

# HOUSING

The City of Decatur has a vibrant residential life and a diverse stock of available housing opportunities. Since its first housing boom when the trolley car system connected Decatur to downtown Atlanta, the City of Decatur has first and foremost been a residential community. As such, much has been invested in housing.

The purpose of this section is to inventory existing housing and to provide an assessment of housing conditions, occupancy, and affordability. The housing element also provides an opportunity to assess the adequacy and suitability of housing for the current and future population. The housing element consists of three main sections: inventory of existing conditions, assessment of current and future housing needs, and a housing community vision and associated goals.

## Inventory of Existing Conditions

The inventory of existing conditions consists of several different housing unit criteria including housing types, composition, condition, age, ownership/rental status, seasonal housing, and cost. The inventory also includes an assessment of how housing costs affect households.

### *Types of Housing Units*

In the years between 1980 and 2000, Decatur added 8% more housing or 632 housing units. The amount of housing by units and percentage were lower than surrounding communities. For example, DeKalb County added 13% more housing units and Gwinnett County added 52%, which is not surprising given DeKalb County's earlier build-out history.

During the 20 years from 1980 to 2000, Decatur experienced a decrease in the share of multifamily housing units as compared to single-family units. In 1980, 45% of housing was multifamily and 55% of the housing was single family. Over the 20-year period, the balance shifted to 37% multifamily housing and 63% single-family housing. A contributing factor to the increase includes marginal infill opportunities, which were exploited between 1995 and 1999. During this time, the City of Decatur reported 219 new single-family dwellings. A second contributing factor was a decrease in demand for rental housing; occupied rental housing decreased by 285 units between 1990 and 2000.

Since the 2000 census, the balance of multifamily housing and single-family housing has shifted again. Due to the City's development and land use policies for downtown development, significant increases in development of townhouse and multifamily dwelling units have taken place since 2000. The City of Decatur reported that 93 townhouse developments and 417 multifamily housing units have been added. As the City continues to encourage and attract downtown residential development, the share of non-single family dwelling units is likely to

increase. The City of Decatur estimates an increase in 523 units by the end of 2005 and up to 410 additional units in the near future from possible mid-rise developments (Clairmont Avenue and East College Avenue) and several townhouse developments (Church Street, Scott Boulevard, South McDonough, and Lenore Street).

The following tables present housing units in Decatur by type between 1980 and 2000 by number of units and percentage of the total.

Table 4.1 – Types of Housing Units  
City of Decatur 1980 to 2000

<b>Year</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Single Units (detached)	4,003	4,284	4,794
Single Units (attached)	294	554	603
Double Units	613	476	313
3 to 9 Units	1,289	1,449	1,403
10 to 19 Units	651	513	461
20 to 49 Units	300	198	200
50 or more Units	731	661	731
Mobile Home or Trailer	0	1	8
All Other	0	94	0
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	<b>7,881</b>	<b>8,230</b>	<b>8,513</b>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

Table 4.2 – Types of Housing Units by Percentage  
City of Decatur 1980 to 2000

Year	1980	1990	2000
Single Units (detached)	50.8%	52.1%	56.3%
Single Units (attached)	3.7%	6.7%	7.1%
Double Units	7.8%	5.8%	3.7%
3 to 9 Units	16.4%	17.6%	16.5%
10 to 19 Units	8.3%	6.2%	5.4%
20 to 49 Units	3.8%	2.4%	2.3%
50 or more Units	9.3%	8.0%	8.6%
Mobile Home or Trailer	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
All Other	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (SF3)

#### *Age and Condition of Housing*

As a well-established community, it is not surprising that Decatur has a large number of older dwelling units. As Table 4.3 indicates, nearly 1/3 of the housing stock was constructed in 1939 or earlier. A 2000 comparison between the City of Decatur, the metropolitan area, and the State of Georgia demonstrated that the share of houses in the 45-65 age range is much greater in Decatur at 32% than the metropolitan area and the state at 10% and 13% respectively.

Table 4.3 – Housing Construction by Era for Decatur Compared with the State of Georgia and the Metropolitan Area (as of 2000)

Jurisdiction	Decatur		Metro Atlanta		Georgia	
	Units	Percent	Units	Percent	Units	Percent
1999-March 2000	73	0.90	72,090	4.50	130,695	4.00
1995-1998	129	1.50	221,325	13.90	413,557	12.60
1990-1994	174	2.00	196,675	12.40	370,878	11.30
1980-1989	726	8.50	391,440	24.60	721,174	22.00
1970-1979	1,203	14.10	286,397	18.00	608,926	18.60
1960-1969	1,027	12.10	190,805	12.00	416,047	12.70
1940-1959	2,779	32.60	163,899	10.30	427,488	13.00
1939 or earlier	2,402	28.20	66,937	4.20	192,972	5.90

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Another consideration of the comprehensive plan is age and condition of housing. Despite the age of housing in Decatur, more than 99% of all housing units in Decatur had complete plumbing and kitchen facilities in 2000.

Finally, as population and median housing costs increased, vacancy in all types of housing units decreased. In 1990, 8% of all units were vacant and the vacancy rate decreased to 5% by 2000. The vacancy rate was comparable in 2000 to the metropolitan area (5.3%), but much lower than the State of Georgia as a whole (8.4%). In addition, it is interesting to note that 89% of all renter-occupied housing units were built prior to 1979, making the rental housing stock relatively old.

#### *Owner and Renter Units*

Consideration of the amount of housing that is owned versus rented is also part of the housing inventory because it provides a snapshot of housing options and affordability. As in other aspects of Decatur housing, stability is a primary characteristic of the owner and renter balance. In 2000, 58% of housing units were owner-occupied in Decatur. In the twenty (20) years from 1980 to 2000, the prevalence of owner-occupied housing has increased only slightly from 54% to 58%.

Table 4.4 – Owned Units and Rented Units in Decatur 1980 to 2000

Year	1980	1990	2000
Ownership (units)	3,869	4,011	4,706
Renting (units)	3,294	3,606	3,345

Source: U.S. Census Bureau  
City of Decatur

Decatur housing occupancy by tenure can also be compared through an owner to renter ratio. The ratio is determined by dividing the number of owners by the number of renters. The higher the resulting number (ratio), the more owners there are in a community as compared to renters. Decatur has consistently held a lower ratio of owners to renters than the State of Georgia. Census information from 2000 indicated a slight increase in the ratio from 1.1 in 1990 to 1.4. In 2000, the DeKalb County ratio was 1.4, the metropolitan area ratio was 2.0, and the State of Georgia ratio was 2.1.

In addition to other issues, seasonal units are not a significant factor in the inventory of housing in Decatur; only 24 units or 0.3% of all housing were reported to be seasonal units in the 2000 census. Metropolitan area seasonal housing (0.4%) is roughly the same as Decatur.

#### *Cost of Housing*

In 1990, Decatur median housing costs were slightly higher than DeKalb County and comparable to other communities in the area. Since then, housing costs in the City have increased dramatically. By 2000, the median housing cost in Decatur increased to \$220,400. This amount is more than double than the median amount in 1990 (\$95,300) and \$85,300 more than the DeKalb County median housing cost.

In 2000, housing costs ranged from \$35,000 to \$749,999. Despite the wide range of housing, 58% of housing had reached a level of \$200,000 or more by 2000. Just 10 years prior, only 6% had values in excess of \$200,000. Specifically, over 20% (880 housing units) were in the range of \$200,000 to \$249,999. Another 18% of the housing units (758) were in the range of \$250,000 to \$299,000. At the highest housing levels, 14% were greater than \$300,000 in value. For those who owned housing property in 2000, the median monthly mortgage was \$1,325.

Table 4.5 – Housing Value in 2000  
City of Decatur

	Housing Units	Percentage of Housing Stock
Less than \$100,000	331	8%
\$100,000 to \$150,000	549	13%
\$150,000 to \$200,000	870	21%
\$200,000 or greater	2,468	58.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

For those who rented housing in 2000, the median rent was \$597. Though the median monthly rent rose 36% from \$439 in 1990, the amount was slightly less than the median monthly rent at the metropolitan area level of \$613, and considerably less than the State of Georgia median level of \$746.

Table 4.6 – Median Housing Value and Rents 1990 to 2000  
City of Decatur

Year	1980	1990	2000
Single Family Median	\$37,800	\$95,300	\$220,400
Contract Rents	\$167	\$439	\$597

Source: U.S. Census Bureau  
City of Decatur

Regarding affordability, the median household income for Decatur was \$47,395 and average per capita income was \$29,363. Even though these incomes increased 77% and 83% respectively since 1990, the median housing cost increase of 131% has greatly exceeded these income increases. In addition, the 2000 census demonstrated that 7% of families lived below the poverty level and 11.7% of individuals lived below the poverty level. For these reasons, affordability has become a critical issue especially as residents have expressed a desire for increasing diversity and affordability for all income levels across Decatur.

In order to address these needs, the City administers a limited program of housing assistance and the Decatur Housing Authority provides public housing and programs for the residents with the most need.

### City of Decatur Activities

Housing is addressed through the City directly and through the Decatur Housing Authority. The City of Decatur addresses affordability challenges through programs for property tax reduction for senior citizens and benefits for qualified residents living in their homes including: a \$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 per year income, no school tax due for those 80 years old with no more than \$40,000 per year income, and tax abatement provisions allow qualified property owners to defer annual property taxes until their home is sold.

Since the last update of the comprehensive plan, the City has recognized that affordability must be addressed through the development process as well. For this reason, the City of Decatur also utilizes a development incentive for affordable housing. In 2004, the City of Decatur Commission approved a life cycle ordinance which enables the City to negotiate with developers in order to deliver guaranteed affordable units in exchange for density bonuses. Through the use of this ordinance, the City has been successful in guaranteeing some affordable housing units through the development process. Since the ordinance was approved in 2004, the City has been able to secure affordable housing through two (2) developments. The developer of the Talley Street Lofts received a 20% density bonus from 75 to 90 dwellings with a minimum of 11 units guaranteed as "lifecycle dwelling" units. The developer of 201 West Ponce received a 20% density bonus from 135 to 162 dwellings with a minimum of 20 units guaranteed as affordable "lifecycle dwelling" units.

