

## Annexation Inquiries

**Below is a list of typical questions that have been asked about annexation. If your question is not included, please contact:**

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### **1. What is the process for approving the annexation plan?**

First, the Decatur City Commission will have to decide whether to proceed.

Second, the City Commission could ask that local legislation be introduced in the Georgia General Assembly.

Third, if approved by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor, if the annexation increases the population by 3% or at least 500 people (whichever is the lower number), or if it was required by the sponsoring legislator, a referendum is required.

The effective date of the annexation would be determined in the local legislation but it would likely be at the beginning of a calendar year. The legislation can establish a different effective date for independent school districts.

### **Who votes in the referendum?**

Only the registered voters in the annexed area would participate in the referendum. The referendum would have to be approved by 50%, plus 1 of the voters to be effective.

### **How long does this process take?**

Estimated at least 12-15 months, including time during the General Assembly and scheduling of the referendum. Additional time may be needed depending on the impact to the school system.

### **2. What services does the city provide for its residents? And what services does DeKalb County provide for the Decatur residents? How does this change and affect our services if annexation occurs?**

The City is a full-service municipal government. The City would provide all public safety; sanitation; planning, zoning and development services; recreation and parks; sidewalk construction. A full description of the City of Decatur services can be found at <http://www.decaturga.com>.

DeKalb County does not provide municipal services to City residents. DeKalb would continue to provide public health, public welfare, Courts & Sheriff services as required by the State of Georgia.

DeKalb County provides all water & sewer services county-wide.

### **3. What is an estimated typical 2012 total tax bill for a home in the City of Decatur valued at \$250,000?**

With Fees - \$4,844 in Decatur; \$3,514 in DeKalb County.

### **Of that amount, what portion goes to the City of Decatur and what goes to DeKalb County?**

Decatur - \$4,079 DeKalb County - \$765

**4. If annexed, what DeKalb County taxes would we no longer be paying?**

Bonded indebtedness would be reduced; the special tax district for Fire Services would be eliminated because it is included in the City's general fund levy; School tax revenue would be received by Decatur City Schools instead of DeKalb County Schools.

**5. Will the city's general fund millage rate be lowered if annexation is successful?**

The City Commission has indicated that they are only interested in pursuing annexation if it ultimately lowers property taxes.

**6. What are estimated changes in property values?**

Assessments are based on the value established by the DeKalb County Board of Tax Assessors. Based on information provided by real estate professionals, over the long term, increases of \$30,000 - \$50,000 over what would occur for unincorporated property for existing structures could be expected. New developments would probably see larger increases in value immediately based on the history of previous developments in the City of Decatur.

**7. Does the DeKalb County property assessment freeze apply to City property taxes?**

No.

**8. What are the senior homestead exemptions for the City of Decatur?**

The senior homestead exemptions for the City of Decatur include \$1,000 homestead exemption from the City taxes for resident owners who are 65 years of age or older; a \$50,000 exemption from city and school taxes if you are at least 62 years of age and income is less than \$25,000; a \$10,000 exemption from school taxes if you are at least 62 years of age and income is less than \$10,000 (excluding retirement income); a \$50,000 homestead exemption from school taxes if you are age 70 or older; and a complete exemption from school taxes if you are age 80 or older with less than \$40,000 in income.

**9. When calculating the \$10,000 income limit for the Decatur City Senior Homestead exemption (S1) is Social Security and retirement income excluded as it is for DeKalb County?**

Retirement income is excluded.

**10. How do we get information about Decatur City School?**

Information about City of Decatur Schools can be found at <http://www.csdecatur.net/>

**11. Are Decatur City School taxes used for any projects that are not school related?**

No.

**12. What is the long term development plan for Decatur?**

The City Commission adopted a ten-year strategic plan in 2010. A copy of the current plan can be found at:

<http://www.decaturga.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=2570>

**13. If annexed, what guarantees would the neighborhoods have that zoning would not change to allow high density dwellings, i.e., condos, town homes or apartments, in our neighborhoods.**

The City Commission has not rezoned any single-family residential property to allow high-density commercial or residential use.

