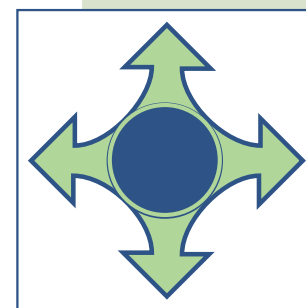




SECTION

PRINCIPLE C:
PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICES

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



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.

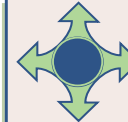
Goal 5: Reinforce Neighborhoods And Develop Connections Between Neighborhoods

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.

PRINCIPLE C: PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICES WITHIN FISCAL LIMITS

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

The Goals supporting Principle C reflect an integration of the economic, social and physical goals of the City.

Decatur provides regionally recognized housing, transportation, environmental, public and school services to its residents. While most residents expressed pride and appreciation for Decatur's current services, almost universally there was the desire for more or improved services. Because taxes are already so high, and City and School staff are currently working at maximum capacity, the identification of sources of potential revenue outside of the City are critical to achieving any of the Goals under this Principle.

The Goals and Projects under Principle C contain some of the most innovative ideas of the Strategic Plan. Projects under Goal #7 are aimed at creating housing that is affordable for people who are invested in the community but are priced out of the open market. The level of Decatur's commitment to creating economically diverse housing will be one test of the City's determination to retain its character. A true "smalltown" provides housing for everyone in the community.

Projects under Goals #8 and #9 focus on taking care of local transportation and environmental elements, recognizing that almost all of these require some type of regional coordination or funding. One concept proposed that may assist with funding and implementation is the development of a Decatur Regional Steering



Bandstand above MARTA rail station on the Square in downtown Decatur.

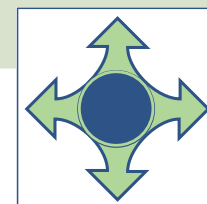
Committee. This group is envisioned as a collaboration among key residents and government and institutional leaders that would focus on issues requiring regional participation.

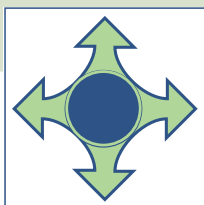
Goal #10 attempts to address the concerns raised within the community about the rate of taxes and quality of services—both for the City and the City Schools of Decatur.

The recommendations made in this Section reflect the understanding that implementation is not the sole responsibility of the City, but is a collaboration between a number of parties including the City. Therefore under some of the projects there is a list of suggested collaborators along with identification of a suggested convener.

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 and work in Decatur.

Project 7-A: Identify tax relief and other programs to aid elderly home owners.

Current Status

Programs now exist in the City to provide property tax reduction for the elderly. The following apply to qualified residents living in their homes:

- \$10,000 standard homestead exemption
- An additional \$1,000 homestead exemption for those aged 65
- An additional \$5,000 homestead exemption for those aged 62 with no more than \$8,000/year income
- An additional \$8,000 homestead exemption for those aged 65 with no more than \$12,000/year income
- No school tax due for those 80 years old with no more than \$40,000/year income

In addition, tax abatement provisions allow qualified property owners to defer annual property taxes until their home is sold.

Recommendations

Assist elderly home owners to remain in their homes or to find other housing within Decatur. Keep existing elderly housing available.



Elderly high-rise housing near downtown Decatur.

Scope

The development of two programs is proposed:

- Task 1. Identify additional property tax relief for elderly residents, particularly those with low incomes.
- Task 2. Develop housing programs to assist middle and lower income Decatur residents, particularly the elderly, by informing and educating them about their options, creating alternatives to "predatory" real estate deals, and by providing housing options for residents who wish to sell their homes but would like to remain in Decatur.

Implementation

Schedule

- Task 1: 2000 - 2002
Task 2: 2000 - 2010

Responsibility

It is recommended that a group of citizens and key institutions study this goal and the projects proposed and make recommendations of ways to help facilitate the achievement of this goal beyond what can be done currently.

Funding

Task 1: Reduction in property taxes collected from elderly property owners must be offset by an increase in taxes collected from other property owners or by a reduction in expenditures.

Task 2: The information component might be provided by staff within the City or Decatur Housing Authority. If housing programs are developed, funding could come from non-profit development, tax incentives for set-asides in new development, and State, Federal or private programs.



Public Housing community in downtown Decatur.

Project 7-B: Provide economically diverse housing options for people working in the City.

Current Status

Economically diverse housing is disappearing in Decatur. The Decatur Housing Authority provides a wide variety of affordable housing opportunities, including rental and home ownership. These range from the Public Housing communities to Section 8 subsidized apartments to mixed-income town houses. Public Housing is provided for those with incomes below \$12,000/year. However, there is very little housing that is affordable for those of moderate income, including teachers, public safety workers, restaurant staff and other service providers. At market rates, the lowest recent sales were at \$107,000 for condominium resales. Purchase of a home at this price would likely require an income of over \$30,000/year. This is more than many workers in Decatur make, including entry level public safety employees and beginning school teachers.

Recommendations

Keep existing affordable housing available and provide housing that is affordable for those working in the City. As shown in Section 3,



Recently developed economically diverse housing with special incentives for city employees.

housing for these workers will need to be made available at a purchase price beginning at \$63,000. Beginning teachers could qualify to purchase a home with a purchase price no higher than \$97,000, based on the program described in Section 3 of this Strategic Plan.

Scope

Task 1: Complete the new housing component of the Scottish Rite Hospital adaptive reuse and redevelopment now underway. This will provide 10 new homes at market rate, 3 affordable homes, and 14 new homes to house former patients from the Shepherd Center in Atlanta.