### Decatur Housing Authority

The Decatur Housing Authority (DHA) administers programs in four main areas: assisted rental, affordable rental, homeownership, and compliance monitoring. The DHA assisted rental program involves housing subsidies for low-income residents. The program consists of the following: 293 public housing units (293 units), Public Housing Section 8 Vouchers (524 families), Section 8 Owned units (112 units), Contract Administration for privately owned subsidized housing (169 units), and Section 8 Portability services for families that have come from other Section 8 locations.

The DHA also administers an affordable, multiple family rental program for units at Spring Pointe in South Decatur (66 units) and for the Columbia Park development (approximately 266 units expected in 2005). The Columbia Park development will consist of both rental units and condominium units. The rental units will consist of 45% affordable units and 55% market rate units. The condominium units will be 15% affordable units and 85% market rate units.

The DHA homeownership program involves housing development. The program consists of the following: Commerce Place Townhouses (13 units), Commodore Square Townhouses (7 units) and Village at Oakhurst (10 single family units) in 2000. Additionally, the Talley Street Condominiums (90 units) are expected in 2005 and will include 11 affordable (life cycle) units.

The DHA also conducts compliance monitoring for U.S. Housing and Urban Development regulations for approximately 100 units in Decatur. The DHA provides this service on a contract basis as part of a statewide organization.

The DHA has experienced recent funding reductions from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Authority reported that funding for the subsidized assistance program by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has provided only 89% of the total Authority funding request for the subsidized assistance program in 2005. In 2003 and 2004 the HUD funding percentages were also lower than the requested funding amounts at 96% and 97% respectively.

#### *Cost Burden Analysis*

In the analysis of housing affordability, one benchmark that is routinely utilized is cost burden. Under the definition of cost burden, it is understood that owner and renter households are cost burdened if the owner or renter pays 30% or more of their income on housing. A second benchmark is severe cost burden where an owner or renter pays 50% or more of their income on housing. The background for this type of analysis is income and housing cost.

A recent analysis of cost burden for Decatur was provided by the Georgia Institute of Technology, City and Regional Planning Program in the fall of 2004. The analysis was conducted by the program using 2001 housing data for the City of Decatur.

The 2001 cost burden analysis demonstrated that a number of Decatur residents are cost burdened and severely cost burdened. The results of the analysis revealed that 1,706 owners and/or renters were cost burdened in 2001. Of those residents who were cost burdened, 61% or 1,038 were renters.

For those who were severely cost burdened, the results of the analysis revealed that 731 owners and/or renters were severely cost burdened in 2001. Of those residents who were cost burdened, 65% or 477 residents were renters. The following table provides cost burden and severe cost burden information for both renters and owners.



Table 4.7 – 2001 Cost Burdened Residents by Tenure

Tenant Type	2000 Owners	2000 Renters
Cost Burdened Residents (30% of income for housing)	668	1,038
Severely Cost Burdened Residents (50% of income for housing)	254	477

Source: Georgia Institute of Technology, 2004

The location of the City and its excellent transportation facilities may offset some of the burdens of housing costs.

#### *Housing and Community Characteristics*

Currently, housing in Decatur is generally characterized by older stable single-family residential areas and a growing multifamily and townhouse housing stock in downtown and surrounding areas. As stated in the Population chapter, the City of Decatur will need to address increases in both population and households over the 20-year planning period. As the tables indicate below, forecasts anticipate an increase of 5,356 persons or 29% by 2025. Regional forecasts also indicate that Decatur will likely experience an increase of 2,674 households or 32% by 2025.

Table 4.8 – City of Decatur Forecasted Population Trends

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2015	2020	2025
Persons	18,802	18,911	19,020	19,129	19,238	20,586	21,934	24,049

Source: Atlanta Regional Commission

Table 4.9 – Forecasted Households, City of Decatur 2005-2025

Year	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Households	8,330	8,542	9,271	10,000	11,004
Avg. HH Size	2.11	2.09	2.07	2.04	2.03

Source: Atlanta Regional Commission, City of Decatur

It is interesting to note that by 2025, average household size is anticipated to decline 4% and the population is expected to be generally older. The household and age demographic forecast is based on expected decreases in the number of

residents between the ages of 0-24 and increases in number of residents between the ages of 34-54. The population of residents 65 years and older is expected to be stable.

The City of Decatur has considered these forecasts and has prepared a strategy for accommodating future growth. Demographic forecasts are compatible with the City's goals and policies for housing development because decreasing household size is consistent with high and medium density dwellings. Current and future special housing needs in Decatur are expected for lower income residents, retail industry residents who wish to work and live in Decatur, and senior citizens who wish to remain in Decatur for their retirement.

Note that other housing related community characteristics such as age, income, and commuting patterns are included in the population element section and the economic development element section. The housing element continues with the assessment portion of the section.

## **Assessment of Current and Future Housing Needs**

The following assessment responds to the inventory of existing conditions and community preferences. Though housing is generally adequate and suitable for current and future needs, the inventory presents several issues which may be critical for long term housing adequacy. These issues involve housing affordability, housing stock, public housing funding, and housing availability.

### Housing Affordability

The community has recognized the increasing challenge of affordability in Decatur. As stated previously, more than 2,400 residents experience some level of cost burden in meeting their housing needs. Since the community has expressed concern for affordability for all income levels and all stages of life, the City will continue to fund housing assistance programs, support the Decatur Housing Authority, and attempt to achieve affordable housing through density bonuses. Additional efforts in this area may include new tax relief specifically for the lower and middle income residents, particularly senior citizens and lower income service industry employees, and education about options for those who would like to sell their home but remain in the City.

### Housing Stock

Though Decatur has an older housing stock relative to other area communities, the housing stock in the City is generally excellent. The City of Decatur has witnessed extensive renovation by individual homeowners since the last comprehensive plan. Individual renovation, expansion, and infill development have been assets to the community as well as issues of concern to the City. While renovation maintains the quality of the single-family neighborhoods, the City also recognizes that regulations and/or guidelines are necessary to maintain the character of the City's neighborhoods. Specifically, such regulations would

address issues related to scale, quality, and style of complete redevelopment of single-family properties, i.e. tear downs, new infill development on vacant parcels, and expansions of existing homes.

In addition, the Decatur Housing Authority reported that the housing stock under the Authority is generally in good condition. However, the oldest units among public housing stock dates to 1941. For this reason, general maintenance is a significant factor. The older housing stock also presents challenges due to outdated design. These challenges are apparent in the lack of closet space or size of rooms.

#### Public Housing Funding

The Housing Authority is faced with greater maintenance challenges due to the age of housing and the ongoing need to provide for severely cost burdened residents. For this reason, reduction in HUD funding is a critical issue for the Authority and additional funding sources to maintain current and future level of service may be necessary.

#### Housing Availability

By 2025, the population of Decatur is expected to grow by approximately 5,000 people. As depicted on the Future Land Use map, high-density residential and commercial development is slated for the downtown central business core. Medium density residential corridors have been identified along Clairmont Avenue, Church Street, Scott Boulevard, and East College Avenue. In addition, the community has underscored a strong preference to maintain existing single-family neighborhoods at current density levels (6.57 people per acre across the City). Most importantly, developable land is nearly 100% built-out throughout the City. If land use policies change, then anticipated residential growth may occur in areas outside of the downtown area. Otherwise, the possibility of accommodating 29% population growth and 32% household growth by 2025 will depend on planned redevelopment of existing underutilized properties predominantly located in downtown Decatur and nearby areas.

These priority issues, including other topics included in the assessment of current and future needs, form the basis for the housing community vision and goals in the following section.

### **Housing Community Vision and Goals**

#### Housing Community Vision

In 2005, the Housing Community Vision reflects desires and concerns in three (3) main areas. First, the City envisions affordable housing for all levels of the Decatur workforce and affordable housing for residents in all stages of life with emphasis on options for senior citizens. Secondly, the City envisions maintenance and renovation of single family housing which is consistent with the character and scale of existing stable single-family neighborhoods. Third, the

City envisions additional well-planned multifamily and townhouse development in an active downtown.

### Goals for Housing

#### Affordability

- Identify additional property tax relief for senior citizens, particularly those with low incomes.
- Develop housing programs tailored to senior citizens including information resources about options and enhanced life cycle housing options.
- Create affordable housing opportunities to insure that all those who work in the community have a viable choice or option to live in the community.
- Consider accessory housing units by revising the zoning ordinance.
- Consider incentives to property owners for providing rent to own lease options.
- Consider the implications for the mix of available housing options when existing rental units are converted to condominiums.
- Support the activities of the Decatur Housing Authority in meeting the housing needs of Decatur's lower income residents and organize support for a restoration of full Department of Housing and Urban Development funding of the Decatur Housing Authority.

#### Community Character

- Revise the zoning ordinance in order to ensure additions, renovations, and rebuilding activities are consistent with the existing stable single-family neighborhoods.
- Promote new housing types through adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
- Encourage the preservation and/or the adaptive reuse of historic structures.

#### Supply of Housing

- Encourage higher density residential development at select locations in downtown Decatur.

- Enhance the City's existing supply of housing by promoting conservation practices, supporting rehabilitation programs, and encouraging the replacement of dilapidated structures.

# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

## Natural Resources

The natural environment places certain opportunities and constraints on the way land is used. Factors such as soil characteristics, topography and flooding frequency affect where development can safely and feasibly occur. Other areas, such as stream buffers, are particularly vulnerable to developmental impact and must receive appropriate measures of protection. In this section, Decatur's natural features and environmentally sensitive areas are described and discussed.