**14. Would annexed areas be eligible for sidewalks and bike paths?**

The City's current standard is to provide usable sidewalks on at least one side of every street. That standard would be in place for any newly annexed area and would be implemented over time. Bike paths depend on the availability of funds, the assessed need and expressed support of the neighborhood and the contribution to connectivity to other parts of the City of Decatur.

**15. What is the City's street lighting standard?**

The City's standard is to have a street light on every other utility pole. Streetlight costs are included as a general expenditure and a fee is not assessed against the property.

**16. Does the City install traffic control devices such as speed humps?**

A petition from residents is required. If approved by the City Commission speed humps are installed as a general cost to the City and are not assessed to individual property owners.

**17. What will the city commission districts be?**

The City Commission districts are currently divided on a north/south basis, with two commissioners from each north district and two commissioners from each south district and one at-large. The City is required to have districts that are reasonably balanced by population so while the immediate districts would not change, it is possible that re-districting to balance the population might be necessary in the future.

**18. Will my County Commission district change?**

No.

**20. What is the effect of annexation on the property tax of DeKalb County residents where houses are not annexed?**

City property owners pay DeKalb County property taxes for services provided county-wide such as the Court system, public health and public welfare. To the extent the City will be providing police and fire services, recreation facilities and programs and streets maintenance, DeKalb County will have reduced expenditures for those services.

**21. If commercial property (Suburban Plaza) is annexed, but residential is not, how will the taxes of DeKalb County residents be effected? How will the lost commercial taxes be recovered/accounted for?**

See response to question number twenty. The City will take on provision of services and DeKalb County will not have the cost of providing those services.

**22. Where will existing students go to school?**

A specific school attendance plan has not been developed.

**23. Will the effected commercial property owners be officially notified that their properties are being annexed?**

It is likely that if a property is in a proposed area to be annexed using local legislation, all property owners would have to be notified.

**24. Will they be informed about the effect on their taxes or level of services?**

It would be the City's intent to provide information or links to information that allowed property owners to determine any additional property tax burden and identify level of services enhancements.

**25. Must you turn in the petitions you have included on the website?**

The petitions on the website were placed there as a courtesy. Alternate formats may be used as long as at a minimum the information requested on the sample petitions is included.

**26. Must you specifically turn in one petition or the other. Our Association believes we can turn in one petition with signatures for AND against.**

Forms including indications of both support and opposition can be presented as one petition. If a neighborhood association or any group of people want to survey others for support/opposition, it would seem reasonable that the result of the entire process could be combined. On the other hand, if there are two separate efforts and each wants to submit a petition either in support or in opposition, that can be done as well.

**27. Who can sign the petition:**

- a) Homeowner; if jointly owned can both sign?
- b) Those who live in the home but aren't on deed?
- c) Renters?

The petitions anticipate that anyone of the above could sign the petition. Homeowners (single or joint) would sign and indicate "Yes" as the property owner; those who live in the home and renters would sign and indicate "No" as the property owner. All would be eligible to indicate by a "Yes" or a "No" whether or not they are resident electors.

- d) If owned by LLC, who can sign?

I would assume it would be the registered agent for the LLC who would indicate that the LLC is the property owner.

**28. Where is the city in the annexation process right now? What are the next steps?**

- **September – November, 2012:** Information and feedback meetings scheduled & background information refined.
- **October 22, 2012:** Public Meeting at Decatur City Hall; 6:00pm-8:00pm.
- **November 6, 2012:** Petition Deadline.
- **December 3, 2012:** Final City Commission work session and public hearing.
- **December 17, 2012:** City Commission receives recommendation. Considers adoption of an annexation resolution.

