



PRINCIPLE A: MANAGE GROWTH WHILE RETAINING CHARACTER

Accommodate commercial and residential growth while retaining Decatur’s unique sense of place within an urban environment.

The preservation of Decatur’s strong sense of community and unique character are important issues for residents, business owners, and visitors. This is also central to ensuring sustainable development, since market trends increasingly value local identity, sense of place, and quality of life as economic assets. This means building on and enhancing the rich built heritage that makes Decatur such a desirable place to live, work, and play.

GOAL 1: RETAIN AND ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OF EXISTING COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS AND EXPAND IT TO NEW DISTRICTS

Walkable, human-scaled commercial districts in Downtown and Oakhurst are a hallmark of Decatur today. In the coming decade, as these areas grow and evolve, and as new commercial areas at East Decatur Station and the East Lake MARTA station emerge, they must do so in a manner that preserves and replicates their best aspects. This means ensuring that development occurs in a way that reinforces and expands the lively, pedestrian-friendly development patterns that make these places special, while respecting their context.

Task 1A Refine citywide commercial design standards.

Design standards should be refined to support quality commercial and mixed-use growth. These should recognize the unique character and scale of Decatur’s neighborhoods, and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches. Updated standards for utility burial, architectural design, and parking should be explored as part of these refinements.

Task 1B Adopt new sign ordinance requirements to encourage more compatible signage in commercial districts.

Task 1C Update the Downtown Decatur Special Pedestrian Area guidelines and expand the downtown streetscape program.

Existing guidelines have promoted a high quality of development on key streets downtown, but updates are now needed. Among the suggested changes are enhanced standards for the protection of historic storefronts, requirements for inter-parcel connectivity, and an expanded area. In addition, the downtown streetscape network should continue to be expanded.

Task 1D Improve the appearance of Decatur’s commercial districts in ways that reinforce their roles as community focal points.

Upgrades could include pedestrian facilities, street furniture, trees, public spaces, or interactive kiosks with maps, visitor information, event schedules, and community information.



The walkability and human scale of Decatur must be preserved



Commercial design standards will ensure more compatible buildings



Restaurants have been pivotal in Decatur's commercial renaissance



Artisanal manufacturing could expand the market for locally-produced goods

Task 1E Improve the landscaping and physical appearance of the Square.

Task 1F Install new waste and recycling bins that are more clearly distinct from each other and more aesthetically pleasing.

Task 1G Rezone selected parcels to allow neighborhood-scale commercial nodes or legalize those that have been grandfathered.

GOAL 2: ENCOURAGE A DIVERSITY OF BUSINESS TYPES WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON SMALL BUSINESSES AND BUSINESSES THAT PROVIDE DAILY NEEDS

Decatur is known throughout the region for its lively mix of stores and restaurants, especially in and around the Square, but needs to expand retail options to provide more variety and price points. Current employment opportunities within the city are limited. To remedy this, Decatur should focus on attracting office and employment uses that are compatible with the community's vision.

Task 2A Target businesses, especially office users, by creating a list of desired business types, relevant data to distribute to potential businesses, and a recruitment strategy.

Task 2B Continue to focus marketing and advertising efforts designed to support and enhance the "Decatur brand," to attract quality new business that meet the community's vision, and to assure the success of existing businesses.

Task 2C Identify available areas for light manufacturing and market them to potential businesses.

While Decatur is poorly suited for conventional manufacturing, niche industries could include artisanal food processing, artist studios, clean technology, and the production of high-value consumer goods.

Task 2D Explore amending vending and food cart regulations to permit them in commercial districts and parks.

These could provide convenient meals and allow more people to open businesses without significant startup costs, but could also negatively impact existing businesses if not carefully implemented.

Task 2E Partner or provide seed funding for a business incubator space. This space could promote tech firms, artisanal manufacturing space, media content production services, or other businesses.

GOAL 3: PROTECT EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS WHILE PROMOTING GROWTH IN DESIRED AREAS AND ADOPTING STANDARDS THAT GUIDE FUTURE GROWTH

Decatur’s neighborhoods are the foundation for the high quality of life that the city enjoys today, and must be preserved and protected. However, if the city is to adequately respond to changing demographics, it must accommodate new housing and retail options. The community expressed the desire to accommodate new growth and protect existing neighborhoods by continued emphasis on appropriately scaled and designed development within existing commercial districts.

