

**MINUTES  
DECATUR CITY COMMISSION**

Regular Meeting  
March 4, 2024  
City Hall: 7:30 p.m.

Mayor Garrett called the Regular Meeting of the Decatur City Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, March 4, 2024.

PRESENT: Mayor Garrett, Mayor pro tem Powers, and Commissioners Dusenbury, Mayer, and Walsh; and City Manager Arnold.

MINUTES of the Regular Meeting of February 20, 2024 were approved on a motion by Mayor pro tem Powers; second by Commissioner Walsh; and, all voting “aye.”

PROCLAMATION.

Mayor Garrett recognized March 2024 as Women’s History Month and March 8, 2024 as International Women’s History Day.

PRESENTATIONS.

Decatur Youth Council members Henry Cayce, Claire Duvall and Elia Mathew-Lewis announced the Fair on the Square would be held March 16 from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. They stated the event was free but tickets would be needed for some rides and games, including the dunk tank and mechanical bull. They invited the community to join the fun at their inaugural event.

Lifelong Community Program Manager Julie Smith shared details from the 2023 Season of Giving program. Ms. Smith stated a total of 720 children, teens and older adults were served. She added 2023 was the first time that teens were included as recipients in the program.

In response to a question from Mayor Garrett, Ms. Smith stated the gifts were given based off wish lists submitted by parents, guardians and seniors.

Chair of the MLK Jr. Service Project Paul Mitchell shared details from the weekend service project in January 2024. He stated 1,094 volunteers worked for 3 three days and performed repairs and yard maintenance at 22 homes. Mr. Mitchell estimated that the financial impact of the weekend equated to \$271,000.

Mayor Garrett expressed her appreciation for Mr. Mitchell and all his work for the service project as well as mentoring the youth that volunteered.

In response to a question from Commissioner Walsh, Mr. Mitchell stated he wished to provide more weatherization and insulation services during the project work time.

In response to a question from Mayor pro tem Powers, Mr. Mitchell stated it would cost about \$1,500 per home for weatherization treatment.

In response to Mayor Garrett, Mr. Mitchell stated that he informed all participants of the opportunity to receive a tree through the City’s front yard tree program.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LICENSES.

City Manager Arnold recommended issuance of an alcoholic beverage license for the retail sale for consumption on premises of beer, wine and spirituous liquors to Eric Williams and Christopher Ellsberry for Williams and Ellsberry, LLC doing business as Platez Southern Kitchen and Cocktailz, 130 Clairemont Avenue, Suite 100. City Manager Arnold stated that a new license was needed due to a change in restaurant ownership. City Manager Arnold stated that the approval of the license was recommended.

On a motion by Commissioner Walsh; second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, all voting “aye,” the license was approved.

City Manager Arnold recommended issuance of an alcoholic beverage license for the retail sale for consumption on premises of beer, wine and spirituous liquors to Hardik Patel and Sarvajit Patel for Habitat at Ponce, LLC doing business as Casa Balam, 201 W. Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite D. City Manager Arnold stated that the application had been approved by the Police Department and all fees had been paid.

On a motion by Commissioner Dusenbury; second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, all voting “aye,” the license was approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ACTION ITEMS.

Mayor Garrett opened the meeting for public comment.

Hearing none, the public comment portion of the meeting was closed.

FIRE APPARATUS SPECIFICATION PROCESS.

Fire Chief Toni Washington recommended approval to begin the specification process for a new fire pumper. Chief Washington stated this would typically be presented in the FY 2024-2025 budget year; however, due to current manufacturing delays, getting started earlier was necessary to ensure a timely delivery. She noted because of the City of Decatur’s Clean Energy Plan, the Fire Department was working towards moving to low - and - zero-emission transportation. She added an apparatus selection committee had been established and it was researching hybrid and all-electric fire pumper model options. She stated the Fire Department was seeking approval to move forward with the specification of a fire pumper in an amount not to exceed \$2.7 million.

Mayor pro tem Powers stated the City Commission participated in a robust work session with the apparatus selection committee earlier in the evening and looked forward to receiving the results from continued research.