### Natural Features

#### *Topography, Physiography and Drainage*

The City of Decatur lies entirely within Georgia's Piedmont Province. Topography in the City consists mostly of very gently sloping and gently sloping soils on broad to narrow ridgetops, and some small areas of steeper sloping soils on hillsides adjacent to small drainageways. The ridgetops commonly are smooth and convex and the hillsides commonly are irregular. Nearly level land is found along the various tributaries of Peachtree Creek and the South River. The flood plains are generally narrow.

Decatur is bisected by a major east-west ridgeline that generally follows the CSX Railroad corridor. This ridgeline forms the boundary between the Chattahoochee River Basin and the South River Basin. Peavine Creek and the South Fork of Peachtree Creek drain the northern half of the City and Shoal Creek and Sugar Creek drain the southern half. Rain that falls in the northern half of Decatur eventually flows into the Gulf of Mexico and rain that falls south of the Georgia Railroad eventually enters the Atlantic Ocean.

#### *Soils*

In general, most of the land within Decatur falls within one of the three soil groupings described below.

- Cecil: Urban land – These are deep, well-drained soils that have a loamy surface layer and clay subsoil. These soils are very gently sloping or gently sloping and are typically found along ridgetops. Slope ranges from 2 to 10 percent.
- Pacolet: Urban land – These are deep, well drained soils that also have a loamy surface layer and clayey subsoil. These soils have steeper slopes than do Cecil soils and are typically found on hillsides. Slope ranges from 10 to 25 percent.
- Urban land – These very gently sloping to strongly sloping urban land

areas are found on both ridgetops and hillsides associated with drainageways and flood plains. Slope ranges from 1 to 25 percent.

The soils in the urban land areas have typically been modified by cutting, filling, shaping, and smoothing. Most soil areas designated as urban land areas contain higher density uses such as commercial centers, schools, parking lots, and housing developments.

Generally, the soils found within the City of Decatur are very suitable for the type of development that Decatur has experienced in the past and the limited amount of development expected to occur during the planning period. While there are some isolated areas of steep slopes within the City, such areas are already developed and no special needs are required at this time.

### **Environmentally Sensitive and Ecologically Significant Areas**

The natural environment includes areas and resources which are vulnerable to the impacts of development and which require protection by the community. The conservation of environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant resources is becoming increasingly important, as their values to communities become better understood. In recognizing the importance of land and water resources, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has developed minimum standards for local governments to follow for the protection of water supply watersheds, wetlands and groundwater recharge areas. Additionally, Decatur must address the value and protection of other vital and fragile resources such as floodplains. These are discussed in the sections which follow. Other major categories of naturally or ecologically significant areas, including prime agricultural and forest land, major plant and animal habitats, protected mountain and river corridors, major parks and recreation areas, and significant scenic views and sites, are not found within the City of Decatur and are consequently not addressed in this plan.

#### *Water Supply Watersheds*

Water supply watersheds are defined by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources as the areas of land upstream of a public drinking water intake.

In the case of the City of Decatur, the area north of the CSX Railroad drains into the Chattahoochee River via Peachtree Creek at a point below both the DeKalb County and City of Atlanta water intakes, and the area south of the CSX Railroad drains to the South River which is not used as a water supply source. Thus, the City is not required to develop water supply watershed protection regulations.

#### *Wetlands*

Federal law defines freshwater wetlands as those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands

generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. Under natural conditions, wetlands help to maintain and enhance water quality by filtering out sediments and associated non-point source pollutants from adjacent land uses. They also store water, thereby stabilizing dry weather stream flows and flood hazards. In addition, wetlands serve important functions as fish, wildlife and plant habitats.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, as part of its National Wetlands Inventory, has published a Wetlands Map for Northeast Atlanta (1990) which includes the City of Decatur. The Wetlands Map identifies only one wetland area located within the City of Decatur – a small pond located in the middle of Decatur Cemetery.

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 prohibits the discharge of dredge or fill materials into the water bodies or wetlands of the United States unless a permit is granted. Because Decatur's only wetland is located in the center of a cemetery, the use of which is not likely to change, it is very unlikely that the City will ever become involved in wetland development and permitting issues, and no specific regulatory actions are being recommended at this time.

#### *Groundwater Recharge Areas*

Recharge is the process by which precipitation infiltrates soil and rock to add to the volume of water stored in pores and other openings within them. Aquifers are soils or rocks that yield water to wells. While recharge takes place throughout practically all of Georgia's land area, the rate or amount of recharge reaching underwater aquifers varies from place to place depending on geologic conditions.

The Georgia DNR has mapped all of the recharge areas in the State which are likely to have the greatest vulnerability to pollution of groundwater from surface and near surface activities of man. Because groundwater systems and the factors controlling recharge vary with geology, different approaches to identification are required for different areas of the State. Significant recharge areas in the crystalline rock terrain of northern Georgia are found in areas that have thick soils or *saprolite*--deposits of clay and disintegrating rock--and relatively low (less than eight percent) slopes. These conditions are present in the City of Decatur and the entire City has been identified by DNR as a possible significant recharge area in a map titled "Most Significant Ground-Water Recharge Areas of Georgia." In an accompanying map titled the "Georgia Pollution Susceptibility Map," the possible Decatur recharge area has been identified as having low pollution susceptibility.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs Criteria for Protection of Groundwater Recharge Areas mandates a regulatory program for possible groundwater recharge areas with low pollution susceptibility that includes regulating: 1) waste disposal sites; 2) the handling of hazardous materials; and 3)



the installation of septic tanks. Decatur does not contain any sanitary landfills or any hazardous waste disposal sites, therefore is no need to develop regulations for the control of such facilities. However, there is a need to control the handling and storage of hazardous materials.

The Department of Natural Resources' Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is responsible for issuing permits for all new facilities that treat, store or dispose of hazardous wastes. Hazardous waste handling and storage operations must be conducted on an impermeable pad having a spill and leak collection system. The City of Decatur has a role to play in this permitting process. A possible local process for consideration by City of Decatur officials is described below.

- 1) Establish a mechanism for identifying new facilities that typically handle or store hazardous materials. This could be done by simply adding a question to the respective applications for building permits and new business licenses to determine if the new facility will handle or store hazardous wastes.

Types of facilities that typically handle or store hazardous wastes include:

- Building Cleaning and Maintenance Companies
- Chemical Manufacturing
- Cleaning Agent and Cosmetics Manufacturing
- Construction Companies
- Equipment Repair Shops
- Freight Terminals/Railroads
- Funeral Service Companies
- Furniture Manufacturing
- Laboratories
- Laundries and Dry Cleaners
- Metal Manufacturing
- Printing Industries
- Pesticide Application Companies
- Plastics Manufacturing
- Textiles and Leather Manufacturing
- Vehicle Maintenance Facilities
- Vocational School Shops
- Wood Preserving and Refinishing

- 2) The City could then refer all prospective hazardous waste handlers to Georgia EPD for permitting.
- 3) The issuance of City building permits or new business licenses for prospective hazardous waste storage and handling facilities could be withheld until either evidence of having obtained required EPD permits is provided, or a determination is made by the City that the proposed facility will not handle

or store hazardous wastes necessitating an EPD permit.

In addition to the process for the control of hazardous materials described above, the City of Decatur needs to also develop a program for requiring secondary containment for above ground chemical and petroleum storage tanks that have a capacity of at least 660 gallons. To satisfy State requirements, Decatur, as part of its development regulations, must require that all such new tanks have secondary containment for 110 percent of tank volume, or 110 percent of the volume of the largest tank in a cluster of tanks.

Finally, the City of Decatur must regulate the size of new single-family lots where septic tanks are utilized. Because sewer service is available throughout the City, it is a rare occurrence for a septic tank disposal system to be utilized for a new residence. However, when the use of a septic system is proposed, the City of Decatur can meet DNR's regulatory criteria by requiring the minimum lot size to be 49,500 square feet, which is 110 percent of the single-family minimum lot size for septic tank use contained in the DNR Manual for On-Site Sewerage Management Systems. The DeKalb County Health Department is presently responsible for permitting the use of septic tanks in the City of Decatur.

