Comprehensive Plan

Decatur, Alabama

ADOPTED BY CITY COUNCIL
FEBRUARY, 2018

OneDecatur
moving forward together

RESOLUTION NO. 18-27

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF DECATUR, ALABAMA

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur has undertaken to advance the community in an open collaborative community based way; and

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur did select a steering committee from a group of 198 applicants to guide and develop the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, members of the Decatur community participated in five Listen and Learn Meetings, the Summit on the Future, numerous stake holder meetings and interviews, and the Choices Open house; and

WHEREAS, over 1,000 residents, committee members, and stakeholders have worked for the past year and a half to create a comprehensive and achievable plan that addresses the economic, social and cultural enrichment of the community; and

WHEREAS, as a result of these meetings and interviews the One Decatur Planning effort has developed a vision for the City's future; and

WHEREAS, the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan including the implementation actions captures the reality and the aspirations of a proud and forward thinking community; and

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur is committed to supporting the voice and work of the community;

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur Planning Commission adopted the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan in its entirety January 23, 2018,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, as brought forth and recommended by the community, the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and the Planning Commission the Decatur City Council adopts for implementation of the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan in its entirety

CERTIFICATE

I, Stacy Gilley, City Clerk of the City of Decatur, Alabama hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution adopted by the City Council of the City of Decatur at a regular meeting of the same held on February 5, 2018, as the same appears of record in the minutes of said meeting in my custody and control.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand as City Clerk of the City of Decatur and affixed the seal of the City of Decatur to the certificate on this 16th day of February, 2018.

SEAL

Stacy Gilley
City Clerk

RESOLUTION NO. 003-18

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur has undertaken to advance the community in an open collaborative community based way; and

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur did select a steering committee from a group of 198 applicants to guide and develop the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, members of the Decatur community participated in five Listen and Learn Meetings, the Summit on the Future, numerous stake holder meetings and interviews, and the Choices Open house; and

WHEREAS, over 1,000 residents, committee members, and stakeholders have worked for the past year and a half to create a comprehensive and achievable plan that addresses the economic, social and cultural enrichment of the community; and

WHEREAS, as a result of these meetings and interviews the One Decatur Planning effort has developed a vision for the City's future; and

WHEREAS, the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan including the implementation actions captures the reality and the aspirations of a proud and forward thinking community; and

WHEREAS, the City of Decatur is committed to supporting the voice and work of the community;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, as brought forth and recommended by the community, and the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Decatur City Planning Commission adopts for implementation the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan in its entirety

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Planning Commission recommends the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan to the Decatur City Council for adoption

APPROVED AND ADOPTED this 23 day of January, 2017.

City of Decatur, Alabama Planning Commission

By: J. Kurt Larson
Its Chairman

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

City of Decatur, Alabama
By: Planning Commission Member

For questions regarding this plan, contact:

Planning Department
(256) 341-4720
Karen Smith, Planner: kjsmith@decatur-al.gov

A MESSAGE FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE

November 4, 2017

To the Decatur Community:

Over 15 months ago, a 40-member Steering Committee was empowered by you, fellow community members of Decatur, to chart a course for the future of our City. Through many workshops, focus groups, and online tools, over 800 people provided more than 2,000 data points for One Decatur. Additionally, thousands more people were aware of the effort through community events, social media, newspaper, and other marketing material. Our community was thoughtful, provocative, considerate, passionate and forward-thinking.

The Decatur we know today is a vibrant community spread along the beautiful Tennessee River and one of the only cities in America to be nationally recognized as a top destination for both active adults and STEM graduates. Our City's list of assets is extensive and enviable: the Alabama Center for the Arts, multiple hiking/biking trails, a growing Downtown, burgeoning arts and entertainment scene, $20 million+ Cook Museum of Natural Science, and much more. Good news abounds as 2017 draws to a close.

However, rather than a celebration of past achievement and current momentum, the One Decatur comprehensive plan is a call to action. In order to build the city that our children and grandchildren desire to call "home" as we do, Decatur must grow its population and average household income. Inability to achieve such growth over the next decade poses a grave threat to the City's current progress as well as its long-term viability. As such, City officials have sought to navigate this crossroads moment in the City's history by seeking the community's insight as expressed in the One Decatur plan and implementing community priorities.

In addition, One Decatur encourages a new era of cooperation and coordination among local governmental and quasi-governmental entities — at both the city and the county level. As demands increase for scarce public funds, these entities must seek new and better ways to deliver essential services as efficiently as possible. Furthermore, our City leaders must ensure that Decatur's interests are represented at a level commensurate with funding provided.

Assembling the One Decatur plan has been exhilaratingly hard and fun work. Now, our community must turn its focus to action — the opportunity to build a city to which future generations can be enthused to move and call "home".

On behalf of the Steering Committee, thank you for the opportunity to serve our community. We could not be more excited to see our City reach its full potential in the days ahead, and we respectfully submit the comprehensive plan detailed in this document as a roadmap for achieving this potential.

Best regards,

Jelisa Thompson
Co-Chair

Juanita Healy
Co-Chair

Stratton Orr
Co-Chair

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City would like to thank the following individuals for their commitment and dedication in assisting with the One Decatur initiative. Sharing your knowledge, thoughts and ideas rendered an invaluable service to your community. Additionally, the City would like to thank the many other community members who participated in One Decatur or simply expressed their support and enthusiasm for the effort.

Elected Officials

Tab Bowling, Mayor
Chuck Ard, City Council
Paige Bibbee, City Council
Billy Jackson, City Council
Kristi Hill, City Council
Charles Kirby, City Council
Terri Collins, Alabama House Representative
Arthur Orr, Alabama State Senator

Planning Commission

Tracy Tubbs, Chairman and Advisory Committee
Kent Lawrence, Vice Chairman and Advisory Committee
Myrna Burroughs
Chuck Ard, City Council liaison, Advisory Committee
Gary Borden, Public Service Representative
Joseph Wynn
Nell Standridge
Frances Tate, Advisory Committee
Eddie Pike
Dan Culpepper

City Staff

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Karen Smith, Planner
Hannah Pearson, Planning Technician
Steve Kelso, Planning Technician
Kim Stone, Administrator

Meeting Facilitators/Volunteers

Kent Lawrence, Planning Commissioner
John Seymour, Chamber CEO
Chuck Ard, Planning Commission liaison
Allen Stover, Community Development
Dana Pigg, Community Development
Frances Tate, Planning Commission
Wylheme Ragland, Community Volunteer
Paul Floyd, Parks and Recreation
Dwight Satterfield, Decatur City Schools
Jennifer Deke, Decatur City Schools

Consultants

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Skipper Consulting
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Steering Committee

Jelisa Thompson – Co-Chair
Juanita Healy – Co-Chair
Stratton Orr – Co-Chair
Alisha Collier
Angela R. Perkins
Bruce Jones
Claire Crane
Clint Murphy
Clint Wortham
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George Cameron Brown
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Jarvis Lane
Jay Clark
Jeffrey Brown
John David Chambless
John Joseph IV
John William (Bill) O'Brien
Juergen Beck
Karissa Everett Lang
Keilee Terry
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Melinda Dunn
Melissa A. Scott
Myrna Burroughs
Noel King
Ross Terry
Ruby De La Peña
Stephanie Cates
Stephen Pate
Susana Salcido
Suzie Wiley
Toinyette Douglas
Victoria McKenzie

Special Thanks

Decatur Youth Percussion Ensemble
Dr. James Reginald Jackson
Jeff Dunlap, Decatur Parks and Recreation
Kelly Sims, Turner Surles
Mattie Miller, Turner Surles
Catherine Jackson, Turner Surles
Kurt Johnson, City Hall
Gloria Robertson, Engineering Department
Brookhaven Middle School
Ridge Middle School
Oak Park Middle School
Burningtree Country Club
Keith Andrews, Ingalls Pavilion
Anne Scarborough, Princess Theater
Dr. Michael Douglass, Decatur City Schools
Pastor Stahlworth, Kings Memorial United Methodist Church
Pastor Burt, Belle Primitive Baptist
John Mulherin, Decatur Mall
Sherry Sakovich, Decatur Public Library
Bayne Hughes, Decatur Daily
Andy Thomas, Magnolia Room
Juergen Beck, Freedom Light Productions

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (Continued)

Focus Groups

Past Community Leaders

MCEDA (Morgan County Economic Development)

Decatur Morgan County Chamber of Commerce

DDRA (Downtown Decatur Redevelopment Authority)

Decatur-Morgan County Entrepreneurial Center

Decatur Corridor Development

Decatur-Morgan County Convention and Visitors Bureau

Decatur Morgan Hospital

Decatur City Schools

Decatur Schools Foundation

Decatur Utilities

Decatur Parks and Recreation

Decatur Environmental Services

Transportation MPO engineering

Arts groups including Athens State and Calhoun Community College

Bike and Pedestrian users

Minority Leaders

National Register Neighborhoods

Neighborhood Groups (Oak Lea, Point Mallard, Westmead, Dunbarton, Burningtree, Woodmeade school area, Northwest Decatur, Vestavia Court area, and East Decatur)

Conservation and environmental groups

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"Thank you ONE Decatur for striving to make our City a great place to live! I am proud of our City."

— Participant

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INTRODUCTION

One Decatur is the name of a effort launched in 2016 to create a new comprehensive plan for Decatur that is rooted in community values and aspirations. This planning process identified critical needs, defined a long-term vision and goals, and identified strategies to achieve the vision. This plan serves as a guide for decision makers and the community for future development and many aspects of our City's quality of life. It is both comprehensive—taking a long-term view of a broad range of topics—and strategic—serving as a call-to-action to move the community forward. But beyond the plan itself, One Decatur marked the beginning of a movement to collectively work to address community needs.

What is a comprehensive plan?

A comprehensive plan is the broadest public policy document for the City and sets forth the long-range vision for physical development, housing, economic development, transportation, community facilities and related topics. This plan is a tool to address community needs, prepare for change and protect what we treasure. It serves as both a business plan and guidebook for decision-makers. The Comprehensive Plan also serves as a marketing tool for the City to clearly convey the community's values and priorities.

To achieve the vision and goals, the plan includes specific actions (policies, projects and programs) and identifies timing and responsibilities for undertaking those actions. It also contains map-based recommendations that indicate the City's intent for where and how it will use land resources and design infrastructure improvements.

The plan serves as the foundation for the City's budgeting process, zoning ordinance, land development regulations, and other ordinances. It is implemented over time through many distinct decisions including annual budgeting, departmental work programs, rezoning, and subdivision of land.

The need for a new plan.

Everyone wants Decatur to grow and thrive. The City is fortunate that our leaders have embraced proactive planning and have followed through on past plans. This plan is a continuation of that legacy.

To be effective, a comprehensive plan must be periodically updated to account for current conditions, data and new technologies. Decatur's previous Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1999. Over the last 18 years, many of that plan's recommendations have been completed, while others are no longer supported or relevant. Recent plans have been limited to a geography or topic. This Comprehensive Plan is an opportunity to consider the City's policies and priorities in light of current needs, opportunities, and best practices.

The plan process was also an opportunity to engage our community at a new level and develop a strong sense of public ownership of the plan outcomes.

Chapter Contents

- A call to action
- Vision
- Plan structure
- Priority Actions
- Process

A CALL TO ACTION

Today is a dynamic time. Rapidly changing technology, national demographic shifts, and changing market preferences are reshaping our cities. Many of the changes Decatur has experienced over the last decade present daunting challenges. But at the same time, the City has had successes addressing needs and cultivating its unique assets. This plan's actions includes many small bets and a few larger, more visionary efforts to address our challenges and build upon our assets.

Challenges to overcome

- **Stagnant population growth.** The City's population over the past few decades has been mostly stagnant and likely has declined since the last Census. Meanwhile, demographics are changing as are community needs and preferences.
- **Limited housing choices.** The City has relatively few options in both for-sale or rental housing, which is a major obstacle to economic development. There has been very little new housing constructed in the past 15 years.
- **Underutilized land and weak aesthetics.** Like many cities, inefficient growth patterns have created long-term challenges to maintenance and provision of services. Further, there is valuable land that is underutilized including on the riverfront and in Limestone County. There are also several declining or vacant commercial centers located at community gateways do not convey a positive first impression of the City.
- **Physical divisions, limited connectivity.** Physical divisions created by railways, highways and natural features makes it difficult for residents in some areas of the City to access community resources and contributes to perceptions of inequality. An incomplete sidewalk and path network restricts mobility choices and limited regional connectivity creates traffic challenges.
- **Funding.** Changing State and Federal policies have led to have shifted many costs to cities. In Decatur, slow growth in jobs and population has contributed to funding challenges. Like many cities, Decatur must be creative to continue to provide quality services, maintain and improve infrastructure, and make smart investments.
- **Weak image (internal and external).** Decatur is not alone in facing many of these and many other challenges, but they have contributed to creating a weak image of the City both within the community and the region.

Assets to build upon

- **Strategic riverfront location.** Decatur's location along one of the nation's great rivers is a tremendous asset. A number of cities, such as Chattanooga, TN, and Greenville, SC, and Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Florence, AL have benefitted from creating development opportunities on their riverfronts for recreational, civic, and other uses, and particularly improving the connection between their downtowns and waterfront.
- **Part of a growing region.** Decatur is fortunate to be part of a region that is growing in population and jobs. The city has been successful in attracting a wide range of industrial employers, but there are many opportunities for Decatur to expand the number and types of industries and economic activity in the city. Further, the City can capture a larger amount of residential growth from people working in Decatur or elsewhere in the region.
- **Revitalizing Downtown.** Downtown Decatur is increasingly attractive and vibrant. As the historic core of the City, the Downtown has received significant attention and revitalization efforts over the past 15 years. Downtown offers a unique setting that other cities in the region cannot reproduce.
- **Historic neighborhoods.** Like Downtown, the City's historic neighborhoods are unique and attractive. There is growing demand nationally for these types of neighborhoods.
- **Refuge and outstanding parks system.** The City offers a wide range of parks and recreational assets, ranging from small neighborhood parks to regionally competitive recreational facilities. The Wheeler Wildlife Refuge is a unique natural amenity.
- **Growing cultural institutions.** Decatur has a wealth of arts and cultural assets for a city of its size, including programs that are entirely unique in the State of Alabama. These assets include the Princess Theatre, Carnegie Visual Arts Center, Alabama Center for the Arts, Calhoun Community College (CCC) and Athens State University (ASU), and Cook Museum.

VISION

The vision statement captures the broadest aspirations for Decatur and serves as the overall direction for the plan.

Thriving, unique, confident.

The vision for Decatur is a thriving community where everyone has opportunities to prosper, where distinct, vibrant places are enjoyed, where investment and visitors are attracted, and where pride and confidence is widespread.

PLAN STRUCTURE

This plan is organized into five topic areas, which reflect themes from community input. Each topic area is supported by a goal and several objectives that serve to organize the 140 specific actions detailed in the plan.

Goals

Intended outcomes expressed in simple terms for the plan's five topic areas.

Objectives

Subthemes within the goal that serve to organize actions.

Actions

A project, policy, or program.

Creating a Quality Place (QP)

Efficient use of land resources that offers distinctive and desirable places to live, work and play, includes strategic revitalization throughout the community, maintains historic and natural assets, and supports a high level of community pride.

Improving our Mobility (MO)

A well-maintained, smart and sustainable transportation system that offers strong regional and internal connectivity, provides attractive and safe options for cycling, walking and public transportation, and supports desirable development.

Advancing our Prosperity (PR)

A thriving economy that offers a variety of jobs, attracts new businesses and residents, and provides a diversity of retail, entertainment, and housing options.

Enhancing our Amenities (AM)

A wide variety of modern city services, outstanding parks and recreational facilities, well-supported cultural institutions, and access to health services that support the needs of our community.

Strengthening our Community (CO)

A united, proud, and confident community that embraces everyone, has highly competitive schools that prepare youth for success in life, and where residents and institutions are meaningfully engaged.

PRIORITIES

While all of the actions described in the plan are important, the One Decatur steering committee chose to emphasize several actions as priorities. These priorities were identified based on community input and include a mix of easily achievable steps to move the City forward as well as more ambitious efforts that would have a significant impact. The priorities are grouped into nine themes and are not intended to be in a ranked order. The numbered actions within each theme are described in detail within the plan.

Aesthetics

Improve the appearance of public and private property throughout the City.

- QP 1.1 Reform the City's zoning and land development codes. (also QP 2.5)
- QP 2.1 Redefine the 6th Avenue gateway.
- MO 2.3 Establish corridor appearance standards or guidelines.

Downtown

Continue to support current revitalization efforts Downtown.

- QP 6.1 Facilitate downtown development.

Economic Diversification and Workforce Development

Strengthen the existing labor force and diversify the local economy.

- PR 2.1 Target workforce development efforts on "skills for the future"
- PR 2.2 Collaborate with public schools to expand vocational programming
- PR 1.2 Diversify Decatur's Industry Recruitment Targets

Health, Poverty, and Social Services

Improve access to quality healthcare and social services.

- AM 7.1 Coordinate social services.
- AM 7.4 Establish a task force on poverty.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Encourage a variety of new housing options (including quality apartment and single family development) and maintain existing neighborhoods.

- PR 4.1 Recruit high-value housing/mixed-use development.
- PR 4.2 Facilitate north-of-the river development.

Lifestyle and Cultural Amenities

Continue to develop unique community features and events that enhance the City's appeal.

- CO 2.1 Create new arts and cultural events
- AM 6.4 Create a public art initiative.
- MO 3.2 Update and formalize a plan to connect the urban trail system. (bikeways)
- MO 6.3 Establish a bicycle and pedestrian crossing over the Tennessee River.
- AM 5.3 Develop the trail network within the Refuge.

Marketing and Branding

Promote a positive and coordinated brand/image to internal and external audiences.

- PR 6.1 Conduct a summit on collaborative branding.