In response to a question from Commissioner Dusenbury, Chief Washington stated research showed firefighters were prone to illnesses because of the carcinogens that were emitted from the diesel trucks in the fire stations. She stated the Fire Department had an exhaust system to limit such carcinogens in the air, but a hybrid or electric truck would significantly improve the air quality in the station.

Commissioner Walsh stated how beneficial she found the work session at Fire Station 1 on the possibility of hybrid or electric fire trucks.

On a motion by Commissioner Mayer; second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, all voting “aye,” the request was approved.

SOUTH MCDONOUGH TRAFFIC CALMING- PHASE 2.

Assistant City Manager Cara Scharer recommended approval of a task order with Toole Design Group for \$60,000 for Phase 2 of the traffic calming plan on South McDonough Street at the College Heights Early Childhood Learning Center. Ms. Scharer stated the scope of work for the next phase included field survey; on-site meetings with individual residents to discuss measures such as chicanes and the proposed slip lane closure; construction documents and construction administration of the recommended design.

In response to a question from Commissioner Mayer, Ms. Scharer stated this phase of the project was for implementation of the design approved at the February 20, 2024 City Commission meeting but there would be engagement with individual homeowners before finalizing the construction documents.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Powers; second by Commissioner Dusenbury; and, all voting “aye,” the task order was approved.

SAFE STREETS AND ROADS FOR ALL ACTION PLAN.

Ms. Scharer recommended approval of an agreement with Toole Design Group to provide a Safe Streets and Roads for All Action Plan in the amount of \$249,839. She added the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Discretionary Grant Program was funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to support planning, infrastructure, behavioral and operational initiatives to prevent death and serious injury on roads and streets. She stated Toole Design Group’s familiarity with the regional transportation safety program and the City of Decatur strategic plan initiatives would be beneficial when providing services that would include data collection, existing conditions analysis, public engagement, equity analysis, assessment of policies, identification of projects and implementing a system for measuring progress. Ms. Scharer added the City had received the grant for \$200,000 in August 2023 with a local match of \$50,000. She added that staff was recommending the establishment of a project budget of \$275,000 after selecting Toole Design Group using a competitive RFP process.

In response to a question from Mayor pro tem Powers, Ms. Scharer stated the Safe Streets for All and Vision Zero were two different names for the same concept.

In response to a question from Commissioner Walsh, Ms. Scharer stated there would be additional opportunities for soliciting grant funds for the implementation of the resulting action plan.

In response to a question from Commissioner Dusenbury, Ms. Scharer stated the funds would need to be used by November 30, 2025. She added the plan was already ahead of schedule.

In response to a question from Mayor Garrett, Ms. Scharer stated the stakeholder group would be made up of community members.

In response to a question from Commissioner Dusenbury, Ms. Scharer stated the plan looked at the entire footprint of the City.

On a motion by Commissioner Walsh; second by Commissioner Dusenbury; and, all voting “aye,” the agreement and project budget were approved.

2024 SANITATION FEE SCHEDULE.

Public Works Assistant Director Sean Woodson recommended adoption of the Sanitation Fee Schedule for 2024. Mr. Woodson stated based on the cost to deliver the service and the increase of salaries from the recent salary survey and compression study, it was recommended that the single-family

residential fee of \$305 be increased to \$310 per unit. Mr. Woodson stated the fee recommendation accounted for actual costs, budget trends, inflation and the continued volatility in the recycling industry. He added the City of Decatur single family recycling program would continue to be collected by the Sanitation Division of the Public Works Department in 2024. He stated the recommended fee accounted for the collection of comingled materials and a separate collection for glass. He noted the current fee went into effect on July 1, 2022 and it represented an approximate cost of \$260 per ton of recyclables collected.

Mr. Woodson stated after careful review of the Solid Waste division budget and operations, the recommended fee for residential sanitation services was determined to support the collection of household pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) garbage, yard waste, comingled recycling and separate glass collection services. He stated the total estimated revenue from residential fees and PAYT bags sales was \$2,445,405. He stated staff was recommending that the various bag prices remain the same at \$1.40 for the 33-gallon (blue) bag; \$.70 for the 5-gallon (yellow) bag; and, \$.40 for the 8-gallon (green) bag.