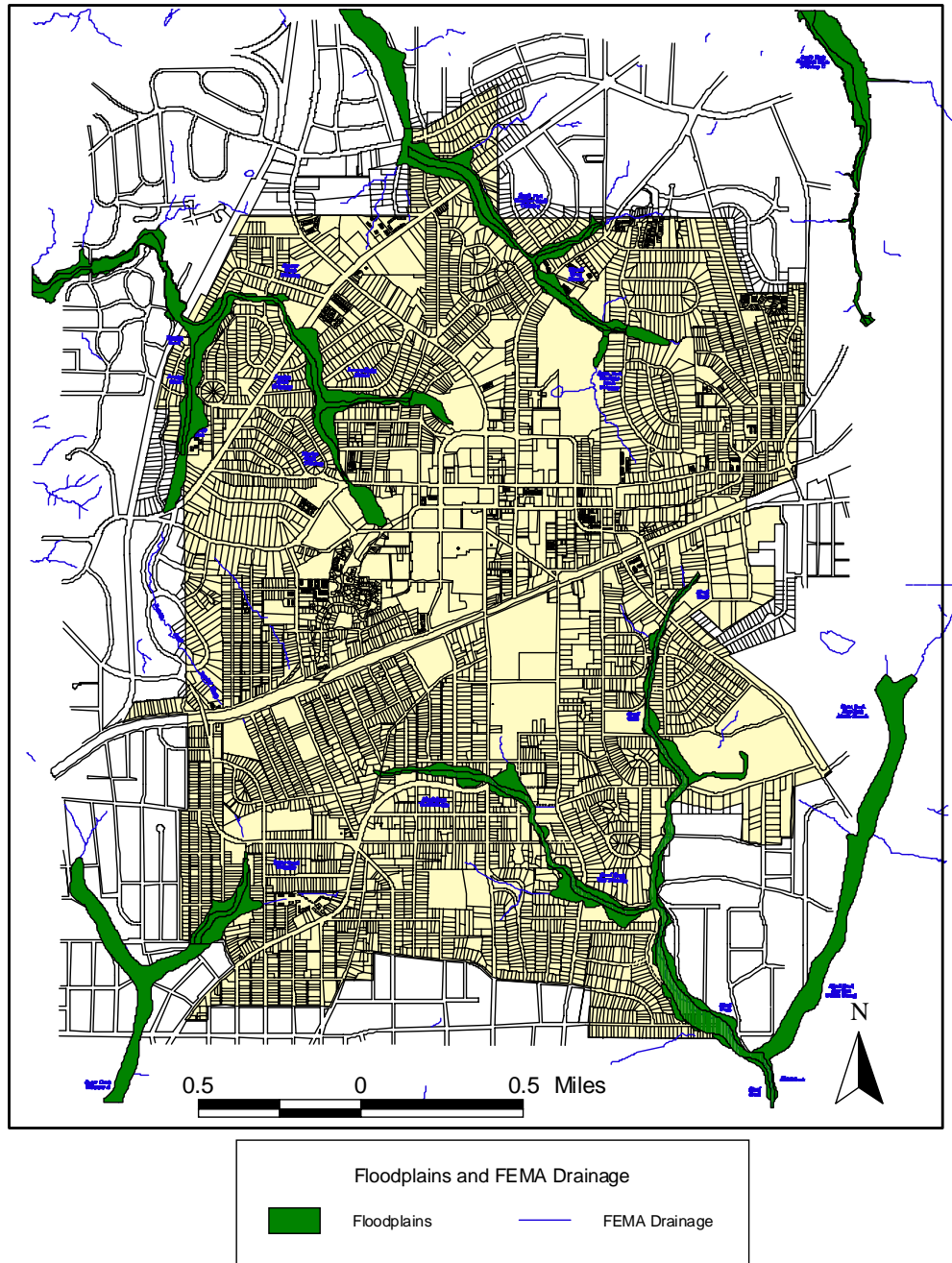
#### *Floodplains*

Flooding is the temporary covering of soil with water from overflowing streams and by runoff from adjacent slopes. Water standing for short periods after rainfalls is not considered flooding, nor is water in swamps.

Floodplains in their natural or relatively undisturbed state are important water resource areas. They serve three major purposes: natural water storage and conveyance, water quality maintenance, and groundwater recharge. Unsuitable development can destroy their value. For example, any fill material placed in the floodplain eliminates essential water storage capacity causing water elevation to rise and resulting in the flooding of previously dry land.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has identified and mapped areas in the City of Decatur which are prone to flooding in a Flood Insurance Rates Map (FIRM) dated May 7, 2001. This map identifies rather narrow floodplain areas located along Peavine Creek, the South Fork of Peachtree Creek, Shoal Creek, and Sugar Creek. Development in areas identified as being flood prone is already regulated by the City of Decatur by its Floodplain Management/Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. Additionally, the City is an active participant in FEMA's Community Rating system which has resulted in lower flood insurance rates for property owners whose houses are located in flood hazard areas. No additional regulatory measures are recommended at this time.

**Map 5.1 – Decatur Floodplains and FEMA Drainage Map**



## **Assessment of Current and Future Needs**

Information on natural features, such as topography and soils, is typically utilized in urban planning to guide development to areas where it is most suitable. In the case of the City of Decatur, which is already fully urbanized, there are no large undeveloped tracts in their natural state. Consequently, the emphasis in Decatur's planning program will be on protecting the natural environment through:

- 1) Continuing regulation of development in flood prone areas.
- 2) New regulatory controls of hazardous wastes and above ground petroleum and chemical storage tanks in order to protect seepage into possible groundwater recharge areas.

## Historic Resources

### Overview

As the first city in DeKalb County and one of the earliest in metro Atlanta, Decatur is home to some of the oldest buildings in the region with many of local or national significance. The old DeKalb County Courthouse serves as the focal point of the downtown with the adjoining square and bandstand used extensively for community festivals and special events. In the neighborhoods that surround the downtown, examples of notable architectural styles can be found with many homes dating from the early 1900s.

### Historic Preservation Commission

Decatur recognizes its historical, cultural, and aesthetic heritage and the need to preserve its neighborhoods and commercial areas. In May of 1989 the Decatur City Commission created the Decatur Historic Preservation Task Force. Simultaneously, the City conducted a comprehensive historical and architectural survey to identify residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and rural resources, archaeological and cultural sites, as well as unique landscape features. The following section “Decatur’s Landmark Properties” details those resources currently eligible for national or local protection.

To effectively manage and protect the City’s resources, the Task Force recommended that a local program be implemented that would include enforceable regulations and a strong, on-going education program. The Decatur City Commission responded by adopting the ordinance creating the Decatur Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in May 1990. The responsibilities of the Commission include:

- **Inventory** – The HPC maintains an extensive inventory of the City's historical and architectural resources and completes updates on a regular basis.
- **Community Awareness** – The HPC provides educational programs, publications, information and assistance about the City’s resources and how to preserve them. It also sponsors the annual Decatur Design Awards, which recognizes developments in the city that contribute to good design.
- **Local Historic Designation** – The HPC oversees the process of local designation. Local designation may be proposed by the City Commission, HPC, historical societies, neighborhood associations or property owners. The HPC is responsible for holding a public hearing. Any recommendations made by the HPC are considered by the City Commission, which enacts an ordinance designating the approved properties.

- **Project Review** – After the designation by the City Commission of an historic district or property, no material change in the exterior appearance of that property may be made unless the owner obtains a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HPC.

### **Decatur's Landmark Properties**

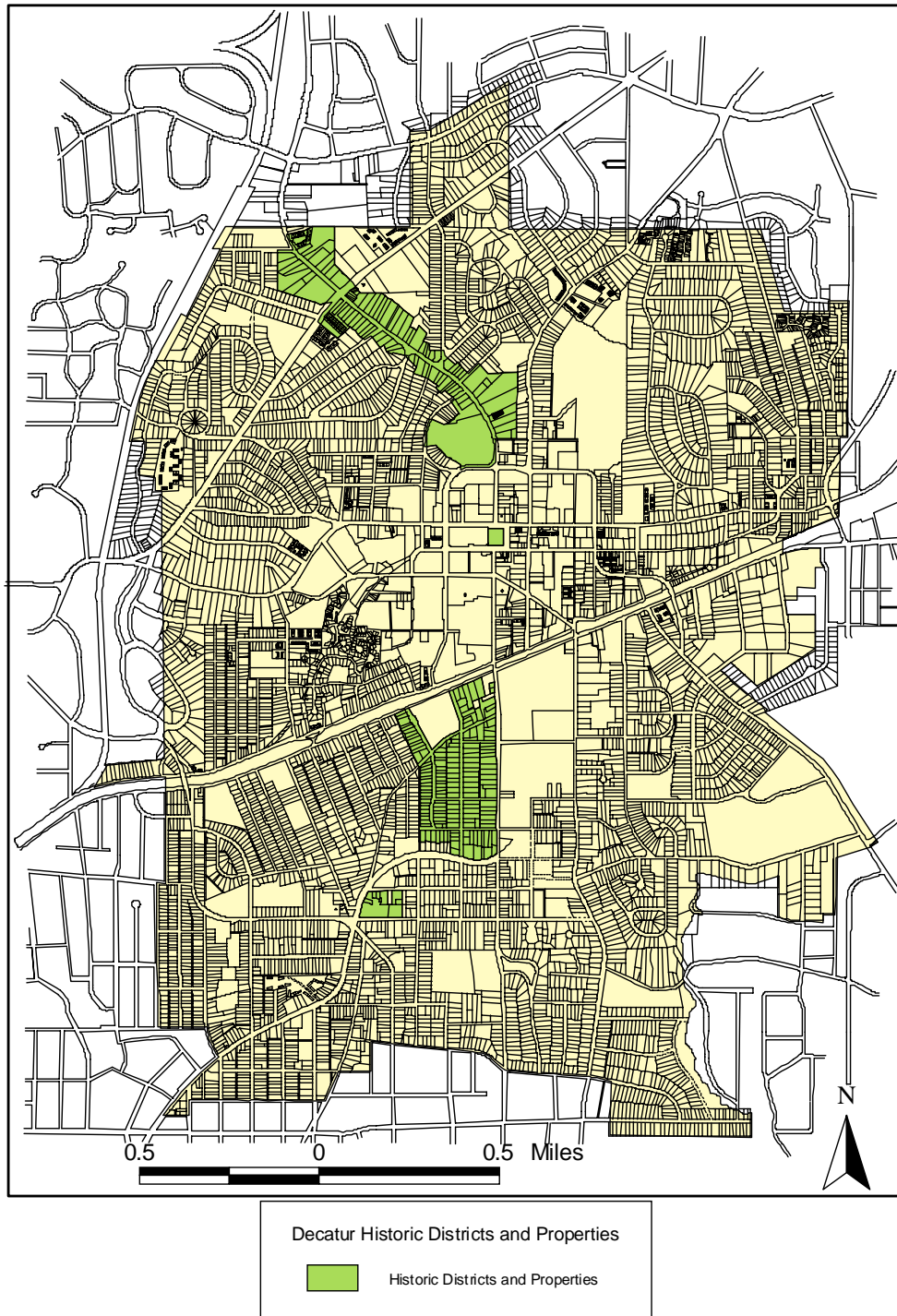
The National Register of Historic Places is the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Properties listed in the National Register can include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects. In evaluating properties for inclusion, such factors as age, historical, architectural, and cultural significance, and integrity of location, design and workmanship are considered. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior. City of Decatur properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places include:

- Old DeKalb County Courthouse  
101 E. Court Square
- Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children  
321 W. Hill Street
- Pythagoras Masonic Temple  
108 E. Ponce de Leon Avenue
- Swanton House  
720 Swanton Way
- Mary Gay House  
716 W. Trinity Place
- High House  
Corner of N. Candler Street and Sycamore Street
- Decatur Cemetery  
229 Bell Street
- South Candler Street/Agnes Scott College Historic District  
Roughly bounded by E. College, S. McDonough, S. Candler, E. Hill and E. Davis Streets
- Agnes Lee Chapter House United Daughters of the Confederacy  
120 Avery Street
- Blair-Rutland Building  
215 Church Street
- Winnona Park Neighborhood  
Roughly bounded by E. College Avenue, Avery Street, S. Columbia Drive, and Mimosa Drive
- Cora Beck Hampton Schoolhouse and Home  
213 Hillyer Place
- United States Post Office  
141 East Trinity Place
- A Lustron House  
513 Drexel Avenue