Riverfront Development

Maximize the riverfront for recreation, living, entertainment, and civic functions. Improve connections between the riverfront and Downtown.

- QP 3.2 Create a riverfront redevelopment task force.
- QP 4.3 Create developer packages to market sites. (also PR 4.1)
- MO 2.1 Undertake strategic improvements in demonstration corridors. (Wilson Street)

Schools

Strive to make Decatur City Schools a highly competitive school system on a state and national level.

- CO 1.1 Establish an education advisory group.
- CO 1.3 Conduct a coordinated and long-term marketing effort to improve Decatur school's image.
- CO 1.7 Conduct city-schools joint work sessions.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The planning process was both intuitive and informed, shaped by quantitative research and input from the community. To ensure that the process was open, inclusive and transparent, a robust public engagement process was implemented with the help of a 40-member citizen steering committee. There were three rounds of public input opportunities throughout the 17-month planning process.

Steering Committee

A 40-member citizen steering committee guided the public process and helped to shape the plan's recommendations. The group was formed through a public selection process that received nearly 200 applicants. Members were selected to represent the City's diverse interests. The committee acted as spokespersons for the planning effort, officially represented citizens in the planning process, and provided direction and feedback to the planning team at crucial steps. The committee held 10 official meetings, several small informal meetings and participated in community outreach events during the process.

The name One Decatur arose from the committee's early work to develop an identity and messages for the process that would appeal to the community.

Stakeholders

At several stages in the process, the planning team interviewed stakeholders in small group sessions. The stakeholders included the Metropolitan Planning Organization, elected officials, local realtors, Decatur City Schools, neighborhood organizations, economic development entities, businesses, developers, transportation professionals, and various special interests such as advocates for environmental causes, biking, and historic preservation (among others). The interviews were designed to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities and gain insight on local knowledge.

Appendix A contains detailed summaries of the public workshops and a complete record of public comments.

Publicity and Outreach

Competing interests, busy lifestyles, the long-term focus of comprehensive planning and the complexity of issues make enticing people to attend planning meetings very challenging. To inform the public about the importance of One Decatur, the Steering Committee carried out a word-of-mouth outreach and publicity campaign that included:

- Flyers and posters distributed throughout the City and at community events such as Third Friday
- A social media campaign, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapshat
- Presenting to civic groups
- Newspaper columns and letters to the editor
- Radio interviews
- A project website (www.One Decatur.org)
- Email

"It's increasingly common these days to view government as an entity separate from the people. The trend makes it easy for citizens to avoid responsibility for perceived problems in our City, state or nation. Officials are at fault for everything that goes wrong. While the mindset is convenient for citizens, it fails to acknowledge the responsibilities that come with self-governance… This is a chance for Decatur residents to take ownership of their City. Together, we can identify the City's weaknesses and opportunities. Together, we can build a better Decatur."

—We are One Decatur Editorial, Decatur Daily

Listening and Learning Workshops (November 2016)

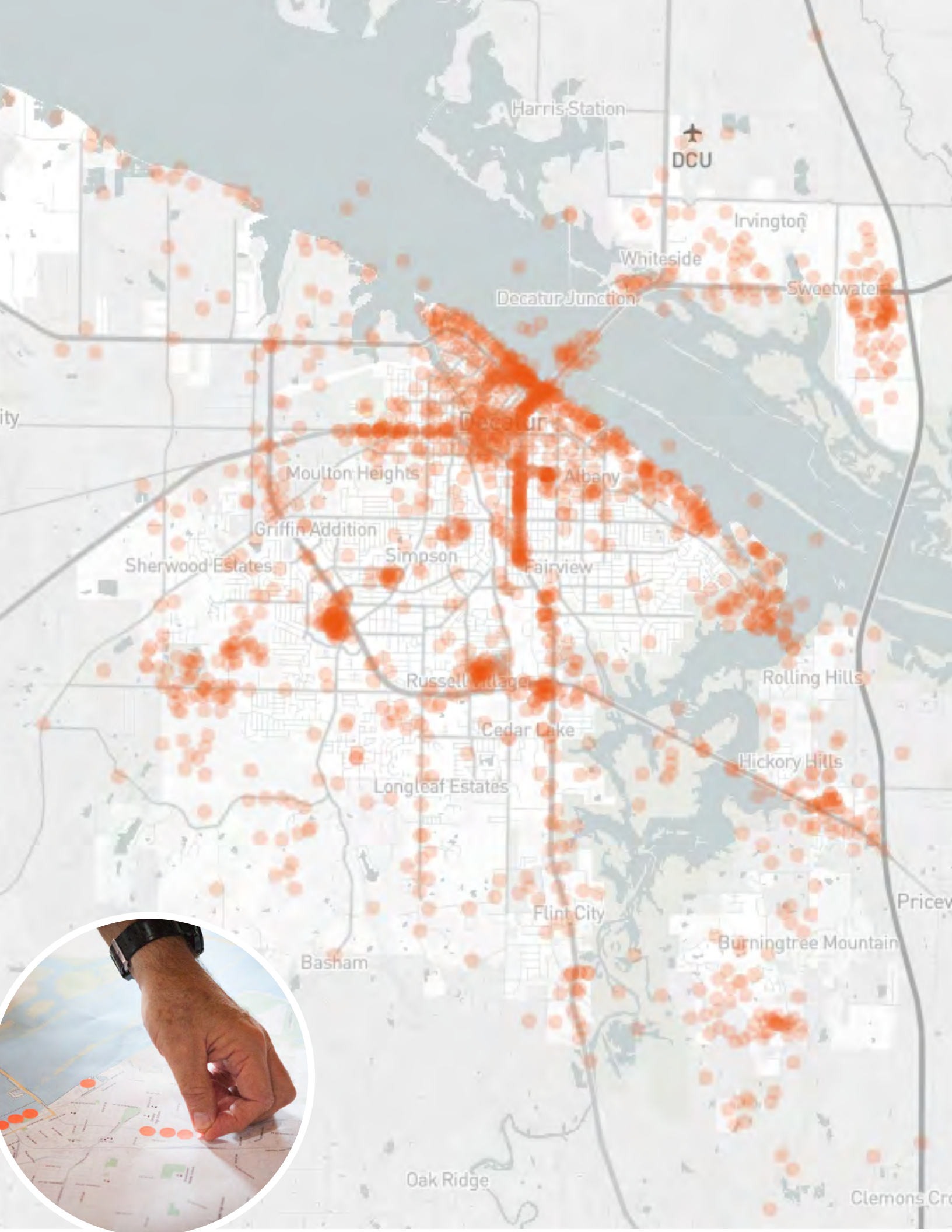
During the first week of November 2016, four public workshops were held at different locations throughout the City to gather input that will help to inform the direction of the plan. In an hour-and-a-half program, participants worked in small groups on two activities with trained volunteer facilitators. In the first activity, participants shared ideas in response to the prompt: "Decatur would be better in the future, if....". The second activity asked groups to identify "opportunity" places of the community on a large map of the City using colored sticker dots and then to discuss the opportunities in the areas identified.

Following these workshops, additional input was collected through the project website. Visitors could submit ideas and identify locations on an interactive map.

Over 375 people attended the three initial workshops and more than 120 additional people contributed by means of the online activity. Based on the demographics of participants, additional small group sessions were conducted in December to obtain input from groups who were underrepresented in the initial sessions.

"Thank you for conducting these meetings and for carrying out the tasks of developing our City's vision. This process is overdue."

— participant at Listening and Learning Workshop


Harris Station
DCU
Irvington
Whiteside
Sweetwater
Decatur Junction
Decatur
Moulton Heights
Albany
Griffin Addition
Simpson
Sherwood Estates
Fairview
Rolling Hills
Cedar Lake
Hickory Hills
Longleaf Estates
Flint City
Burningtree Mountain
Basham
Oak Ridge

Summit on the Future

On April 4, 2017 over 250 participants attended the Summit on the Future at Ingalls Harbor Pavilion. The event marked roughly the mid-point of the planning process. In a two-hour workshop, participants learned about conditions that are shaping the City and its future, evaluated draft vision and goals that the steering committee developed based on previous community input, provided input on key questions to guide the plan, and worked in groups to review a conceptual map for the City's future development. During the activities, participants used their personal smartphones to engage in real-time polling and saw live results at the workshop.

Following the Summit, over 100 additional people provided feedback through the project website.

Open House

On October 3, 2017 the draft plan was presented to the community for the first time at the Princess Theater. Approximately 250 people attended. After a brief presentation that shared the basic organization of the plan and provided a brief background to the planning process, attendees viewed the display boards containing the specific actions in the plan. Each participant was given a set of sticker dots to vote for their top priority actions.

Participants also used comment cards to share feedback on any of the specific actions and indicated which actions they were interested in helping to implement.

Like the previous two rounds, feedback was collected through the OneDecatur.org website for three weeks following the open house. During that time, the presentation boards appeared in five locations throughout the City.

CREATING A QUALITY PLACE
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CREATING A QUALITY PLACE
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CREATING A QUALITY PLACE
4
OneDecatur
IMPROVING OUR MOBILITY
9
Future Land Use and Character Types
8
Future Land Use and Character Map
7

"Decatur is a wonderful community. We are working hard here in City Hall — as well as all entities associated with the City — in trying to find ways to motivate growth in our community. We know that's going to take development and new home building, and we believe that we'll start seeing growth."

— Mayor Tab Bowling

2

CREATING A QUALITY PLACE

A community's physical environment, both built and natural, is a critical element of the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter provides guidance for Decatur's physical development and redevelopment. It addresses strategies for enhancing areas such as Downtown, commercial corridors and the riverfront, strengthening neighborhoods, improving community appearance, and protecting historic and natural assets. This element of the Comprehensive Plan also substantially influences the other elements, particularly Mobility and Prosperity.

Goal

Efficient use of land resources that offers distinctive and desirable places to live, work and play, includes strategic revitalization throughout the community, maintains historic and natural assets, and supports a high level of community pride.

Objectives

1. Promote desirable and financially beneficial development patterns
2. Improve the appearance of public and private property throughout the City (particularly gateways)
3. Encourage redevelopment along the Riverfront (and other areas).
4. Stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods
5. Establish standards to ensure that new residential areas exhibit strong neighborhood qualities including walkable blocks, integrated open space (parks), and a variety of housing options.
6. Continue to support current revitalization efforts downtown
7. Improve code enforcement tools
8. Maintain our historical assets
9. Protect our watersheds and conserve sensitive habitat

Chapter Organization

- Key Findings and Opportunities
- Conceptual Development Strategy
- Future Land Use and Character
- Actions

KEY FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Decatur's physical characteristics are among its most valuable assets. Its location on the Tennessee River, access to Interstate 65, and proximity to the larger City of Huntsville, unique parks and natural areas and an revitalizing Downtown can all be drivers of future growth. But some of Decatur's current conditions reveal challenges and mask opportunities. Some neighborhoods struggle with disinvestment, while aging retail development lines large sections of the City's corridors, and industrial uses dominate prime waterfront land on the river. The City has been proactive in planning and implementing strategies to address its challenges and capitalize on its opportunities. The following findings directly inform this chapter's policies and actions. These findings are discussed in more detail in Appendix B.

Early History

Originally a river crossing for settlers west of the Appalachian Mountains, the City was incorporated in 1826. In the 1830s, the City became home to the eastern terminus of the first railway west of the Appalachian Mountains. With two major outlets for industry – the Tennessee River and the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad – Decatur became an important industrial hub in Alabama. These two prominent transportation assets also made the City a focus point during the Civil War. The City saw heavy damage from the war and two settlements arose from the rubble; Decatur and New Decatur which was located just to the southeast. This new town was renamed to Albany in 1916 and eventually merged with Decatur in 1925.

The 1930's saw the largest population growth in Decatur with significant work generated by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Establishment of the TVA and riverside ports allowed for industrial development, and, coupled with the advent of rail lines, helped propel Decatur into a position of importance as a hub for manufacturing and distribution. The City's population grew by roughly 10 percent per decade through the 1980s.

Regional Context

Decatur is primarily located in Morgan County, with some portions of the City in Limestone County across the Tennessee River. Decatur is part of a region defined by the State as North Central Alabama, which covers Cullman, Morgan, and Lawrence Counties. It has the largest population of any city in this region.

Decatur's core is located just 25 miles to the west of the City of Huntsville, which is one of Alabama's largest and fastest growing cities. In fact, the City limits of Decatur and Huntsville meet at the I-65 / I-565 Interchange (in Limestone County). Given their proximity, the two cities are closely linked economically. Decatur's growth and development is often compared to Huntsville. Huntsville and its metropolitan area have shown consistent population growth in the recent years, with a 24%

Major Challenges and Opportunities:

- The City's population over the past few decades has been mostly stagnant and likely has declined since the last Census. Meanwhile, demographics are changing as are community needs and preferences.
- There has been no formal growth strategy over the past few decades which has led to inefficient land use patterns.
- The appearance of the City's major corridors and gateways does not create a positive impression.
- There are several underutilized or vacant commercial centers that are opportunities for redevelopment.
- Access to the river is limited with most of the City's 10 miles of riverfront property occupied by industrial uses.
- The City annexed land in Limestone County and has extended utilities across the river to prepare development-ready sites.
- The City is gaining momentum in revitalizing its unique and historic Downtown, but connectivity between the two historic centers should be improved.
- Many older neighborhoods are challenged by blight and in need of reinvestment, while newer neighborhoods lack qualities such as sidewalks and street trees.
- Preservation of historic neighborhoods and sites is a challenge as the benefits of historic districts are underappreciated.
- The City has unique natural resources with the Tennessee River and Wheeler Wildlife refuge but pollution is an ongoing concern.

increase since 2000 in Madison County. While growth in technology and aerospace industries has fueled Huntsville's growth, the City has also had an aggressive policy of outward expansion allowing it to capture new growth on its urban edge.

Overall Growth Trends

Decatur's population has grown very slowly in the past fifteen years compared to Alabama's average growth rate and earlier periods of Decatur's history. Meanwhile the surrounding counties have grown at a much faster rate. But while the overall population growth has stalled, the composition of Decatur's population in terms of age, household makeup, and racial diversity has been changing.

According to the 2014 Census estimate, Decatur's population is 55,641. That estimate represents a growth of 1,712 people or 3.2% since the year 2000. Compared to the year 2010, Decatur's population declined by approximately 1%. In comparison, Limestone and Madison Counties grew by 32.7% and 24% since 2000 respectively, fueled primarily by growth in Huntsville.

While the overall population has changed little in the past 15 years, the age of residents and household makeup has shifted. In terms of age, all groups under age 45 declined in number, while those over age 45 increased. Meanwhile households with children are declining in number while single-person households are growing. These demographic trends reflect those seen at the State and National level, as the large Baby Boomer generation has moved from child-rearing to retirement over the past 20 years.

The demographic shifts have implications for the kinds of places that people will prefer to live. The Baby Boomer generation fueled the growth of single family housing development nationally over the past 20 years. That demographic is still driving housing demand, but their preferences are shifting.

Recent studies by the National Association of Realtors, Urban Land Institute, and other organizations are pointing towards increasing preferences for walkable communities where daily needs are close to homes and jobs. There is also growing demand for homes on smaller lots, attached housing styles and quality rental housing that supports a low-maintenance lifestyle.

Existing Land Use and Character

Decatur's land use patterns reflect both its unique antebellum history with historic Downtown and traditional neighborhoods, but also typical late 20th-century development. For much of its history, there has been no formal growth strategy and few limitations to where growth could occur. Due to an aggressive annexation effort during the 1970s and 1980s, the City has a large amount of vacant but developable land within its municipal boundary.

Today, Roughly half of the City's area is developed, a quarter is protected or constrained (Refuge and wetlands) and quarter is undeveloped but potentially developable.

This overall pattern of inefficient growth is expensive to sustain long-term and may compete with older areas. For instance, development along the Beltline has spurred commercial growth, but likely at a cost to the downtown and neighborhood shopping centers.

Residential

Over 50% of Decatur's developed land area is residential and most of that land is platted for single family homes. There has been very little residential development since the year 2000 (167 net units of housing). As Decatur's housing stock ages, there is a need for maintenance, rehabilitation and upgrading.

To understand Decatur's housing challenges, a housing market analysis was conducted as part of this plan. Those findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

The character of residential neighborhoods varies. The City's historic districts are relatively stable and attractive with a range of housing styles, sidewalks and mature street trees. However, until the past decade, sidewalks and street trees were not required in new subdivisions, so most of the City lacks these features.

Commercial corridors and gateways

While some neighborhoods are lacking in quality character attributes, a larger challenge involves its commercial corridors that serve as gateways to both the City and its neighborhoods. 6th Avenue (Route 31 Corridor) is a low-quality gateway, even though this is the route is most frequently a visitor's first impression to the City. Downtown is proximate but there are few if any visual cues that 6th Avenue is close to the center of town and to beautiful historic neighborhoods. Linkages between 6th Avenue and Downtown are relatively weak. The City has implemented new landscaping and streetscape standards in recent development, but change along the corridor has been slow.

The Beltline similarly lacks character as the major commercial corridor around the City, dominated by big box retail stores, lodging chains and other sprawling commercial uses.

Riverfront

Decatur benefits from its location along one of America's great rivers. However, the City has not taken full advantage of that asset. Nearly all of the City's river frontage is used for industrial activities, with the exception of relatively isolated residential, hotel and civic uses near Downtown. These industrial facilities capitalize on the value of the Tennessee River as a commercial waterway and provide a huge economic value to the City. However, there is currently little land available along the riverfront for other purposes. Particularly on the riverfront along Wilson Street, there is under-utilized or vacant land and other uses that may not represent the highest and best use of this public resource.

