

## Clower

### Communication and common ground: How well are we connected?

#### **In this process, we are having productive conversations and making important decisions together. What are some other Decatur ways to build and maintain common ground, even on difficult issues where we can't reach agreement?**

- Meeting with each other (*it was noted by several members that face-to-face meetings or conversations greatly enhanced communication when there are difficult issues*)
  - Open forums
  - Community meetings to discuss issues
    - City budget walk-thrus
- Internet - Use of the city website
- Send mailings; for example, flyers on important issues
- Billboard announcements around town of important events or issues that need community feedback
- Sandwich boards could be utilized to communicate info for meetings, etc.
- Do not imbed important info in the Decatur Focus magazine as some only scan the issues
  - More individualized communications when there is more desired participation
- Communicate thru City Blog
- Participation in Council meetings
- Make sure that those that are indirectly impacted are actively brought into discussion of issues
- Town Halls where the community can raise issues
  - Quarterly or twice a year
  - Special meeting as the situation warrants
- Greater leveraging of community group
  - For example, city hall reps meet with presidents of groups
- Solicit neighborhood volunteers
  - Flyer creation
- Communication thru the churches
- One issue that was raised was the need for more discussion on the hours or recreational facilities; it was noted that Glen Lake Park (*I think*) was only open for a very short period of time.
- Bring different sides of the city together for less of a 'cultural divide'
  - for example, more discussion between the north side and Southside communities
- Find a way to bring city together with Boys and Girls Clubs
- Community center billboards
- On-line ability to weigh-in on issues, for example, a kind of 'open city hall'

**How can we get people involved in public life? What can we do to encourage all kinds of people to volunteer in the community and serve on community boards and commissions?**

- Make people aware of what currently exists and what the volunteer opportunities are. Several participants noted that they were not fully aware of all the opportunities
- Decatur 101: great way to learn about the city/expand # of groups/expand # of times per year
- City schools planning to do a similar program to Decatur 101, so the concept seems positive
- Familiarize the community with the Public Safety program
- Internet but there needs to be a better link on the city site
- Metro blog
- Some members noted that the use of Twitter could help
- City blog
- Introduce/announce upcoming openings on commissions - try to increase involvement in discussions and also noted that maybe a turnover in commissioners would encourage more participation
- For the most part, citizens want to be involved but depending on life situation/realities, some can not participate or have little participation

**How can the city and its citizens communicate with each other effectively? How do we create ways for citizens to better communicate with each other? How can we take advantage of the internet and foster other healthy conversations?**

- Maybe try an experiment with TV/Public Service Announcements
- Current city website is hard to navigate and cumbersome
  - Make more user-friendly
  - Section for recent news items
  - posts from citizens
  - Try YouTube videos similar to the ones used for the Strategic meetings
  - Videos on the website
- Flyers
- Open city hall - post more issues or agendas
- City management can meet more frequently with community groups
- Sandwich boards at major intersections, as needed, to communicate pertinent info
- Publicize how to get on commissions agendas
- City is very responsive to individual emails from citizens so this should continue
- Encourage citizens to reach out to city reps or to the commission
- Community message boards should be encouraged
- Update and publicize minutes from HOA or community meetings

- Liaisons from community groups to meet with city management and commissioners
- Talk with neighbors/get to know them and drive a sense of community
- Community events and BBQs with a neighborhood
- Encourage adults to get to know the neighborhood and the kids in the neighborhood
- Internet
  - provide opportunity to vent but sometime too much
  - blog is a good exchange sometimes
    - for example, who to contact on certain issues/informative responses

### **Who is missing out on this conversation? How can we get them involved?**

- Seniors and those not Internet savvy may be missing out
  - Some still use phone books
- Need to use all the different media to reach those not using the newest technology
- Reach out to youth to participate in city planning efforts
  - For example, get them involved in thinking about the city in the future and their ideas
- Establish something that is exclusive/tailored to youth- input/exchange program with the city

**Contributions: What can I do as an individual, with groups and organizations, and with institutions in the city?**

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

### **Individual change. What could one person do to make progress on a particular issue?**

- Take part – don't just sit back
- work to find out what opportunities are out there
- Talk to right person, for example, a commissioner
- Run for commissioner or other elected position
- Gather community support for particular issue
- Got to commission meetings and participate in discussions
- remind neighbors of rules, send reminders