Task 2: Identify the potential for development of new or rehabilitated housing with an affordable component. Start by redeveloping currently “undesirable” property. Such sites might include Olympic Village in Oakhurst, the Relax Inn and other sites on College Avenue and in Downtown.

Task 3: Identify the potential for development of housing that is accessible for those with disabilities, including units that are “visitable” on the ground floor.

Task 4: Create a plan and package of incentives to encourage development of mixed-income housing options within the same residential community.

Implementation

Schedule

Task 1: 2000 - 2001

Task 2: 2000 - 2007

Task 3: 2000 - 2007

Task 4: 2000 - 2010

Responsibility

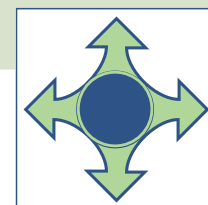
It is recommended that a group of citizens and key institutions study this goal and the projects proposed and make recommendations of ways to help facilitate the achievement of this goal beyond what can be done currently.

Funding

This can be achieved through a combination of grants, incentives, and other strategies.

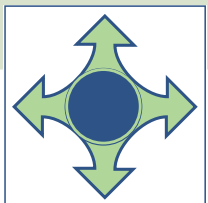
PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

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



PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

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



Spring Pointe apartments managed by Decatur Housing Authority

Project 7-C: Develop marketing programs to attract African-American and other minority residents.

Current Status

The African-American population in Decatur is declining. Data from the 2000 Census will not be available for another year and projections based on the 1990 Census are very out of date. However, the 8% decline of African-American students in Decatur High School over the past four years is an indication that the overall population of African-Americans is changing.

A recent escalation of home sales and prices in the Oakhurst neighborhood, which historically

has had a high percentage of African-American homeowners, is one part of the demographic shift. Another part, according to an informal poll of real estate agents active in the Decatur market, is that few if any of the recent home sales in Decatur have been to African-Americans.

Recommendations

To continue having a smalltown character, Decatur should maintain its current economic and racial diversity. Newcomers to Decatur should reflect diversity in age, race and income.

Scope

Task 1: Develop marketing programs to attract African-American and other minority residents.



Ice House apartments.



Avery Glen apartments.

Implementation

Schedule

Task 1: 2000 - 2002

Responsibility

It is recommended that a group of citizens and key institutions study this goal and the projects proposed and make recommendations of ways to help facilitate the achievement of this goal beyond what can be done currently.

Funding

Potentially from local public or private sources.

Project 7-D: Develop and implement programs to improve the condition and availability of rental housing.

Current Status

Rental housing in Decatur varies in quality from well maintained and managed units to housing that is substandard and a blight on the surrounding neighborhood.

Many existing rental apartments are being converted to condominiums, thus reducing the rental housing stock in Decatur. However, these condominiums often provide options for affordable home ownership.

Recommendations

Provide housing for residents not yet ready to purchase homes in the City, in many cases younger individuals and families seeking to return to the community.

Scope

- Task 1. Improve the physical conditions at the Olympic Village apartments located on Olympic Place in southwest Decatur.
- Task 2. Consider revising the Zoning Ordinance to allow more accessory dwellings such as garage or basement apartments.
- Task 3. Consider incentives to property owners for providing “rent-to-own” lease options.
- Task 4: Consider the implications for the mix of available housing options when existing rental units are converted to condominiums.



Park Trace apartments provides affordable units.

Implementation

Schedule

- Task 1: 2000 - 2003
- Task 2: 2001 - 2002
- Task 3: 2000 - 2001
- Task 4: 2000 - 2010

Responsibility

It is recommended that a group of citizens and key institutions study this goal and the projects proposed and make recommendations of ways to help facilitate the achievement of this goal beyond what can be done currently.

Funding

If housing programs are developed it is anticipated that funding would come from nonprofit development, tax incentives for set-asides in new developments and federal, state or private programs.



Typical garden-style apartments in Decatur.

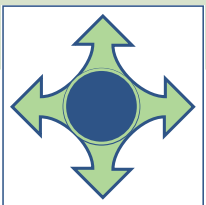
PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

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



PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

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Streetscape improvements reduced roadway width and widened sidewalks.

Goal #8: Enhance mobility in and through Decatur.

Project 8-A: Selectively reduce traffic volume and speeds in the City.

Current Status

Traffic and parking were very high on the list of issues raised by the community. However, research indicates that most residents choose to drive when presented with options.

Decatur's roads and streets are used for local trips and through-traffic and many are congested with heavy volume, especially during rush hour. This is of particular concern along the main corridors of Ponce De Leon Avenue, Scott Boulevard, Clairemont Avenue, Church Street and S. Candler Street. All of these streets pass through residential neighborhoods where they become barriers to neighborhood interaction and quality of life.

Considering the natural and mature landscapes of Decatur, it is doubtful that new roadways, or significant road widening, will occur.

Decatur currently has a number of physical traffic-calming and control devices, including signage limiting access to neighborhoods, narrowing of streets, and a variety of different "speed humps". Individually these devices have varying degrees of effectiveness, but currently they do not function as an integrated system.

Decatur has successfully implemented a downtown streetscape program that has improved traffic and pedestrian mobility. The portion of Ponce de Leon in downtown Decatur demonstrates the success of fewer traffic lanes and improved sidewalks.

Recommendations

The traffic issues mentioned above are chronic problems. There is no one solution, and until regional solutions are in place, local solutions may only address a small component of the problem.

Further reduce traffic volumes and speeds through continued implementation of a combination of calming and control devices along with increased enforcement.

Traffic improvements must recognize the pedestrian use of streets and sidewalks, especially at intersections, and include enhancements for the benefit and safety of pedestrians.

Assess synchronization of the traffic signals on Ponce de Leon in downtown Decatur to reduce through-traffic and further encourage use of Commerce Drive as a "ring road."