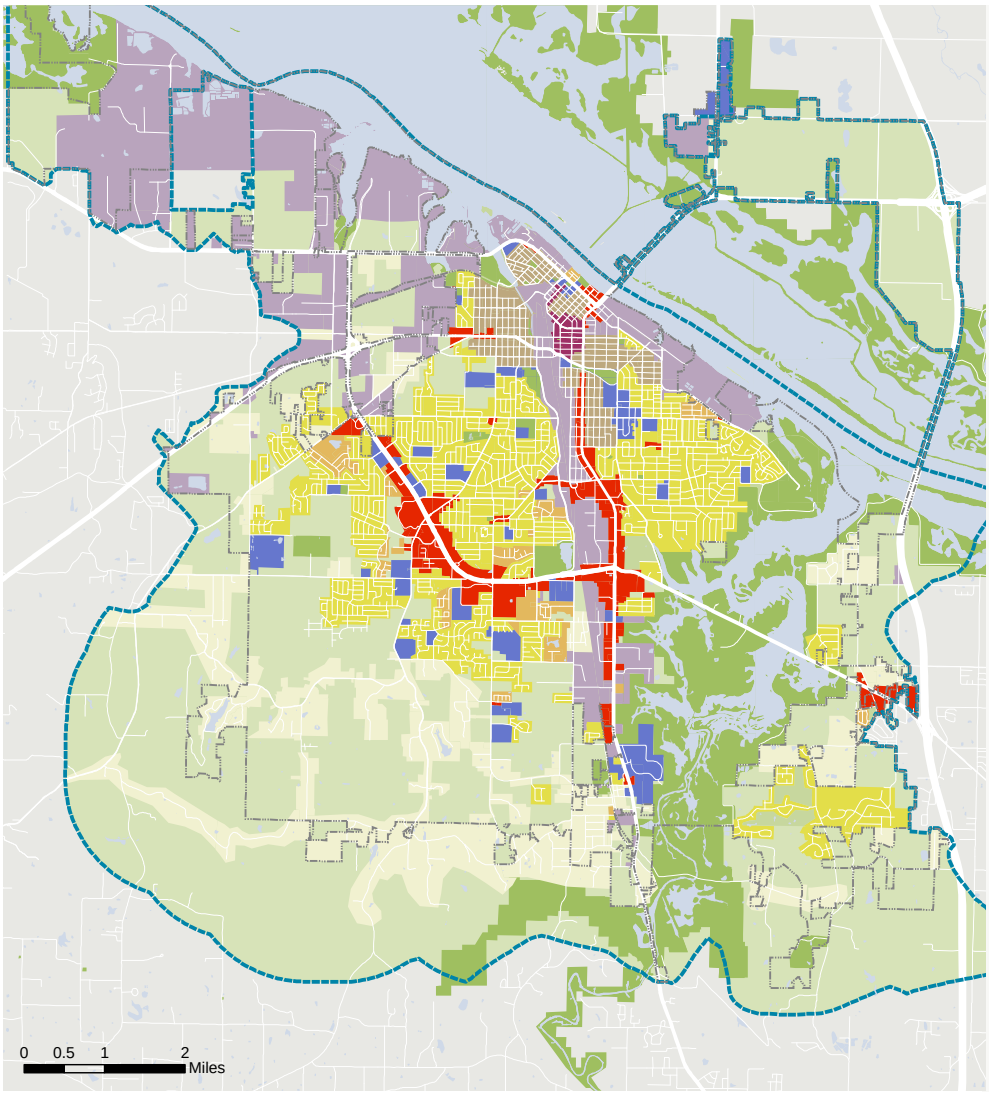
A number of cities, such as Chattanooga, TN, and Greenville, SC, and Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Florence, AL have benefitted from creating development opportunities on their riverfronts for recreational, civic, and other uses, and particularly improving the connection between their downtowns and waterfront.

Downtown

Downtown Decatur is increasingly attractive and vibrant. As the historic core of the City, the Downtown has received significant attention and revitalization efforts over the past 15 years since the Envision Decatur Downtown plan was adopted in 2003.

Downtown Decatur is divided into two primary areas, the Bank Street area and 2nd Avenue area. These two areas are divided both perceptually and physically by large thoroughfares and government buildings/complexes. Many efforts are underway to bridge this gap, and the development of the Cook Museum, scheduled to open in 2018, will promote a better connection.

The Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority (DDRA) manages marketing, events, improvements, and business recruitment efforts for Downtown. DDRA also houses Decatur's Main Street program, which is an organization that uses a proven model for downtown revitalization.



Existing Land Use

The adjacent map generally illustrates existing land use patterns in Decatur and its police jurisdiction.

- Downtown Core
- Commercial
- Core Residential
- Residential, Low Density
- Residential, Medium Density
- General Industrial
- Institutional / Semi-public
- Park / Conservation Area
- Rural Residential
- Undeveloped / Agriculture
- Bodies of Water
- Decatur City Limits
- Decatur Police Jurisdiction

Physical divisions

Several of Decatur's most notable physical features constitute physical or perceptual divisions. The expansive Wheeler Wildlife Refuge is an immense land area that is a unique asset for conservation and recreational opportunities. However, the refuge creates a physical barrier between the Burningtree area to the southeast, and the rest of the City. The main CSX rail line through the center of Decatur yielded the proverbial "other side of the tracks" with an historic east-west split in the City's neighborhoods. The Tennessee River on which the City has built its economic fortunes, has also served as a geographic (and perceptual) boundary, despite the fact that Decatur lies on both sides of the river. Finally, the City's bypass, the "Beltline," serves as yet another divider, with neighborhoods designated as "inside" (old) or "outside" (new) of the Beltline. As Decatur moves forward in a positive direction, it can be assumed that these boundaries, both artificial and real, will soften.

Limestone County

Decatur annexed land in Limestone County (across the river) in the mid-1980s. The City has extended utilities across the river to encourage development. There have been past proposals for mixed use projects but they have fallen through. To this day, most of that land is undeveloped and represents a prime opportunity for development given its access to I-65 and proximity to Huntsville.

Neighborhoods and Code Enforcement

Within existing neighborhoods, property maintenance is a top issue. Residents are concerned about the number and condition of rental properties in their neighborhoods and about absentee landlords. The City has a property maintenance ordinance, but does not license rental properties and does not maintain information about which properties are rentals and who manages them.

The City's code enforcement division typically investigates more than 2,000 complaints from the citizens of Decatur annually. Those issues include an annual average of more than 200 unsafe building conditions, overcrowding and property maintenance violations, as well as issuing more than 2,000 weed, junk, and litter violation notices. The City also has a nuisance abatement program as part of its code enforcement responsibilities and has demolished an average of twenty uninhabitable buildings annually since 1991.

Aside from property maintenance, residents find accessibility and lack of public transportation as an issue, particularly in southeast Decatur where many people have limited access to transportation.

Historic preservation

In acknowledgment of Decatur's important history, many of the City's historic areas and properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Decatur has two neighborhoods that are designated by the City as historic districts – Old Decatur and Albany. The Decatur Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is a municipally appointed board that, by law, reviews all building permits within these designated districts.

The process for review of building permits within the two historic districts is seen by some property owners as burdensome. There is no expedited process for reviewing most minor repairs or replacements, with the exception of roofs, which have a simplified process. Due to the HPC process, historic district designation is seen by some property owners as a burden rather than a benefit.

Decatur has a number of historic districts that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places but are not locally designated, including the Bank Street Historic District and New Decatur-Albany Historic District, both of which encompass much of Decatur's downtown. There are no restrictions on or protections for historic buildings downtown through historic designation or otherwise.

Within the HPC districts and in the other historic neighborhoods, there are ongoing property maintenance issues. The Historic Decatur Association has been formed recently as a non-profit with a goal of buying distressed properties and rehabbing them to resell.

Conservation and Natural Resources

The City has two major natural resources within its limits, the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge and the Tennessee River. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 35,000 acres and offers a wide variety of programs including birdwatching, fishing, hunting, biking/hiking trails, walking trails, visitor center, wildlife photography, special events, and paddle sports. Decatur, has a unique situation with such a large natural resource right at its doorstep. However, many residents and visitors are unaware of the Refuge's numerous programs or do not know how to access its public areas.

The Tennessee River is another extremely biodiverse and important resource. Tennessee Riverkeeper has a number of educational outreach events, and there are opportunities for partnerships. Decatur could promote paddle sports, using Chattanooga's many rental opportunities for paddle equipment on the Tennessee River as a model. Tennessee Riverkeeper monitors the water frequently and addresses pollution from a number of sources such as sedimentation, industrial sources, sewage, coal mining, etc.

Officials associated with the Refuge and Tennessee Riverkeeper expressed concerns that Decatur's unique natural resources are being compromised by pollution and sedimentation that is largely preventable.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The development strategy map describes the big concepts for where and how the City should guide future physical development. The concepts described below are illustrated on a map on the facing page. Colored areas illustrate broad concepts, while numbered locations identify opportunities in specific areas.

Create a more vibrant Downtown
Continue efforts to strengthen Downtown as a vibrant, mixed-use area that supports live, work, play opportunities. Restore and repurpose existing buildings; support local businesses. Attract more arts, and entertainment amenities. Improve connections between the Bank St. and Second Ave. areas and to adjacent neighborhoods.

Maximize the riverfront
Maximize use of the riverfront through redevelopment that improves access for recreation, living, entertainment, and civic functions. Improve connections between the riverfront and Downtown.

Enhance major corridors and gateways
Improve the appearance of public and private development and safety for all users along primary corridors to promote a positive impression of the City.

Enhance commercial centers and encourage new mixed use development
Improve the character of development of existing commercial and mixed-use centers at major gateways or nodes within the City. Development should improve aesthetics, better accommodate traffic flow and offer safe opportunities to access sites by walking, bicycle and public transportation.

Grow new industry and employment areas
Encourage growth within areas that are generally undeveloped and appropriate for future industrial, commercial or a mix of uses that represent strategic opportunities to strengthen the City's economy.

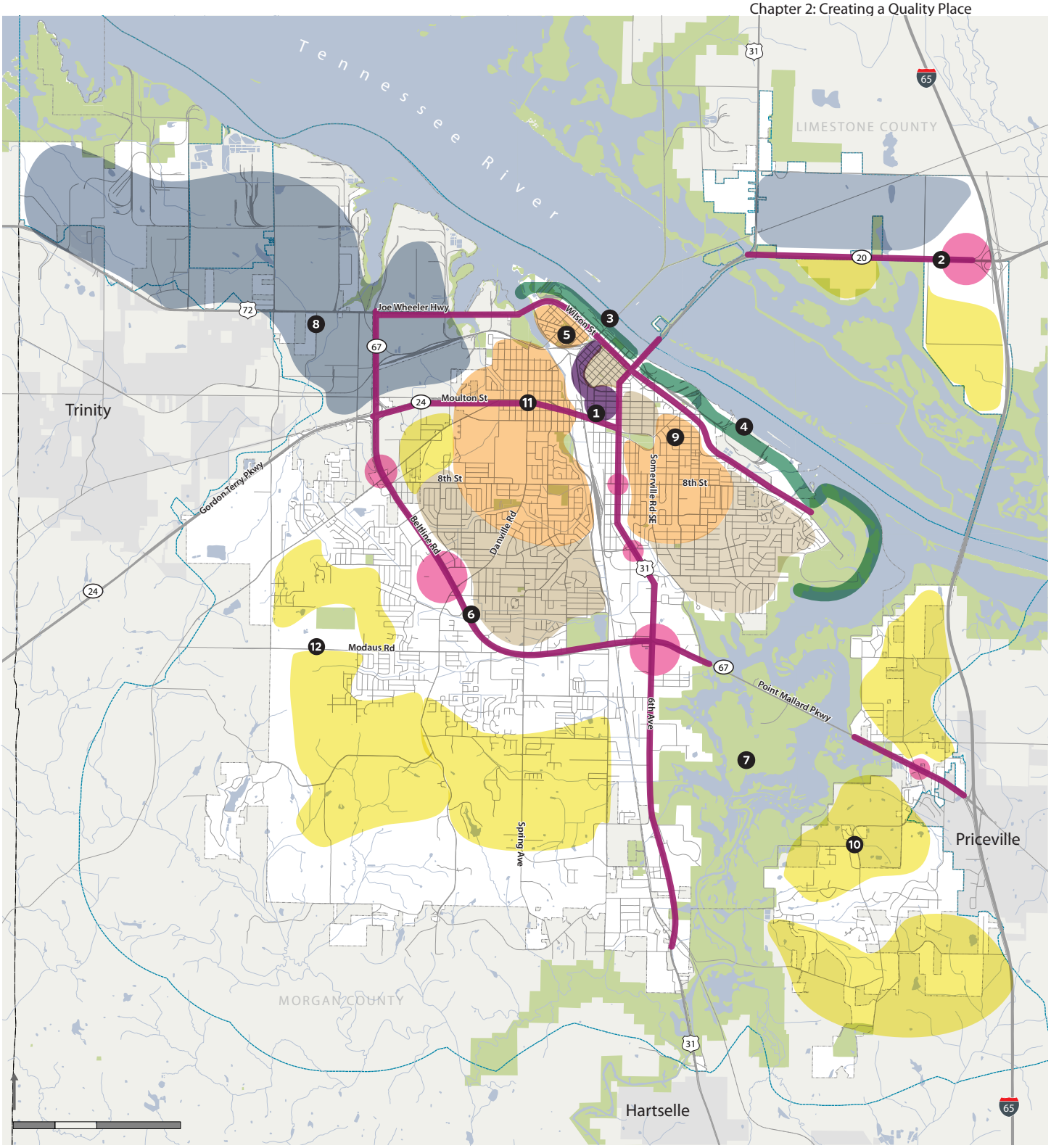
Revitalize neighborhoods
Stabilize and revitalize older neighborhoods that may be experiencing decline. Investment in these areas should maintain the existing pattern and character while encouraging improvements to public and private buildings; strong enforcement of maintenance codes to limit visible blight; and support appropriate redevelopment on underutilized sites that may serve as catalysts for further improvement and improve neighborhood pride.

Preserve neighborhood character
Invest in maintenance and preservation efforts in stable neighborhoods to retain their value and viability. Investment in these areas should maintain the existing pattern and character while encouraging improvements to public and private buildings; and support appropriate new development.

Grow complete neighborhoods
Grow new neighborhoods in undeveloped areas adjacent to existing roadways, utilities or established neighborhoods. Future neighborhoods should have a walkable pattern (small blocks and sidewalks), be connected to adjacent neighborhoods and recreational open space, and include a mix of housing types. Neighborhood growth areas may also include new parks, community facilities such as schools, and small-scale retail.

Preserve natural areas and improve access to parks and open space
Preserve and improve parks and recreational open space or undeveloped natural areas that are currently protected from development by the City, state, private dedication, or some other authority. These areas should include access to recreational facilities that serve the needs of the community and be well-connected to neighborhoods.

Promote walkable, connected development
Improve pedestrian facilities, connectivity and development character throughout the City but prioritizing areas within approximately 1/4 to 1/2 mile from a Downtown and other commercial or mixed-use centers. Residential uses within this area should generally be more compact than in areas further from a center.



Development Strategy Map

- Create a more vibrant Downtown
- Maximize the riverfront
- Enhance major corridors and gateways
- Enhance commercial centers and encourage new mixed use development
- Grow new industry and employment areas
- Revitalize neighborhoods
- Preserve neighborhood character
- Grow complete neighborhoods
- Preserve natural areas and improve access to parks and open space
- Bodies of Water
- Decatur City Limits
- Decatur Police Jurisdiction

Specific Opportunities

1. **6th Avenue from river to Beltline:** Improve aesthetics through landscaping, signs and burying utility lines; future development will improve the pedestrian experience and provide an appealing "front-door" to adjacent neighborhoods. Focus improvements near Downtown and at major intersections along the corridor.

2. **Intersection of I-65/565:** Encourage development of a unique mixed use area that can promote a positive brand for Decatur at the I-65/565/Hwy 20 gateway. Near the interchange support a mix of uses including retail, office and residential configured in a compact and walkable pattern; Retail and employment uses would be located along highway frontage areas, while high value industrial uses would occupy land near the rail line and existing industry. A mix of residential uses could be developed as a neighborhood with compact walkable development closest to commercial uses. Direct access to the Highway 20 corridor should be limited (per the ALDOT-approved access management plan) with mixed use development clustered at nodes with an internal street network. The Highway 20 corridor should feature attractive landscaping, lighting, signs and adjacent development that promotes a strong first impression for the City.

3. **Riverfront and Rhodes Ferry Park.** Encourage redevelopment surrounding Rhodes Ferry Park that connects the riverfront with Downtown. Future development should include a mix of civic, commercial, and residential uses and integrate public access to the river and bikeway network (see Riverfront Mixed Use page X). Redevelopment of this area may require working with existing property owners such as the Decatur Housing Authority to explore alternative uses of high value riverfront sites.

4. **Southeast riverfront from US31 bridge toward Point Mallard:** Support opportunities to facilitate redevelopment of underutilized land along the riverfront for a mix of uses including recreation, housing, commercial and employment with improved public access to the riverfront. Since this section of the riverfront is currently occupied by several large industrial employers, future development should be compatible with those uses (discouraging residential near existing heavy industry).

5. **"Old Town" Vine Street Neighborhood.** Revitalize the neighborhood by capitalizing on recent development at the edge of Downtown (including the depot and Turner Surles community center). Maintain historic character. Improve connections between Old Town, northeast and northwest neighborhoods, Downtown and Ingalls Harbor.

6. **Beltline:** Grow and revitalize commercial development while improving aesthetics of the corridor through landscaping along the right-of-way (including medians). Major commercial centers along the corridor should evolve to be more accessible to public transportation, biking, and support park-once development. Encourage mixed-use centers that integrate commercial, employment and residential uses at major nodes such as the US 31 intersection and Decatur Mall area. (see Demonstration Corridors page in Chapter 3)

7. **Wheeler Wildlife Refuge:** Encourage the Refuge to create more opportunities for passive recreation via trails, boardwalks, blueways, and sites for access. Promote awareness of opportunities for the community to enjoy this unique natural area within the City while supporting its conservation mission (which may mean that some access is seasonal).