Task 3A Adopt new transitional design standards.

In recent decades, Decatur has used buffers and height limits to transition between existing neighborhoods and new development. These have focused on separating such areas, rather than unifying them. As an alternative, new design techniques should be explored to provide appropriate connection between new development and existing neighborhoods, such as improved architectural design, scale and massing, and landscaping.

Task 3B Continue to encourage private residential, retail, and commercial development in existing commercial districts.

Commercial districts are ideally suited to accommodate the housing types needed to serve Decatur’s future. Development here should provide multifamily units for sale or rent, townhouses, live-work units, senior housing, and other options.

Task 3C Encourage the creation of new local historic districts.

The creation of local historic districts is the best tool at Decatur’s disposal for ensuring the physical preservation of historic neighborhoods. The City should support efforts to establish additional historic districts.

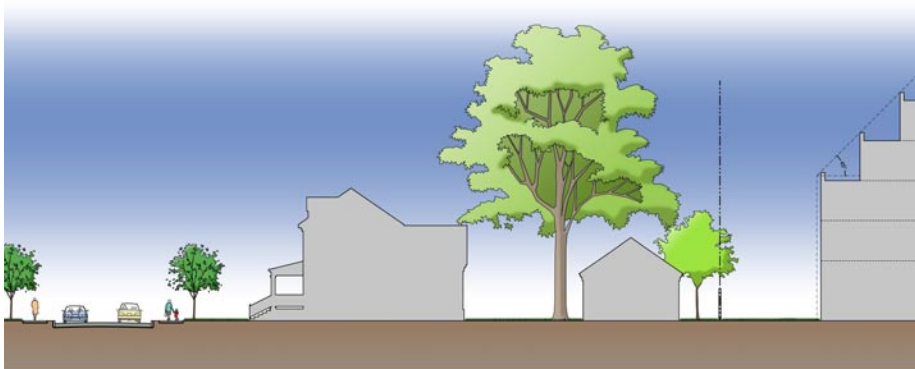
Task 3D Strive to realize long-term build-out visions for commercial areas expressed in the Concept Plans.



The last decade saw a major increase in Downtown housing



The Concept Plans on page x show examples of how long-term development might occur



There are many ways to transition between new development and existing houses, including the existing requirement for upper story setbacks



Some communities have amended their zoning to permit small home businesses on single-family lots



The protection of existing historic buildings is essential to preserving Decatur's identity

Please see the Concept Plans for examples of how new development in these areas could occur.

Task 3E Reexamine historic design standards and restrictions against historic home demolition.

The preservation of neighborhood character is as much about protecting historic homes as it is ensuring compatible new construction. While new construction is now regulated by zoning, retaining the historic character of existing homes is also critical. A citywide reexamination of regulations affecting the preservation of historic homes should be undertaken, and regulatory changes made, if appropriate.

Task 3F Study if live-work housing can be implemented in existing neighborhoods without a negative impact on nearby homes.

As technology and employment continue to evolve, more Decatur residents are running small businesses from their homes. Although current zoning regulates the types of home businesses that can occur, these may need to be reviewed or modified periodically to ensure their relevance.

Task 3G Improve the predictability and efficiency of the process for new development approval by establishing development standards and requirements that are consistent with the goals of the strategic plan.

GOAL 4: PROTECT AND ENCOURAGE THE CREATIVE REUSE OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, AND PLACES

The preservation of Decatur's historic buildings, structures, and places is essential to retaining its identity as the community grows and changes. Significant progress has been made in the past decade in understanding how fortunate Decatur is with regard to such resources, but more remains to be done to encourage the preservation and appropriate reuse of historic structures.

Task 4A Educate and encourage commercial property owners about historic preservation tax credits.

Task 4B Educate about the Georgia Cities Foundation loan program and encourage its use.

Task 4C Place all eligible buildings and districts on the National Register of Historic Places.

Task 4D Increase public awareness of historic buildings and places.

Task 4E Develop regulations regarding demolition of historic commercial structures that are outside the scope of local historic districts.



PRINCIPLE B: ENCOURAGE A DIVERSE AND ENGAGED COMMUNITY

Protect and expand diversity among Decatur residents, businesses, and visitors while promoting an innovative, engaged, and informed community.