Mr. Woodson added the Solid Waste division would continue to host events such as Styrofoam recycling, electronics recycling, document shredding and neighborhood cleanup days. He stated the estimated cost to host spring cleanup events was approximately \$60,000. As a reminder, he noted that bulky items such as furniture and appliances were accepted free of charge as a part of regular residential sanitation pick-up and did not need to wait for a spring neighborhood cleanup.

Mr. Woodson stated in FY 2023-2024, the City of Decatur started the process of developing a curbside organics collection pilot program for single-family residences, which supported the Strategic Plan Action Item CA.16- Create a compost collection program. He stated that as currently designed, this program would provide service to 250 volunteer households. He stated participants in this pilot program would receive an additional collection bin, educational materials and training to successfully implement weekly collection of organic materials. Mr. Woodson noted staff was working to identify and contract with an organics' processor for this project. He stated in the FY 2024-2025 that the Solid Waste Fund budget would continue to develop this pilot program.

Mr. Woodson stated based on collection costs for commercial service, it was recommended that the commercial refuse container cubic yard charge remain unchanged at \$4.25 per cubic yard. He also recommended that the charge for collection of 95-gallon carts remain \$800 for one cart once per week and the charge for collection of 3 cubic yard containers remain at \$1,210 for one cart serviced once per week. Mr. Woodson stated total estimated revenue from commercial collections was \$549,564. He added the Solid Waste Fund did not charge the City or the City Schools of Decatur for commercial collection and the estimated charge for the City of Decatur and City Schools of Decatur would be \$40,220 and \$170,620, respectively.

In response to a question from City Manager Arnold, Mr. Woodson stated there was a tipping fee for recycling and there was another for DeKalb County's landfill.

In response to a question from Commissioner Walsh, Energy and Sustainability Manager David Nifong stated the composting program could potentially lower the overall cost of the sanitation fee but the current composting pilot program was behind on schedule so he couldn't say definitively.

In response to a question from Commissioner Walsh, Mr. Woodson stated the price of pay-as-you-throw bags were set to cover the tipping fee from DeKalb County.

In response to a question from Mayor Garrett, Mr. Woodson stated that the education component from the waste characterization study had resulted in a slight reduction of contamination in the recycling collection.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Powers; second by Commissioner Walsh; and, all voting “aye,” the 2024 Sanitation Fee Schedule was approved.

#### TAX BILLING ORDINANCE.

Finance Director Russ Madison recommended adoption of O-24-01 establishing payment dates for real property taxes and setting the deadlines for penalties and interest when payments were late. Mr. Madison stated the ordinance complied with O.C.G.A. §48-2-40 that dictated the bank prime rate plus 3% which would bring it to 11.5%, according to the Georgia Department of Revenue. He stated that recommended due dates were June 3, 2024 and December 20, 2024. He noted the first installment real property tax bills would be mailed no later than April 3, 2024 in order to allow taxpayers 60 days to make their payments.

Mr. Madison also shared an update on the changes to the City’s homestead exemptions that were approved by referendum in November 2023. He stated that homestead applications were due on April 1 but requested that anyone who was eligible for a new exemption for any reason submit the application by March 15 so that Revenue staff would have time to include eligible exemptions on the first installment bill.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Powers; second by Commissioner Dusenbury; and, all voting “aye” with a roll call vote, Ordinance O-24-01 was adopted.

#### FEE OFFSETS FOR SENIORS.

Mr. Madison recommended approval of fee offsets from the City’s residential sanitation fee and the storm water utility fee through 2026 for resident homeowners qualifying for the S-2 (age 80) homestead exemption. Mr. Madison stated due to rising property values over the past 10 years, the City Commission had approved relief of fees for specific senior homeowner categories. He stated although property tax exemptions had been expanded in recent years, the savings were enough to offset the residential service fees only if property values had remained constant. He stated property values have continued to rise since the need for fee relief first arose. He added that taxes for the general obligation bond for school projects became effective in 2016, increasing taxes a couple hundred dollars per household depending on the property values, and that seniors were not exempt from school bond taxes.

