

Sept 18, 2016

Angela Threadgill

Planning Director, City of Decatur

On behalf of the Board of the Downtown Decatur Neighbors (DDN), we thank you for changing the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update to further embrace the creation of a new Downtown Decatur Park and an update of the City's thirty-year-old Downtown Plan. However, while the Comprehensive Plan now more closely reflects both DDN priorities and the expressed views of a majority of the Commission, it still requires additional changes to capture those views and priorities.

In regard to the park, we are pleased to see the City's investment in parks and greenspace citywide, and particularly pleased by Mayor Garrett's and other Commissioners' expressed support for a Downtown park. With the rapid development of Downtown, now is the time to acquire land if we ever are to have a new park Downtown. While incorporating "increasing parks...including in or nearer downtown" into the Comprehensive Plan's short-term work plan is a marked improvement, we believe that the action item would more accurately reflect the expressed views of the Commission and DDN's priorities if it stated "increasing parks...including in Downtown." DDN has committed – in coordination with the City - to raise significant funds to this end, and we already have begun to develop our fundraising plan.

In regard to the Master Plan, we believe that Mayor Garrett put it best. *"I believe that the best approach may be to support efforts for the Decatur Downtown Development Authority to update the City's existing Downtown Master Plan and to incorporate the downtown-related elements of our other plans into a consolidated document."* While the current version of the Comprehensive plan calls for consolidating downtown-related elements of other plans, there is no mention of the plan update noted by Mayor Garrett.

Downtown Decatur is the City's most populous neighborhood. The majority of residents are new, having had no opportunity to engage in the 2000 or 2010 strategic plan efforts. The 1982 Town Center Plan and subsequent citywide planning efforts provide a vision for Downtown but do not adequately address the quality of life issues facing Decatur's most populous and most visited community. Former Commissioners, in office when the Town Center Plan was created, have noted the need for an actual update. Just last year, a majority of the current Commissioners endorsed such a course of action.

Given the amount of development currently occurring in Downtown Decatur (Decatur High School expansion, Decatur Housing Authority expansion, Hampton Inn and more than 600 new private homes built in the past two years, with the soon-to-break-ground Callaway project pushing that number close to 1,000), we cannot wait until 2020 to develop a Downtown plan. Quite simply, the planning should precede the development. If the issue is one of

funding, DDN is confident that we can raise the necessary funds or find a professional planner willing to donate *pro bono* services to create the plan.

Downtown Decatur Neighbors represents the 2100 (soon to be 2600) Decatur families living Downtown. As noted in the Decatur Focus, dense, multi-family communities like ours are significant net revenue producers and we “provide much of the market support for Decatur’s restaurant and retail business.” A new park and master plan will benefit the ENTIRE city by helping Downtown remain vibrant as it absorbs significant new density & development (“manage growth while retaining character” – Principle A of the 2010 Decatur Strategic Plan).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely
George Dusenbury
President

Al “Buddy” Harrell
Chair, Planning & Development