

SECTION



STRATEGIC PLAN:
PROCESS/ECONOMICS/TRANSPORTATION/HOUSING



SECTION

3



VISION: *The City of Decatur Will Assure a High Quality of Life for its Residents, Businesses & Visitors Both Today and in the Future.*



Introduction: The City of Decatur requested a Strategic Plan that included physical and economic planning while incorporating social goals. The Vision, Principles, Goals and Projects listed below were developed through a collaboration of residents and government, business and institutional leaders. Goals and Projects are aligned under the Principles that they most appropriately support. It should be noted that many of the Goals and Projects do not fit neatly under a particular Principle. In fact, many of the Goals and Projects are interrelated and could support more than one Principle.



PRINCIPLE A: Manage Growth While Retaining Character

Accommodate commercial and residential growth while retaining a small town character within an urban environment.

Goal 1: Retain and Enhance The Existing Character Of Commercial Districts

Project A: Refine Standards For Downtown.

Project B: Develop and Adopt Standards For Neighborhood Commercial Districts.

Project C: Adopt Standards For East College Avenue.

Goal 2: Encourage A Diversity Of Business Types With Particular Focus On Small Businesses

Project A: Diversify the Office Tenant Base.

Project B: Encourage Owner Occupied Retail.

Goal 3: Protect Existing Neighborhoods While Identifying The Potential For Selected Growth And Adopting Standards That Guide Future Growth

Project A: Adopt Standards for New Residential.

Project B: Consider Guidelines for Residential Renovations.



PRINCIPLE B: Encourage Community Interaction

Determine methods to maximize communication and connections between residents, businesses, institutions and government.

Goal 4: Maintain And Encourage Racial, Ethnic, Economic, Cultural And Other Types Of Diversity

Project A: Diversify attendance at public events.

Project B: Support and expand volunteer activities.

Project C: Expand distribution of and personalize community publications.

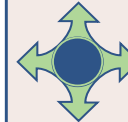
Goal 5: Reinforce Neighborhoods And Develop Connections Between Neighborhoods

Project A: Support Decatur Neighborhood Alliance or Similar Organization.

Goal 6: Strengthen Communication And Connections Throughout The Community

Project A: Improve Communication between residents, the City and Schools.

Project B: Support New and Existing Programs that Strengthen Community Connections.



PRINCIPLE C: Provide Quality Services Within Fiscal Limits

Provide housing, transportation, environmental quality and public services to Decatur's residents and workers.

Goal 7: Increase Opportunities For Economically Diverse Housing For Persons Who Live Or Work In Decatur

Project A: Identify Tax Relief & Other Programs To Aid Elderly.

Project B: Provide Housing For People Working In The City.

Project C: Develop Programs To Attract Minority Residents.

Project D: Develop Programs To Improve Rental Housing.

Goal 8: Enhance Mobility In And Through Decatur

Project A: Selectively Reduce Traffic Volume and Speed.

Project B: Improve Public Transit.

Project C: Improve Sidewalks and Crosswalks.

Project D: Improve Bicycle Paths.

Goal 9: Continue The Commitment To Environmental Quality

Project A: Improve Linkages between Green Spaces.

Project B: Preserve and Expand Green Space, Wetlands & Trees.

Project C: Study Air and Water Quality Programs.

Goal 10: Continue To Provide Quality City And School System Services Within Fiscal Limits Acceptable To The Community

Project A: Address Concerns Regarding Taxes For General Operations.

Project B: Address Concerns Regarding Taxes For School Operations.

Project C: Address Concerns Regarding Quality Of Services.

Project D: Improve Quality Of Buildings, Parks & Recreational Facilities.

Definition

The Decatur Strategic Plan is a vision for the City of Decatur from 2000 – 2010 that combines physical and economic planning with the social goals of the community. The City engaged the planning team of Brookwood/Brown – a joint venture of Brookwood Group and RL Brown and Associates, Inc. to provide professional assistance in the development of the Decatur Strategic Plan 2000.