Mr. Madison stated homeowners aged 80 and above with federal adjusted gross income of less than \$40,000 qualified for the S-2 exemption. He stated at the time of the first waiver the City had almost 200 homeowners with the S-2; now it was down to about 110. He stated using last year’s sanitation fee of \$305 for the purposes of estimation, the cost of funding an offset would be about \$33,550 per year, and if a storm water fee of \$285 was maintained (with an average equivalent residential unit for S-2 households of 0.7), the cost for that would be about \$21,945 per year. He added that eligible residents would still have to pay the established rates for pay-as-you-throw bags.

Mr. Madison recommended the offset be extended for a period of three years (2024, 2025, and 2026) to allow seniors who were on fixed incomes to do financial planning with greater certainty without overcommitting or constraining city commissioners for subsequent years. He stated the proposed offset would align with the Better Together Community Action Plan objective to prevent

displacement of existing residents, as well as the Affordable Housing Task Force goal of preserving existing affordable units and keeping residents in place.

In response to a question from Mayor Garrett, Mr. Madison stated the fee was not waived but was instead paid from the General Fund. He added that this three-year period would allow time for financial planning so older residents could plan accordingly.

In response to a question from Commissioner Walsh, Mr. Madison stated someone who had applied for the S-2 exemption would be exempt from storm water fees, sanitation fees, and school taxes.

On a motion by Commissioner Mayer; second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, all voting “aye,” the fee offsets were approved as recommended.

#### TASK ORDER FOR DECATUR RECREATION CENTER SOLAR AND BATTERY PROJECT.

Mr. Nifong recommended approval of a task order with Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc. in the amount of \$86,000 and a project budget in the amount of \$90,000 for design and environmental documentation services for the Decatur Recreation Center Solar and Battery Project. He stated in the 2022 Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, the City of Decatur was awarded \$750,000 of Community Project Funding for a rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) array and battery energy storage system (BESS) installation at the Decatur Recreation Center. He added this microgrid would be designed to optimize both normal grid-connected and emergency grid-islanded situations, maximizing the offset of grid-purchased electricity at the facility and improving the City’s resilience to grid outages.

Mr. Nifong stated under the recommended task order, Jacobs would develop a conceptual design of the solar and battery storage microgrid at the facility, including equipment size specifications, system control strategies and a single-line system diagram. He stated following the completion of the system design and site conditions assessment, Jacobs would prepare the necessary NEPA documentation for submission to DeKalb County, including the Categorical Exclusion declaration. He added in 2023, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requested that DeKalb County serve as the Responsible Entity to complete the environmental review process.

Mr. Nifong stated funding for this task order was available in the FY 2023-2024 Capital Improvements Fund budget. He stated this budget allocation would then be recovered upon receipt of the City’s award. He added the work was expected to be completed within six months.

In response to a question from Mayor Garrett, Mr. Nifong stated Jacobs Engineering Group had installed micro grids all over the world so this project type was not unknown to them.

In response to a question from Commissioner Dusenbury, Mr. Nifong stated the micro grid would support normal functions as well during emergency situations such as a mass power outage.

In response to a question from Commissioner Dusenbury, Mr. Nifong stated this specific micro grid would only be for the Decatur Recreation Center building.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Powers; second by Commissioner Walsh; and, all voting “aye,” the task order and project budget were approved.

## REQUESTS AND PETITIONS.

Mayor Garrett read a draft resolution from the Georgia State Senate recognizing the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights for its work for a more equitable community.

City Manager Arnold stated there was a request from the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights on behalf of the reparations taskforce for funding for reparations research and recommendations. City Manager Arnold referenced this work was laid out in the City's 2020 Strategic Plan under the Equity and Racial Justice theme. She stated that the strategic plan called for a reparations task force and that the research and recommendations from the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights could help to inform the community-wide task force process that would be needed to address reparations.

