

April 22, 2016

Email from Lyn Deardorff

Dear Mayor and City Commissioners,

May I introduce myself to those of you I haven't had the pleasure of meeting. I and my family are past residents of Decatur for over 30 years and empty-nested into Downtown Atlanta in 2006. Our four children attended the Decatur Schools and all graduated from Decatur High School.

I served as Chair of the Downtown Decatur Redevelopment Task Force (1979-1982) that produced the Decatur Town Center Plan. Subsequently I was appointed to the first Downtown Decatur Development Authority and served as Vice President for a number of years. I also served on the Decatur City Commission for two terms and worked in various community groups including the Decatur Business Association and as founding member of the Winnona Park Neighbors Association. Our time in Decatur was happy, educational and productive.

This last week I was fortunate to enjoy dinner in Decatur with a few local friends. One of the big topics of conversation was the idea of a Downtown Park, proposed for the old Bank South property. I was surprised to find out that this proposal has had a long life (2 years) with no resulting action by the City Commission. I understand that the property was sold five months ago.

Subsequently, I spent Tuesday night reviewing the long video of Monday night's City Commission meeting: the comprehensive presentation by George Dusenbury, the audience members' supporting comments, and the remarks by the City Commission members present.

It appears that this proposal is in danger of dying a death from no action and no commitment from the City Commission. I want to add some material for thought from my past experience as Chair of the Town Center plan, a plan that was mentioned several times that night and as (happily) continued to be the benchmark by which developments have been measured for more than thirty years.

When we held our extensive two-year meetings and worked with an amazing team of urban planners, we could never have envisioned how successful our concepts would become. But the best of all possible worlds prevailed with a lot of hard work and a lot of committed people. We ended up with an exemplary development in the form of the Town Center project, a hotel and conference center, the revitalization of streets, the infusion of new retail and restaurants - and, most notable of all - an incredible amount of downtown housing. The achievement of the latter probably is the most important element to have made Decatur viable again these many years - as it brought residents back into the city core in large numbers who frequent the establishments, who populate its streets after dark, and who join in the many opportunities for public and private participation in the City - and certainly has contributed to Decatur's tax coffers.

Because we could never had imagined the success of the residential component, it was impossible to foresee the need for preserving "green space", a term most of us had never heard

of at that time. But the concepts of "walkable streets", "pedestrian access", "small-town feel", "landscape treatments", conserving "small-town scale" are there - all words found within the Decatur Town Center document. They point to the final piece of the puzzle which is green space in the downtown area, the area defined by the "Ring Road". Just today I happened onto the Project for Public Spaces website and saw this: "*When we talk about "streets" at PPS, we're not just talking about curb-to-curb concrete and pavement; we're talking about the entire scene and environment of a street-sidewalks, storefronts, transit stops, markets, waterfronts, and **green space**.*" We can't leave this out of the equation for a viable downtown.

Yes, I realize the task may seem daunting, especially in light of many demands on the City's revenues. But I also believe that this could be a missed opportunity that could easily mean no effective green space addition for the next decade. It's possible that the City **could** decide it **should**, it **must** come up with a plan. If this course is decided, then it takes sitting down with all the parties involved - the City, the Staff, the Developers and finding a way to make it work. George Dusenbury is a great talent - and as you and I know, Decatur is blessed with talented, able, willing folks all around.

You all have worked miracles in Decatur for many years. And actually, I don't think this is as hard or as costly as some of the early, inconceivable successes that you see all around you today in Decatur.

Don't look back and say this is the one that got away. I'm sure this is one you can make work.

Thanks for listening - and thanks for your contributions to a great City!

Lyn Deardorff