8. **Northwest Industrial Area:** Encourage growth of industrial and manufacturing operations within vacant land near existing industrial development and transportation infrastructure. Promote environmentally sensitive development practices; Buffer large-scale industrial development from neighborhoods.

9. **Delano Park Area:** Encourage revitalization/upkeep of nearby homes. Consider expanding historic district protections. Expand use and programming within the park.

10. **Burningtree Area:** Improve connectivity through future neighborhood development. Support expansion of community facilities in the area.

11. **West Moulton Gateway:** Invest in improving the appearance of the West Moulton Street corridor as a gateway to Downtown. Improvements should be within the right-of-way and act as a catalyst for revitalizing the adjacent neighborhoods. (see Demonstration Corridors)

12. **New Austin High School and Jack Allen areas:** Encourage new neighborhood growth and improved street connectivity and trail network linking parks, schools and neighborhoods to the regional trail network. Support a small-scale commercial node in this area. Encourage expanding and improving facilities at the Jack Allen Sports Complex.

FUTURE LAND USE AND CHARACTER

The Future Land Use and Character Map expresses the City's intent for how Decatur should use its land resources in the future. For the entire City, this map identifies the character areas, which are types of places that share attributes of urban form and function including the size and type of buildings and their relationship to the street; the surrounding street and block pattern; parking and access; as well as land uses or types of development. The 15 Character Types are listed below. Each type is defined on the following pages.

Centers and Corridors

- Urban Core (Downtown)
- Urban Edge Mixed Use
- Regional Mixed Use
- Riverfront Mixed Use
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Community Commercial

Residential Areas

- Core Neighborhood
- Residential, Low Density
- Residential, Medium-High Density
- Mixed Neighborhood

Employment / Institutional Areas

- Flex Employment Center
- Industrial, General
- Major Institution / Civic Campus

Open Space / Rural Areas

- Park / Conservation Area
- Rural / Agriculture

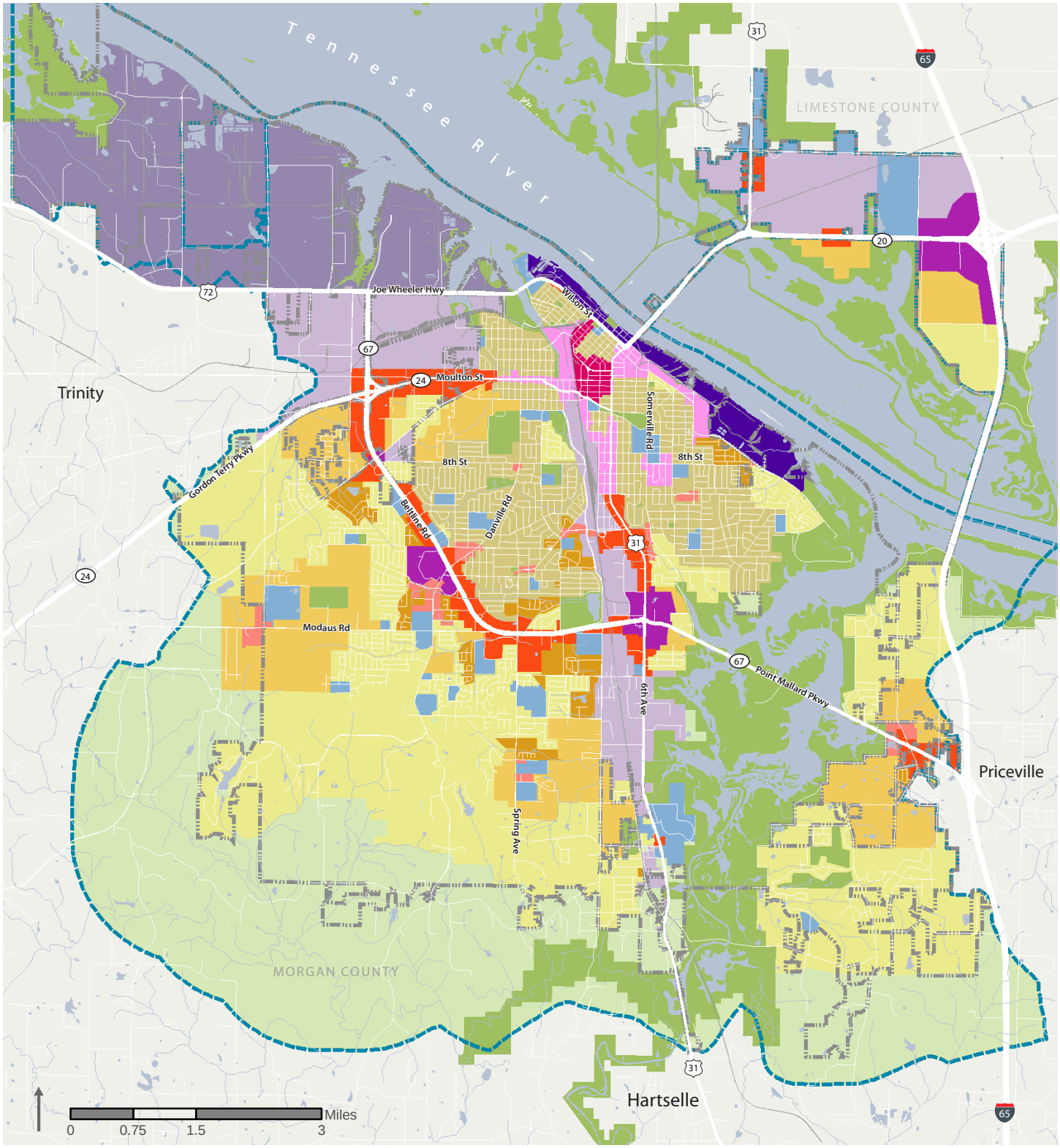
Future Land Use on the City's edge
The Future Land Use Map is implemented through Decatur's zoning ordinance and zoning map. Properties outside of the City but within the Decatur Police Jurisdiction (PJ) are assigned a Future Land Use Classification although those properties are not subject to City zoning. In the case where a property owner in the PJ wishes to annex into the City (which is required to obtain sewer service) the Future Land Use and Character map provides guidance to determine the most appropriate zoning classification for the property.

Implementing the land use vision through zoning

The Comprehensive Plan's future land use map depicts desired development patterns throughout the City and its police jurisdiction, which reinforces existing patterns in some areas and supports changes to land use or development patterns in other areas.

The future land use and character map is implemented through the City's zoning ordinance. Zoning is a legal tool that regulates land use including types of structures that may be built, how they are to be built, where they are to be built and how they may be used. Each property in the City is assigned to a zoning district.

The land use vision is implemented over time through many distinct public and private development decisions. For example, property owners seeking to change the use of their property often have to seek rezoning. Rezoning decisions are evaluated with respect to how they conform to the Comprehensive Plan's future land use map. Effectively implementing this land use vision will require updating the City's zoning ordinance and its zoning map to reflect the desired outcomes.



Future Land Use and Character

- Urban Core Downtown
- Urban Edge Mixed Use
- Regional Mixed Use
- Riverfront Mixed Use
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Community Commercial
- Urban Neighborhood
- Mixed Neighborhood
- Residential, Low Density
- Residential, Medium-High Density
- Flex Employment Center
- General Industrial
- Major Institution / Civic Campus
- Park / Conservation Area
- Rural / Agriculture
- Bodies of Water
- Decatur City Limits
- Decatur Police Jurisdiction

URBAN CORE (DOWNTOWN)

Downtown is Decatur's original mixed-use district, and its civic, cultural and historic center that is composed of two distinct areas. Buildings in Downtown are located near the street with wide sidewalks from the curb to building front. Civic and institutional buildings may be set back further from the street. Development in Downtown will include both new and adaptively reused historic buildings that support a mix of employment, commercial, entertainment, civic and residential uses. Buildings will frame attractive, pedestrian-scaled streets.

Intent

- > Infill development on vacant lots
- > Encourage residential development in various forms
- > Reduce surface parking
- > Development that connects the Bank Street area with 2nd Avenue areas
- > Retain historic character, adaptive reuse of existing buildings
- > Improve connections and transitions to surrounding neighborhoods

Primary Uses

- Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)
- Office
- Commercial
- Civic/Institutional
- Multi-family residential

Secondary Uses

- Attached residential (townhomes)
- Small-lot single family residential
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	2-8 stories (no height limit)
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes attached and freestanding
Building Setback	0-15 feet (generally consistent within a block. Greater setbacks for civic or institutional uses is appropriate)
Streets	Small, grid-like blocks with a streetscape designed to encourage pedestrian activity
Transportation	Walking, biking, transit, automobile
Parking	Shared parking areas located behind buildings. Structured parking incorporated into infill mixed-use projects, on-street parking.
Open Space	Plazas, pocket parks, public realm acts as open space. Wide sidewalks, street trees, benches.

Existing pattern and character examples Downtown.

URBAN EDGE MIXED USE

Areas generally on the edge of Downtown and along primary streets such as 6th Avenue and Moulton Street that serve as gateways to Downtown and Decatur's urban neighborhoods. These places offer various opportunities for revitalization through redevelopment of underutilized land. Depending on the location, these areas may be appropriate for single-use commercial or employment buildings, vertical mixed-use and a mix of residential development.

Intent

- Maximize the use of existing land near Downtown
- Support adaptive reuse of existing buildings where feasible
- Locate new buildings near the street on at least one side and accommodate parking to the side or rear of buildings; cluster buildings to consolidate and share surface parking
- Improve connections between Downtown and neighborhoods
- Improve/provide public realm features such as signs, sidewalks, landscaping, and street trees
- Reduce access-points into development for pedestrian and vehicular safety

Example character from other communities.

Primary Uses

- Commercial
- Office
- Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)

Secondary Uses

- Multi-family residential
- Civic/Institutional
- Light Industrial
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-4 stories (taller buildings appropriate near Downtown)
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes
Building Setback	0-30 feet (parking areas should be set back further)
Streets	Small, grid-like blocks with a streetscape designed to encourage pedestrian activity
Transportation	Walking, biking, transit, automobile
Parking	Shared parking areas located behind buildings. On-street parking.
Open Space	Plazas, 'green infrastructure," public realm act as open space.

REGIONAL MIXED USE

A major activity center that integrates places to live, work, and shop. A Mixed Use center may include a variety of commercial, employment and residential uses arranged through a site in a compact, walkable pattern. It may include mixed use buildings where residential or office uses exist above ground-floor retail. It may be anchored by a large commercial use such as a shopping mall or a major office or institutional employer with a Citywide or region-wide reach.

Intent

- Existing commercial activity centers should evolve from a single-use automobile-oriented character, to a walkable mixed use character
- Design to support pedestrian activity, with high quality streetscapes within the center and connecting to its surrounding area. Centers should be supportive of transit service
- Minimize surface parking by allowing compatible uses to share parking areas
- Provide connectivity to nearby uses (paths, streets)
- Improve/provide public realm features such as signs, sidewalks, landscaping
- Reduce access-points into development for pedestrian and vehicular safety

Primary Uses

- Commercial
- Office
- Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)
- Multi-family residential

Secondary Uses

- Civic/Institutional
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	2-6 stories
Building Form	Mix of large footprint buildings and smaller buildings that may be occupied by a single commercial tenant or multiple tenants
Building Setback	0-30 feet
Streets	Located along primary corridors with shared access drives connecting individual developments and shared access points off streets
Transportation	Automobile, sidewalks, bikeway connectivity, suitable for transit
Parking	Off street surface lots are shared between buildings in the same area, structured parking and on-street parking may be appropriate
Open Space	"Green infrastructure" and landscaping on individual sites, plazas and pocket parks

Regional Mixed Use Centers integrate places to live, work and shop in a compact, walkable pattern.
(Character examples from other communities)

RIVERFRONT MIXED USE

The Riverfront Mixed Use is an area where redevelopment is encouraged to create a mixed use center along Decatur's riverfront that offers highly attractive areas for living, working, tourism, recreation, and entertainment. Like Downtown and other mixed use centers, Riverfront Mixed Use areas should be compact and pedestrian-oriented.

Intent

> Maximize development opportunities on Decatur's most valuable waterfront areas

> The riverfront land between the US 31 bridge and Ingalls Harbor (near Downtown) should be the priority for revitalization with mixed use development.

> The southeast riverfront from the US 31 bridge to Point Mallard should be encouraged to gradually move away from current heavy industrial use. However, future development should not negatively impact pre-existing active industrial sites. Residential or other uses that would pose a conflict with industry could be supported if industrial uses were to discontinue operating in the area.

> Encourage redevelopment of underutilized industrial sites and facilitate environmental remediation

> Provide greater community access to the river through parks, multi-use trails, inviting public spaces, and amenities for water-based recreation

> Emphasize high quality design and building materials

Primary Uses

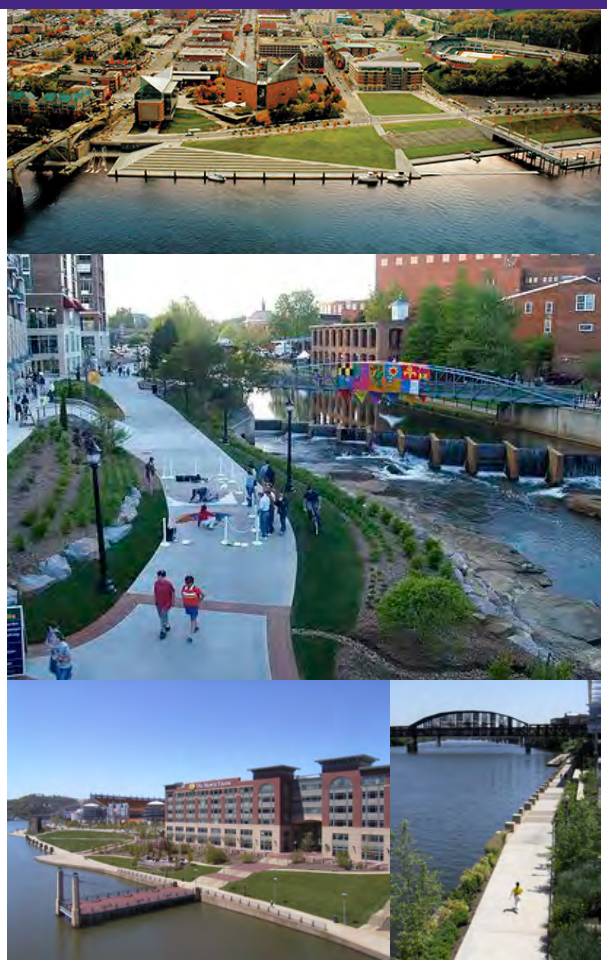
- Vertical mixed-use (commercial first floor, office or residential above)
- Multi-family residential (various forms)
- Hotels
- Civic/Institutional

Secondary Uses

- Commercial
- Office
- Attached residential (townhomes)
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	2-6 stories
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes attached and freestanding
Building Setback	15-30 feet (generally consistent within a block. Greater setbacks for civic or institutional uses is appropriate)
Streets	Small, grid-like blocks with a streetscape designed to encourage pedestrian activity
Transportation	Walking, biking, transit, automobile
Parking	Shared parking areas located behind buildings. Structured parking incorporated into mixed-use projects, on-street parking.
Open Space	Plazas, pocket parks, public realm acts as open space. Wide sidewalks, street trees, benches.



Similar in scale to Regional Mixed Use centers, Riverfront Mixed Use areas are intended to maximize development potential on Decatur's riverfront. (Character and pattern examples from other communities)

The One Decatur Steering Committee appreciates and recognizes the vital contribution that Decatur's industrial community makes the economic health of our City. In designating the area to the East of the US 31 bridge and along the Tennessee River as "riverfront mixed use," it is not the intention to promote development which would interfere with, discourage or otherwise negatively impact existing industries located in the corridor. Instead, the intent is to implement the desires of the community as a whole by improving access to the Tennessee River for public use, should the industrial activities as they presently exist along such corridor ever materially change or be discontinued. Public use activities which can co-exist harmoniously with existing industries should be encouraged and promoted under this plan as appropriate.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

Small nodes of mixed commercial development that provide goods and services to and within walking distance of surrounding neighborhoods. They generally exist near prominent intersections within a neighborhood or at its edge, and may serve as a transition between a more intense Commercial Corridor and a residential area. These centers may include mixed-use, live-work or multi-family residential uses that are compatible in character to nearby single family neighborhoods. Existing neighborhood centers should evolve to orient buildings to the street and improve pedestrian mobility.

Intent

- Provide pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and nearby public uses (schools, parks, etc.)
- Support some residential use that is compatible to the surrounding neighborhood character
- Locate new buildings near the street and accommodate parking to the side or rear of buildings
- Improve/provide public realm features such as signs, sidewalks, landscaping, and street trees
- Reduce access-points into development for pedestrian and vehicular safety

Primary Uses

- Small-scale retail, services
- Office
- Vertical mixed-use with commercial/office 1st floor and office/residential above

Secondary Uses

- Multi-family residential
- Civic / Institutional
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-3 stories
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes attached and freestanding
Building Setback	15-30 feet
Streets	Small, grid-like blocks with a streetscape designed to encourage pedestrian activity
Transportation	Walking, biking, automobile, supportive of transit
Parking	On-street or shared surface parking located to the side or rear of buildings
Open Space	Increased landscaping and "green infrastructure" elements per site and integrated in streetscape. Plazas, parks and trail connections as amenities.

Future neighborhood commercial centers should orient buildings to the street with parking to the rear or side of buildings. (Example pattern and character from other communities)

COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL

A mix of retail, service, and other commercial development along major streets and highway corridors. Given their context, Community Commercial areas have a more pronounced vehicular orientation than Urban Edge or Neighborhood Commercial areas. Existing development is characterized by buildings set back from streets behind surface parking. Over time, new development and redevelopment in Community Commercial areas is encouraged to raise design quality; improve the character of the streetscape; and improve mobility and accessibility for all users of the corridor.