Commissioner Mayer shared the need for reparations work to undo the harm that was done to black communities in the history of Decatur. She added the City did not have the expertise to lead this effort; however, using a partnership with the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights, the reparations work could begin.

Mayor pro tem Powers stated this was important work with the community behind it. He noted this would be difficult work. He added that it was not work the city government should do. He expressed his support for the request.

Commissioner Dusenbury stated this was an important conversation and that it was needed. He expressed his appreciation to the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights and Commissioner Mayer on their leadership in this area.

Commissioner Walsh expressed appreciation to the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights and its work. She added this was proud work.

Mayor Garrett stated the work the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights was succinctly highlighted in the State Senate's resolution.

In response to a question from Mayor Garrett, City Manager Arnold stated next steps would be to authorize the City Manager to enter into a contract for services with the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights in the amount of \$25,000 to continue the reparations work.

Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights Co-founder Mawuli Davis shared the group's commitment to this work and stated they were standing on the shoulders of their ancestors. Mr. Davis stated they had stood before the City Commission in recent years to have these courageous and difficult conversations. He thanked his mentor, Jumoke Ifetayo, for leading others in reparations research over the years and for coming to the meeting.

Commissioner Dusenbury stated the conversations on reparations would be more difficult than the removal of the Confederate obelisk. He stated residents could separate themselves from that, but it would be harder for them to separate themselves from reparations.

On a motion by Commissioner Mayer; second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, all voting "aye," the City Manager was authorized to prepare a contract for services with the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights in the amount of \$25,000 for reparations research work.

Susan Stern, Greenbelt, Maryland, stated that she was interested in moving to Decatur and had spent a couple days learning about the city. Ms. Stern asked about tree removal and why there were no local grocery stores in the Downtown area.

#### REPORTS AND OTHER BUSINESS.

Mayor Garrett read the March 11, 2024 Zoning Board of Appeals agenda.

Mayor Garrett read the March 12, 2024 Planning Commission agenda.

Chief of Staff Meredith Roark announced Touch a Truck/Touch a Budget would be held March 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the south parking lot at the East Lake MARTA station.

Ms. Roark stated the 2024 National Community Survey would conclude on March 13. She said respondents could complete the survey by mail or online.

Ms. Roark reiterated that the DYC's Fair on the Square would be held on Saturday, March 16 from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.

City Manager Arnold announced the Parks and Recreation Department was awarded the BOOST Award from the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association in the amount of the \$125,000. City Manager Arnold stated this award was for out of school time programming.

Commissioner Mayer expressed pride in the action the City Commission took for reparations. She added this work would result in hard conversations because reparations work was harder to distance oneself from.

Commissioner Dusenbury stated the conversation around reparations was important work and worthy of conversation.

Commissioner Dusenbury stated he enjoyed attending the work session at Fire Station 1.

Commissioner Dusenbury expressed excitement for movement towards the establishment of a Safe Streets and Roads Action Plan.

Commissioner Dusenbury stated he was excited about the solar panel project at the Decatur Recreation Center.

Commissioner Walsh spoke about the influence of women throughout her life.

Commissioner Walsh thanked Commissioner Mayer on her work towards the creation of a more equitable community.

Commissioner Walsh expressed appreciation to the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights for its hard work and the many milestones it had accomplished over the last few years.

Mayor pro tem Powers recalled a time in March 2020 before the world and the City were changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Mayor pro tem Powers stated movement was afoot and that movement happened because people were tired of being oppressed and attacked. He added he hoped the community would take the time to really understand the degree of this work.

Mayor Garrett appreciated the conversation around reparations and research. She stated the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights had the support of the City Commission.

In response to the remarks from Ms. Stern, Mayor Garrett stated the City had a Downtown Master Plan to address the lack of a grocery store as well as a strong tree ordinance to preserve and bring back lost canopy. She stated the City was doing its best to reach the goals established in all of its plans.

Mayor Garrett highlighted events that celebrated women across the Metro-Atlanta area in honor of Women's History Month.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

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Meredith Roark  
Chief of Staff (City Clerk)