If the City Commission adopts a plan, then:

- **January – April, 2013:** General Assembly considers and adopts legislation incorporating the annexation request, including authorizing a referendum.

If the General Assembly adopts the legislation and the Governor signs it, then:

- **November 5, 2013:** Referendum is held.

If the referendum passes in the affirmative, then:

- **December 15, 2013:** Annexation is effective.
  - **June 1, 2014:** First Installment tax bills are due.
  - **August, 2014:** School year begins.

### **29. Why is the city currently accepting petitions for annexation?**

In 2008 the City Commission looked at an annexation plan but decided that available data, including the 2000 census was outdated and decided to defer further consideration until after 2010 census data was published so that decision making could be better informed.

The 2010 Strategic Plan as Part of GOAL 9: EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY THE CITY'S REVENUE BASE, Task 9B states: "Explore annexation opportunities in partnership with the City Schools of Decatur that expand the property tax base and enhance school operations."

The objectives of the current annexation study are to influence and control development at key gateways; expand and stabilize the property tax base; respond to interest from property owners; and, consolidate partial parcels.

Both the City Schools of Decatur and the City have committees analyzing the draft annexation plan to determine whether or not it meets the goals of the 2010 Strategic Plan.

### **30. What is the hierarchy of the objectives? For instance, is "Expanding the tax base" the most important objective, or are they all equal?**

No hierarchy has been developed.

### **31. What are City's reasons for considering [annexing] UMCH [United Methodist Children's Home]?**

In the past, the UMCH has been interested in being annexed. Their current interest level has not been established.

### **32. How many of these parcels are being considered solely because of inquiries from property owners? And how many are being considered for monetary reason?**

Please refer to the link to the City's website shown below for a view of the maps.

<http://www.decaturga.com/index.aspx?page=660>

Areas A and B are a mixture of commercial and residential properties. Areas B-1, C-1 and D are primarily residential.

### **33. I see the city has projected possible school attendance to 23% for the proposed annexed parcels. Is this based on current school attendance for families in Decatur, and has the city done any other projections that factor in a greater number of students?**

The 2010 census data shows the percentage of population under 18 residing in areas included in the draft annexation plan varies from 10% - 19%, for a total of 265 persons. The current percentage of under 18 population in the City of Decatur is 23%. A projected number of 400 students 10 years after annexation was used based on a 23% utilization rate in the annexed areas.

City Schools has a committee refining school population estimates as part of their analysis of the draft plan.

**34. How many of our tuition families live in the areas being considered for annexation; and, how many courtesy students live in areas being considered for annexation?**

I do not know. City Schools has a committee refining school population estimates as part of their analysis of the draft plan.

**35. Will the folks in the residential corridors next to the commercial properties have a vote?**

Any registered voter residing in an annexation area would be eligible to vote in the referendum.

**36. Who exactly gets a say-so by property? \* Owner occupied or rental single family residence- All registered voters living there? \* Duplexes, Apartments, and Assisted Living & Seniors Home- Do their residents who'll likely be affected by increased rents get to vote too or are these regarded as commercial properties?**

If "say-so," means who can vote in the referendum, any registered voter in an area included for annexation in the legislation can participate.

**37. My voting district would be split between annex areas and non-annex areas. How would people be notified of the vote and where would the voting be held?**

If an area is annexed, voting districts for DeKalb County Commissioners, Georgia General Assembly members and federal elected officials do not change. Annexed areas would be assigned to City Commission districts. It is anticipated that the referendum would be held on a scheduled election date.

And if ownership of a house is split between two owners, do they both get to vote?

As long as both owners are registered voters, both could vote.

**38. As a current city resident, how will annexation impact my tax bill?**

One of the objectives is to expand and stabilize the property tax base and the goal in the 2010 Strategic Plan is to expand and diversify the property tax base so one of the purposes of considering annexation would be to provide long-term opportunities to reduce or keep the tax rate stable.