Intent

- Provide pedestrian and vehicular connectivity between adjacent uses (pedestrian paths, streets, crossings)
- Improve internal walkability by clustering buildings and providing for shared parking configurations. Orient buildings near the street on at least one side.
- Allow for an increase in the mix and density of uses on a given site including residential
- Improve/provide public realm features such as consistent signs, sidewalks, landscaping, and street trees
- Reduce access-points into development for pedestrian and vehicular safety

Primary Uses

- Commercial (small and large format)
- Mixed use
- Office

Secondary Uses

- Institutional
- Multi-family residential
- Civic

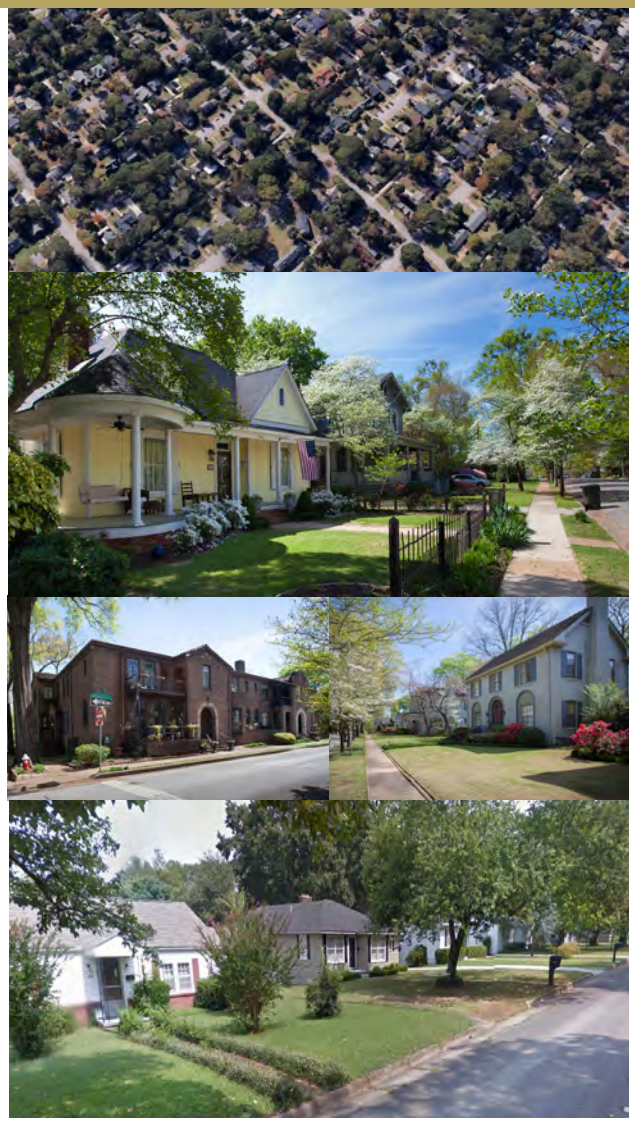
Building Blocks

Height Range	1-3 stories
Building Form	Mix of large footprint buildings and smaller buildings that may be occupied by a single commercial tenant or multiple tenants
Building Setback	20-50 feet
Streets	Located along primary corridors with shared access drives connecting individual developments and shared access points off streets
Transportation	Automobile, sidewalks, bikeway connectivity, suitable for transit
Parking	Off street surface lots are shared between buildings in the same area
Open Space	"Green infrastructure" and landscaping on individual sites, plazas and pocket parks

While community commercial areas exist in a car-oriented context, they should be designed to consolidate and share parking areas to improve internal walkability. (Example pattern and character from other communities)

CORE NEIGHBORHOOD

Decatur's earliest neighborhoods that include several designated historic areas. Primarily single-family residential neighborhoods with a mix of house sizes and styles on small lots. Streets form a grid pattern with small blocks that typically include alleys. Most streets have sidewalks and street trees. These neighborhoods may include limited attached housing types as well as small office, commercial, and civic uses. Where these neighborhoods approach commercial corridors and employment centers, a greater mix of housing types including townhomes, duplexes and small multi-family buildings in addition to single family houses.



Existing pattern and character examples.

Intent

- > Maintain the existing neighborhood character. Allow residential infill development that is compatible in scale to neighboring homes
- > Continue code enforcement and address unmaintained properties to stabilize declining areas
- > Continue historic preservation efforts
- > Emphasize quality design and landscaping for infill and redevelopment

Primary Uses

- Single family residential on small lots
- Attached residential that has the scale of a single family home (townhomes, duplexes, fourplexes, etc.)
- Small scale multifamily

Secondary Uses

- Neighborhood-scale office or commercial uses
- Civic / institutional
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-2.5 stories
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes. Typically pedestrian-focused with detached garages located off rear alleys.
Building Setback	10-30 feet (generally consistent within a block)
Streets	Small, grid-like blocks with a high degree of street connectivity.
Transportation	Walking, biking, transit, automobile
Parking	On-street and private off-street (both alley-loaded and front-loaded driveways/garages)
Open Space	Pocket parks within neighborhoods. Connections to school yards and community parks.

RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Primarily single-family developments arranged along wide, curvilinear streets with few intersections. Building and lot size range in size and density but tend to be highly consistent within a development with limited connectivity between different residential types and non-residential uses. Future Suburban Residential areas should be designed with a more connected street network of short blocks, street trees and sidewalks.

Intent

> Provide better pedestrian and vehicular connectivity between residential developments

> Improve streetscape features such as consistent sidewalks, lighting and street trees

Primary Uses

- Single family residential

Secondary Uses

- Civic / Institutional
- Attached residential with single family scale
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks	
Height Range	1-3 stories
Building Form	A range of housing sizes and styles with single-family scale and appearance
Building Setback	20-30 feet (generally consistent within a block)
Streets	Longer blocks with a curvilinear pattern are common, though connectivity and the pedestrian experience is important.
Transportation	Automobile access with sidewalk network.
Parking	On-street and private off-street, individual drives from street. May include alley-loaded garages.
Open Space	Neighborhood parks are given high priority and are located in prominent, easily-accessible locations. Schools also supplement public parks.

Existing pattern and character examples (top, middle). Future residential areas should be designed with sidewalks and street trees (bottom example from another community).

RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM-HIGH DENSITY

Residential areas composed primarily of multi-family housing in various forms. Building size and style tend to be consistent within a development, with large blocks, and limited connectivity between different building types and uses. Future development should take a more traditional neighborhood pattern where different residential types are connected in a walkable pattern. High density residential is typically appropriate near centers and corridors.

Intent

> Provide better vehicular and pedestrian connectivity between developments

> Improve architectural variety and site design for new developments

> Improve streetscape features such as consistent sidewalks, lighting and street trees

Primary Uses

- Multi-family residential
- Two-family residential
- Attached residential (townhomes)

Secondary Uses

- Office
- Single family detached residential (small lot)
- Commercial (neighborhood scale)
- Civic / Institutional (neighborhood scale)

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-3 stories
Building Form	Variety of multi-family housing types including apartment buildings, townhomes, patio homes etc.
Building Setback	20-30 feet
Streets	A higher degree of street connectivity with short walkable blocks
Transportation	Automobile; sidewalks within development should connect to outside sidewalk and trail network
Parking	on-street & private off-street in shared parking lots or private driveways
Open Space	Smaller, private pocket parks serve residents with access to larger public parks via sidewalks and bike paths

Higher intensity attached residential includes a variety of housing types that may not exist in Decatur today. Design of these buildings and the quality of their neighborhoods is a critical factor in their long-term viability.

MIXED NEIGHBORHOOD

Primarily residential area featuring a mix of housing types ranging from multi-family, townhomes, and small-lot single family detached. They are typically located within a walkable distance to a neighborhood activity center such as a commercial center or civic site. Mixed neighborhoods should have a street network of small blocks, a defined center and edges, and connections to surrounding development. These neighborhoods may include small-scale retail or office uses.

Intent

> Provide streetscape features such as sidewalks, street trees, and lighting

> Provide street and sidewalk connections to surrounding neighborhoods and commercial centers

> Provide for appropriate transitions in scale and density to surrounding neighborhoods

Primary Uses

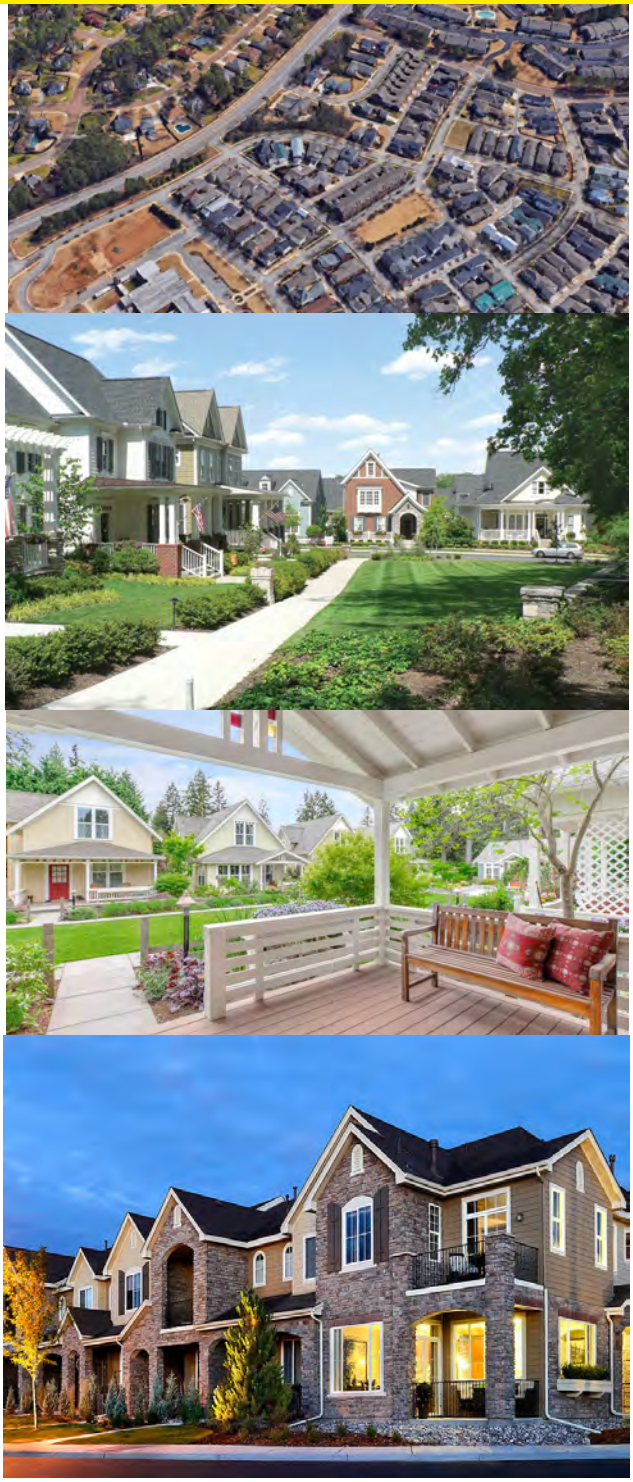
- Single family residential
- Single family residential attached (townhomes)
- Multi-family residential

Secondary Uses

- Commercial (neighborhood scale)
- Office (neighborhood scale)
- Institutional
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	2-4 stories
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes clustered and grouped but linked by a connected street network
Building Setback	10-30 feet (generally consistent within a block)
Streets	Grid-like blocks with a high degree of connectivity
Transportation	Automobile access with complete sidewalk system, recreational trails
Parking	on-street & private off-street
Open Space	Public parks of varying sizes are integrated into developments



Pattern and character examples from other communities.

FLEX EMPLOYMENT CENTER

Includes an array of modern, low-impact industrial uses that include assembly and processing, warehousing and distribution and flex space suitable for high-tech or research and development activities. The bulk of the light industrial use must be contained within a building or facility. These areas may serve as a transition from heavy industrial sites. These areas may include commercial and residential uses but generally at a smaller scale than other commercial or mixed use areas.

Intent

> Provide flexible space to support a variety of low-impact but high value industrial activities.

> Encourage the use of higher-quality building materials and landscaping for highly-visible sites.

Primary Uses

- Light Industrial
- Commercial
- Office

Secondary Uses

- Multi-family residential
- Parks and open space
- Civic/Institutional

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-3 stories
Building Form	Large to very large footprint structures, offering flexible space to accommodate market demand for various users. Buildings oriented to the street.
Building Setback	30-50+ feet (tends to vary from lot to lot)
Streets	Varies, but street design should accommodate truck traffic while maintaining safe environment for pedestrians and automobiles. Easy access to major corridors.
Transportation	Access by automobile and bicycles. Transit supportive.
Parking	Off street surface lots
Open Space	Natural buffers between adjacent development. Access to trails. "Green infrastructure" incorporated into site design.

Pattern and character examples from other communities.

GENERAL INDUSTRIAL

Large industrial sites, manufacturing and materials processing facilities. These are primarily found along the river and railway corridors. Sites typically include multiple large footprint buildings that vary in height. General Industrial sites typically involve some outdoor component to their operation.

Intent

> Support heavy industrial activities away from neighborhoods and other commercial or mixed use areas.

> Utilize physical or natural buffers (railway, water, forest) to separate the industrial use from other nearby uses.

> Encourage "green infrastructure" and site design practices that reduce environmental impacts.

Primary Uses

- Heavy industrial

Secondary Uses

- Passive open space
- Office
- Commercial

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-4 stories
Building Form	Variety of building types and sizes
Building Setback	100+ feet (varies)
Streets	Long blocks with few connections. Street design accommodates truck traffic while maintaining safe environment for pedestrians and automobiles. Easy access to major corridors.
Transportation	Automobile
Parking	Off street surface lots
Open Space	Natural buffers between adjacent development. "Green infrastructure" incorporated into site design.

RURAL EDGE / AGRICULTURE

Land at the edge of the City or in unincorporated areas that is primarily undeveloped or in agricultural use. These areas may include rural edge development that is mostly single-family residential with some small commercial or civic uses. Buildings are generally set far back from the roadway on large lots (over one acre). These areas may not be served by municipal water and sewer utilities.

Intent

> Encourage preservation of environmentally sensitive land such as wetlands, floodplain and mature forest.

> Discourage suburban residential subdivisions in this area through use of municipal water and sewer infrastructure.

Primary Uses

- Agriculture
- Single family residential

Secondary Uses

- Civic/Institutional
- Commercial (small scale)
- Industrial (small scale)
- Parks and open space

Building Blocks

Height Range	1-2 stories
Building Form	Individual residential structures and accessory buildings
Building Setback	Varies
Streets	Rural roadways with limited pedestrian provisions
Transportation	Automobile, connection to trail system primarily via wide shoulders
Parking	Private off-street, individual driveways and garages
Open Space	Regional parks and private open spaces

PUBLIC / INSTITUTIONAL

Land and buildings occupied by municipal and other governmental agencies for the exercise of their functions, such as major libraries, airports, public schools and public safety facilities. Semi-public uses such as colleges and universities, hospitals, and other major institutions such as large church facilities are included. These sites often have a development pattern that is unique to each area and may differ significantly from their surroundings.

PARK / OPEN SPACE

Public and private parks, recreational open space or undeveloped natural areas that are permanently protected from development by the city, state, county, or some other authority. This classification also includes large cemeteries that function as open space.

ACTIONS

In addition to the Future Land Use and Character Map, the following projects, policies, and programs support the goal for creating a quality place:

Efficient use of land resources that offers distinctive and desirable places to live, work and play, includes strategic revitalization throughout the community, maintains historic and natural assets, and supports a high level of community pride.

Objective 1. Promote desirable and financially beneficial development patterns.

QP **1.1 Reform the City's zoning and land development codes.** City codes are the primary means of implementing the Future Land Use recommendations illustrated on the Future Land Use and Character Map. An update to the zoning code and land development regulations should include standards that prescribe the form of development as well as allowable uses. There are various regulatory actions throughout this plan. In terms of improving the physical character of development, zoning reform should:

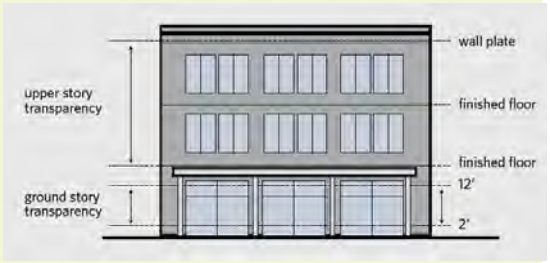
- **Adopt mixed use zoning districts.** The zoning code should feature mixed use zoning districts that are consistent with the intent and building blocks described in the Future Land Use and Character types including Urban Edge, Regional Mixed Use, and Riverfront Mixed Use.
- **Enhance aesthetic and design standards Citywide and along specific corridors.** More robust standards for building design, landscaping, signs and lighting should be considered to apply Citywide with specific standards along key corridors.
- **Provide incentives for desired development.** Regulatory incentives such as density bonuses or an expedited review process could be used to promote redevelopment, mixed-use development, affordable housing, preserve open space or fund public art.
- **Clarify expectations and streamline the development regulations.** An update to the zoning code should consider form-based standards that clearly indicate the type of development intended using easy-to-understand illustrations and tables. The City should also consider if a "Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)" which combines traditional zoning and subdivision regulations, along with other City regulations, such as design guidelines, sign regulations, and floodplain and stormwater management, into one document.