A local historic district is a geographically designated area that contains buildings, structures, sites, objects, landscape features and works of art that have 1) special character, historic and/or aesthetic value or interest; 2) represent periods, styles or types of architecture typical of the history of the municipality, county, state or region; and 3) constitute a visibly perceptible section of the municipality or county. Properties in the districts must adhere to design guidelines and a design review process for changes to exterior features. Decatur has two such locally designated historic districts and two local landmarks:

- The M.A.K. Local Historic District  
Named for the three main streets it encompasses (McDonough, Adams and Kings Highway), the MAK Local Historic District includes ten city blocks of varying sizes and is Decatur's first locally designated historic district.
- Clairemont Historic District  
This district runs the length of Clairemont Avenue from Commerce Drive and Hunter Street in the south to Maediris Drive in the north.
- Old DeKalb County Courthouse  
101 E. Court Square
- Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children  
321 W. Hill Street

**Map 5.2 – Decatur Historic Districts and Properties Map**





The following properties are currently not included on either the National Register or in locally designated districts but are still considered significant for their historic and cultural relevance to the City:

- Decatur City Hall  
509 N. McDonough Street
- Columbia Theological Seminary  
701 Columbia Drive
- Fraser House  
Corner of Church Street and Bell Street
- The Chapel at Decatur First United Methodist Church  
Corner of Sycamore Street. and Commerce Drive
- Sharian, Inc.  
368 W. Ponce de Leon Avenue
- Decatur Railroad Depot  
301 E. Howard Street
- Avary-Fulton House  
205 South Columbia Drive

### **Decatur Preservation Alliance**

The Decatur Preservation Alliance is a nonprofit charitable organization that focuses on preserving Decatur's historic structures and green spaces. Incorporated in 2000, the DPA has over 200 members and has worked closely with the City on several projects such as the relocation and stabilization of the Decatur Depot and Fraser House, the establishment of a Preservation Corridor Committee and 2004 Preservation Corridor Master Plan (discussed under the Community Facilities Element), and the Decatur Cemetery tree-planting program.

### **Assessment of Current and Future Needs**

The City of Decatur is considered to have a model historic preservation program. Throughout the twenty-year planning period, of this document, the City is committed to its dedication of the protection and preservation of its rich heritage.

### **Natural and Cultural Resources Vision and Goals**

The Natural and Cultural Resources community vision is for the City of Decatur to conserve and protect the natural and historical environment that contributes to the City's unique character.

- Preserve and protect Decatur historic resources for the education and enjoyment of current and future City residents and visitors.
- Protect natural resources from development which would create significant negative environmental or economic impacts.
- Continue to plant 50 trees each year in the City.

- Preserve stream buffers and floodplains as permanent open space whenever feasible.
- Protect and improve air quality in the City of Decatur.
- Continue to promote compact land development that allows for walking and other non-vehicular transportation.
- Begin implementation of the Preservation Corridor Master Plan

# **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

## **Public Safety Inventory & Assessment**

### **Police**

The Police Division currently employs 44 police officers, 8 dispatchers, 15 crossing guards, 10 communication personnel and 1 support technician providing 24 hours of complete coverage. The Department maintains a total of 22 patrol cars. The Department's headquarters is located at 420 West Trinity Place. The facility contains the Municipal Courtroom and two holding cells, but no permanent detention facilities. Suspects and prisoners are housed at the DeKalb County Jail. The Community Relations office, with one full-time specialist, is located in Oakhurst Village at 707-C East Lake Dr.

Police services in the City of Decatur are considered excellent and adequately staffed at this time. Immediate additions to the staff are not anticipated. In the future when potential additions are considered, increases will be proportional to population increases. Factors also considered when making staff changes are the number of calls for service, the type of crimes being perpetrated, and times of day service calls are received.

### **Fire Protection**

The Decatur Fire Department has a staff of 40 and operates out of two fire stations. Station No. 1 is located at 230 East Trinity Place in downtown Decatur and Station No. 2 is located on West Hill Street in Oakhurst Village. The Department maintains four fire engines and a service truck unit.

Recently, the Fire Department received Georgia Emergency Management (GEMA) Homeland Security and Domestic Preparedness grants to fund the purchase of an Air and Light truck, a hazardous material trailer, decontamination and logistical support equipment for the trailer and a new vehicle to pull the trailer. The grant provides the city with a wealth of disaster response gear, including decontamination facilities, level B hazardous material suits, heaters, breathing apparatus, contamination monitors, stretchers, emergency lighting and more.

The Department places a strong emphasis on fire prevention and education and conducts classes for schools, high-rise residential homes, business groups, civic groups and child care providers.

The City of Decatur provides excellent fire protection service. The two stations provide excellent geographical coverage for the entire City.

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) has established a system of fire protection ratings based upon a community's available fire suppression facilities. These ratings, ranging from 1 to 10, are used by insurance companies in calculating

homeowner insurance rates. The lower the ISO rating, the lower insurance rates are for homeowners. The City of Decatur has an excellent ISO rating of 2, one of the best in the State.

### **Emergency Medical Service**

The City of Decatur does not provide emergency medical service other than emergency response, if needed, when City fire and police personnel are first on the scene of an accident. Rather, emergency medical service is provided within the City of Decatur by DeKalb County's Emergency Medical Service Division. Currently, DeKalb County EMS stations an EMS unit at Decatur Fire Station No. 1 on East Trinity Place.

Emergency medical service within the City of Decatur is considered to be excellent. The City intends to maintain its service delivery agreement with DeKalb County to provide EMS throughout the planning period.

## **Library Facilities Inventory and Assessment**

The Decatur Library, which is located at 215 Sycamore Street in downtown Decatur, is the main branch of the DeKalb County Public Library System. The Decatur Library has approximately 53,000 square feet of usable floor area and is the largest library in the DeKalb County System. The library collection exceeds 100,000 volumes. The Decatur Library also serves as the DeKalb County Public Library's administrative headquarters and as the County's main reference library.

A major renovation of the Decatur Library was completed in 1992. Library facilities and services are considered to be excellent and far exceed minimum standards established by the American Library Association (ALA).

## **Educational Facilities Inventory & Assessment**

### **Inventory**

City Schools of Decatur (CSD) is the City's independent school system with a total system enrollment of about 2,400 students. The schools are staffed by more than 200 teachers, over 70% of whom have advanced degrees.

The City Schools of Decatur consists of three neighborhood elementary schools, a citywide academy for fourth and fifth graders, a middle school, and a high school. Profiles of each are listed below.

The Early Childhood Learning Center has been located on Scott Boulevard in the Westchester School building. It was completed in 1955 and newly renovated in 1999. The ECLC serves as the home of the City Schools of Decatur Pre-k and Even Start programs. Enrollment: 120

College Heights School is currently under extensive renovation. It is anticipated to open in 2006 as the new home of the citywide Pre-k and Even Start Programs. Through a partnership with the YMCA, a program for children ages 0-3 will also be available. (As of the date of this plan, the future use of the Westchester Elementary building is undetermined. However it is anticipated the facility will remain under the management of CSD.)

Clairemont Elementary School (K-3), built in 1936, is located within the Great Lakes neighborhood. The building was renovated in 2000 with classroom additions, a new media center, a technology lab and a completely refurbished 360-seat auditorium. Additional renovations are presently underway. Enrollment: 240

Oakhurst Elementary School (K-3) was built in 1915. It was renovated in 2002 with the addition of new classrooms, a new media center, and air conditioning. Enrollment: 226

Winnona Park Elementary School (K-3) is located in the Winnona Park neighborhood. The building was erected in 1923 and a renovation, completed in the fall of 2001, added new classrooms and air conditioning. Additional renovations are presently underway. Enrollment: 280

Glennwood 4/5 Academy (4-5) is the oldest school in the City of Decatur and one of the four oldest schools in DeKalb County still in operation today. It was recently renovated and opened for occupancy in August of 2003. Special care was given to preserve the historical integrity of the building while adding new classrooms, a new media center, air conditioning, and outfitting the entire building for use of technology. Enrollment: 300

Carl G. Renfroe Middle School (6-8) is the newest school building in the school district. It was built in 1972 to service students in grades 6-8. Enrollment: 589

Decatur High School (9-12) was established in 1912, but the current building was erected in 1965 and is located in the heart of the City of Decatur, walking distance from the Courthouse Square and MARTA. Enrollment: 712

No students are currently enrolled at Fifth Avenue Elementary School. As of the date of this plan, a future use for the building has not been determined. However it is anticipated the facility will remain under the management of CSD.

Decatur City Schools are well staffed. For the 2003-2004 school year, 225 teachers were employed. Of that number 76% held a Master's or higher graduate degree. The average student to teacher ratio was 10:1.

CSD recently completed its 2004 Strategic Plan. The planning process utilized an extensive stakeholder involvement effort resulting in five main goals:

- 1) Improve academic achievement by providing the highest quality instruction and ensuring consistently challenging "knowledge work" for every student in the system.
- 2) Close the achievement gap between black and white students according to state and national test criteria.
- 3) Develop a systemic approach to providing a challenging and quality educational experience for all students.
- 4) Improve fiscal responsibility while maintaining educational quality.
- 5) Strengthen the relationship with the community.

The 2004 Strategic Plan projects no significant near-term changes in school enrollment. Since 2000, enrollment has been in the 2,300-2,400 range and is predicted to remain stable for the next five years. This is consistent with population forecasts for the City discussed in the population element of this plan. Over the next 20 years forecasts for the City actually show a slight decrease in the 0-24 population by 15%.