Scope

Task 1: Develop a city-wide plan for implementation of traffic volume and speed reductions that focuses on the streets identified as a priority for



Sidewalk in front of elementary school.

pedestrian and bicycle travel in Projects 8C and 8D.

Task 2: Develop an inventory of current calming and control devices and analyze the effectiveness of the current devices in meeting the goals of the citywide plan.

Task 3: Identify alternative devices as necessary and create "test" zones to improve traffic. This should include consideration of "road diets" that reduce the number of lanes and replace them with bike lanes and wider sidewalks on selected streets.

Task 4: Based on the most effective devices, develop a menu of preferred devices to be implemented throughout the city.

Task 5: Increase enforcement of existing and new controls, including pedestrian safety laws and speed limits.

Implementation

Schedule:

Tasks 1-3: 2000 - 2004

Task 4: 2003 - 2010

Task 5: 2000 - 2010

Responsibility

Tasks 1-4: City staff with consultants and assistance from Regional Issues Steering Committee (see the first page of this Section for a description).

Task 5: Public Safety Director

Funding

Tasks 1, 2 and 3: \$100,000 or more for additional staff or consultants.

Task 4: To be determined based on Task 1. Likely to require a significant amount of funding.

Task 5: \$ 25,000 - \$50,000 annually to increase staff within Public Safety.

There are three state highways that pass through Decatur. Funding for certain types of changes to these roads can be pursued from a diversity of Federal and State sources.

A variety of funding sources exist for state highways, including the National Highway System Fund, the Surface Transportation Program Fund (STF), the Transportation Enhancement STF Setaside Fund and the Safety Construction STF Setaside Fund, and the Railroad Crossing and Railroad/Highway Funds.

For roads outside the state highway system, funding may come from local annual allocations through the county or state. Major elements, such as narrowing or reducing lanes of traffic, will require the identification of special local, state and/or federal funding sources.

Project 8-B: Improve public transit with upgrades to MARTA stops and coordination of shuttle routes.



MARTA map indicating rail lines and bus routes.

Current Status

Decatur is served by three MARTA rail transit stations within the city limits and five feeder bus routes to these stations. The four bus routes serving downtown Decatur carry a large volume of passengers and provide reasonable hours of service. However, the infrequency of bus service is a deterrent to commuters who must wait from 10 - 20 minutes during peak periods and 19 - 55 minutes during off-peak periods for buses.

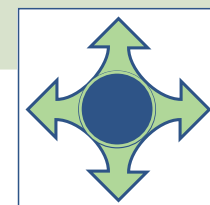
A shuttle system complements the MARTA service. Agnes Scott College and Emory University operate their own shuttles through the downtown area. Currently these shuttles are intended for private ridership.

Recommendations

Ridership on the MARTA system can be increased by making it more convenient. Coordinate private shuttle systems with resident needs and allow for public access.

PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within Fiscal Limits

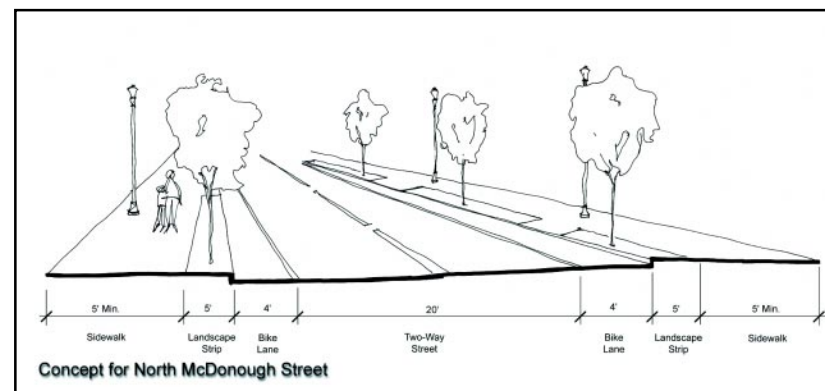
Provide housing, transportation, environmental quality and public services to Decatur's residents and workers.



PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits



Bus Depot at Decatur MARTA Rail Station



Sketch showing reducing roadway width to provide bike lanes and wider sidewalks.

Scope

Task 1: Improve information about the MARTA bus system through a system of signage that clearly marks stops and includes information on routes and frequency/duration of service. Pocket route schedules and fare cards/tokens should be made available in Decatur.

Task 2: Enhance bus shelters to reflect the traditional design character of historic Decatur.

Task 3: Consider establishing a coordinated shuttle system.

Task 4: Consider establishing a special "Decatur" zone within the MARTA system providing reduced fares for those traveling within the City limits.

Task 5: Explore the option to create a Transportation Management Authority (TMA) within Decatur.

Implementation

Schedule

Task 1: 2001 - 2004

Task 2: 2002 - 2005

Task 3: 2000 - 2002

Task 4: 2003 - 2005

Task 5: 2002 - 2004

Responsibility

Community and Economic Development Director in liaison with the Decatur Regional Steering Committee. (See first page of this Section for a description.)

Funding

Pursue Federal Transportation Act (FTA) and Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) funding for transit improvements. Pursue business sponsorship for shuttles. The existing private shuttles could charge a fare to the public. Creating a TMA could assist Decatur in qualifying for federal funding.

Project 8-C: Improve sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the City.

Current Status

There are approximately 62 miles of streets in the City of Decatur. Therefore there are about

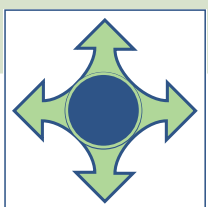
125 miles of potential sidewalks if they were located on both sides of all City streets. The majority of Decatur's streets (73%) have sidewalks that are in good repair. However, there are many streets without sidewalks, some with sidewalks on only one side of the street and some sidewalks in disrepair. Many curbcuts are a challenge to navigate.

