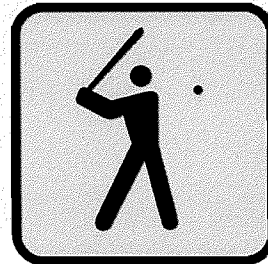




Section 3

History of Planning



History of Planning

In recent years, both the City of Decatur and Decatur organizations have undertaken planning projects to identify needs and develop strategies for improved community services. In June of 1995, the Decatur City Commission and the Decatur Planning Commission adopted a comprehensive plan which included an inventory and assessment of every aspect of the community from population, housing, and historic resources, to community facilities, transportation and existing land uses. The result of that inventory was an implementation strategy and plan "intended to serve as the framework for managing and guiding developmental and related service delivery activities within the city through the year 2010." The plan was developed to satisfy minimum standards and procedures established by the Georgia Planning Act of 1989, and to serve as a guide for the community for the coming years.

Population issues identified in the 1995 plan concluded that Decatur would see relatively small population growth or decline over the 15-year planning period. The assessment of Decatur's parks and recreation found that the city met or exceeded all established national and state recreational and park facility standards, except for total recreation acreage. It was noted that with the full development of the city there would be very little opportunity for new park development; however, since many private and county facilities were said to be located within Decatur or in close proximity to the city limits, the availability of city, private and county athletic facilities was said to meet or exceed the needs of Decatur residents.

Beginning in the fall of 1998, the City Commission and the Downtown Decatur Development Authority established the Decatur Round Tables-focus groups comprised of over 500 citizens who were asked to identify and form solutions to community issues. The result of these focus groups was establishment of 60 action items which subsequently led to the development of the City of Decatur Strategic Plan in the summer of 2000. The strategic plan was initiated with the following principles in mind:

- Manage growth while retaining character.
- Encourage community interaction.
- Provide quality services within fiscal limits.

The strategic plan addressed issues related to transportation, housing, environmental quality and communications between residents, businesses, institutions and government. In addition, it addressed ways to maintain Decatur's small town character while at the same time accommodating new development and growth.

Other community planning efforts included the Decatur High School Planning Report, developed by the City Schools of Decatur in response to a growing student population. Initiated in 2000, the plan solicited input from teachers, coaches, students, parents and others to identify needs and develop strategies for improved and expanded athletic facilities for the school system. The resulting master plan inventoried the various user groups, identified current facilities, and listed shortages and needed improvements.

Ultimately, a campus master plan was developed recommending new facilities that would meet the needs of a large number of the users. The exception involved several athletic teams including baseball, softball, track and field, tennis, and swim teams. Limited space on the campus resulted in the inability to accommodate those interests at dedicated facilities located within the high school's boundaries.

The United Methodist Children's Home also developed a long-range plan in 2000. The mission of the Children's Home focuses on Christian ministry and the provision of quality social services. Shifting from child-centered services to family-oriented services in the 1970s, the Children's Home 2000 long-range plan was developed to improve their family service offerings.

As with other planning projects in the area, a task force was appointed by the United Methodist Children's Home Board to consider the long-range plan and prepare a vision for the future of the agency. The task force established a list of nine criteria with two major influences for the future of the home. The first influence was to be a multi-service agency serving a variety of needs and the second was to better serve children and families of the North Georgia geographic region.

A capital improvement identified in the Children's Home master plan was the development of an emergency shelter/diagnostic center that would take boys and girls in troubled situations and assess their needs. Another was the development of a maternity home for unwed mothers within the metropolitan Atlanta region. All improvements were dependent on funding opportunities, which were to be governed by principles established by the task force.

Other agencies, such as the Samuel L. Jones Boys and Girls Club, have identified missions and goals for the future; however, written master plans were not available for review. Agnes Scott College completed a campus master plan in 1996-1997 to study future growth of the college, as did the Columbia Theological Seminary in 2000. Each of the various partner agencies and institutions provided a needs assessment and outline of existing facilities.