A truly sustainable community is one that can adapt to a changing world by drawing on the passion, energy, and knowledge of its citizens. For these efforts to be most successful, the community should reflect the diversity found in society as a whole. It is equally important for citizens to feel that they have a stake in the future of their community and that they play an active, engaged role in making it a reality.

GOAL 5: MAINTAIN AND ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY OF RACE, ETHNICITY, INCOME, CULTURE, AGE, FAMILY TYPE, AND OTHER KINDS OF DIVERSITY

- Task 5A** Promote Decatur as a naturally occurring retirement community (NORC) where people can stay in their homes and communities as they age.
- Task 5B** Continue to encourage the participation of artists and performers that represent a broad range of cultures at festivals and special events.
- Task 5C** Identify and support marketing and media outlets that target diverse cultures.
- Task 5D** Track and report policies that encourage diversity and attendance at festivals.
- Task 5E** Identify networking opportunities for minority groups and reach out to these groups to solicit them to live, work, and play in Decatur, as well as participate in community leadership roles.
- Task 5F** Adopt universal design guidelines to allow new buildings and homes to be visitable by those with mobility impairments.

Even the most able-bodied members of society will one day reach periods in their life where their mobility is impaired. Creating housing that is accessible or visitable to a wide range of citizens would benefit both current and future residents, and make the city resilient in the face of demographic changes.

GOAL 6: STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN AND AMONG NEIGHBORHOODS, CITY GOVERNMENT, VOLUNTEER BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, LOCAL BUSINESSES, AND DECATUR AS A WHOLE

- Task 6A** Provide communication in a variety of formats to reach a broad audience. Expand the use of social media and electronic tools such as Open City Hall to encourage citizen participation.
- Task 6B** Reorganize city staff assignments to provide focused support to improve interaction between neighborhood and community groups, and focus on developing a community that supports aging in place.



Naturally occurring retirement communities allow people to grow old around friends and family, in a familiar environment



Decatur should strive to be a place that is accessible and visitable for people with disabilities



A Decatur smart phone application could benefit both residents and visitors



Mini-grants could fund neighborhood tree plantings and similar efforts

Task 6C Create a Decatur smart phone application to serve as a visitor and resident guide for local businesses, as well as a source of event and other information.

GOAL 7: SUPPORT, EXPAND, AND DEVELOP PROGRAMS, SERVICES, EVENTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT RESPOND TO DIVERSE INTERESTS, ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY INTERACTION, AND PROMOTE A STRONGER SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Task 7A Continue to provide volunteer support services and maintain programs like the MLK Day service project, Season of Giving, and special event support.

Task 7B Explore the opportunity for an event that educates citizens about their community and connects them with community, institutional, and nonprofit organizations to promote community pride, volunteerism, neighborhood interaction, and communication with the public.

Task 7C Expand the Decatur 101 program to reach as many citizens as possible.

Task 7D Consider using public funds to create a neighborhood mini-grant program that encourages grass roots community improvement projects such as neighborhood kiosks, public art, tree plantings, neighborhood signs, and park improvements, and builds a stronger partnership between city government and neighborhood organizations.

Task 7E Partner with City Schools of Decatur to establish a Decatur Youth Council to advise on Strategic Plan implementation and how the city government can best meet the needs of local youth.

GOAL 8: PROMOTE A CULTURE OF CREATIVE INNOVATION AND EXPRESSION

Task 8A Support the implementation of the Cultural Arts Master Plan.

Task 8B Support the development of the Arts Partnership identified in the Cultural Arts Master Plan to bring collective, institutional support for the Decatur Arts Alliance and better coordination of cultural arts facilities.



PRINCIPLE C: SERVE AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Practice fiscal, environmental, and organizational stewardship to make efficient use of finite resources through collaboration and conservation.

Decatur is known throughout the Southeast for being a progressive community, and for providing excellent public services. The city should continue to practice fiscal, environmental and organizational stewardship as a way of ensuring its long-term viability and quality of life.