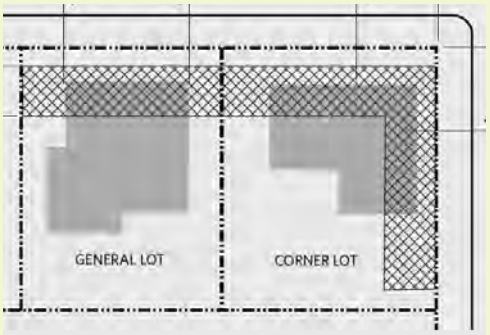
See summary table of regulatory actions under How To Use The Plan , page 112

Best Practices in Zoning Codes

A common shortcoming of traditional zoning codes is that they emphasize separation of land uses and prescribe little direction for the appearance of development. Contemporary zoning codes that are intended to implement a character-based land use plan will place a high emphasis on the form of development such as building design characteristics and placement on a site. In these codes, regulating specific land uses is often secondary. Such "form-based" codes have been adopted in various degrees by communities of all sizes as a way to carry out their visions for a vibrant built environment while fostering predictable results for both developers and residents.

Form-based codes address the relationship between building fronts and public areas, the size and mass of buildings and their relationship to one another, and the scale and type of streets and blocks. The regulations are presented with clear diagrams and graphics.





QP **1.2 Create a task force to consider various incentives for development.** The task force should evaluate various financial or regulatory incentives and make recommendations about using incentives to promote development in designated areas. The types of incentives considered should include tax increment financing (TIF), density bonuses, limited property tax abatements, among others.

The City of Mobile's Redevelopment Incentive Program is one example TIF model in Alabama that should be evaluated for applicability to Decatur.

QP **1.3 Conduct a 'return on investment' analysis for major development proposals.** Not all development projects bring net fiscal benefits to the City over the long term. For large-scale development proposals that require changes to zoning, infrastructure investment or other financial incentive from the City, an assessment of the net fiscal impact should be conducted to evaluate the proposal. A fiscal return on investment (ROI) analysis would determine the fiscal benefits to the City relative to costs for providing public improvements to support a development. ROI methodology will vary by project, but would generally consider project costs to the City (initial incentives and long term utility and service costs), fiscal returns (sales and property tax revenue) and economic returns (direct and indirect benefits such as jobs, related investments, and amenity value).

QP **1.4 Adopt a strategic annexation policy.** An annexation policy would identify priority areas for potential future annexation and outline terms for properties annexing into the City. Those terms should include rezoning of a property in accordance with this plan's Future Land Use and Character Map. This policy would continue to require that provision of public sewer utility service be tied to annexation.

QP **1.5 Collaborate with Decatur Utilities to evaluate infrastructure funding models.** The City should encourage Decatur Utilities (which is independently managed) to consider other models of funding sewer and water infrastructure expansions. The current developer-funded model minimizes the use of taxpayer funds for capital improvements. However, it may be beneficial for the City to encourage development by pro-actively funding infrastructure expansion to drive growth.

Objective 2. Improve the appearance of public and private property throughout the City (particularly gateways).

QP **2.1 Redefine the 6th Avenue Gateway.** As the primary entry to Decatur, the appearance of 6th Avenue between Downtown and the river fundamentally shapes visitor perceptions and community pride. The City should focus beautification efforts on this area through capital improvements to the street (lighting, landscaping, pedestrian facilities, utilities), and also through zoning updates that support higher quality design and pedestrian-scaled development. (See demonstration corridors, page 66)

QP **2.2 Recognize and award business and homeowners who enhance their properties.** The maintenance and appearance of individual properties has an impact on the appearance, pride and reputation of the community. Decatur should reinstate the beautification awards or create a new a program that recognizes and awards property owners for their positive efforts. The City should also consider monetary rewards that could enhance participation, such as a one-year tax abatement or credit awarded to one "most improved" property per year.

QP **2.3 Relocate utilities from view of primary streets.** In highly visible areas, the City should evaluate the feasibility of relocating utilities (preferably underground) during major redevelopment projects.

QP **2.4** **Create a tree planting and street tree replacement program.** A tree planting program would have aesthetic, economic, and environmental benefits. The program could involve regulatory changes such as requiring street trees in all new developments and incentivizing the preservation of existing trees, especially large shade trees in new development and redevelopment projects. It may also include proactive efforts by the City such as planting trees and installing landscaping along streets (on the side of streets or within medians) in targeted revitalization areas such as 6th Avenue, Moulton Street, Wilson Street, and the Beltline.

QP **2.5** **Strengthen development regulations regarding aesthetics Citywide.** An update to the City's zoning should evaluate landscaping, signs, lighting and other aesthetic standards for all development. For example:

- All development projects (non-residential and multifamily residential) should be required to have trash receptacle enclosure(s) constructed of approved materials.
- Address parking in residential zones. Restrict the number of vehicles that can be parked in a front yard. Also restrict overnight truck and tractor parking that cannot be accessed from the designated truck route.

What else?

- Adopt corridor design standards (see Chapter 3, MO 2.3)
- Undertake improvements in strategic corridors (see demonstration corridors in Chapter 3)

Objective 3. Encourage redevelopment along the Riverfront (and other areas).

QP **3.1** **Create a riverfront redevelopment task force.** There are several potential sites along the riverfront that could be redeveloped to create a signature mixed use destination that would serve as a catalyst for revitalization. A task force should be established to research and recommend steps necessary to create an upscale, publicly accessible riverfront development. Such steps may include land acquisition, developer recruitment, infrastructure upgrades, and financing options (among others).

QP **3.2** **Initiate zoning map updates to targeted areas.** Upon adopting a major update to the zoning code and zoning map, the City should develop rezoning procedures for targeted sites to encourage redevelopment. The City may establish a process where it initiates rezonings to targeted areas to align the zoning map to the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use and Character Map (like all rezonings this process would require multiple public hearings).

QP **3.3** **Meet with key property owners.** Approach property owners in target redevelopment areas to discuss the potential acquisition of key properties or to build awareness of the City's support for redevelopment. For example, Decatur Housing Authority should be approached to evaluate opportunities for riverfront development.

QP **3.4** **Seek resources to remediate brownfield sites.** Redevelopment of key riverfront sites may be challenged by contamination due to previous land uses. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management offers several mitigation programs to help fund cleanup of so-called brownfield sites.

Objective 4. Stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods.

QP **4.1 Develop a "maintain, revitalize, redevelop" program for neighborhoods.** The State of Alabama supports the creation of revitalization/redevelopment districts that offer cities power to target programs and improvements, acquire land, and promote redevelopment. The City would first need to designate a specific area and prepare a revitalization plan. Such a plan would also make the City eligible for Federal HUD Choice Neighborhood Grants.

QP **4.2 Expand community-based neighborhood enhancement programs.** Expand upon existing volunteer-based community-building programs offered by the Community Action Partnership of North Alabama (CAPNA) such as a "Clean Team," patterned after Habitat for Humanity, to help with neighborhood clean-ups throughout the community; a "Curb Appeal" program to provide landscaping and design services and matching funds to property owners, particularly for historic structures and along major corridors; a "Paint the Town" program (perhaps a competition) to utilize volunteers and corporate sponsors to assist property owners in painting homes and other structures; and an Adopt-a-Block program.

QP **4.3 Create a housing upkeep community education program.** This program would be designed to encourage the maintenance and upkeep of current housing stock by spreading awareness of available tools and programs (such as, FHA 203K renovation loans; HUD energy efficiency tools; HUD renovation for seniors; etc.).

QP **4.4 Continue the blight abatement program.** Decatur has maintained a robust program of vacant structure demolition in the interest of neighborhood stabilization and public safety. Prior to demolition of a vacant structure, the City should evaluate whether the structure is viable. An effort should be made (through a land bank authority) to connect potential investors (or non-profits) with properties that could be renovated.

QP **4.5 Establish a land bank system.** The City owns and maintains numerous vacant parcels. A land bank should be established to strategically work toward transferring properties into productive use. As an example, the City of Birmingham's Land Bank Authority catalogs thousands of potential parcels for purchase through an online map.

QP **4.6 Create a mow-to-own program.** A mow-to-own program could reduce the City's cost for maintaining vacant lots, potentially return formerly tax-delinquent properties to the tax rolls, and improve the appearance of neighborhoods. Mow-to-own has been adopted by several major cities as a way for property owners to take ownership of nearby vacant lots that are currently owned by the City. A property owner agrees to mow and maintain the appearance of the lot in exchange for earning credit toward the purchase of the property, up to a certain dollar amount per year. In other programs, the property is deeded to the new owner for a nominal fee with a lien that requires the owner to maintain the property.

Redevelop and Revitalize

Section 24-3 of the Code of Alabama allows for municipalities to undertake urban renewal projects for the purposes of rehabilitation and redevelopment and the elimination or prevention of the spread of blighted property. These powers include the acquisition of real property and demolition, removal, or rehabilitation of buildings where necessary and the installation, construction, or reconstruction of streets, parks, utilities, playgrounds, and other improvements. An urban renewal project or plan may include property that is not blighted, but eminent domain may be exercised to acquire non-blighted property. This legislation is a powerful tool for cities.

The City of Huntsville created an urban renewal and redevelopment plan for the oldest section of Cummings Research Park in order to reverse further decline in the area. The plan's objectives include the elimination of blighted and deteriorated conditions, restoration of economic vitality, promotion of the development of new urban centers, provision of public improvements, revitalization of the appearance and condition of these properties, establishment of an environment for viable mixed-use urban neighborhood projects, and provision of public open space opportunities. Huntsville is working with a private developer on this project, but the urban renewal plan can help the city provide funding for the public improvements.

Choice Neighborhoods Program

The Choice Neighborhoods program supports locally driven strategies to address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation. Local leaders, residents, and stakeholders, such as public housing authorities, cities, schools, police, business owners, nonprofits, and private developers, come together to create and implement a plan that transforms distressed HUD housing and addresses the challenges in the surrounding neighborhood. The program is designed to catalyze critical improvements in neighborhood assets, including vacant property, housing, services and schools.

Mobile received two Choice Neighborhood Planning Grants in 2015; these grants are being used to create plans for the Three Mile Trace Choice Neighborhood and the Southside Choice Neighborhood.

QP **4.7** **Establish Neighborhood Branding Programs.** A branding program focused on the City's neighborhoods, including its historic districts, could be established to help create stronger neighborhood identities and boost pride.

Objective 5. Establish standards to ensure that new residential areas exhibit strong neighborhood qualities including walkable blocks, integrated open space (parks), and a variety of housing options.

QP **5.1** **Require that neighborhoods have a well-connected street network and walkable blocks.** The City's land development regulations should be updated to require that new neighborhood development utilize a street pattern of walkable blocks with minimal use of cul-de-sacs. Neighborhoods should provide multiple connections to adjacent neighborhoods. All neighborhood streets including local streets and collectors should be designed with sidewalks on both sides of the street.

QP **5.2** **Ensure that the zoning code defines and permits a wide range of housing types.** An update to the City's zoning code should include definitions for a range of housing and other building types, their design characteristics, and their appropriate land use context. Residential development intensity should be determined by design characteristics such as building type, height, distance from the street, architectural variety, and streetscape features rather than by units-per-acre alone.

QP **5.3** **Allow mixed housing types within new neighborhoods.** While the City's current zoning classification "planned residential district (PRD)" allows for flexibility in neighborhood design with multiple housing types, the PRD process is more involved than a conventional zoning district. An update to the City's zoning code should clearly define criteria for mixed or "traditional" neighborhood development and allow such development through a standard approval process.

QP **5.4** **Evaluate open space provisions in proposals for new neighborhoods.** Open space is a critical component of complete neighborhoods. Proposals should be examined to ensure that open space is integrated into the design of new neighborhoods and how such open space will be maintained in the future. To consistently evaluate open space provisions, the City should adopt a standard for how much open space should be provided per residential unit.

Neighborhood Patterns

A conventional suburban development pattern (below) with long blocks and few connections between different housing types should be discouraged in favor of a more connected pattern (bottom).

Neighborhoods should be designed with a connected street network of small blocks, provide for a range of housing options, and integrate community facilities including schools and parks at various scales. All streets should feature sidewalks and street trees.

Objective 6. Continue to support current revitalization efforts downtown.

QP **6.1** **Facilitate Downtown Development.** The City should continue to work closely with the Decatur Downtown Development Authority (DDRA) and support implementation of its five-year strategic plan (Forward Decatur) which is based on its long-range plan, Envision Decatur. The current Strategic Plan focuses on residential development in Downtown, the establishment of the Education and Technology Business Park in developing the Decatur Downtown Commons and streetscape improvements and economic development of the 6th Avenue Gateway Corridor. City leaders should receive annual updates from DDRA and be involved in their short-term strategic planning efforts.

QP **6.2** **Create a Downtown Business Improvement District (BID).** As mentioned in the Envision Decatur plan, the City should consider the creation of a Business Improvement District or BID. A BID is an area where property owners within the BID area pay a special assessment that funds improvements in that area. BIDs have been successfully used in many downtowns across the country to fund a wide range of needs. A Downtown BID would fund improvements that are prioritized by DDRA.

QP **6.3** **Continue to acquire land in the Dry Creek to support creation of Decatur Commons.** The City should continue to acquire and land bank property in the dry creek area to facilitate future development of a signature community gathering space and mixed use employment area connected to Downtown.

QP **6.4** **Maintain the historic trolley tracks on upper Bank Street and Church Street.** The tracks exposed in the center of Bank and Church streets contributes positively to the character of Downtown, however the tracks are in a state of disrepair. The City should consider options for rehabilitation or another use of the historical trolley tracks that retains their presence in future street improvements.

QP **6.5** **Expand railroad "quiet zones."** With a large amount of rail traffic and at-grade crossings near Downtown, train horn noise is a frequent issue. A quiet zone is an area where trains are prohibited from sounding their horns. The City has established a quiet zone on Vine Street near the depot, but that zone should be extended. Establishing a quiet zone may require that the City mitigate the increased risk caused by the absence of a horn through supplemental safety features approved by the US Federal Railroad Administration.

Business Improvement Districts

"Self-help Business Improvement Districts," as they are known in Alabama, are legally permissible under Chapter 54B of the Code of Alabama. To be created, two-thirds of property owners in a district must support the BID. The BID includes a special assessment (above the regular property tax rate) that is levied on property owners of real property located within the district. The revenue from this assessment directly funds programs and projects within the BID area. While these special tax districts typically utilize property taxes, other forms of assessment such as sales tax districts could be considered.

- Example: Downtown Mobile Business Improvement District Management Plan

Objective 7. Improve code enforcement tools.

QP **7.1** **License rental properties (rental unit certificate of occupancy program).** Some rental properties are responsible for a disproportionate share of police and emergency calls and property code violations. A rental licensing program would be a way to reduce some problems by requiring landlords to register rental properties before leasing them. The City would provide inspections to ensure that properties are well-maintained, compliant with codes, and safe for habitation. This program would apply to all non-owner-occupied dwellings including short-term and long-term rentals, boarding houses and group homes. Many cities and counties have such requirements. In Anniston, licenses are renewed on an annual basis, so properties would be inspected yearly. In other places, licenses are granted for two-years, while some cities tie inspections to tenant lease renewals. Another model may simply require registration, but not inspections unless there are complaints. Licensing fees may be based on property type and size. A rental license program in Decatur should be designed to minimize the burden on responsible landlords.

QP **7.2** **Create more robust regulations for housing, safety and nuisances.** Review the City's code restrictions on occupancy including the number of persons per housing unit and number of unrelated persons. Also include definitions for group homes, boarding houses, short-term rentals, and home sharing and the conditions and locations where such uses are permitted. Clarifying these regulations will help with enforcement of unsafe conditions.

QP **7.3** **Regulate short-term or transient rentals.** Short-term or transient rentals are two terms that refer to the relatively new and growing market for home-sharing and vacation rentals. The City should require that such rentals be licensed with the intent of allowing property owners the option to utilize their properties in this way, while minimizing public safety risks and the noise, trash and parking problems often associated with short-term rentals and home-sharing without creating additional work for the local police department, and to ensure that the City does not lose out on tax revenue that could be invested in much needed services for permanent residents.

QP **7.4** **Upgrade the City's tracking system.** A GIS-based tracking system should be considered to manage code compliance, rental registration, and 311 requests. Such a system would help staff determine patterns and allocate time and resources efficiently.

QP **7.5** **Adopt a cooperative compliance model.** Under a cooperative compliance model, code enforcement officers do much more than inspect housing and issue violation notices – they also provide guidance to property owners on how to properly address problems and comply with codes. The officer may also help the property owner find resources for fixing the violations by providing written materials, offering classes, or identifying sources of low-interest loans or grant funding. As a result, code enforcement officers can be considered trusted community partners, helping to improve housing and neighborhood quality, and help save the City time and money on re-inspections, abatement hearings, and prosecutions.

Rental Licensing Program Precedents

There is a growing number of cities that have some form of licensing requirement for rental housing. The following is a short list of precedent programs in other communities that should be evaluated when considering a rental license requirement in Decatur.

Large Cities
- Baltimore, MD
- Minneapolis, MN
- Philadelphia, PA
- Memphis, TN
- Denver, CO

Small-Mid Size Cities
- Tacoma, WA
- Annapolis, MD
- Boulder, CO

Alabama Cities
- Anniston
- Tuscaloosa
- Gulf Shores

QP **7.6 Continue to provide educational material about code compliance.** When it comes to City regulations, renters often don't know their rights, do not understand the process, and/or don't feel they can file a complaint about housing conditions. Renters are often unfamiliar with existing protections and programs, and those with language barriers or disabilities may have trouble navigating the system. In addition, many residents avoid notifying their property owner of problems for fear of increased rent, retaliation, or eviction. The City should continue to provide informational material to inform residents of their rights, City codes, and services available to address property issues.

QP **7.7 Recognize landlord responsibility.** Prevent property owners who have unresolved violations from establishing (or renewing) a rental property license. Reward rental property owners that have no recorded code violations in a certain time period, such as through reduced or waived rental registration fees.

What else?

> Implement a 311 system (see Enhancing our Amenities)

Objective 8. Maintain our historical assets.