A mapped inventory provided by the City indicates about 83,500 linear feet (16 miles) of streets without any sidewalk and about 10,000 linear feet (2 miles) of sidewalk that needs to be replaced because it's in poor condition.

Recommendations

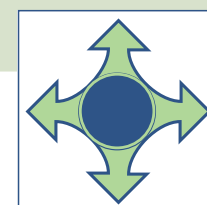
Providing convenient alternatives to local automobile trips such as functional sidewalks is an immediate action that the City of Decatur can take to reduce traffic volumes. Because over 25% of Decatur's sidewalks require repair or replacement, the City should prioritize investment in sidewalks that function as primary "walk routes" to connect residents to schools, institutions, commercial areas and green space.

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



PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

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



West Ponce de Leon, where the roadway was narrowed to produce wider sidewalks. See photo with Project 8A.

- Task 4: Pursue approvals and implementation of the MARTA Plaza/Sidewalk Study improvements along Sycamore and Church Streets.
- Task 5: Consider rebuilding the intersection at South McDonough and the College Avenue railroad tracks.
- Task 6: Consider building pedestrian crossings for the railroad tracks at strategic locations: Renfroe Middle School, West College Commercial District and Avery Street/Ice House, for example.
- Task 7: Consider improving pedestrian crosswalk safety at intersections on Commerce Drive, the downtown "ring road." Give special attention to the needs of elderly and physically disabled pedestrians.

Implementation

Schedule

- Task 1: 2000 - 2003
- Task 2: 2004 - 2010
- Task 3: 2000 - 2001
- Task 4: 2002 - 2005
- Tasks 5 - 7: 2004 - 2010

Responsibility

Assistant City Manager with assistance from the Decatur Regional Steering Committee. (See first page of this Section for a description.)

Funding

A 4' wide sidewalk currently costs approximately \$24 per linear foot for replacement and \$30 per linear foot for new construction, including grading. The cost to provide sidewalks on one



Walk route map

The Safe Routes to School program in New York City and other cities provides useful guidelines that should be considered in Decatur. This initiative aims to calm traffic and produce safer walking and bicycling routes.

Sidewalk improvements should address use by the elderly and those with physical disabilities.

Scope

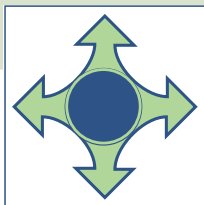
Task 1: The initial phase of this project should

address providing a safe walk route to the public schools in Decatur. Other hazardous conditions that may exist should also be improved.

- Task 2: Provide new sidewalks on at least one side of all streets that have no sidewalks now.
- Task 3: Continue the ongoing streetscape and sidewalk improvements designed for the downtown area. The success of this work can be seen in the 100 block of

PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

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



side of all streets and to repair the significantly damaged sidewalks would be about \$2,745,000. Replacement and repair of curbs would be an additional \$2,000,000. An average of \$500,000 each year for the next ten years will be needed to complete these components.

Decatur has received federal funding for some of the downtown streetscape improvements, however these funds are distributed on a competitive basis. Although additional federal funding may be available for a coordinated sidewalk system, a minimum of 20% in local matching funds is required.

The City currently has in place the goal of setting aside at least \$100,000 each year to address sidewalk needs. Some curb repair and replacement can be budgeted through the Storm Water Management Program. To really make an impact, however, it is recommended that the City study the possibility of assessing property owners, including nonprofits, for funds to install and maintain sidewalks and curbing.

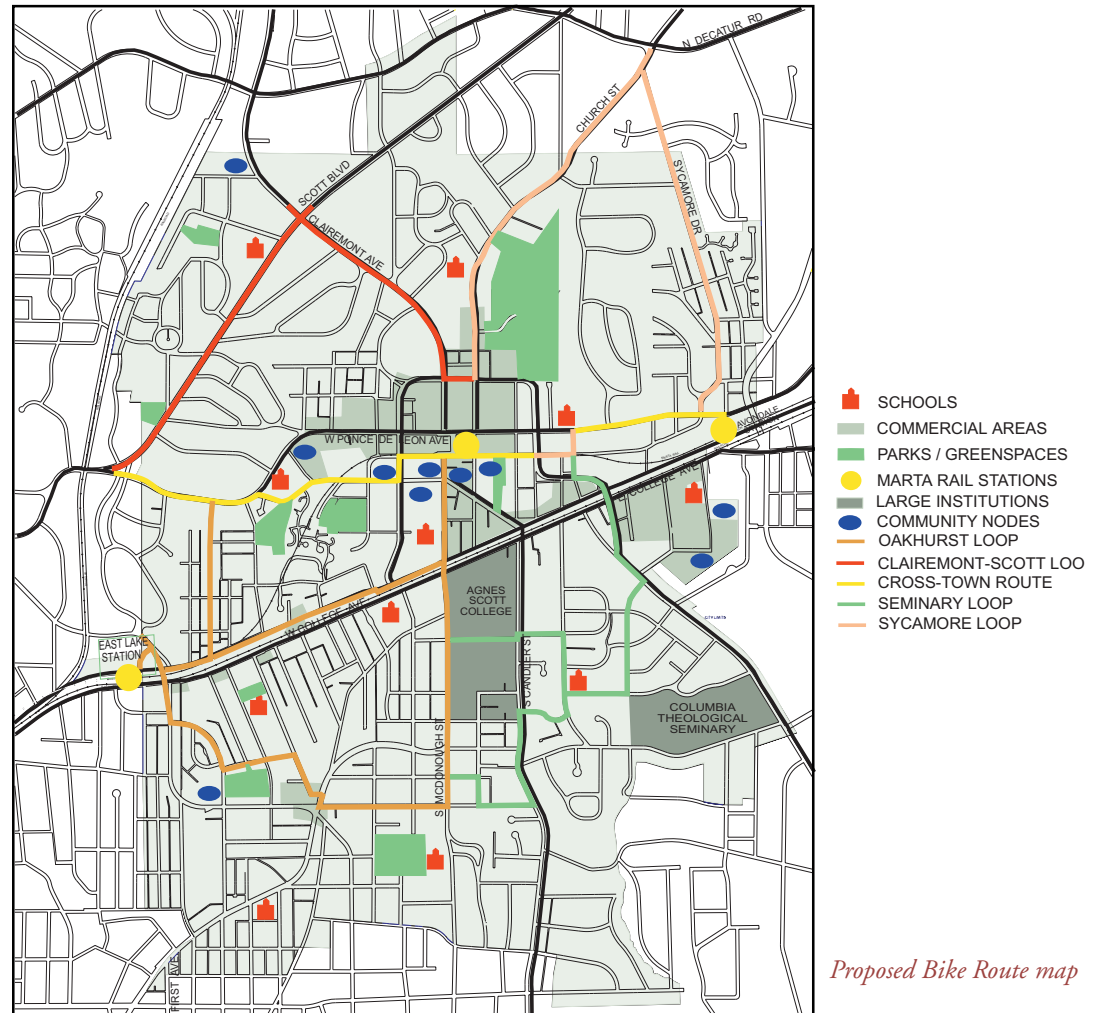
Project 8-D: Improve bicycle paths throughout the City.