**Organizational change. What are the many types of formal and informal organizations? How could these organizations and other groups of citizens make a difference?**

- Blogs to communicate issues
- Church organizations can drive change or varying view points
  - Place to network with other community groups/partnerships and support one another regarding issues
- Taking part in round tables
- community groups taking responsibility for driving issues, implementing solutions, focusing specific city department son issues

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

- Businesses/banks to publicize info and issues with flyers in windows, sandwich boards
- Places of worship
  - raise important issues
  - flyers
  - hold community meetings
  - make announcements
- School
  - youth involvement
  - students to take info home
  - community group meetings
- Entities partnering to provide meeting spaces
- city partnering with organizations to support citizens
  - Banks assisting city with housing needs

**What gifts or talents can you offer the community? What commitments are you willing to make to the remainder of the process? How can you help make our story come true? Are there particular way that you could see yourself working on particular issues and changes?**

- Work to engage people in volunteer activities
  - skilled trades, professional services
- Accounting skills can be offered
- Commissioners - run for political office
- Offer classes to the community
  - Computer repair
  - SAT prep
  - basic computer classes
  - languages
  - sign language

- legal and tax assessment processes - how to challenge and drafting statutes
- nutritional
- gardening
- exercise
- Signing at commission meetings
- City to offer classes on how to navigate website
- Willing to help the city re-design their website to be more user friendly
- Tutoring students
- Make citizens aware of volunteer opportunities
  - list on website
  - Classified section for volunteers, need screening process

**Group 57 (plus a few new folks) • June 5 • Saturday, 9 am**

M. Lampe

**1. Communication and Common Ground**

- Newcomers / long-timers: "soft barriers" to overcome between these two groups
- Round tables, volunteer structure, newsletters -- all help connect
- Suggestion: interactive digital display on the square to invite public comment, "bring it outside our walls"
- City/community bulletin board (the old-fashioned kind), centrally located
- Focus newsletter is effective; information is good, but acting on it is difficult due to transportation issues
- City should encourage neighborhood associations
- Format is a challenge: paper / internet / email
- There is a good information foundation in place
- News sources are blogs, neighborhood meetings, neighborhood newsletters
- Neighborhood meetings in particular provide universal access, "social sustainability"

- Crossroads for information must go "cross platform," (human / digital / print) and therefore must be flexible
- How to capture / share community history? This has strong broad-based interest, esp. from newcomers
- Encourage (market) community participation through Focus announcements, emphasize opportunities for individuals to make a difference (MLK work day is an example)

## **2. Contributions**

### **Individual change**

examples high school garden, Oakhurst community garden, encourage idea/action entrepreneurs; put spotlight on hometown heroes

### **Organizational change:**

- Hold "speed dating" event for residents to meet local groups
- Boards should encourage and recruit participants
- Plan regular events for sharing concerns, informal town hall meetings
- Publish list of all community events each month
- Publish index of organizations
- Create a social association like DBA
- More D101! Give the people what they want! (referring to well-known waiting list); expand via local broadcast, make podcasts; make it a class elective at DHS

### **Institutional Change**

More cooperation between city entities. Specifically, eliminate barriers between CoD / CSD. (Note: this came up often)

Newsstand on the "Piazza," bulletin board for announcements and central place for community-oriented brochures and newsletters of all kinds

### 3. Gifts and Talents We Can Give

Personal mission: recruit a Trader Joe's in Oakhurst -- let someone make this a project!

Tap into professional talents within residents -- raise awareness of available boards and commissions -- "Luca for DDA board!" (Seriously, he would like to see / help make McDonough Street into Decatur's Champs-Élysées.)

Senior citizens telling their stories at monthly social events in conjunction with DeKalb History Center and the local library; or at a new senior center

### Recap of All Three Sessions

- Connections, physically and socially -- "Connecting the Dots"
- Mini transit bus / trolley -- much-discussed; final embellishments include digital bulletin board and senior citizen passengers to provide running commentary and life lessons (this refers to Luca's fond recollections of growing up in Rome, using public transportation along with local seniors who tended to be very blunt and outspoken about how the bus was being driven and life in general.)
- Keep focus on retail -- sustainable retail that fits our city; a small department store like the old Belk's would be great
- Taxes: get a better balance of resident / business; lower the age of exemption
- Improve cooperation between CSD / CoD
- Better walkability: improve streetlights, sidewalks; fix RR crossing dangers
- Environmental sustainability: make it a commonplace

Kristen Thornton-Webb

6-5-2010

Sat 2-4pm

### Thoughts from session 2

\*are we addressing the issues of Decatur's aging population?