GOAL 9: EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY THE CITY'S REVENUE BASE

- Task 9A** Find opportunities to redevelop existing commercially zoned properties to their highest and best use.
- Task 9B** Explore annexation options in partnership with the City Schools of Decatur that expand the property tax base and enhance school operations.
- Task 9C** Support the redevelopment of the former Devry University property with a mix of uses that will serve the community.
- Task 9D** Promote other revenue sources in addition to property taxes, such as increased sales tax revenues.



Redevelopment opportunities can help expand the property tax base

GOAL 10: CONTINUE TO PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICES WITHIN FISCAL LIMITS ACCEPTABLE TO THE COMMUNITY

- Task 10A** Pursue energy saving options and long-term sustainability policies to reduce the cost of providing services.
- Task 10B** Continue to access grant funding opportunities to pay for capital projects, support strategic goals, and improve quality of life.
- Task 10C** Use the budget process to assure the most cost effective use of city resources.
- Task 10D** Evaluate homestead exemptions, including their effect on residential tax burden and city's ability to provide services.



Increased retail sales can provide additional tax revenues for the city

GOAL 11: ASSURE THE EFFICIENT USE AND COORDINATION OF ALL COMMUNITY FACILITIES BY STRENGTHENING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

- Task 11A** Create facility committees as needed to work with community institutions to identify opportunities for shared use of public facilities, to allow for more efficient use of these facilities, and to make certain that existing partnerships like the athletic facilities partnership meet regularly to accomplish this goal.
- Task 11B** Incorporate multi-use rooms into as many city-owned buildings as possible to provide for flexible community use opportunities.



The arts enhance a quality of life and community identity



Community gardens bring people together and strengthen community bonds



Solar street lights can reduce energy consumption

Task 11C Convene an annual forum for non-profit, public, religious, and institutional organizations to share ideas, resources, and strategies to meet the strategic goals of the community.

Task 11D Integrate art into public facilities, such as sidewalks or new buildings, in partnership with local schools, the Arts Alliance and local artists.

GOAL 12: FOSTER ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN ALL ASPECTS OF CITY LIFE AND GOVERNMENT PRACTICE

Task 12A Develop a citywide sustainability plan with the assistance of the environmental sustainability board to address issues such as the creation of a climate action plan, initiatives such as an ordinance to limit motor vehicle idling, and roof color standards to reduce the heat island effect.

Task 12B Encourage the construction of sustainable buildings in commercial districts.

Task 12C Support the expansion of urban gardening opportunities.

Urban gardening benefits the community by promoting physical activity, bringing neighbors together, improving food quality, and keeping dollars local. In addition, it begins to change society's relationship to food in a positive, sustainable way.

Efforts to expand urban gardening could include increased community garden sites, creation of a neighborhood tool bank, information sharing, removing regulatory barriers, material support, or expanded farmer's markets.

Task 12D When building public facilities, design them to achieve LEED or equivalent certification and to assure quality construction that will serve the community for 50 years.

Task 12E Conduct energy conservation audits of city facilities.

Task 12F Update and create a unified land development ordinance that requires sustainable practices.

Task 12G Expand the use of more sustainable lighting options on streets and within city parks and public areas.

Task 12H Support the installation of pay-to-charge electric car charging stations in public or semi-public places.

Task 12I Purchase additional alternative fuel vehicles for city use.

Task 12J Support efforts to convert traffic signals to low-energy LEDs and implement a pilot program for LED street lights.

GOAL 13: PROTECT AND RESTORE NATURAL RESOURCES, SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, AND INCREASE ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

- Task 13A** Create an urban forest management plan to assess Decatur’s existing tree canopy, recommend strategies for protection, maintenance, and new tree plantings, and revise the city’s tree ordinance.
- Task 13B** Create an updated storm water management plan and continue to upgrade the storm water system.
- Task 13C** Support educational programs to encourage individual support of environmental sustainability programs such as the Kilowatt Crackdown.
- Task 13D** Adopt a long-range maintenance schedule for parks and greenspace to assure that facilities and fields are maintained and repaired, and that greenspace areas and trails are well managed.
- Task 13E** Conduct stream bank restoration and naturalization of stream channels. Install signs along each creek to increase public awareness.
- Task 13F** Expand the existing single-family residential recycling program to multifamily buildings and local businesses.
- Task 13G** Remove all invasive plant species from city property and ban the sale of invasive species on city property.
- Task 13H** Adopt light pollution guidelines to lessen the impact of new development and public light sources on the night sky.
- Task 13I** Install additional dog waste bag stations in public places and along streets to reduce the amount of dog waste that pollutes streams.