Current Status

There are two regional bicycle paths between downtown Atlanta and Stone Mountain that intersect in the City of Decatur. These routes do not have a dedicated bike lane. Decatur has only one 1/4 mile off-street bike path.

Recommendations

Bicycling can reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled by 1-3%. In a small city like



Proposed Bike Route map

Decatur this might be increased dramatically. Planning for bicycle facilities should be conducted in conjunction with planning for other transportation modes and parking considerations. Bicycle facilities should be planned and designed to accommodate bicyclists with a broad range of abilities.

Scope

Task 1: Validate the network of bicycle routes

connecting the major activity centers and recreational areas in Decatur. This will include observing and gathering data on the existing conditions for bicycle travel. Problems, deficiencies and safety needs should be identified. Obstructions and impediments on existing streets, high-speed or high-volume traffic, and curbside and traffic signals that are not responsive to bicycles must be considered for their effect on bicycling.

Task 2: Expand the network of bike paths in Decatur. Specific streets with sufficient lane widths should be marked on the pavement and signs placed to indicate the bike route. A map of suggested roads that will provide connectivity for the City is shown on previous page.

Implementation

Schedule

Task 1: 2002 - 2004

Task 2: 2005 - 2010

Responsibility

Assistant City Manager with assistance from the Decatur Regional Steering Committee. (See first page of this section for a description.)

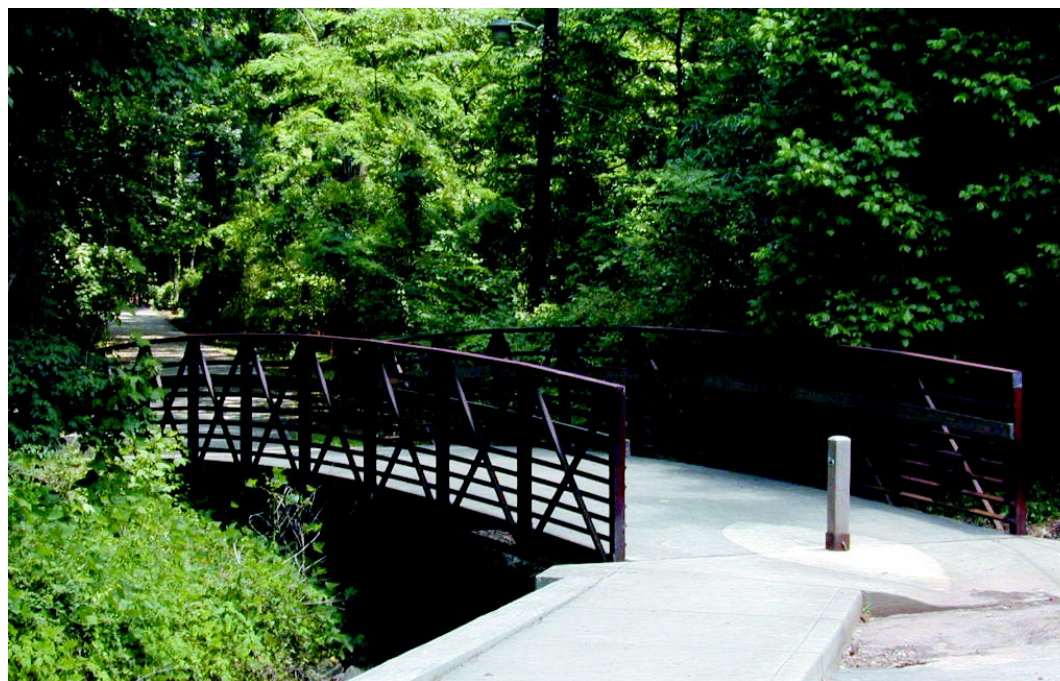
Funding

Task 1: \$15,000 – 30,000 for additional staff and/or consultants.

Task 2: Traditional striping on one side of a street costs \$1 per linear foot. However, the current preference for cyclists' safety is to paint the entire bike lane. Total cost for implementation of on-street routes is dependent on the number of paths recommended. For off-street routes the costs are significantly higher, particularly if land acquisition is involved.

Local funds may be sufficient for on-street routes. State, federal or private funding may be required for off-street routes. Most of these funding sources require a 20% or more local match.