\*participants are thinking about closing part of Decatur to car traffic, like it

How can resident/government communication be productive?

Have ongoing roundtables (facilitated)

Meet ups at casual places to discuss topics

Town meetings (are there current meetings that are “open” but don’t encourage participation?)  
too formal

Better publicity about how to participate- make the information easy to find

Use low tech call trees as well as high tech internet, webinars, conference calls

(ex. Rep. Stephanie Stuckey Benefield called the whole district)

Get everyone in Decatur a computer (at least to borrow)

Decatur wi-fi needs to work reliably

Use written newsletters also (need to be timely so postings are not after the event)

Distribute information in person, by phone calls, online, print, community bulletin boards (one in Oakhurst & in Decatur square but not used)

Consistent, redundant, timely information in multiple places

Project information (literally with a film projector) on the sidewalk to get attention

Phone app, Decatur phone app

Who is missing out?

Meet in neighborhoods/places where all people feel comfortable like parks, schools, rec. center, churches

Use brief postcard surveys to collect info, low tech

Use many modes

Offer rides to meetings for seniors



Have neighborhood surveys person to person, groups of volunteers to knock on doors in their community, would foster relationships

Multiple block parties/living room parties on same day

Is there funding for block parties?

Google groups or the like for small neighborhoods so the community is broken into manageable numbers. The city could inspire this so all neighborhoods have it. Then people could tap into an existing framework and get guidance.

The government helps foster communication between the citizens themselves

Encourage city-wide happy hour/pie hour- everyone gets out into the street at a designated time to meet each other. Or lemonade day.

The city can foster opportunities and some people will participate.

Have a free day before trash amnesty day. Everybody puts out “usable trash” near the curb so others can browse. A formal trash swap.

We like the door hanger (public works dates), it could be expanded

The week before electronics recycling day should be for the collection of working electronics. A freecycle day in Decatur. Make it easy- curb or drop off area or both, volunteer pickups

The government can be a central idea communicator and celebrate and inspire and co-opt good ideas

Create neighborhood ambassadors so very small groups are represented (not just neighborhood associations)

No one comes to budget meetings- don't know how to get involved. Are people intimidated by place or scope of topic? Could we answer brief surveys or have small topical meetings?

Break the budget into small topics and the public needs to be informed that the information is accessible and people friendly. Not just meetings. Use website conferences and polls. Make it clear that people's opinions matter

Tax bills could include a response card survey! It would remind people that their input determines how the money is spent. Post the results and how their money was spent. Mail or drop off the card. (Facilitator note: This is in red because the group requested I circle it in red pen; it had lively support.)

Cartoons/visual make the budget areas more understandable. Provide a broad overview.

Have roundtables at dinner time (7 pm) & get local business to donate snacks or gather at a restaurant and provide/promote appetizers in exchange for people eating there during the meeting

Some meetings should have childcare available/considered. Is church-offered childcare an option?

Neighborhood ambassadors come to meetings to help provide a presence, build relationships and facilitate

### Change- Organizational change

Mid-level groups could help spread information and build enthusiasm

Create a guide to existing organizations like garden and book clubs. Help them find each other.

City could use groups to spread information and gather information

For example, there are 25 environmental groups (facilitator note: there is a city worker in the group who states this) in Decatur- who knew? The city can help bring groups together such as garden groups (if they want to be open groups- not forced)

Give a way for groups to physically interact with each other

Link groups through like topics for networking opportunities (give them pie- bring your own plate!)

### Change- Institutions

Encourage gatherings like movie screenings

Create city- wide green initiatives- can be small like bring your own dish/non-disposable day/no trash day. Create “ways of being” akin to bring your own bag to the grocery. **Create a culture where certain behaviors are expected.** (Facilitator note: the participants asked me to underline the previous sentence in red because it had so much support) Ceramic mugs could be common. Real spoons.