The Strategic Planning process used is an adaptation of the Strategic Facilities Planning (SFP) process developed by George Heery, CEO of Brookwood Group, in 1981 and subsequently used nationally to successfully develop Strategic Plans for both public and private institutions. The adaptation of the SFP process for communities results in a method for aligning the “business” plan with the “facility” plan while considering the social goals of a community.

Background

The Brookwood/Brown team began the planning process with a thorough analysis of three previous and significant planning efforts: the 1982 Town Center Plan, the 1995 Comprehensive Development Plan and the published results of the 1998 Decatur Round Tables process. These planning and consensus-building efforts, summarized in Section 2, provided a foundation on which the strategic planning process was built.

Process

From the foundation of previous plans, and using the ongoing Round Tables process, Brookwood/Brown began updating and validating community input. The team met

with all of the Round Tables Action Teams. These meetings were followed by a series of four Focus Group sessions that were widely publicized to the general public and attended by over 100 people. At each Focus Group session the Brookwood/Brown team gave a brief overview of the current status of the project, then facilitated sessions to gather feedback and additional information. The Focus Groups were supplemented by two special topic groups focused on issues of economically diverse housing and community connections. In addition, over 150 people completed a checklist in which they indicated those issues of most importance to them. The diversity of the Decatur community, in age, race and income, was well represented by the participants in the Strategic Planning process.

During the period that the Focus Groups were in process, the Brookwood/Brown team collected physical planning, market, transportation and housing data. This provided a measure of the current status of Decatur within the region, a comparison to past data, and allowed for a projection of what might be anticipated if current trends continue. In addition, Brookwood/Brown met with and interviewed over 30 organizations and individuals representing the residents, business community, government and institutions that play a significant role in Decatur.

During the community input and data-gathering process the foundation of the Strategic Plan, the City’s Vision, was developed:

The City of Decatur will assure a high quality of life for its residents, businesses and visitors both today and in the future.

Three Principles evolved to support the Vision, each in turn supported by Goals and Projects:

Principle A: Manage growth while retaining character.

Principle B: Encourage community interaction.

Principle C: Provide quality services within fiscal limits.

See chart on facing page for the final version of the Vision/Principles/Goals/Projects that evolved through this process.



The Brookwood/Brown team incorporated the community input, the data collected and the interviews into the Vision/Principles/Goals/Projects. A draft of the Strategic Plan was displayed for community review in a Workshop held at the Decatur Recreation Center that over 200 people attended. Many of the attendees spent hours in discussion sessions working through the details of the goals and projects.

After the Workshop, Brookwood/Brown incorporated the many comments and ideas and produced the final draft of the Strategic Plan.





This was distributed broadly to the community for final review and comment. The text in this document reflects the many voices of the people who participated throughout the process.

Details of the Principles, Goals and Projects are contained in Sections 4, 5 & 6 of this document. The remainder of this Section is dedicated to information on economics, transportation and housing that provides background for many of the Goals and Projects.

Economics

Current Status:

Decatur's position within the Region, as measured by population, continues to decline due to metropolitan Atlanta's explosive growth from a population of 2.2 million in 1980 to an estimated 3.8 million in 1999. As the second oldest urban community in the Atlanta Region, Decatur has gone from representing approximately 1% of the population of the metropolitan area in 1980 to less than .5% of the population in 1999. During that time, Decatur's population has remained relatively stable, experiencing a slight decrease of .2% to