Goal #9: Continue the commitment to environmental quality.



Greenway PATH route off S. McDonough in Oakhurst.

Project 9-A: Improve linkages between green spaces within the community.

Current Status

Decatur has 56 acres of parks, a 43-acre cemetery and 128 acres of open space, including the City Schools of Decatur and other private open recreational areas. This open space represents about 9% of the total land area within the City.

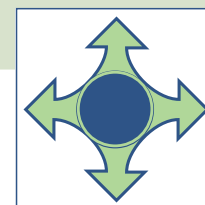
During the Round Tables process the Decatur Greens Action Team was formed. There are approximately 40 members of this team who are very actively working on the protection and expansion of green space. The Decatur Greens



Existing landscaped median at Oakview Road.

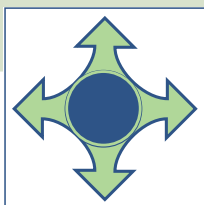
PRINCIPLE C:
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Landscaped open space at commercial building.

have drafted a Priority Environmental Items list that includes a commitment on the part of individuals for carrying out specific action items.

Recommendations

Decatur has a great deal of green space that is currently underutilized, in part because there are no good pedestrian or bicycle connections between the spaces. In combination with the projects under Goal #8, it is recommended that the city develop a “necklace” of planted bicycle and pedestrian linkages connecting the major green spaces of the city. This will result in multiple benefits: 1) easier, safer and more aesthetically pleasing access to existing green space, 2) “new” green space on existing public land (streets), and 3) traffic volume and speed reductions.

Scope

- Task 1: Develop and adopt a linkages plan, see preliminary recommendation above.
- Task 2: Implement green space linkage plan on key streets such as North



City cemetery with 43 acres of open space near downtown Decatur.

McDonough and Clairemont Avenue between Commerce and Ponce De Leon. See illustration on page 62.
Task 3: Implement linkage plan throughout City.

Implementation

Schedule

- Task 1: 2003 - 2005
- Task 2: 2003 - 2005
- Task 3: 2006 - 2008

Responsibility

Community and Economic Development Director in liaison with the Decatur Greens Action Team.

Funding

\$40,000 - \$75,000 for additional staff and/or consultant to develop linkages plan. The level of funding for implementation will vary according to the plan, but it can be anticipated that each project will cost enough to require a combination of funding sources including local, regional, state and federal funding.

Project 9-B: Preserve and expand green space, wetlands and trees.

Current Status

The green space, wetlands and trees of Decatur are part of the fundamental character of the city that make it so appealing. The City of Decatur has a tree ordinance and utilizes the service of a consulting arborist. Storm water runoff and site development regulations are in place. A few programs exist, such as the Oakhurst Community Garden Project, the Trees Atlanta projects including Church Street north of downtown, the downtown streetscapes program and a city planting program that adds 50 new trees on public property each year.

Recommendations

During the course of the Strategic Plan process, support from a cross section of the Decatur community was voiced for strengthening standards that protect these natural elements. A study of the green space, wetlands and trees

should be done with two objectives: 1) development of a comprehensive plan for preservation and expansion, 2) identification of ways to coordinate all of the various programs and to harvest the energy of volunteer organizations like the Decatur Greens Action Team. The study should consider: 1) the inventory and purchase of unbuildable lots to create additional areas for parks, wildlife refuges and other needed open areas, and 2) establishment of a tree bank and a coordinated public and private planting plan that includes trees indigenous to the area.

There are a number of immediate steps the City can take to protect its natural heritage, which are outlined in the Scope section below.

Scope

- Task 1: Implement the design and construction components of the Storm Water Management Program.
- Task 2: Encourage private property owners to deed wetlands to the City for passive recreational use.
- Task 3: Perform an inventory of existing green spaces in the City.
- Task 4: Perform green space study described in Recommendations above.
- Task 5: Implement recommendations of green space study.

Implementation

Schedule

- Task 1: 2000 - 2010
- Task 2: 2000 - 2010
- Tasks 3 & 4: 2002 - 2004
- Task 5: 2005 - 2010

Responsibility

Assistant City Manager in liaison with the Decatur Greens Action Team.



Glenlake Park is the City's largest park with 17 acres.

Funding

The Storm Water Management Program is funded by a fee that is assessed on all property owners.

The green space study will require an estimated \$30,000 - \$75,000, assuming utilization of volunteers for many of the necessary inventories and information gathering. This work might be supplemented by the City's tree consultant, who is funded through fees paid by property owners when they apply for a construction permit.

Funding opportunities for the purchase of land and/or trees will have to be explored. The State has established a fund dedicated to preserving green space from which Decatur can anticipate receiving some funds. The Oakhurst Community Garden, a nonprofit, has actively pursued acquiring property to "setaside" as green space, with support coming from a combination of public and private sources.

Project 9C: Study air and water quality programs.

Current Status

The quality of the air and water in Decatur are very much regional issues. Air quality in the Atlanta region has been out of compliance with EPA regulations for two years and the Atlanta Regional Commission has just submitted a ten-year plan to bring the region into compliance.

At the local level, Decatur has successful programs for solid waste reduction, yard waste reduction and recycling.

Recommendation

The City of Decatur can become a regional leader by developing a local air and water quality program. There are a number of opportunities to address air quality locally, including: restrictions on drive-through business windows, encouragement of telecommuting for those who live and work in Decatur, and increasing parking costs to encourage alternative transportation. Water quality is a more challenging issue to address on the local level, however, opportunities to act locally should be studied.

Scope:

Actively participate in programs to resolve regional air and water quality problems.

Implementation

Schedule

2000 - 2010

Responsibility

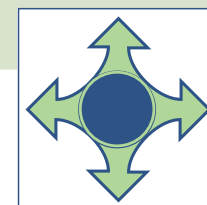
City staff and City Commission in liaison with the Decatur Greens Action Team.