QP **8.1 Develop an expedited review process for historic properties.** Decatur has a simplified or expedited approval process for roof replacements in historic districts, but any other building permit must be reviewed by the HPC. Most cities have an expedited review process, implemented by a City staff member, for repairs or replacements that do not involve changes in style, materials, colors, etc. Implementing such a process significantly reduces the amount of time home and property owners spend obtaining a building permit for simple items. If the City had an expedited process for simple items, other historic districts, those that are not yet locally designated, may be more willing to consider designation, as the process can seem less burdensome.

QP **8.2 Designate other local historic districts.** Decatur currently has two locally designated historic districts; however, the City has at least three other historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places that are candidates for local designation. More neighborhoods are eligible for National Register nomination. Local designation is the only way to ensure that historic properties are protected, as national and state registers are honorifics only. Currently, the City has no way of ensuring that the historic buildings in districts, other than in the Old Decatur and Albany neighborhoods are significantly altered.

QP **8.3 Educate property owners regarding historic designation.** Many property owners seem to see historic designation as a burden rather than a benefit. Historic designation offers numerous benefits, including increased property values, greater neighborhood stability, and tax incentives. An educational campaign could inform property owners of the benefits of designation and garner support for the designation of more local districts.

QP **8.4 Require HPC review prior to demolition.** The City's current regulations do not require review prior to demolition of a structure within a historic district. To ensure that buildings and structures worthy of preservation are not inadvertently demolished, a permit and review by the HPC should be required for proposed demolition of structures in a historic district. Such review may not always prevent the demolition of historically significant buildings or structures. If the building is deemed significant, then issuance of the permit may be delayed for a specific period of time to pursue landmark designation, or to explore preservation solutions such as selling the property to a purchaser interested in rehabilitating the structure or finding alternative sites for the proposed post-demolition project.

Objective 9. Protect our watersheds and conserve sensitive habitat.

QP **9.1** **Develop more runoff restrictions for areas adjacent to waterways that drain to the Wildlife Refuge.** Currently, the City's stormwater ordinance regulates runoff and stormwater management, but runoff and sedimentation is still an issue at the Refuge. The City should conduct a study to determine problem areas for runoff and create restrictions that will protect the Refuge and Tennessee River.

QP **9.2** **Adopt low-impact development standards.** Incorporate natural systems and practices to manage stormwater in order to protect water quality and aquatic habitats such as the Refuge. Use green infrastructure techniques when possible for City projects by preserving or de-channeling streams while at the same time creating green space that is both functional and useful. Bioretention facilities, rain gardens, vegetated rooftops, rain barrels, and permeable pavements are some examples of ways to incorporate these practices.

QP **9.3** **Create a pilot project to test stormwater filtering techniques.** While runoff regulations and low impact development standards may help reduce certain types of pollution caused by stormwater runoff, visible pollution in the form of debris and litter often find their way into waterways. The City should initiate a project to test techniques such as rain gardens and tools including floatable litter traps. The City could secure business sponsors for individual demonstration projects.

QP **9.4** **Promote environmental education programs through the Refuge and River as major assets, important for protection and preservation.** The River and the Refuge are unique environmental assets that deserve better appreciation. If residents appreciate these assets as important to their quality of life, they will support efforts to protect them. The City could work with the organizations protecting these resources to raise awareness about existing educational programs and sponsor volunteer clean-up days or crews, hold City events at these places, etc.

QP **9.5** **Maintain Wilson Morgan Lake for flood control.** Wilson Morgan Lake serves a critical role in the City's flood control infrastructure. The lake has not been adequately maintained, which could compromise its effectiveness. A engineering study is currently underway to evaluate the lake and make recommendations on its future maintenance needs and potential uses. The City should support the recommendations of that study.

What else?

> Tree planting to expand the urban tree canopy (see QP 2.4)

Low Impact Development and Green Infrastructure

Low Impact Development (LID) is a stormwater management approach modeled after nature. LID's goal is to mimic a site's predevelopment hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source. LID addresses stormwater through small, cost-effective landscape features located at the lot level. This includes not only open space, but also rooftops, streetscapes, parking lots, sidewalks, and medians. LID is a versatile approach that can be applied equally well to new development, urban retrofits, and redevelopment / revitalization projects.

- Resource: Low Impact Design Handbook for the State of Alabama

Floatable litter traps

A "Bandalong Litter Trap" is a product designed to float in waterways and capture litter before it flows further downstream. This floatable control technology continuously operates year-round without any mechanical assistance to capture floating litter. The Bandalong is in use in several US and international cities.

ONE WAY

Dr. Bill Sims
HIKE-BIKE WAY
DECATUR
POINT MALLARD
Golf Course Trail Head 2 mi.
Ice Rink Trail Head 2.9 mi.
Rhodes Ferry River Park 3.6 mi.
Pt. Mallard Camp Ground 7 mi.
• No Motorized Vehicles
• Use Trail at Own Risk
• Trail Closed at Dark
• No Littering

3

IMPROVING OUR MOBILITY

The mobility component of the Comprehensive Plan builds upon the land use and quality of place recommendations to define a vision for the future transportation network. It addresses a range of vehicular and non-vehicular transportation needs in Decatur with recommendations at various scales to balance the needs and concerns of residents against the real-world constraints caused by funding challenges, limited space, and competing priorities. This element supports other plan initiatives, particularly creating a quality place and advancing economic prosperity.

Goal

A well-maintained, smart and sustainable transportation system that offers strong regional and internal connectivity, provides attractive and safe options for cycling, walking and public transportation, and supports desirable development and a strong economy.

Objectives

1. Design street improvements to balance mobility, accessibility, land use, and desired development character.
2. Improve the appearance and condition of the City's streets.
3. Increase efforts to make City more walkable and bike friendly.
4. Expand access to shared-ride transit options.
5. Improve Downtown mobility.
6. Support strategic efforts to improve regional connectivity.

Chapter Organization

- Key Findings
- Actions
- Street Typology
- Demonstration Corridors

KEY FINDINGS

The City of Decatur owes its existence to the strategic transportation links that made it an economic hub for the South. Though the railroad and river have waned somewhat in economic importance, an efficient and connected transportation system is just as important to the City's economic health and vitality as it ever was. Locally, a balanced and connected transportation network supports economic vitality, provides travel options, and allows the community to grow in a compact and sustainable way. Regionally, efficient connections to Huntsville and areas beyond promote access to employment, education, and entertainment while also supporting a more connected regional economy. The following findings from research and community input provide context for the mobility recommendations.

Opportunity for Change

Fourteen percent of the ideas brought forward by the public during the One Decatur listening and learning sessions in November 2016 pertained to transportation in some way. This is a community of bright and thoughtful individuals who care about their community, their mobility, and leaving Decatur a better town to live, work, and recreate in.

Following local and national trends, the most popular topic of public concern were bicycle and pedestrian facilities, followed by maintenance. A thorough reading of the community's comments, along with stakeholder interviews that followed in December, provided a better understanding of Decatur's transportation system, and the major challenges the community faces.

Context

The City of Decatur is part of the Decatur Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which plans for and coordinates major transportation projects throughout the urbanized area. The MPO maintains and updates the area's long range transportation plan (LRTP), which guides major transportation improvements over a 25-year period. The MPO also acts as the coordinator for federal transportation funding which goes toward various regional projects.

Since the Decatur Area 2040 LRTP includes plans for major improvement projects to regional roadways in the area, the intent of Decatur's Comprehensive Plan is to focus on recommendations for smaller projects that will improve local mobility.

Major Challenges and Opportunities:

- Need to expand and connect bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the City to connect to more neighborhoods and community resources and throughout the region to connect the City to employment, education, and recreation
- Lack of funding for major improvement projects and street maintenance will require creative solutions
- General lack of local and regional connectivity that makes it difficult to access community resources
- Heavy truck traffic that increases maintenance costs, causes safety conflicts, and causes congestion in some areas of town
- A desire to improve aesthetics and streetscaping throughout the City in cooperation with redevelopment efforts

Road Network

Decatur plans for and maintains a comprehensive local roadway system. Roads within the City of Decatur include everything from controlled-access interstates to neighborhood streets, with a total of just over 600 centerline miles within the City limits.

Interstates	11 miles
Arterials	73 miles
Collector Roads	114 miles
Local Streets	406 miles
TOTAL	**604 miles**

Though many of these are maintained by the State of Alabama, the City has a major interest in the design and operations of all regional roadways that carry traffic to and from destinations in Decatur.

Funding Challenges

Funding has repeatedly been a major constraint for roadway projects in Decatur. Recently, plans for a new river crossing were declared infeasible by the state, while long-standing hopes for a southern bypass around the City were removed from the state's future plans due to a lack of funding.

Management, Maintenance, and Connectivity

Local streets in older neighborhoods surrounding downtown are mostly aligned on a grid network, with the network becoming less dense and more curvilinear farther out. The railroad is a major barrier in Decatur that creates a disconnection between neighborhoods, causing mobility issues for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. Additional connections between neighborhoods are needed to improve traffic flow and reduce barriers to accessing community resources, as well as additional connections to regional destinations.

The City maintains all local roadways that are not part of a state or federal highway. Currently, local officials identify individual streets for yearly improvements based on a political system, but the City is moving toward a need-based pavement management system.

Heavy truck traffic in certain parts of the City causes high wear and tear on local roads, and street maintenance is a major concern among Decatur residents.

Congestion and Traffic Flow

Four corridors within the City limits were identified in the MPO's 2040 LRTP as having "unacceptable levels of service" as of 2015. Level of service is a way to measure the typical flow of traffic through a corridor with "A" being free flow and no delays, and "F" being stop-and-go traffic.

Individual areas of the City have been studied due to isolated transportation needs in the past. Two corridor plans, for Wilson Street and Red Bank Road/Upper River Road, address special capacity or accessibility issues associated with each area.

Corridor	Extents	Level of Service
US 31/State Route 20 Bridge	Church Street to State Route 20 in Limestone County	F
6th Avenue	Moulton Street to 4th Avenue NE	E
8th Street	6th Avenue to Central Parkway SW	E
State Route 67	Country Club Road SE to Upper River Road	E

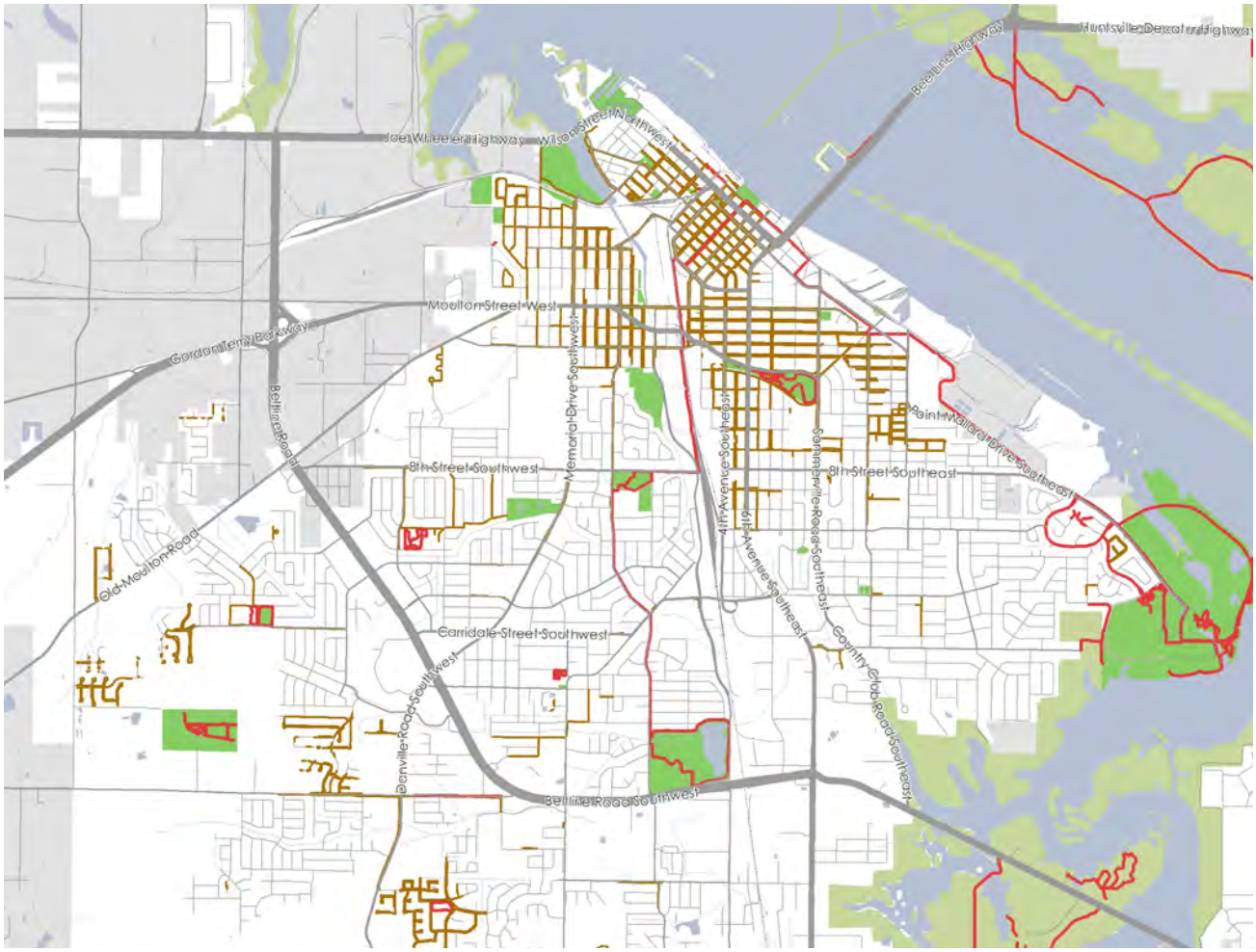
The Highway 31 bridge crossing is the only major route into and out of Downtown Decatur from the north, and causes traffic bottlenecks during peak traffic periods. This bridge is also the choice route for trucks from the areas along the Tennessee River to cross the river, leading to conflicts with local traffic. Improvements to the Wilson Street intersection have improved traffic flow recently, but long-term solutions should be considered to improve this issue.

Bicycle & Pedestrian

Decatur's bicycle culture is maturing, but it lags other communities of similar size. Many advocates in the community recognize the need to encourage bicycling and promote it as a functional form of transportation. The City completed a bicycle and pedestrian plan in 2015 with a major goal of improving connectivity between residential neighborhoods and activity centers. Recommendations in the plan include implementing a Complete Streets policy, proactive maintenance on bicycle and pedestrian facilities, wayfinding signage, higher density development, and bicycle parking.

Though the City has a growing multi-use trail network, these trails are disconnected from each other, from downtown, and often from the neighborhoods surrounding them. These disconnects limit their use as a functional transportation facility. The City is making efforts to encourage walkability, but the same challenge applies to the City's sidewalk network with comprehensive coverage only in downtown.

Connectivity beyond the City limits is a major challenge, though many local and regional groups continue to advocate for multimodal connections to destinations across the river. One such prominent effort is Launch2035, a cooperative effort of leaders from Limestone, Madison and Morgan counties that seeks to promote opportunities for regional collaboration. They are promoting a plan for a new regional greenway system that would connect downtown Decatur and Calhoun Community College with regional cultural and educational destinations such as Athens State University and the University of Alabama- Huntsville.



Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

- Sidewalks
- Bicycle Facilities

Freight & Rail

Decatur's position as a center of industry and location on a strategically significant navigable waterway means that a large amount of freight traffic moves through the local network daily. This has been a persistent challenge for the City, which seeks to balance the mobility needs of local residents with the economic needs of industry partners.

Three port terminals are located along the river within the City limits, at Mallard-Fox Creek, the Morgan County Port Authority State Docks, and the Port of Decatur. The latter two of these locations are very close to downtown. The port terminals combined with the heavy industrial presence along the riverfront and a lack of alternative routing options bring a significant amount of truck traffic to Decatur. As an example, Wilson Street, which serves a variety of industrial, commercial, and residential uses, carried 25,300 vehicles per day on average in 2012, including 2,500 heavy trucks.

Fourteen truck terminals are located within the City limits, many of which are located near downtown. In addition, two freight rail yards are located near downtown to service these industrial zones. The Norfolk Southern Railway line which runs through Decatur acts as a barrier to all modes of travel and creates connectivity issues. This causes an overreliance on just a few roads which cross the rail line, and makes biking and walking around Decatur difficult due to a lack of safe and convenient ways to cross the rail line.

Public Transportation

The City of Decatur currently is served by demand-response transit operated through North Central Alabama Council of Government (NARCOG). NARCOG took over management of the service from the Morgan County Area Transportation System (MCATS) in 2016.

One-way rides throughout the service area cost $2, and reservations must be made at least one day in advance. Service is provided Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In 2014, MCATS provided 137,000 trips. NARCOG provided just over 34,000 rides in the first half of 2017.

Though no fixed route transit currently is available in Decatur, the area's Long Range Transportation Plan includes a goal to fund a feasibility study for a fixed-route circulator in downtown. Such a system has been studied before but was deemed cost prohibitive at the time (2004-2005). The need for public transportation was heavily supported by comments from the public. Many cited the need to improve mobility for those without vehicles, create regional connections to Huntsville and Madison, and improve safety. Decatur should explore ways to meet the local mobility needs of all residents though shared-ride transit options.

Other

Parking

The City of Decatur commissioned a Downtown Parking Study in 2013. The report concluded that parking in downtown was more than adequate for the City's current and future parking needs, with on-street occupancy rates hovering around 32%. Even so, the perception remains that parking availability is not adequate as evidenced by several comments regarding the need for additional downtown parking.

Gateways and Streetscape

Decatur is in the process of revitalizing and redeveloping its downtown and riverfront districts. Streetscaping and gateway treatments have been identified as an important part of that process. Enhancement projects, such as landscaping, gateway treatments and street furniture, can help identify key corridors and nodes throughout the City and boost their image to guide development.