In addition to the public school system, there are several private schools located within the City limits. The Lullwater School, St. Thomas More Parochial School, and Waldorf School, offer instruction for grades K – 8. The Friends School offers pre-K as well as K – 8. Academe of the Oaks is a private high school for 9 – 12 grades. Decatur Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church of Decatur, First Methodist Church of Decatur and the Phoenix School offer private pre-K instruction.

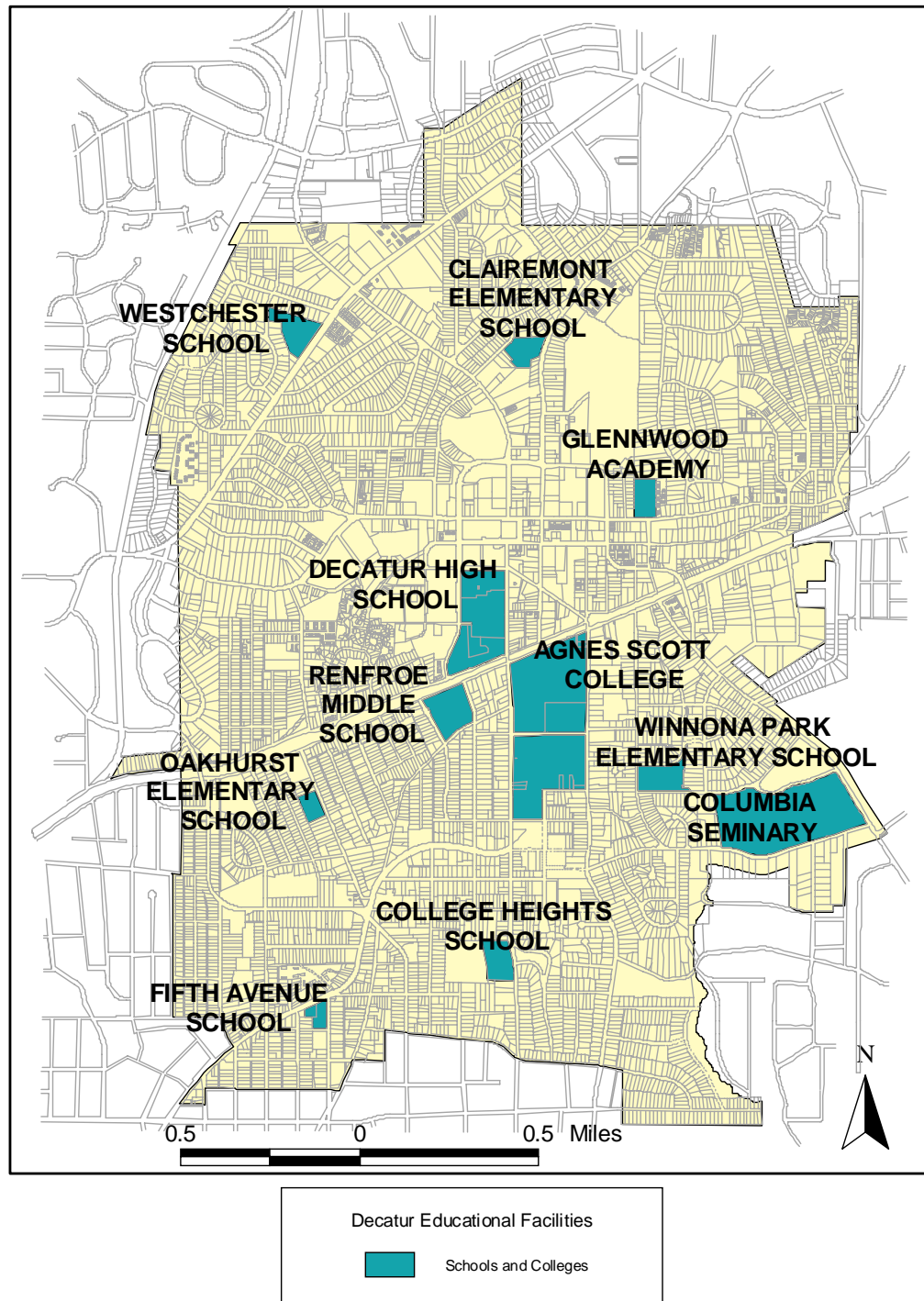
#### Higher Education

Decatur is home to Agnes Scott College, a private, nationally recognized liberal arts college for women. *U.S. News & World Report's* 2005 rankings place Agnes Scott among the Top 10 liberal arts colleges in the South (ranking No. 7) and 53rd overall among national liberal arts colleges. Founded in 1889, the college enrolls just over 1,000 students and employs 87 faculty members. The 100-acre campus is located along E. College Avenue and makes up portion of the South Candler/Agnes Scott College Historic District.

Columbia Theological Seminary is an educational institution of the Presbyterian Church. It was established in 1828 and offers five graduate degree programs. The seminary has an enrollment of 500 students and employs 36 faculty members. The 52-acre campus along Columbia Drive anchors the southeastern quadrant of the City.

Emory University is located a few miles west of the City, and DeVry University and Georgia Perimeter College are located to the east.

**Map 6.1 – Decatur Educational Facilities Map**



## **Assessment**

Given the population projections for the City, Decatur City School system facilities are adequate for meeting local needs through the twenty year planning period. Potential issues that could arise stem from the relationship between the City and the School System over facility management.

The City of Decatur owns the facilities. CSD handles the management of the resources, including maintenance and needed improvements, hiring of teachers, etc. as long as the use of the facility remains educational. If the educational use lapses, the management of the facility reverts back to the City, which has the authority to sell the facility as surplus.

It was identified through the joint Commission planning session and public meetings that the quality of the school system is very important to the leadership and citizenry of Decatur. It was cited as one of the major reasons people choose to live in Decatur. The City is committed to working collaboratively with the CSD in maintaining a high level of quality education throughout the planning period.

## **Recreation Facilities Inventory & Assessment**

### **Inventory**

Within the City of Decatur, there are 14 city-owned parks equaling 56.5 acres. The parks range in size from less than half an acre up to 17 acres and offer such amenities as tennis and basketball courts, swimming pools, picnic pavilions, playgrounds, skateboard facilities, softball and soccer fields, and nature/walking trails. Table 6.1 provides a summary of these facilities.

In terms of passive open space, the City of Decatur operates the Historic Decatur Cemetery, which provides 43 acres in the heart of the City and shares the 8.5 acre Dearborn Park with DeKalb County. Also within the City limits is The Woodlands, a 7-acre nature preserve donated to the non-profit group, Decatur Preservation Alliance (DPA). In FY 2004, the City began providing a \$50,000 year/5 year grant to the DPA for master planning activities for the parcel. The City also owns a small lot adjacent to the Oakhurst Community Garden. For a nominal fee, the parcel is leased to the nonprofit group for environmental educational purposes.

The City Schools of Decatur's elementary, middle and high schools offer additional, but limited, recreational opportunities as well. The elementary schools provide playground and open space for the neighborhoods they are located in or adjacent to. The middle school and the high school are ideally situated in the City's downtown. The middle school offers open space and the high school has a football field.

Decatur's recreational programs are offered through the City's Recreation and Community Services Department. In addition to the 14 City-owned parks, the



Recreation Department operates two recreational centers located at W. Trinity Place and Sycamore Street. The Recreation Department offers year-round programs of team sports, athletics, classes and workshops for residents of all ages. The Recreation Department also works cooperatively with City Schools of Decatur in offering affordable after-school programs.

In addition to recreational facilities operated by either the City of Decatur Recreational Department or the City Schools of Decatur, there are several of privately owned and operated recreational facilities located within the City. These include facilities operated by the following entities:

- Samuel L. Jones Boys and Girls Club
- St. Thomas More School
- Decatur-DeKalb Y.M.C.A.
- Venetian Community Pool
- Agnes Scott College
- Columbia Theological Seminary
- Decatur First Baptist Church
- First Christian Church
- First Decatur United Methodist Church

Table 6.1– City of Decatur Park Amenities

Facility	Size (Acres)	Soccer Fields	Baseball/Softball Fields	Basketball Courts	Tennis Courts	Swimming Pool	Playground	Walking Trails	Picnic Pavilions	Special Amenity
Adair Park	4	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	
Ebster Park	5	1	-	2	-	1	1	-	1	Community Center
Glenlake Park	17	1	1	1	5	1	1	-	1	
Hidden Cove Park	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	Passive
McKoy Park	9	-	1	1	2	-	1	1	1	Concessions Amphitheater Skate Park
Mead Road Park	0.75	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	2	
Oakhurst Park	8	-	2	2	2	-	1		2	Concessions
Oakview Road Park	0.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Passive
Parkside Circle	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Passive
Roy Moss Garden	2	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	Passive
Sycamore Park	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Passive
Scott Park	4	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	Recreation Center Community Garden
Waddell Park	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	Passive
<b>Totals</b>	<b>56.5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	