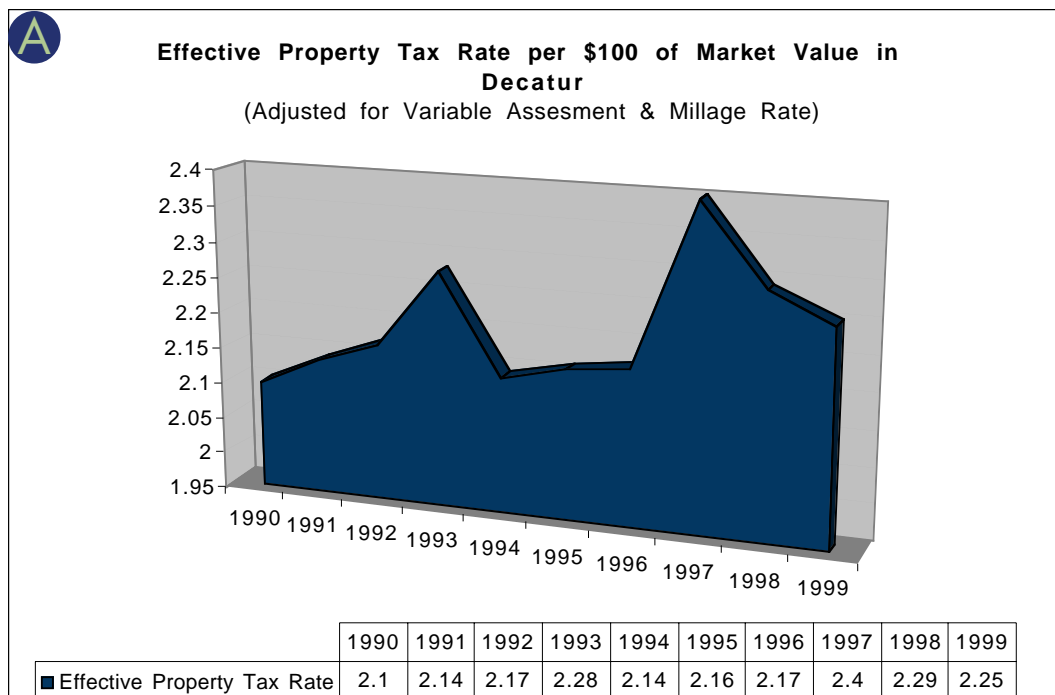
an estimated 1999 population of 17,721. The reduction in population is primarily a factor of changing demographics and the decrease in the number of persons per household. The number of households in Decatur has actually increased by 6%, from 7,547 in 1980 to a 1999 estimated number of 7,999. In contrast the Atlanta region has grown 83%, from 789,576 households in 1980 to an estimated 1,444,559 in 1999. Decatur has continued to have a presence in the region in part because it is the seat of DeKalb County, which represents over 15% of the region's population.

Metropolitan Atlanta is approaching the peak of a real estate cycle based on construction employment, multifamily housing permits and annual percent change in employment. The decline from this peak should be gradual, as has been the incline in these indicators.

Key Decatur statistics identified for this Strategic Plan include:

1. Building Permits for new construction and renovations have skyrocketed in the last five years, with 1999 having twice as many permits as 1994.
2. Downtown Decatur has 10 major office buildings, totaling 1,144,304 square feet. There has not been a major office building built in Decatur since 1992 when Decatur Plaza was constructed.
3. The current occupancy rate for commercial office space is 94%. Rental rates range from \$16.50 to \$21.50 per gross square foot.
4. Downtown Decatur has a very limited tenant base, partly because available space is so scarce. Major tenants include Emory Clinic, Egleston, Centers for Disease
5. Decatur has one hotel and three motels with a total of 295 rooms. Occupancy levels are fairly high, ranging from 61% to 82% in 1999. Tourist and transient business is an important demand source driven in great measure by Agnes Scott College, nearby Emory University and the DeKalb Medical Center. The Decatur Holiday Inn and Emory University have conference centers with 20,000 square feet of meeting space each.
6. Decatur has limited retail space downtown. New retail includes Commerce Square with a pharmacy and other shops, ground-floor "sidewalk" space at both Town Square Condominiums and the new parking deck at One West Court Square, and a grocery store.
7. The effective property tax rate (adjusted for millage rate and assessment ratio variation) has declined since 1997 and is now lower than it was in 1993. See Chart "A" on next page.
8. Property tax is the key revenue source for Decatur's General Budget, at 40% of the total.
9. Public Safety is the major expense of Decatur's General Budget, at 44% of the total.
10. Based on the 1990 Census, the City's estimated racial makeup is 53% white, 43% black and 4% other races. Expectations are that the racial make-up





will vary from this estimate when verified by the 2000 Census.