Funding

Matching grants should be pursued to supplement City funding.

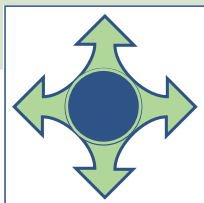
PRINCIPLE C:
Provide Quality Services Within
Fiscal Limits

Provide
housing,
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environmental
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public
services to
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Decatur City Hall.

Goal #10: Continue to provide quality City and School System services within fiscal limits acceptable to the community.

Project 10-A: Address concerns regarding tax issues for general operations.

Current Status

Decatur residents enjoy the benefits of outstanding services as demonstrated by high quality public safety, waste management programs, recreational and quality of life programming. The City of Decatur provides one police officer per square mile on patrol during each shift as compared to one officer per every 15 miles in DeKalb County. The Decatur Fire Department has a class 2 rating that is better than DeKalb County's class 4 rating. This rating is awarded by the Insurance

Services Office (ISO) and is based on a variety of factors, such as staffing, training, types and age of equipment, availability of water, etc. The rating indicates quality of service and affects property insurance premiums. Maintaining this class 2 rating requires additional resources as well as maintaining two fire stations and answering accident and health-related emergencies. This quality of service requires a high tax rate.

The City of Decatur has several tax relief mechanisms in place that address exemptions from general fund taxes, but the methods used to advertise these programs need to be improved.

The following suggestions regarding taxes in Decatur came from a range of citizen input:

Provide tax relief for those hit hardest by our tax structure.

Create additional homestead exemption levels for the elderly and low-income residents.

Add an Occupation Tax and a Utility Tax and create an Enterprise Zone.

Recommendations

The City Commission should review and assess existing tax exemption programs and opportunities for expanding these options. A study should be conducted that assesses the revenue potential without raising taxes and the impact of expanding tax exemptions on future revenues. An analysis of the effectiveness of methods used to provide information about taxes should also be conducted. The study could consider other revenue options like impact fees on new development and additional fees on tax-



Conference Center and Parking Deck owned by the City.

exempt properties that could increase revenue sources for the City of Decatur general fund.

(Refer to Goal # 7 of this Strategic Plan for housing tax recommendations.)

Scope:

Task 1: Identify opportunities for creating additional homestead exemptions targeted to elderly and low-income homeowners.

Task 2: Consider establishment of a business improvement district for Downtown Decatur to fund additional public safety activities, maintenance operations and landscaping and beautification projects.

Task 3: Reevaluate the assessment of impact fees for new development.

Task 4: Determine whether additional opportunities for charging fees for service exist.

Task 5: Continue to publish annual report in the Decatur Focus indicating sources of revenue, types of expenditures and describing general financial condition.

Task 6: Aggressively identify opportunities to reduce millage rate.

Implementation

Schedule

Task 1: 2001 - 2010

Task 2: 2001 - 2002

Task 3: 2001 - 2002

Task 4: 2003 - 2004

Task 5: 2000 - 2010

Task 6: 2000 - 2010

Responsibility

City staff

City Commissioners

Funding:

These tasks should be evaluated for incorporation within the usual business of those named and therefore should not require additional funding.



Oakhurst Elementary School built in 1915 is one of Decatur's oldest schools.

Project 10-B: Address concerns regarding tax issues for school operations

Current Status

Property owners in the City of Decatur pay high property taxes, with two-thirds of the property tax supporting the school system. As a result, the city's neighborhood school system is widely recognized as outstanding in the state. There are 2,612 children enrolled this year in the City Schools of Decatur, representing about 15% of the City's total population. This enrollment has declined 6% system-wide over the last four years. By contrast, the high school enrollment has increased by 17% during this period.

While several options exist to provide property tax relief from City of Decatur general fund taxes, only one option exists to provide relief from school taxes. The suggestions made by the Round Tables process included the expansion of options for tax relief from city school taxes.



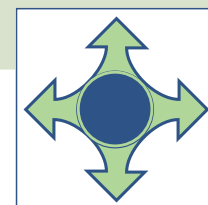
Renfroe Middle School



Decatur High School

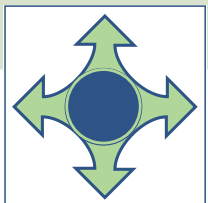
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Westchester Elementary School

Recommendations

A study of the impact of expanding tax exemption programs to apply to school taxes should be conducted and a report developed related to the impact of school tax exemptions on school revenues. If it is determined that additional tax exemptions can be expanded to apply to the City Schools of Decatur, the Decatur School Board should work in cooperation with the Decatur City Commission to pursue necessary local legislation to implement this tax exemption program.

Scope:

- Task 1: Establish homestead exemption from school taxes for low-income and elderly homeowners.
- Task 2: Publish annual report in Decatur Focus indicating sources of revenue and types of expenditures and describing the general financial condition of the City Schools of Decatur.
- Task 3: Identify opportunities to reduce millage rate while maintaining quality.

Implementation

Schedule:

- Task 1: 2001 - 2002
- Task 2: 2001 - 2010
- Task 3: 2000 - 2010

Responsibility:

Suggested conveners:

- City Schools of Decatur Superintendent
- City Schools of Decatur School Board

Suggested collaborators:

- Decatur City Commission
- DeKalb State Delegation

Funding:

These tasks should be evaluated for incorporation within the usual business of those named and therefore should not require additional funding.

Project 10-C: Address concerns regarding quality of services.

