

Notes from Swanson, 6/01/10, 2pm, Group 9

QUESTION 1: COMMUNICATION & COMMON GROUND

NIMBY. We sometimes experience the “not in my backyard” syndrome with issues.

CRISIS BEFORE INVOLVEMENT. For many citizens, an issue has to become a crisis before they get involved. Efforts should be made to build relationships before issues become problems.

OFFICIALS COFFEE SESSIONS. Consideration should be given to making City Commissioners and/or managers available to citizens in an informal setting, like occasional scheduled coffee sessions or something like that.

MULTIPLE OR CONTINUOUS INFO FEEDS. The City should find some method of getting information to the citizens more often.

FOLKS WITHOUT EMAIL LEFT OUT. Individuals who lack internet access are left out of timely City communication efforts, relying only on the Focus.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNICATORS. An effort should be made to find individuals to serve as neighborhood communicators, like watch captains in the neighborhood watch. We could give them a t-shirt or something. This person could help with the “build relationships before crisis” item above. This individual would be the neighborhood “go to” person when someone needs to know who in the City bureaucracy to go to for any issues or answers. S/he would also be the person the City could contact to get information out to that person’s neighbors, particularly those without internet access.

COMMISSION OPPORTUNITIES. People don’t know they can serve on City Commissions, and greater outreach should be made in publishing these opportunities in the Focus.

COMMISSIONER REPRESENTATION. Better listings of which Commissioners represent which areas of the City should be made. A map should be put in the Focus annually.

FREE NEWSPAPER. The free newspaper that includes City notifications and information about City events and issues is not distributed to apartments and townhomes, so that information is not getting to some of our citizens.

PHONE COMMUNICATIONS. Greater efforts should be made for getting event information by phone. A special number could be set up that contains a recorded message providing information about current events. A phone outreach could be established also, something like a subscribable Code Red or calling post thing that notifies people about our events. This could be jazzed up, like using beach music for the Beach Party, or Roy Blount for the Book Festival, etc.

QUESTION 2: CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHANGE

INDIVIDUALS

BECOME INVOLVED. Run for office, volunteer to serve on commissions, attend meetings.

NOTE: A discussion ensued concerning what the City could do to help with the above item. It was suggested that a Roundtable event be organized, sort of a "Running for Office 101". It could cover such items as the philosophical call to public service, and the actual logistics and discernment process. The group noted the importance of having good people in these offices.

STAY INFORMED. Communicate with public officials.

VOLUNTEER.

ORGANIZATIONS

COMMUNICATIONS. Make sure that all appropriate organizations are tied in to the City communications process.

LISTINGS. Is there are definitive listing of the various businesses and organizations related to the City? Can we create a directory?

INSTITUTIONS

CHURCHES. The use of church facilities for meetings and forums should be encouraged, especially as respects issues concerning race relations and diversity due to the safe haven aspect.

AGNES SCOTT, COLUMBIA SEMINARY. Both institution's facilities and activities should be included and utilized by the City to the extent possible.

CSD. The City School system should do a better job of communicating with non-parents and the community at large.

PHA. The Public Housing Authority should do more with respect to publicizing to the community at large the construction and changes currently taking place.

PARKING LOT: DIVERSITY VIA ANNEXATION

Placed in the parking lot and not returned to for further discussion was an item that came up during diversity maintenance and race relations discussions. This concept dealt with inclusion of primarily minority populated neighborhoods in annexation efforts.

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 3: Connecting to the Community & Sharing our Gifts

Facilitator Name: Karwoski

Meeting Date: June 2, 2010

Time: 7 pm

1. Communication & Common Ground: How well are we connected?

Ways we communicate with each other...

Decatur Focus, Decatur Metro Blog with calendar and links to other blogs, City of Decatur web site, neighborhood website & list serves

would like to see a downtown kiosk (i.e., Athens), announcements/bulletin boards at city parks, school websites & list serves, government email & telephone, neighborhood associations, promote the different neighborhoods (newsletters geared toward individual neighborhoods or columns/news bullets in the Focus), better locate banners announcing activities – banners seem geared to non-citizens (located towards the edges of the city – Scott Bld.)

plenty of opportunity for communication and involvement exists, city web site does a good job soliciting involvement, always seems to be an abundance of applicants for community boards & commissions

Who's left out? "non-techies" not as connected – reach out through printed media, kiosk, city hall postings on bulletin board outside door; City Gov't – improve the City's website, post agendas earlier (i.e., 3-4 days before meetings); provide for more opinion response opportunities, provide opportunities for large city-wide meetings on important issues facing the City – especially fiscal and high dollar issues; provide automatic email notifications

2. What can I do as an individual, with groups and organization, with institutions in the City?

Individuals-

Clubs

Petitions

Volunteer as a learning opportunity – expand connections/network

Organizational-

Retirees – City sponsored reach out to senior living facilities within the city limits

International/Cultural – meet & greet, explore diversity

City sponsored "open house" to exhibit & inform everyone about volunteer

opportunities

Out reach to the adjacent Indian/South Asian community

Use the Decatur Focus to highlight opportunities or maybe through the web

Neighborhood Associations – strengthen link to the City

Institutional-

Provide for an “open house” opportunity on the Square with booths or tables introducing all of the institutions, clubs, organizations, etc. allowing people to casually, but in an organized fashion learn what Decatur has to offer

Provide a public track & intramural field to increase meeting opportunities

Have only one elementary school so that parents and students can get to know each other better and have a more stable structure(?)

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 1: Envisioning the Future

Facilitator Name: Karwoski

Meeting Date: April 28, 2010

Time: 7 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.”