11. Enrollment in Decatur's public schools has declined nearly 6% over the last four years. Only the High School has not lost students. Its enrollment increased by 17%. The number of African-American students in Decatur High School declined 8% between 1996 and 2000.

Several factors highlight Decatur's need to grow its tax base and other revenue sources in order to maintain a quality school system and adequate city services: 1) assessed property value has more than doubled during the last seven years in spite of nominal new development, thereby increasing the burden on current residents; 2) 82% of taxable assessed value is residential property; 3) Decatur has the highest

effective property tax rate in metro Atlanta; 4) a significant amount of property is tax exempt; and 5) Decatur does not benefit from a local option sales tax as many other communities do.

Vision:

Decatur has the opportunity to manage what it determines is an acceptable amount of growth and development. Certainly the market pressure for additional commercial office and retail space exists. A strong market for multifamily housing has also been confirmed. Considering the limited available land area within Decatur, it is important for the City to make wise decisions regarding the optimal use of remaining land.

Recommendations

All 10 goals in the 2000 Strategic Plan are to some degree related to current economic determinants. Goals 1-3 in Section 4 address managing the growth resulting from positive market conditions. Goals 4-6 in Section 5 address maintaining the social fabric as the city experiences demographic changes. Goals 7-10 in Section 6 are heavily dependent on identification of new revenue sources for implementation.

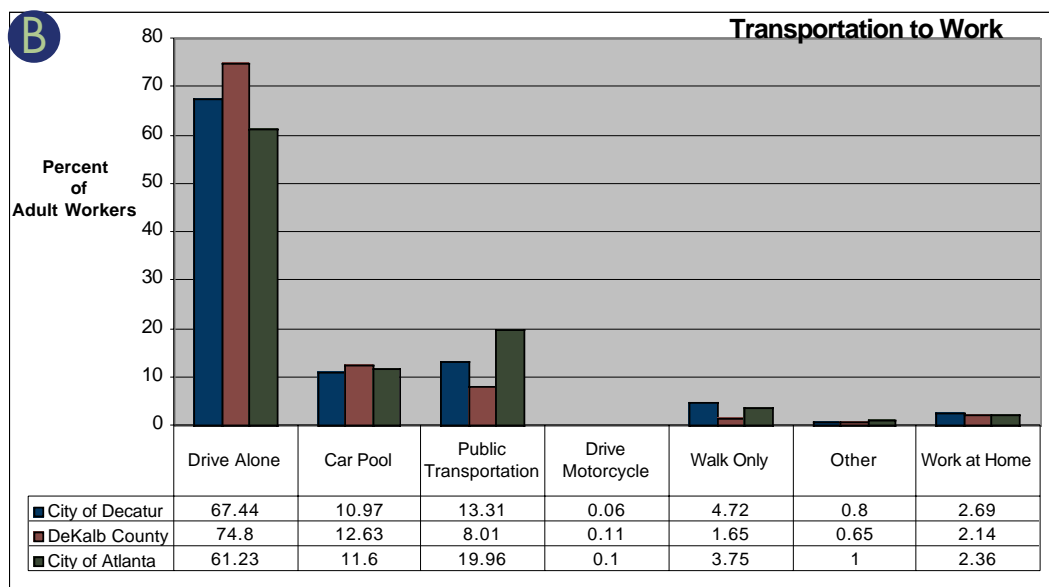
Several potential opportunities for limited additional revenue exist: 1) promote commercial and multifamily development on targeted sites in order to diversify and enhance the tax base (illustrated in Section 4); 2) explore the possibility of charging direct fees for other city services, similar to what has already been done for sanitation and storm water management; 3) impose impact fees on new development, with possibly a surcharge applied to tax-exempt properties; and 4) explore annexation options. Projects 10A and 10B in Section 6 recommend that the City look at these and other options.