An urban forest plan could provide comprehensive guidance for the protection and expansion of Decatur’s tree canopy



Invasive plant removal can start to restore native ecosystems, while strengthening community bonds



PRINCIPLE D: SUPPORT A SAFE, HEALTHY, LIFELONG COMMUNITY

Assure that housing, mobility, and support services exist to provide everyone at every age a high quality of life.

Decatur must be an active community that supports healthy living at all points in a person’s life. This means creating an environment that supports physical activity for people of all abilities and ages, providing housing and services for all citizens, and nurturing programs that reinforce these concepts, especially for under-served populations.



A local shuttle service is a priority for Decatur residents

GOAL 14: ENHANCE MOBILITY OPTIONS WITHIN AND TO DECATUR

Task 14A Implement the recommendations of the Community Transportation Plan.

This comprehensive plan includes a thoughtful range of transportation projects and policies. These include an internal shuttle system, gateway intersection upgrades, and improved at-grade railroad crossings. Implementing the plan’s recommendations will improve safety for all modes of transportation, improve quality of life, and serve the needs of an aging population.

Task 14B Continue to implement the Safe Routes to Schools program.

Task 14C Be recognized as a bicycle friendly community. Provide more bike racks, bike lockers at MARTA stations, and a bike station downtown featuring showers, secure storage, and repair.

Task 14D Establish a speed limit of 30 miles per hour on all city streets to increase safety and make walking and biking more desirable.

Task 14E Strengthen partnerships between the City, the Clifton Corridor Transportation Management Association, and major Decatur employers to encourage alternative transportation.

Task 14F Encourage MARTA to improve maintenance and cleaning at Decatur Station, especially the bus bay.

Task 14G Continue to support other creative transportation options, like car sharing and scooters, through public education and by providing parking opportunities.

Task 14H Update parking standards to allow innovative parking strategies, such as shared or unbundled parking.

Task 14I Promote more efficient use of parking with electronic signs, shared use of existing lots and decks, consolidated parking meters, more strict enforcement, higher parking fines, and similar techniques.



Electronic signs can show parking availability upon entering the downtown area

GOAL 15: EXPAND THE VARIETY OF HIGH QUALITY HOUSING OPTIONS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Task 15A Support the efforts of the Decatur Housing Authority to develop a long-range plan for implementing the goals of the Decatur Affordable Housing Study.

Task 15B Adopt ordinance changes that allow smaller homes and support accessory dwellings to support affordable housing options in single family neighborhoods. Educate the public about their characteristics and benefits.

Task 15C Encourage the development of new apartment buildings in commercial districts and the renovation of existing apartment housing throughout the community.

Task 15D Support the expansion of the Decatur housing trust fund by revising and expanding affordable housing incentives like the housing density bonus to encourage private developer funding.

Task 15E Support a wholistic understanding of affordability that looks beyond simple rent or sale price.

The true cost of housing should also consider factors such as transportation, utility, and maintenance costs. Strategies aimed at reducing car ownership and parking, increasing energy efficiency, and providing buildings that are built to last can lower the cost of living.

GOAL 16: PROVIDE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT SUPPORT AND ENHANCE A SAFE, HEALTHY, AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

Task 16A Expand the off-street path system throughout the community, especially by using vacant or unbuildable lots, utility corridors, or stream corridors to create mid-block passages.

Task 16B Implement an effective “walk there” campaign using education and infrastructure improvements, including signage that indicates walking times to major destinations.

Task 16C Expand program offerings to encourage active, healthy lifestyles for all age groups.

Task 16D Continue to provide safe, healthy, and affordable after school and summer programming for Decatur’s children.

Task 16E Install active living facilities in parks and public spaces to promote physical activity and human interaction among all age groups.

Task 16F Improve Dearborn Park.

Task 16G Increase police patrols on foot or by bicycle.

Task 16H Expand car-free day activities to increase efforts to promote physical activity and walking.



Small cottage homes can expand the range of housing prices provided in Decatur, but are currently illegal



People of all ages can benefit from programs that encourage physical activity