Source: City of Decatur

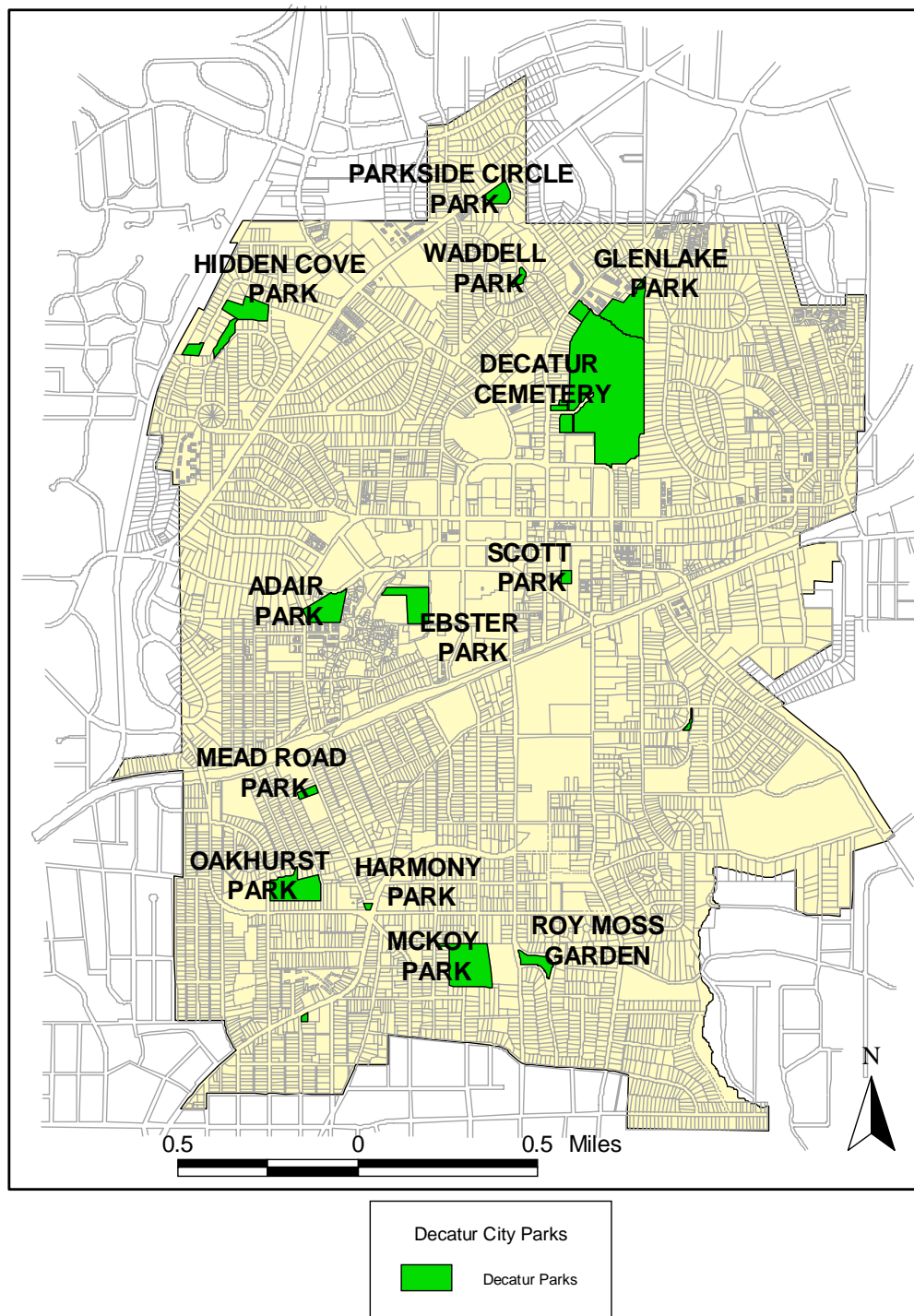
Programs, Commissions and Initiatives

From 2001-2004, the City purchased three undeveloped lots with funds from the Georgia Greenspace Program. The properties are located on Oakview Road, Glenn Circle and East Hill Street. All the lots will be used as passive open space. The Adams Street lot is currently being leased to the Oakhurst Community Garden. The lot at Glenn Circle is planned as a nature preserve.

The Decatur Greenspace Commission was established by City Ordinance in 2002. The Commission grew out of a recommendation from the Greenspace Task Force that met from 2001-2002. The Greenspace Commission is an advisory and advocacy group for greenspace protection and enhancement in the City. It is responsible for developing and implementing a greenspace preservation strategy and advising the City Commission on greenspace-related issues.

The Greenspace Task Force and Greenspace Commission were instrumental in the formation of a preservation corridor concept. This concept sought to establish a physical connection between north and south sections of the City and link the City's historical elements with areas of greenspace. In December 2004, the Decatur Preservation Corridor Master Plan was completed. The master plan process began with the original goal of the north-south corridor concept linking four major environmental resources – The Woodlands, Decatur Cemetery, Oakhurst Community Garden, and Dearborn Park. Through public input, the scope was expanded to include two more sites, Decatur Square and Oakhurst Business District, and opportunities for overall city-wide connectivity. The result is a plan that recommends a network of connectivity improvements such as neighborhood gateways, pedestrian and bicycle streetscapes, links to most major civic and park spaces and historic landmarks, and identification of potential preservation sites.

Map 6.2 – Decatur City Parks



## **Assessment**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has been involved in developing standards for recreation, parks and open space for over 40 years. NRPA standards are the most widely used and accepted standards of their type. The standards help guide local governments design their own specific set of criteria.

The NRPA standards recommend a core system of parks with a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population. Based on the Census 2000 population of 18,147, the City should have a dedicated park acreage ranging from 114 to 191 acres. The existing park acreage for Decatur is 56.5 acres, a deficiency of 58 to 134 acres. The City of Decatur 2000 Strategic Master Plan identified an additional 128 acres of non-park related open space. This open space consists of land around public schools and other private recreational areas. Decatur Cemetery adds another 43 acres of passive open space.

Given the City is almost entirely built out, and considering the high cost of available land, it is highly unlikely that large tracts of land will be purchased by the City for additional dedicated park space. While communities ideally strive to meet acreage standards within public parks, the City is fortunate to have close working relationships with other public and private organizations in the community to provide additional recreational opportunities for residents.

To comprehensively address Decatur's recreational issues, the Citywide Comprehensive Athletic Facility Master Plan was completed in 2002. The master plan was initiated by an organization of seven community partners to identify critical needs of the community, opportunities for collaboration and necessary facility improvements to better meet the needs of Decatur citizens. The partners included City of Decatur, City Schools of Decatur, Decatur-DeKalb YMCA, Samuel Jones Boys and Girls Club, Columbia Theological Seminary, United Methodist Children's Home and Agnes Scott College.

Through extensive public involvement, research and assessment, the master plan resulted in a series of recommended improvements totaling \$17.7 million, to be implemented over a ten-year timeframe. The recommendations include the upgrade of park amenities, optimization of existing facilities and construction of new facilities. The plan also identifies opportunities for shared use agreements between the partners. Since the plan's completion, several projects have been initiated including the McCoy Park Skate-Park, citywide playground equipment replacement, utilization of the Boys and Girls Club pool by the YMCA and Decatur High School, and award of Community Development Block Grant for the development of a multi-purpose/soccer field at the Boys and Girls Club.

Throughout the twenty-year horizon of this plan, it will remain a challenge to significantly increase the City's dedicated park acreage through land acquisition.

However, the City remains committed to providing its residents with a variety of modern and safe recreational amenities through relationships with private and non-profit recreation sources. The City will continue to participate in the Georgia Greenspace Program and purchase appropriate properties as they and adequate funding become available. The City has also been active in pursuing funds from non-profit initiatives such as the Arthur Blank Family Foundation. The City is currently pursuing land acquisition opportunities adjacent to its portion of Dearborn Park with assistance from the Georgia State Department of Natural Resources Land and Water Conservation grant.

## **Public Water and Sanitary Sewer Inventory & Assessment**

### **Inventory**

The entire City of Decatur is provided public water and sanitary sewer service by DeKalb County. The City of Decatur has no role in providing these services. All customer accounts are handled directly by the County.

The City of Decatur operates and maintains a citywide public storm drainage system comprised of over 2500 storm water sewer junction structures, 32 miles of connecting storm drain pipes, 12.6 miles of natural stream channels and approximately 4,000 linear feet of man-made open storm water channels. The City is a co-permittee with DeKalb County for a municipal storm water discharge permit under the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System.

### **Assessment**

The following assessments regarding public water and sanitary sewer have been taken from the 2005 DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan (DRAFT).

#### *Water Treatment and Distribution*

DeKalb County draws its water supply from the Chattahoochee River along with Gwinnett County, North Fulton County, and the Gainesville area. Currently DeKalb County is permitted to withdraw 140 million gallons per day (MGD) from the river at the intake point on Holcomb Bridge Road in Fulton County. There are six 35 MGD capacity pumps which remove water from the Chattahoochee River providing a maximum of 210 MGD to three raw water storage reservoirs. The newly constructed 43-acre reservoir No. 3 has a capacity of 324 MG and together with the 37.7-acre No.1 reservoir and the 28.8-acre No.2 reservoir, both under renovation, provide the County with a total capacity of one billion gallons which feed into the County's water treatment plant, the Scott Candler Filter Plant. This facility also includes 16 settling basins, 32 high rate storage filters, and a total capacity of 66.5 millions of gallons of treated water storage capacity. Approximately, 255 MGD can be delivered to the distribution system through service pumps. The County is currently in the process of constructing a new water production facility, which, when completed in 2005, will be able to process 150 MGD and has the capability of expanding to 200 MGD.

Plans are also underway to design a new raw water pump station for DeKalb County as well. In conjunction with the station improvements, the Water and Sewer Division will also install a new 96-inch pipeline from the river to the reservoirs on Peeler Road. This pipeline will parallel the other three existing water supply lines that are now in use. Within our planning window, this intake will provide water to a million customers in the metropolitan area. Anticipated cost for this project is \$45,000,000. These expansion projects should assist in providing ample water capacity for the next twenty years.

#### *Sanitary Sewer and Wastewater Facilities*

In total, there are approximately 254,000 sewer customers in DeKalb County. These customers are served by 2,000 miles of sewer pipeline. Because the county's drainage patterns rarely conform to political boundaries, the county has established a number of shared facilities and joint use agreements with adjacent municipalities and counties. There are two primary drainage basins in the County which are delineated to the north and south by the CSX Railroad.

Currently DeKalb County works in conjunction with the City of Atlanta and Fulton and Gwinnett Counties to provide wastewater treatment services to the portion of the county located north of the CSX Railroad east-west line. Sewage is sent to the R. M. Clayton Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) under a formal agreement with the City of Atlanta which has been in place since 1954. In accordance with this agreement, the County shares the cost of operation and maintenance of three Atlanta plants. The City of Atlanta's R.M. Clayton WWTP serves the areas of the Peachtree and Nancy Creek basins with a capacity of 122 MGD. Fulton County's Johns Creek Plant and Big Creek Plant serve the small portions of DeKalb County north of Mount Vernon, Tilly Mill and Peeler Roads. Gwinnett County's Jackson Creek Plants serve two small basins in the northeastern portion of DeKalb.

