, work and play (live close to work)
- Diversity is celebrated (as opposed to tolerated)
- Big city convenience, small town flavor
- Nature is honored
- We have the best small school system in the country
- Sustainability is taken seriously – development codes, incentives for conservation
- Where artistic impression reflects the community (diversity of music, artistic experiences)
- We work together to develop our future
- Empower our citizens to participate
- Capture the diversity of thought
- Decrease pollution – zero impact building (stormwater, carbon footprint/offsets)
- We maintain our assets by reinvesting in what we've already accomplished
- We adapt to the future

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Mattice Haynes

Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 27, 2010

Time: 2-4pm

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.”

Community of people and families.

Your voice is heard, respected, and responded to by city officials. (Example: emails from residents expressing concerns are forwarded around within the city departments).

Close proximity to friends and neighbors (i.e. small geographic area).

Lots of opportunities for people to get to know each other.

People look out for each other.

Preserving and valuing what we have; for example by supporting a local business instead of purchasing outside of the area.

Diversity of shops in small area.

Developing a culture where driving is optional.

Safe community (“can walk around at night”).

Teens not as anxious to begin driving because much of what they need is accessible in walking/biking distance. If they do drive, Decatur is ideal area because speed limit is no more than 45mph in the city.

Transportation/accessible (MARTA).

Safe, healthy, free/inexpensive activities.

Great schools with passionate staff and teachers as well as high parental involvement.

People in Decatur/community gets involved and takes ownership for creating this place/environment.

Focus on sustainable living (i.e. idling campaign etc).

Decatur is progressive; one step ahead of others.

Strategic planning process with citizen involvement and 80% success on last plan.

Responsive police and fire.

Festivals.

“Our community problems.”

Lack of affordable housing (Ex. 2 bedroom 1 bath house in city is \$250,000; can get a 5 bedroom house just outside city boundaries for same price).

Gentrification and maintaining diversity (young people, elderly, low income).

Tough economic times and our dependence on residential tax base to fund our initiatives.

High taxes.

Some facilities need major renovations.

Disparity in services in low income areas (Ex. Ebster Pool).

Offering services equally in all areas.

Disparate policing (Ex. teen drivers (especially boys) are followed by police in the city;

Speeding on Candler goes unchecked by law enforcement; Drivers consistently don't stop at pedestrian crosswalks on Candler and near the square and law enforcement doesn't enforce enough).

Safety issue, due to driving speeds/traffic, for runners, bikers, Safe Routes to School/kids walking to school etc.

Railroad tracks through the center of the city.

Poor traffic flow (perhaps intentionally).

Concerned about Decatur becoming like Virginia Highlands back in the '90s (i.e. (young people not from the area hanging out late in the city/square and nightlife culture overtaking community culture)

Decatur becoming so popular for outsiders that there are often long waits Fri/Sat night at local restaurants and this may deter residents from staying in the city (to dine/spend money).

People don't know where parking is/parking not well identified.

City departments lack financial resources needed.

Parental involvement in schools could be more diverse.

How to balance potential growth (ex. annexation).

2- Where do we want to go?

"Inspiring visions of the city."

Maintaining and increasing diversity.

Promoting and educating on healthy lifestyles especially with kids – walkable/bikeable.

Tournament tennis and salt water pools.

Not having to leave the city to buy or experience things.

Better lodging options (Ex. boutique hotel plus renovate Holiday Inn).

Maintaining sense of community and family (ex. neighbors bringing food every night for 2 months when family member ill).

Continue to be one step ahead of "trends" (comment also made that they weren't trends when Decatur started doing them).

Continue to involve citizens.

"We want Decatur to be..."

Home.

Self supporting and sustaining.

Diverse.

Successful.

A leader in the active living/healthy lifestyle/green movements.

Center of residents lives (don't have to leave).

Safest city in metro area.

A place where small businesses thrive.

Familiar to other states.

A place with great festivals.

A place where people want to live.

A place that continues to have great schools.

"Decatur, a city where _____"

Everyone is respected.

People never want to leave.

You feel like a member of the community.

People can live where they work.

People want to be.