Schools – Good Reputation/Great Teachers; Good Food & Drink; Festivals & Events; Walkable (reasonably); Community Feeling; Music/Art Scene; A real Town Square – no national chains; responsible local government; opportunity to get involved (Decatur 101, Decatur Recreation Center activities, Public Safety); a well known secret; good/outstanding public services; all kinds of diversity; close but not too (Atlanta); low building heights/good pedestrian scale; good parks & recreation facilities; engaged citizens; the MARTA station; historic preservation activities; street trees (new), old /mature trees (canopy) green; Kroger; local farmers market

“Our community problems.”

Safe routes not evident for pedestrians – auto traffic is too fast; the RR tracks divide the city in two; crossing the RR tracks a real problem; **taxes** (too high); community arrogance; too satisfied with the status quo; school politics – rumors – leadership process (deficient); weirdness to school hierarchy; the City doesn’t seem to operate on a balanced budget - cost over runs too easily revisited (and approved) by the City Commission; government doesn’t seem to anticipate budget and contract requirements very accurately (i.e., new fire station cost overruns); too much flexibility leading to too quick decision making leading to bad decisions; not bike friendly enough; who is making the aesthetic decisions? (don’t like the new directional and city signage program, also the MARTA Station redo isn’t all that great, kind of dated looking already); lack of affordable housing; lack of a food co-op; speed limits too high (35 mph should be lower – especially South Candler; traffic congestion – N. Decatur @ Clairmont & lights not coordinated on Trinity (constant back up); not pedestrian friendly; need a coordinated plan with GDOT on responsibility & maintenance; too much growth too fast (slow

growth is okay); infill “McMansions” too big, raises taxes and generally inappropriate; vacant spec houses, too much single family need more multifamily; not enough green space (esp. downtown – Ponce/Commerce/Trinity/Howard; no ball fields for either organized or pickup games

2 Where do we want to go?

“Inspiring visions of the city.”

2030 Challenge; all streets equally shared by bikes, pedestrians, automobiles; no car zones; a friendly tax structure; mandated balanced budget; better marketing of the City to non-residents; controlled nightlife (don’t want to be Buckhead); local co-op/grocery; more wildlife habitat (but not urban wildlife - no rats); daylight previously piped streams; street cars/shuttle; city parking deck; cautious annexation; no annexation

“We want Decatur to be...”

frozen in time; better forecasting of student populations; greener; better services & lower taxes; thinking outside of the box and changing expectations; sustainable; better relationships with adjacent Cities (i.e., Avondale Estates); more cohesive internally – trails, pretty signs; take more advantage of assets

“Decatur, a city where ____”

lots of people are comfortable; know your neighbors; laid back and easygoing; has a 5¢ & 10¢ or a Woolworth’s; can go to the movies; walk everywhere; holistic – not just a downtown; development is dynamic; recreation happens; multi-generational

Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 2: Exploring our Stories & the Issues

Facilitator Name: Karwoski

Meeting Date: May 12, 2010

Time: 7 pm

1. How do we sustain this city? How do we preserve the things we appreciate?

Need for social service – direction to; are sustainability & preservation mutually exclusive?; slow growth versus booming growth (more desirable); increase & maintain affordability; increase activities which bring people face to face (i.e., off-line); more human interaction; vibrancy; safe – enforce traffic laws/rules; work with “Cliff” Emory transportation service and Emory, Agnes Scott, Seminary. UM Children’s Home, etc.; redevelop Suburban Plaza

2. How do we preserve and improve our natural environment? How do we protect our air, water & greenspace?

Trees – preserve & plant for the future (now – both public & private property); add more public green space; less cars – better pedestrian infrastructure; central parking deck (i.e., Athens); more traffic calming; better park maintenance; remove exotic & invasive species; limit the use of power blowers (dust, noise, exhaust); encourage rain gardens, ponds & daylight streams (increase natural water features); more pocket parks; encourage bio-diversity (both plants & animals) – increase & enhance habitat; encourage

green energy; urban farming (chickens, bee keeping, etc. – farm zones); better web services for city government – video capture of public hearings & meetings

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

Multi-use streets for bikes, pedestrians & autos; complete implementation of existing transportation plan; add sidewalks where there are none; improve sidewalk maintenance; improve and add better wayfinding; railroad crossing & tracks – visual enhancement – trees, etc. provide for a pedestrian crossing either flyover or street level that works; improve lighting for nighttime pedestrian activity; bike friendly sensors for traffic lights; flexible streets for alternative transportation; electric charging stations for electric cars – possible revenue source for city; local public transportation – small scale even like open air trams at Disney World; pedestrian only streets

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

Variety – what we have & more! increase frequency; open to all welcoming; more adult & kid opportunity (like the beach party); add more “ownable” unique to Decatur events like the book festival; utilize the new auditorium at Decatur HS for community events; amphitheater; theater Live & cinema & comedy; better communication of events (better/more advertising); cultural clearing house – web site/kiosk, etc.; public toilets

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

Affordable taxes – especially for older residents; variety of age in place opportunities; young/family; existing mix of single & multifamily is good; safe especially for young kids and older citizens; each type makes the others stronger – good mix; better infill housing regulations – minimize impact of “mcmansions”; more public housing/no more public housing

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

Greener buildings for new construction; connectivity – ways to move through the city; cut down on cars; more community education opportunities; farm to school; healthy street food vendors (instead of only restaurants);

limit cars – more greenspace – more affordability – affordable everything – more & better fiscal responsibility (from city government)