Transportation

Current Status:

Decatur has a wealth of public transportation options in comparison with the rest of the Atlanta region. With three MARTA stations located within the city limits, numerous public bus routes and two private shuttle routes, Decatur residents and visitors have many transportation choices. However, although public transportation options exist, residents indicated that the connection to regional destinations outside of Decatur remains relatively limited. As a result, 67% of Decatur's





residents commute to work primarily by driving alone, 13% utilize public transportation, and 11% carpool. Chart “B” shows that Decatur exceeds Atlanta for commuting alone to work. Despite the easy access to MARTA, Decatur’s percentage of solo commuters is close to DeKalb’s.

A significant amount of regional automobile traffic passes through the City every day along three major east-west arterials: Scott Boulevard, Ponce de Leon Ave. and College Avenue/DeKalb Avenue. In the north-south direction, regional traffic is found on Columbia Drive, South Candler Street, McDonough Street, Church Street, Clairemont Avenue and East Lake Drive. These include several segments of state and national highway systems:

Ga 8/US 78/US 29 - Scott Boulevard
Ga 155/US 23 - Clairemont Avenue, Commerce Drive, S. Candler Street
Ga 10/US 278 - College Avenue, East Lake Drive

Due to its regional location, many of Decatur’s roads and streets are used for both local trips and travel passing through the City.

Several of the most congested intersections were evaluated using a Level of Service indicator which measured the vehicular delay when moving through that intersection. Of these, only Commerce Drive at Clairemont Avenue demonstrated the lowest Level of Service which is typically considered the limit of acceptable delay. Other intersections can accept additional capacity without causing unacceptable delays, according to the Level of Service indicator.

Vision:

Traffic and parking were identified as two of Decatur’s greatest problems and challenges. At odds are the current regional traffic need of move an increasing volume of vehicles through the City and the local desire to maintain a quality of life minimally impacted by the automobile. Another conflict is between the

desire for better access to parking and the desire to reduce the number of cars in the city.

Recommendations

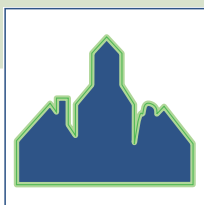
Projects listed under *Goal 8: Enhance mobility in and through Decatur* provide detailed recommendations for reducing traffic volume and speeds through a combination of calming and control devices, increased use of alternative transportation, improvements to sidewalks and inclusion of bicycle paths on the city streets.

Housing

The 1995 Comprehensive Plan recommended a growth rate for townhouse/multifamily housing of 70 units per year for the period through the year 2010. Decatur is currently meeting this target.