You don't have to lock your door.

Children are valued.

We're known for our people, businesses, and community events.

Diverse populations are welcomed, involved and interact with each other.

Everyone is invested and take ownership.

People want to visit, play, live and work here.

We maintain what we have while also improving; continuing to plan for the future and executing our plans.

We have affordable housing and mixed development (i.e. low or high income not concentrated in one particular area).

THEME: Big focus on the people of Decatur (i.e. culture, relationships, and sense of community).

Nilsson 04-29-2010 7 p.m.

Facilitator Notes

Where Are We Now?

- Strong sense of community
- People live outside their homes
- Good options for social activity
- Generates desire to stay within the community
- Good transportation options within and to get to out
- Small town feel with close access to Atlanta
- Opportunity for residents to become involved and volunteer
- MLK service project
- Activities that foster relationships
- Good school system
- Environmentally conscious
- Professional government that is well administered
- Feel safe; PD has presence and quick response
- Same for FD
- Proximity to top medical facilities
- Closeness to medical facilities promotes sense of safety for elderly and families with young children
- Dekalb Farmers Market
- Green space; community gardens that serve as model to others (i.e. Oakhurst)
- Feeling of stewardship
- Dog friendly
- Good night life
- Unique businesses and restaurants

Our Community Problems

- Lack of quality affordable housing

- Hard to be 20-30 years old in Decatur or a professional in the smaller compensation jobs. Cannot afford to purchase a home in the city and there are limited rental properties
- Service sector cannot afford the city
- “Old” Decatur residents have to leave due to high taxes
- Elderly should be exempt from school taxes
- Dangerous intersections (i.e. Trinity/ S.Candler and McDonough/College; Commerce/College/Columbia; Scott and Coventry; Scott and Clairemont)
- Concern over trees that are planted too close to traffic
- Need more parking. Can we use school lots?
- Need to clarify where available lots and decks are located and when they are available at no cost
- Traffic lights not synchronized on Ponce (but good for cyclists)
- Not enough bike and scooter racks
- Need movie theater and Trade Joes or Whole Foods
- More open air Farmer’s Markets
- Street surfaces are not good – potholes and cracks
- Need bike “SHARROWS” on Clairemont, Scott, Commerce, College
- Need to close Ponce from Commerce to Commerce on specific times or weekends and make fully pedestrian during those times
- Need more sidewalks. Should fix or connect current ones; more crosswalks (Scott and Clairemont)
- Some individual homes and businesses are not maintained

Inspiring Visions of the City

- City will continue and will stay conscious of being fiscally responsible
- Better/higher standard of visual arts with sustained commitments from institutions (i.e. develop an Arts Center)
- Continue to support diversity
- Continue to have a strong school system
- Continue growing the school curriculum to expand the PE and Arts depts.
- Continue to creatively think of alternative transportation modes (i.e. Zip Car)
- City should provide incentives for water reuse and reclamation for residential and businesses
- Continue to enhance sustainable and storm water efforts
- Further support urban agriculture
- Continue to grow active living and add less formal events; more micro-community oriented activities
- Educate people on recycling
- Good effort on trash collection, but plastic bag program is counterproductive environmentally. Consider bins or biodegradable bags without discouraging recycling

We Want Decatur to be...

- Sexually and racially diverse
- Age Diverse
- Professionally diverse
- Income diverse
- Culturally diverse
- Light on cars
- A dense City Center with decreasing radial density
- A city that maintains a village vision
- Supportive of micro-village centers that surround the main Downtown (i.e. Oakhurst and promote others...)
- Zoning friendly to small businesses
- Better connected between North and South of the tracks and North and South of Scott Boulevard

Decatur is a Place Where We...

- Can live at every age and stage of life and have a good time
- Drink and eat and not drive
- We know our neighbors
- Are environmentally conscious
- Care about those around us
- Live, work and play
- Proud to live in
- (you) can be you
- Have residential individuality and architectural autonomy and uniqueness

Suggestions Moving Forward

- Allow for comment cards for further discussion

Value of this Discussion

- Extremely valuable
- Good to have a voice
- Discussion guide is a valuable document