To the south of the railroad, sewage flows to Atlanta's Entrenchment Creek Plant and to DeKalb's Snapfinger and Pole Bridge Wastewater Treatment Plants. A small portion of southeast DeKalb is served by Atlanta's South River Treatment Plant. All of these plants including DeKalb's Pole Bridge and Snapfinger plants are Advanced Secondary Waste Treatment (ASWT) plants. In 2003, the Snapfinger plant operated at 71.72% capacity and the Pole Bridge plant operated at 36.19% capacity. Between these two plants, there is a total design capacity of 56 MGD.

#### *Future Water and Sewage Capacity*

A flow study completed in the 1980's showed that the biggest problem in DeKalb County's sewer and water system is deteriorating water lines and the need to replace old pipes which are substandard or made out of high maintenance materials. As a result, ongoing projects include surveying, inventorying, identifying and replacing old and undersized pipes. Other projects include maintaining and repainting interiors and exteriors of water tanks, further

automating sewage treatment plants, and replacing existing water meters with more efficient electronic meters. Projects planned in the immediate future include the pipe maintenance, replacement and rehabilitation projects, installation of relief lines along the upper half of Nancy Creek and in other areas of the County, removal of pump stations where possible, surveying North Fork and South Fork of Peachtree Creek to reduce infiltration and expansion of sewer service to Stone Mountain Park and the remaining areas of the county.

Long term capital improvement issues include continual replacement of older water and sewer lines, the construction of an additional water storage tank and pumping station near the Mall at Stonecrest (Turner Hill), and construction of DeKalb County's portion of the wastewater tunnel from the R.M. Clayton Treatment Plant to the Utoy River as part of the City of Atlanta's Phosphorus Reduction Program. Overall, DeKalb County's sewage treatment facilities will be adequate to serve the county until 2015, with the exception of the Pole Bridge Plant which may need to be expanded towards the latter part of this twenty-year time period. By 2015, it is expected that the Pole Bridge Plant will be operating closer to capacity and consideration should be made at that time for a new facility.

## **Storm Water Management Inventory and Assessment**

Decatur is located on the Atlanta Plateau in the north central part of the Georgia Piedmont. Topography is rolling, with elevations ranging between 900 and 1,070 feet above sea level. Decatur has four primary watersheds--Peavine Creek Tributary, South Fork Peachtree Creek Tributary, Shoal Creek and Sugar Creek Tributary--and is bisected by the sub-continental drainage divide, with water on the north side of the City draining to the Gulf of Mexico and water on the south draining into the Atlantic Ocean.

Decatur's location along the drainage divide limits the potential for flooding. Issues generally concern flooding in floodplains and other areas close to streams during heavy rains. In terms of water quality, a large part of the City is residential which limits the negative effects it has on receiving streams. Impacts to the four major watersheds intersected by the City are limited as well since Decatur occupies a very small percentage of the overall contributing area.

The City adopted its first storm drainage ordinance in 1972, with comprehensive revisions in 1977, 1990, 1997, 2001, and 2004. The City presently requires on-site storm detention systems for all new developments with its Post-development Stormwater Management for New Development and Redevelopment ordinance. Ordinances related to storm water volumes and water quality include ordinances regulating Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control, Illicit Discharge and Illegal Connection, Floodplain Management/Floodplain Damage Prevention, and Stream Buffer Protection, Litter Control, and Conservation Subdivision/Open Space Development.



In 1999, the City implemented a Storm Water Utility under the City Engineering Department to provide a means of funding its storm water management plan. The Utility is responsible for the maintenance and upgrades to the storm water system including pipes, culverts, inlets, manholes, headwalls, flumes, concrete channels and related appurtenances. It is also responsible for the enforcement of environmental regulations, and for the City's compliance with Clean Water Act requirements and other environmental regulations related to storm water. It is estimated that the City's Storm Water Utility will generate approximately \$750,000 per year to fund the storm water improvements and management plan based on its current (existing) fee schedule.

To address the City's storm water needs on a long-term basis, a Storm Water Master Plan was completed in 2004 and adopted in 2005. The report included an inventory and assessment of the City's existing storm drainage system, an evaluation of system performance during storms, and recommendations for improvement. The report found that parts of the City storm drain system function adequately during moderately intense storms while other parts showed overflows during low intensity storms. Most of the significant overflow problems were associated with the densely developed core downtown area. To remedy these issues, the report recommends \$6.4 million in critical improvements and the installation of Best Management Practices during the development or redevelopment of properties within the City. The City plans to undertake the improvements over the next twenty years.

## **Solid Waste Collection and Disposal Inventory and Assessment**

### **Inventory**

Backyard and curbside collection of household garbage is carried out on a weekly basis by the City of Decatur Sanitation Department. Commercial, business, and apartment garbage collection is also offered by the City, and provided by private companies such as BFI as well.

The City of Decatur instituted a "Pay-as-You-Throw" refuse collection system in July 1998 in an effort to meet state requirements to reduce landfill deposits. Under the program, residents pay an annual fee for collection of garbage and trash and collection and disposal of yard trimmings, furniture, most appliances and recyclables, and for street sweeping. Residents purchase special plastic bags from local supermarkets, hardware stores and other local suppliers to use for disposing of garbage. The cost of disposal is included in the cost of the bag. Business operators pay fees based on the size of their commercial container and the number of service visits each week.

Once collected, solid waste is transported by the City to DeKalb County's transfer station on Memorial Drive and ultimately disposed of at the County's Seminole Road landfill. Yard trimmings are collected separately and delivered to the compost facility at the landfill.

The City also conducts a voluntary residential curbside recycling program. Recyclables include newspapers, cans, magazines, catalogs, glass bottles, telephone books, plastic, junk mail, mixed office paper, corrugated cardboard and pasteboard. Recycling services are contracted out to a private recycling contractor.

### **Assessment**

Because of its size and the absence of landfill opportunities within the City, the City of Decatur will likely rely on DeKalb County to meet its solid waste disposal needs. The City is participating with DeKalb County in the preparation of its Solid Waste Management Plan, as required by the State Solid Waste Management Law.

The City's "Pay-as-You-Throw" and recycling programs have been successful at helping to achieve the State's required 25% per capita waste reduction goal mandated by the Solid Waste Management Act. From FY 1997-1998 to FY 2002-2003 landfill deposits have decreased by 13% and tonnage of recyclables has increased almost 100%.

## **General Government Inventory & Assessment**

### **Inventory**

The City of Decatur's City Commission Meeting Room and administrative offices are located at the City Hall, 509 North McDonough Street. The Downtown Development Authority is housed in the south wing of the building. Presently, City Hall has about 9,700 square feet of floor area. The current Commission meeting room provides seating for about 30 persons.

Beginning in Mid 2005, City Hall will undergo a major 12-month renovation. The proposed City Hall improvements include an addition on the second floor and a new Commission meeting room. For ADA compliance, the improvements will also include a new elevator and new wheelchair accessible rest rooms. The proposed additions will enlarge the building to about 15,600 square feet. The proposed Commission room will provide seating for about 100 persons.

The City Engineering, Sanitation, and Motor Maintenance Departments are located in the Leveritt Public Works Building, at 2635 Talley Street. The 16,900 square foot, two-story building, houses offices, central supply storage and the vehicle maintenance garage. A large exterior area is used for parking and storing of vehicles and equipment.

### **Assessment**

In June 2002, the Capital Needs Assessment Task Force, established by the Decatur City Commission, published a report evaluating various city owned properties and recommendations for improvements.

The recommendations cited by the report for City Hall include the need for additional office space, public space, and ADA compliance. These improvements are being addressed by the planned renovations. The renovated facilities are anticipated to be fully adequate for the 20 year planning horizon of this plan.

The Task Force's report also states the need for additional exterior space at the Public Works building. This need is anticipated to increase as the amount of material and equipment associated with the Storm Water Utility operations and compliance with clean water regulations increases. The report further states the need for ADA accessibility features on the second floor as well as telephone and electrical upgrades. The City's Public Works facility may be relocated within the twenty-year planning period to accommodate future municipal needs.

## **Hospitals and Other Public Health Facilities Inventory and Assessment**

### **Inventory**

Located within the City of Decatur's downtown is DeKalb Medical Center at Decatur. Also known as Decatur Hospital, the center is a 102-bed facility whose specialties include outpatient surgery, ophthalmology, podiatry and gynecology. It also is home to a 44-bed Long-Term, Acute-Care unit.

Adjacent to the City is the DeKalb Medical Center, a 525-bed acute care hospital which includes the former DeKalb General Hospital and a variety of clinics and service facilities. Located to the northwest of the City is the Emory University medical complex which includes the Emory Children's Center, Emory University Hospital, and Wesley Woods Center for older adults.

Grady Health System, one of the largest public hospitals in the Southeast is located a few miles away in the City of Atlanta. The complex includes the 900+ bed Grady Memorial Hospital and Hughes Spalding Children's Hospital.

### **Assessment**

The array of medical services, both private and public, available to the City of Decatur residents are considered to be excellent and will meet the needs of the City's residents through the planning period.

## **Community Facilities Community Vision and Goals**

The Community Facilities Community Vision is to provide high quality community facilities and services to ensure a continuing high level of service and enhanced quality of life for City residents.

- Continue to work closely with DeKalb County to support the provision of

those services that the County provides to Decatur residents.

- Conduct on-going periodic assessments that ensure that fire and other emergency services are provided in the most cost effective manner.
- Continue coordination with City Schools of Decatur in providing outstanding educational services to Decatur residents.
- Continue to upgrade, and improve neighborhood recreational facilities and programs.
- Implement the recommendations from the 2005 Storm Water Master Plan.
- Continue participation in the Georgia Greenspace Program to expand Decatur's open space resources.