

## Annexation Inquiries

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

Peggy Merriss, City Manager  
City of Decatur  
P.O. Box 220  
Decatur, GA 30031; or, [Peggy.Merriss@decaturga.com](mailto:Peggy.Merriss@decaturga.com)

### GENERAL

#### **1. Why is the city currently considering an annexation master plan?**

In 2008 the City Commission looked at an annexation plan but decided that available data, including the 2000 census was outdated and decided to defer further consideration until after 2010 census data was published so that decision making could be better informed.

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

In December, 2012 the City Commission adopted two resolutions requesting annexation of areas to the north central and northwest of the existing city limits. The resolutions did not move forward through the Georgia General Assembly.

During the 2013 and 2014 sessions of the General Assembly, legislation to create the cities of Briarcliff, Lakeside and Tucker were considered. Incorporation of these areas would have municipalized the entire northern part of DeKalb County and resulted in placing new cities immediately contiguous to the existing City of Decatur city limits. None of the bills passed.

Currently, the Georgia House Governmental Affairs Committee Chairwoman Amy Carter (R-Valdosta) has issued a statement indicating that DeKalb County cityhood proponents have until November 15, 2014 to submit an agreed upon map and if they do not she will appoint a five-member panel to produce a map by December 31, 2015.

Given the current efforts to municipalize the unincorporated northern area of DeKalb County, the City of Decatur is in a position where long-term permanent city limits must be determined. Once the City is adjacent to another city, annexation is no longer a possibility. The question is no longer about being in the City of Decatur or remaining in unincorporated DeKalb County, but instead is about which city you will be part of.

In addition to the long-term city limit definition, key objectives of the annexation master plan are to influence and control development at key gateways; expand and stabilize the property tax base; respond to interest from property owners; and, consolidate partial parcels.

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

First, the Decatur City Commission will have to decide whether to proceed. They would want support from the Board of Education of the City Schools of Decatur.

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

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

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

### 3. How long does this process take?

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

### 4. Where is the city in the annexation process right now? What are the next steps?

(Updated October 10, 2014)

- **September – October 2014:** Information and feedback meetings scheduled and background information refined.
- **October 24, 2014:** Petition Deadline.
- **November 12, 2014:** Joint Work Session with City Commission and Board of Education.
- **December 1, 2014:** Final report released to public.
- **December 9, 2014:** Board of Education considers adoption of a resolution regarding the Annexation Master Plan.
- **December 15, 2014:** City Commission officially receives the Annexation Master Plan. Considers adoption of an annexation resolution.

If the City Commission adopts a plan, then:

- **January – April, 2015:** General Assembly considers and adopts legislation incorporating the annexation request, including authorizing a referendum.

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

- **November 3, 2015:** Referendum is held.

If the referendum passes in the affirmative, then:

- **December 15, 2015:** Annexation is effective.
  - **June 1, 2016:** First Installment tax bills are due.
  - **August, 2016:** School year begins.

### 5. Will property owners be officially notified that their properties are being annexed?

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

## **PETITIONS**

### 6. Must you use the petition forms that are included on the website?

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

### 7. Who can sign the petition:

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

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

d) If owned by LLC, who can sign?

The LLC should check with their legal advisor but it is assumed that it would be the registered agent for the LLC who would indicate that the LLC is the property owner.

**8. Must you specifically turn in one petition or the other?**

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

**REFERENDUM**

**9. Who votes in the referendum?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**13. If ownership of a house is split between two owners, do they both get to vote?**

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

**CITY AND SCHOOL SERVICES**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**20. How do we get information about Decatur City Schools?**

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

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

No.

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

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

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

No.

**TAXES**

**24. What is an estimated typical 2014 total tax bill for an owner-occupied home in the City of Decatur valued at \$300,000?**

With Fees - \$5,327 in Decatur; \$4,095 in DeKalb County.

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

Decatur - \$4,880; DeKalb County - \$447

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No.

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

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

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

Retirement income is excluded.

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

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