Oakhurst tennis courts should be unlocked (too inconvenient, or have access code)

City wide coop to encourage green sharing- supplies and equipment (for example REI loans camping equipment) share lawn equipment, utensils for large parties. How can we make sharing easy?

City parks could have a grown up to organize games and help supervise & facilitate games. Retired volunteers?

## Change- Individuals

Ambassadors

Block party host

Be present at meetings

Search out ways to be involved

Encourage each other to get involved- go in groups

Act like a small town & watch out for each other (kids, in particular)

## Change- Organizations

Do kids and adults have a place for unstructured play?

Inspire **creativity!!** (Facilitator Note: participants requested I circle the word creativity in red and add 2 red exclamation points because it had so much support)

Ex. Everybody “comes out” on Wednesday evening or on a play day. Let fun/games happen.

Open-ended art, experiment, jam sessions, neighborhood play dates

## Our Commitments to do

Do more and don't consider involvement a burden

Participate in budget process

Get involved in government (want accessible situations) City of Decatur- please make it easy to find out where to go

Take small chunks like Decatur City 101

Host a block party

Find my neighborhood association

Volunteer again (& avoid burnout)

A participant says thanks to Lee Ann Harvey for soliciting & coordinating volunteers (but others don't know how to contact her or get on her list). Some participants didn't know this resource existed so didn't know to look for a volunteer coordinator

Go to website

(Facilitator Note: These are additional ideas that came up after the session and participants wanted me to record)

\*we want to collect Decatur's local history

\*Decatur Story Core, podcasts?

\*use the expertise of people who are long-time residents

**Tony Leung**

**Decatur Roundtables 2010 – Session 3: Communications and Common Ground**

**How well are we connected?**

**Facilitator Name: Antonio D. Leung (Tony)**

**Meeting Date: June 5<sup>th</sup> 2010**

**Time: 9:00 – 11:00**

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.

**How are we communicating and how could we do better.**

Political campaign and meeting of candidates

Groups by Geographical boundaries, by Interest

Groups by age groups, family & children, vs. single & no children

By school districts (geographical boundaries)

Formalize role and purpose of subgroup eg neighborhoods, interest, so citizens are interested in giving input, requires the City to listen to citizens

Need to help the City to listen

Roundtables to occur more frequently than every ten years

Continuing constructive dialogue

**Getting to know your neighbors**

“I use to know all my neighbors, now I only know 4”

Cater to different ways of socializing with neighbors

Interest groups often have single point of view, narrow focus

Get a cross section of interest, view points, diversity of views

Electronic/website/blogs, only reaches a sector of the population that is connected and interested

Create a matrix for connection between geographical and interest

<b>Geographical</b>	Precinct 1	Precinct 2	Precinct 3	Precinct 4	Precinct 5	Precinct 6	Precinct 7
<b>Interest</b>							
Arts							
Education							
Recreation							
Green							

## 2. Contributions

### Individual Change

- Constructive input
- Make the City know
  
- Organization Change
- Make your voice heard
- Create a clearing house for gathering and dispersing information
- Electronic vs printed

- Create ad hoc groups for better communication
- Exposure to the groups
- Electronic posting
- Create a 'Decatur wikipedia' for sharing of information
- City and Institutions to create communication forum
- Do Roundtables more frequently than every ten years

Who is missing out?

- Seniors, people have not transportation
- People that are physically and mentally not able
- Blogs is only one way to communicate to a portion of the populace
- Print copies can service various groups

Decatur focus – good forum to reach out

### **Institutional change**

- City facilitate citizens to find information
- City as ombudsman, as concierge, provide outreach
- Community outreach coordinator, United Way 'family connection' program,
- Religious institutes partner with the City
- City Church partnership
- For affordable afterschool and other programs
- Social forum with church
- Partnership with communication
- Church as a community center
- Facilitate individuals or groups to post information – bulletin boards both electronic and physical

Focus groups

- Adults – singles
- Non school age family groups
- Provide Income vs tax relief
- Senior income level
- Annexation – expanding the city's physical boundaries, to increase business tax base
- City and school board partnership
- Parks & recreation, greenways connection between them, look at conservation easement behind residential lots