Current Status:

There was little discussion related to problems with the quality of general services provided by the City of Decatur. However, the City should continue to monitor city services to assure efficiency, effectiveness and the highest possible quality of service for the lowest possible cost. Specific discussions regarding the need to focus more attention on quality of life programming and services, and to assure that communications and neighborhood connections are strengthened and improved can be found in Principle B of this Strategic Plan.



City of Decatur Fire Department at Station No. 1.

Many people recognize the value of the independent Decatur city school system. Part of the success of Decatur can be attributed to the desirability of the school system. The Round Tables process identified several issues related to improving the quality of services provided by the City Schools of Decatur. These suggestions included: Foster community support and involvement in the schools; encourage continued adoption of schools by community businesses; involve non-parent community members in tutoring or mentoring programs; hold community meetings in schools when possible so that community members gain new insights into schools and their challenges; and deal with feelings and questions about racial diversity, including school quality, allocation of resources, and the perceived tracking of students.

Activities are already in place that address many of the concerns related to schools. The school budget describes how the tax proceeds are spent. It is available to the public at the school board office and at the public library, and will soon be provided to each of the school media centers as well. The school board meetings are held at each of the schools on a rotating basis in an effort to make them more accessible. The agenda for school board meetings is posted at the school board office. Board members have been considering a community forum meeting to improve discussion, because the formal input portion of the school board meetings does not promote group dialogue. The school board members are willing to attend community meetings individually if invited. A large announcement board will be installed at the high school lobby to provide increased visibility of school board meeting information. The school superintendent has a parents advisory committee that meets monthly to address issues and programs that contribute to the quality of education. The school system regularly publishes newsletters in each school, publishes The Report Card each semester, and sends articles to the local print media.

Recommendations:

The initiative should be taken to broaden civic education both in schools and the community. Decatur citizens would benefit from exploring their civic obligations and the opportunities that exist to get involved in a small town. Implementation of the “Decatur 101” program by the City of Decatur to help educate citizens about their government and the services it provides will occur this fall. A unit on the City Schools of Decatur should be included in the

Decatur 101 program. Current efforts by Decatur High School political science and civics instructors to include more local government topics in their courses should be encouraged. The Decatur Round Tables should pursue efforts to initiate a Round Tables program to discuss issues of City Schools of Decatur and the Community, to help refine issues and develop specific initiatives to address them.

Scope:

- Task 1: Establish a Community Relations Manager position in the Community and Economic Development Department to address requests for expanded communication activities and neighborhood networking activities.
- Task 2: Modify or expand existing programs within city government and the school system to incorporate suggestions not already being addressed.
- Task 3: Organize a community-based Focus Group in cooperation with the City Schools of Decatur to address specific issues related to the school system.
- Task 4: Publish an annual report for the City Schools of Decatur that incorporates both financial and performance reports.

Implementation

Schedule

- Task 1: 2001 - 2002
- Task 2: 2001 - 2005
- Task 3: 2001 - 2002
- Task 4: 2001 - 2010



City of Decatur Public Safety officers.

Responsibility:

Suggested conveners:

- City Manager
- School Superintendent

Suggested collaborators:

- Director of Community and Economic Development
- School System Public Information/Community Service Officer

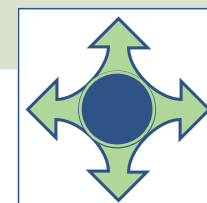
Funding:

- Task 1: \$36,000 salary target to be evaluated against pay scale of other City staff positions.
- Task 3: \$15,000 fee target for a consultant to lead this effort.

The other tasks should be considered for incorporation within the usual business of the persons named and therefore should not require additional funding.

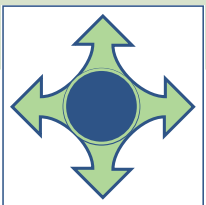
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**Project 10-D: Improve quality of
buildings, parks and
recreational facilities.**

Current Status:

The City of Decatur is running out of space to provide for expanding program needs and existing staff requirements. City-owned facilities are in need of renovation and upgrading to assure efficient and effective provision of city services. There is a need for expanded and accessible public meeting space, office space for expanded programming and centralized storage facilities.

City school facility improvements were made possible through the passage of a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) passed by voting DeKalb residents a few years ago that imposed a five-year one percent sales tax in DeKalb County. City Schools of Decatur receives a portion of this county-wide tax. This

Elementary school undergoing renovation & addition.

SPLOST produced an estimated \$15 million to supplement the state funding of about \$3 million for capital improvements to the school facilities. Current facility improvements now underway include additions of needed instruction space, air conditioning and code upgrades to all buildings. In addition, a committee comprised of community members is pursuing a concept for a new civic/arts center/gymnasium for the high school that would be available to the entire community.

Recommendations:

Conduct an assessment of existing city-owned facilities and develop recommendations for a capital improvement program for City of Decatur buildings, parks and other public facilities. Continue to improve the quality of existing school facilities and investigate the opportunity to fund a new building adjacent to Decatur High School to provide improved

civic, performing, athletic and recreational facilities within the city.

Scope:

- Task 1: Appoint a citizen-based task force to assess the current condition of general City facilities, make recommendations for renovation, repair or construction of new City facilities, and to determine possible sources of funding for capital needs.
- Task 2: Pursue concept for new civic/arts center/gymnasium to be built at Decatur High School but available to entire community.
- Task 3: Support and pursue renewal of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax to fund renovation and repair to School facilities.

Implementation

Schedule:

- Task 1: 2001 - 2002
- Task 2: 2000 - 2001
- Task 3: 2001 - 2002, 2007 - 2008

Responsibility

Suggested conveners:

City Manager
School Superintendent

Suggested collaborators:

Assistant City Manager
Director, Decatur Recreation and
Community Services Dept.
School System Facilities Manager

Funding:

Additional SPLOST funding should be considered. Supplemental funding for improvements will rely heavily on local public and/or private funds.