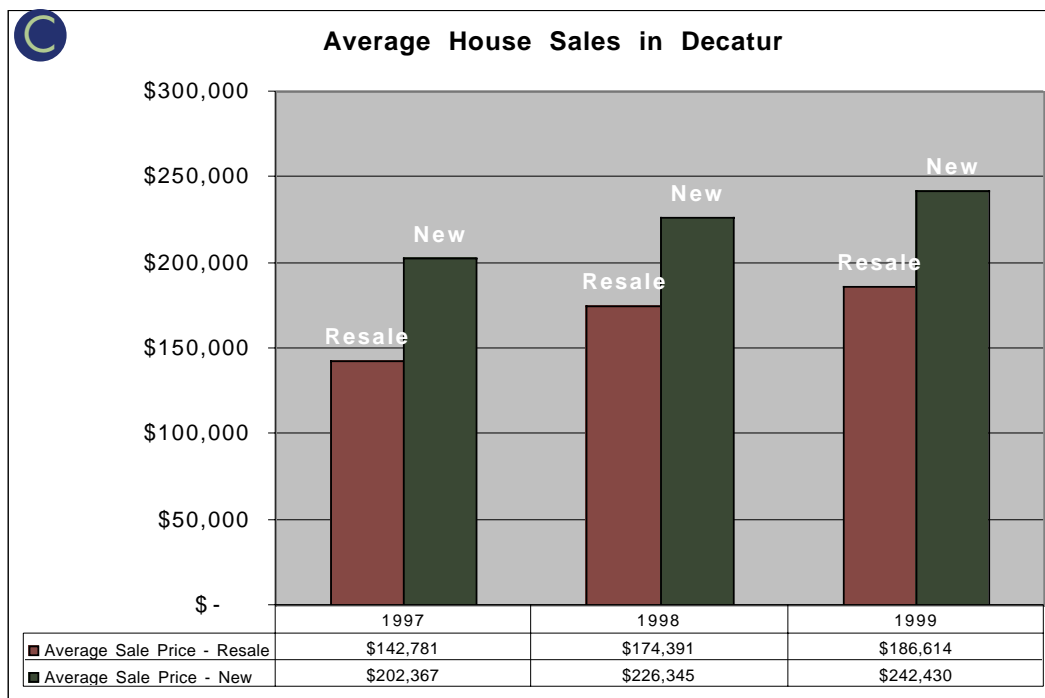
Current Status:

1. There are 8,564 housing units in Decatur, of which 3,028 (35%) are multifamily units. These figures have changed very little since 1990, with a net increase through 2000 of 359 units (4%). Several new cluster home and townhouse developments currently in process will add about 70 units. The Sycamore Ridge development of single-family homes will add 75 new units, and major renovations of about 50 houses contiguous to the 75 new units. The Ice House will add about 100 new rental units, the Town Center Condominiums will add another 112 condominium units, and the First Union site will add 100 mid-rise condominiums.
2. There are 3,765 rental units, both single and multifamily, within the city,



- representing 47% of the housing stock.
- There are about 600 vacant housing units in Decatur, representing about 7 % of the housing stock.
 - The average single-family house price in Decatur has risen sharply during the last two years. The average resale price was \$186,614 in 1999, compared to \$142,781 in 1997, nearly a 31% increase in two years. See Chart "C" at right.
 - The median housing property value is about \$98,000, compared with about \$71,500 for both Atlanta and Georgia.
 - The median monthly rent in Decatur is \$375 compared with \$343 for both Atlanta and Georgia.
 - The Decatur Housing Authority provides 293 units in two downtown public housing communities and another 625 assisted-rental units throughout the city. These assisted-rental units account for about 7% of Decatur's housing units.

There are fewer and fewer opportunities for home ownership for people who work in Decatur. This is illustrated by the purchase power of city employees at the lowest salary levels. Beginning police officers make just over \$26,000 and teachers start at \$30,000. At these salaries, all of the employees would be considered low income because they are making less than 80% of the median household income for Decatur. The table "D" at right indicates a range of incomes and the maximum purchase price for which households with a particular income can qualify based on certain assumptions. The affordable purchase price for a home is far below the average sale price in Decatur for both new and resale homes.



City of Decatur Income/Purchase Table

Income estimated for 1999 by National Decision Systems

Income Level Name	Description	Income	Affordable Purchase Price	Notes
Median Household Income		\$39,613	\$121,500	
Low Income	80% of Median	\$31,690	\$97,500	
Very Low Income	50% of Median	\$19,807	\$63,000	
"Very Very Low Income"	From 50% - 30% of Median	\$11,884	\$35,000	Income shown at 30% of Median
Extremely Low Income	Below 30% of Median			Provided by Public Housing

Assumptions: 97% loan to value ratio: 8 1/4% fixed 30 year mortgage rate; property taxes, insurance and PMI included

Vision:

Provide opportunities for a diversity of housing options for current Decatur residents and new residents, with a focus on those working in the city, in a manner that preserves a small town atmosphere.

Recommendations

Projects listed under Goal #7 in Section 6 provide recommendations for increasing housing options for persons who live or work in Decatur.