ACTIONS

The mobility element includes the following transportation initiatives that focus on the most critical transportation needs of local and regional stakeholders. These projects, policies, and programs will elevate the importance of critical links in the transportation network, improve regional multimodal connections, and advance local mobility and accessibility to the goal:

A well-maintained, smart and sustainable transportation system that offers strong regional and internal connectivity, provides attractive and safe options for cycling, walking and public transportation, and supports desirable development and a strong economy.

Objective 1: Design street improvements to balance mobility, accessibility, land use, and desired development character.

MO **1.1** **Adopt a Complete Streets Policy.** Complete Streets policies require all streets to be planned and designed to consider the safety and accessibility of all users, no matter their age and ability. Complete streets prioritize sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and safe crossings in accordance with the street's context and function. Therefore, streets near schools may reserve more space for walking and cycling, while higher speed arterials may set aside less space or focus on off street connections.

The City of Decatur currently does not have a Complete Streets policy, but other cities in Alabama have adopted such policies, including Birmingham, Mobile and Huntsville. Adopting a policy would help guide future decisions to prioritize space for safe cycling and walking and improve crossing facilities to better accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians.

MO **1.2** **Design street improvements with considerations for the surrounding context and various users.** The Street Design Typology Matrix (on page 60) uses a street classification system that relates to the destinations served by the road, future land use, and how people travel along the corridor. When related to the community's future land use character areas, the tool offers a framework for future decision making and serves as a guide to prioritize certain travel modes in each corridor and understand design decisions.

Complete Streets

Complete Streets is an initiative by which cities or other jurisdictions adopt policies to ensure that future roadway projects will attempt to accommodate all users who walk, bike, take transit, move goods, or drive cars. Complete Streets design is a process, not a specific product. For that reason, not all "Complete Streets" will look the same. Complete Streets may make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, bicycle to work, and make transit more accessible and reliable. A Complete Street may include: sidewalks, bike lanes (or wide paved shoulders), frequent and safe crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, roundabouts, and more. The design of a "Complete Street" depends on context. For example, a Complete Street in a rural area may not include sidewalks and curbs, but could feature a multi-use path on one side of the street to provide a meaningful transportation option in that setting.

Taking complete streets further: Vision Zero

Vision Zero is an international road safety initiative that aims to achieve a road system with zero fatalities or serious injuries. Vision Zero policies target travel speed, road design, and pedestrian crossing enhancements to improve safety. While the Vision Zero campaign has focused on major cities and only a few cities in the United States have achieved official designation (none in Alabama), Decatur would benefit from working toward the organization's minimum criteria, which includes:

- A clear goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and severe injuries
- Commitment from City elected officials to Vision Zero
- A Vision Zero plan or strategy in place
- Engagement by key City departments (including police, transportation, and public health)

Resources are available at www.visionzeronetwork.org

Objective 2: Improve the appearance and condition of the City's streets.

MO **2.1** **Undertake strategic improvement projects in demonstration corridors.** This plan provides a more detailed vision and set of strategies for five corridors in Decatur. These corridors have been selected to demonstrate conditions and opportunities that exist throughout the City. The intent is to provide strategies applicable beyond the boundaries of the selected corridor. Each corridor includes existing transportation and land use context as well as corridor improvements that enhance connections to the surrounding neighborhoods and improve travel, safety, accessibility, and appearance. Demonstration graphics provide a visual cue of key strategies for each corridor and accompany a narrative explanation. See the Demonstration Corridors beginning on page 65.

The demonstration corridors are:

- 6th Avenue SE—11th Street SE to Wilson Street (1.8 miles)
- Moulton Street W—Gordon Drive SW to Old Moulton Road SW (.6 miles)
- Beltline Road SW—Old Moulton Rd to Danville Rd SW (1.5 miles)
- Wilson Street—Davis Street NW to 6th Avenue NE (1.5 miles)
- 8th Street SE—6th Avenue SE to Point Mallard Drive SE (1.7 miles)

MO **2.2** **Fully utilize GIS software to track, plan and prioritize street maintenance and drainage improvements.** The City of Decatur currently owns software that can be used to track and plan street maintenance projects. However, current practices rely on paper tracking among various individual staff files. The City should revise protocols and invest in staff training to fully utilize GIS-based software to improve the efficiency and prioritization of street maintenance, sidewalk improvements, and other infrastructure improvements.

MO **2.3** **Establish corridor appearance standards or guidelines with an emphasis on sustainable landscaping.** City streets make up a significant portion of the public realm, and their design and appearance are major contributors to the character of Decatur and the City's economic potential. Public streets can enhance the community's overall identity and image through thoughtful, quality design. Design standards for new and redeveloped major transportation corridors should address appropriate transportation modes as well as access, land uses, setbacks, building appearance, lighting, utilities, signage, and landscaping. Where possible, priority should be given to consolidating or burying utility lines. These standards should be targeted and tailored to the conditions of specific corridors such as 6th Avenue, the Beltline, and other highways and major corridors that serve as community gateways. Thoughtful design can also minimize expenses associated with landscape maintenance. In particular, replacing grassy medians on corridors such as Beltline Road with low shrubs would improve aesthetics and minimize maintenance.

Sustainable, low-maintenance landscaping

In areas with large blocks and infrequent curb cuts, a landscaped center median with one or two travel lanes in either direction can be used instead of a center turn lane. These landscaped medians could act as "green infrastructure" if designed as a rain garden.

What else?

> Relocate above ground utilities (see QP 2.3)

Objective 3: Increase efforts to make City more walkable and bike friendly.

MO **3.1 Create a sidewalk repair program.** Many existing sidewalks in the City's older neighborhoods are in need of repair. A City program should be established to repair existing sidewalks and prioritize new sidewalk connections. Such a repair program could be part of the City's regular capital improvements effort or could be a matching grant program whereby the City shares the cost with adjacent property owners. Sidewalks also should be a standard and sufficient width, which requires the City's subdivision regulations to reflect a minimum of five feet width with wider sidewalks in the downtown core. This may require an amendment to the City's subdivision regulations.

MO **3.2 Update and formalize a plan to connect the urban trail system.** Strategic connections to the existing Decatur greenway system can help link recreational opportunities and economic activity centers by way of low-stress bicycle and pedestrian facilities. A formal trails and greenways planning effort should be considered as an essential next step toward providing active transportation mobility and creating these crucial links. Connections may take the form of multi-use paths, on-street bicycle facilities, and sidewalk connections depending on feasibility. The design of the system should create a comprehensive network of intersecting pathways that serve short- and medium-distance trips. Other considerations for the formal bicycle and pedestrian network plan include:

- Complete the Bill Sims Bike trail connecting destinations within the City such as parks and schools and linking to the regional trail network.
- Create and regularly update a map that identifies the type and location of existing connections throughout the City.
- Consider ways to repurpose Wilson Street should a new river crossing be constructed that redirects through trips and truck traffic. Among the considerations should be fewer travel lanes, slower speeds, and intersection improvements to better connect Old Decatur/downtown with Rhodes Ferry Park and the riverfront.
- Continue to more clearly identify barriers to walking and biking and seek effective ways to overcome them. For example, if a new river crossing does not seem apparent or the resulting changes to travel behavior have a limited impact on Wilson Street, the City should explore a grade-separated pedestrian crossing (pedestrian overpass).
- Work toward providing bicycle and pedestrian connections on City Connectors and Neighborhood Connectors as identified in the Street Typology map.
- Actively seek ways to expand accessibility to schools by foot and on bike.
- Create a selection of "healthy lifestyle walking routes" in downtown Decatur, to encourage residents to walk around the downtown area both for transportation and recreation.

MO **3.3 Seek funding to implement trail and path connections.** ALDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program provides matching grants and technical assistance for implementing pedestrian, bicycle mobility and Safe Routes to Schools initiatives. Other competitive grant programs are available to help cities complete safety improvement projects, sidewalk or bike facility connections, or begin educational programs to develop a safer active transportation environment.

MO **3.4** **Increase marketing and wayfinding efforts to support the urban trail system.** Awareness of Decatur's existing bikeway and trail system should be improved by providing maps (electronic and print), installing wayfinding signs, conducting safety education campaigns, and improving street markings to better designate on-street connections. As a major effort, designating a location such as the Old Decatur Depot as a trail hub for downtown Decatur can provide both a tourism boost to the downtown area as well as a practical center for local active transportation efforts. This location should offer maps and information about sights and events around town, as well as bicycle parking and a potential bike share location in the future.

Painting bike lanes green is one way to promote awareness of the trail system's on-street facilities and improve safety.

Objective 4: Expand access to shared-ride transit options.

MO **4.1** **Reevaluate the feasibility of a Downtown Circulator.** Decatur's lack of comprehensive transit service is a gap to be addressed on a long-term time frame. As the downtown further develops and the City grows, transit service that was previously deemed infeasible might prove to be a sound investment. The City should re-evaluate the feasibility of the fixed-route circulator with an expanded scope that connects downtown and major employment centers as well as commercial hubs and recreational destinations in an efficient way. Continued coordination with the Northern Alabama Council of Governments (NARCOG) and regional partners will be necessary. In addition, transit supportive land use planning and development can ensure transit remains a key part of Decatur's future transportation vision.

MO **4.2** **Establish a transit connection between Calhoun Community College and Downtown.** Connecting the Alabama Center for the Arts in Downtown Decatur with Calhoun Community College and the Alabama Robotics Technology Park as well as the Huntsville campus would improve educational opportunities for many residents who do not have access to personal vehicles. NARCOG, Morgan County's transit provider, is currently exploring the feasibility of providing this route, and the City of Decatur should support its development as a first step toward comprehensive regional transit options.

MO **4.3** **Establish an express connection to Huntsville.** A substantial amount of traffic travels each day between Decatur and Huntsville at predictable commute times. This route is a key contender for express bus service that provides choice of travel and alleviates some peak travel time congestion.

Objective 5: Improve Downtown mobility.

MO **5.1** **Develop a Downtown parking strategy to address changing parking needs**. Though parking space in Downtown Decatur is sufficient for current and future parking demand, many people cite a need for more parking convenient to key destinations. Improvements to parking wayfinding, parking facility designs, and potential policy changes can address these concerns without substantially adding capacity to the already adequate parking supply. The strategy should consider a potential parking deck as well as upgrades to current on and off street parking. Consolidating parking may make land available for development.

MO **5.2 Evaluate the feasibility of reestablishing strategic connections across the railroad.** Mobility in downtown Decatur is constrained by many natural and man-made barriers. The railroad corridor that borders Downtown to the west limits connectivity with the residential neighborhoods, and causes an overreliance on a few arterial streets. The City should study the feasibility of establishing strategic vehicular and/or bicycle/pedestrian connections over the railroad to increase local connectivity and spur economic development activity.

Objective 6: Support strategic efforts to improve regional connectivity

MO **6.1 Plan for a new bridge.** As one of the key routes into and out of Decatur, the US 31/AL 20 bridge over the Tennessee River causes bottlenecks, especially for freight traffic. ALDOT has recently spent approximately $10 million to improve traffic flow at the base of the bridge. Additional improvements to the existing bridge are constrained by nearby historic properties and available right-of-way. Long term, a new river crossing should be evaluated in partnership Morgan County, Limestone County, Lawrence County and other appropriate regional entities. Those plans should identify preferred locations and design concepts. While a new bridge could reduce traffic on US 31 and Highway 20, it would also potentially have a major boost to revitalizing the Wilson Street riverfront. By redirecting through traffic, Wilson Street could more feasibly become a neighborhood street (as envisioned in the Demonstration Corridors section). That change could help reconnect Old Decatur and downtown with the riverfront and support the conversation around potential riverfront redevelopment sites.

MO **6.2 Establish regional trail connections.** Additional multimodal trail segments should be constructed in collaboration with the regional Launch 2035 effort to connect Decatur to cultural, educational, and recreational destinations in the region as well as to create a multimodal connection between Decatur and Huntsville.

MO **6.3 Establish a bicycle and pedestrian crossing over the Tennessee River.** Currently, the Tennessee River is a major regional barrier with no safe way for cyclists and pedestrians to cross. Providing safe crossing options would improve recreational opportunities, economic connections between communities on both sides of the river, and provide alternate transportation options to alleviate congestion.

- Short term: Decatur should coordinate with NARCOG and Morgan County to ensure that all regional transit vehicles are equipped with bicycle racks. This provides a low-cost way to connect both sides of the river and makes use of existing transportation resources.
- Long term: The City should begin coordination with the State Department of Transportation to plan the provision of fixed bicycle and pedestrian crossing facilities over the Tennessee River. Options are diverse, ranging from retrofitting the existing Hwy 31 bridge, adding a separated pathway to the existing railroad crossing, or planning for an eventual new river crossing to include a separated multiuse path. The ultimate solution should be the outcome of a long-term regional conversation.

MO **6.4 Consider the viability of regional passenger rail service at the restored Decatur Depot.** With the Southern Railway Depot newly renovated, Decatur should consider restoring its place as a strategic regional transportation hub. The Southern Rail Commission has expressed some interest in restoring passenger rail service to Huntsville and Decatur, and the City, MPO and other regional partners should be planning to assess the long-term viability of that service and its role in the regional network.

STREET TYPOLOGY

Transportation in Decatur should be a supportive measure to broader community initiatives such as quality of place and economic vibrancy. To better integrate the transportation system with community context, One Decatur includes an enhanced street classification system that combines transportation function with land use and urban design context. The resulting classification is unique to Decatur and better suited to achieve community's goals through thoughtful design. The street types, street network map, and design considerations described on the following pages should be referenced as potential street improvements and new connections are evaluated to ensure the design aligns with the City's goals and transportation objectives.

The One Decatur street types include:

- Interstate
- Beltline
- Workhorse
- City Connectors
- Neighborhood Connectors
- Local

The One Decatur typology defines streets by the way they relate to nearby destinations, current or future land uses, and how people can—or should—travel along the corridor. These street types, coupled with the City's future land use character areas, inform a street design typology matrix (page 64) that provides a framework for decision making that balances competition among travel modes, design, and limited available right-of-way. For example, City Connectors in residential areas should look different than City Connectors in Commercial Corridor areas. This matrix, maps, and graphics on the following pages show which modes and design elements should be prioritized based on the surrounding land use character and street context.

How streets are defined today: Functional Classification

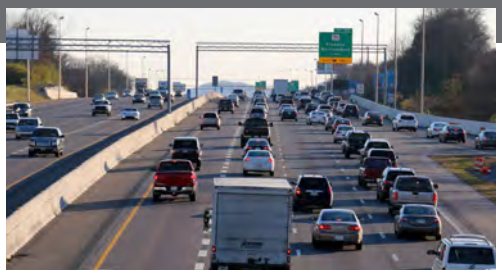
FHWA, ALDOT, and the Decatur MPO currently use a traditional functional classification system to express the hierarchy of roadways. While useful for many things, this conventional typology falls short of offering adequate local guidance on designing streets that support community goals and initiatives. Therefore, cities often supplement the traditional functional classification system with a locally-based system that is tailored to specific community needs and context. The traditional functional classifications will continue to play a role in federal programs, state and regional planning, and other coordination efforts. Therefore, the One Decatur street typology references traditional functional classifications and are intended to supplement rather than replace the MPO's traditional classification system.

Street Types

INTERSTATE

- Controlled access, exclusive to vehicular travel
- Multi-lane roadways for higher speeds and longer distance travel
- Design does not change based on surrounding land use

Functional Classification: Freeway/Interstate
Local Example: I-65
Typical Section: 4+ travel lanes



WORKHORSE

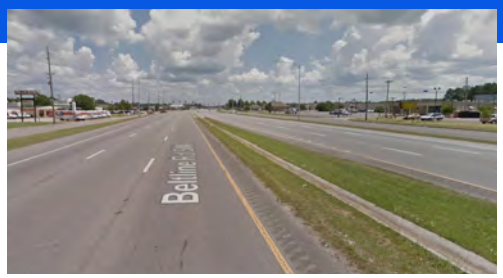
- Multi-lane thoroughfares that mainly serve commuting or regional travel needs
- Designed to connect regional destinations with minimal travel interruption, but should respond to the surrounding context

Functional Classification: Principal Arterial/Minor Arterial
Examples: US 31, AL 20, W Moulton St
Typical Section: 3-4 travel lanes

BELTLINE

- Multi-lane roadway that links major commercial and industrial uses
- Allows for faster travel and connects to other regional roadways while bypassing downtown

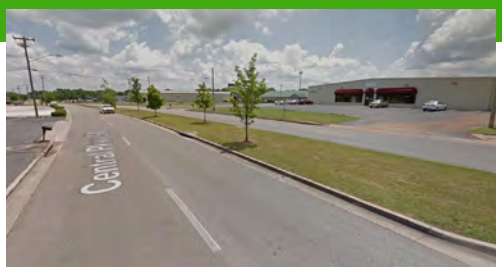
Functional Classification: Principal Arterial
Example: Beltline Road
Typical Section: 4+ travel lanes



CITY CONNECTOR

- Lower travel speeds and traffic volumes than workhorse speeds
- Tend to be limited in width by the built environment that they serve and should provide more multimodal accommodations than higher order streets

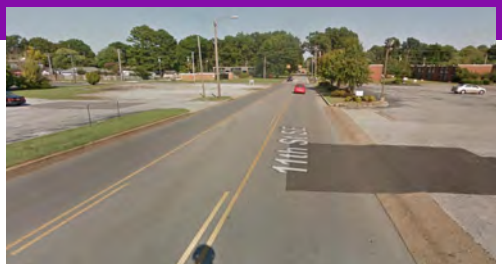
Functional Classification: Minor Arterial
Example: Central Parkway SW, Danville Rd SW, 8th Street SE
Typical Section: 2-4 travel lanes



NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTOR

- Connects neighborhood traffic to local destinations
- Often includes slower travel speeds and on-street parking, and are excellent candidates for dedicated multimodal facilities

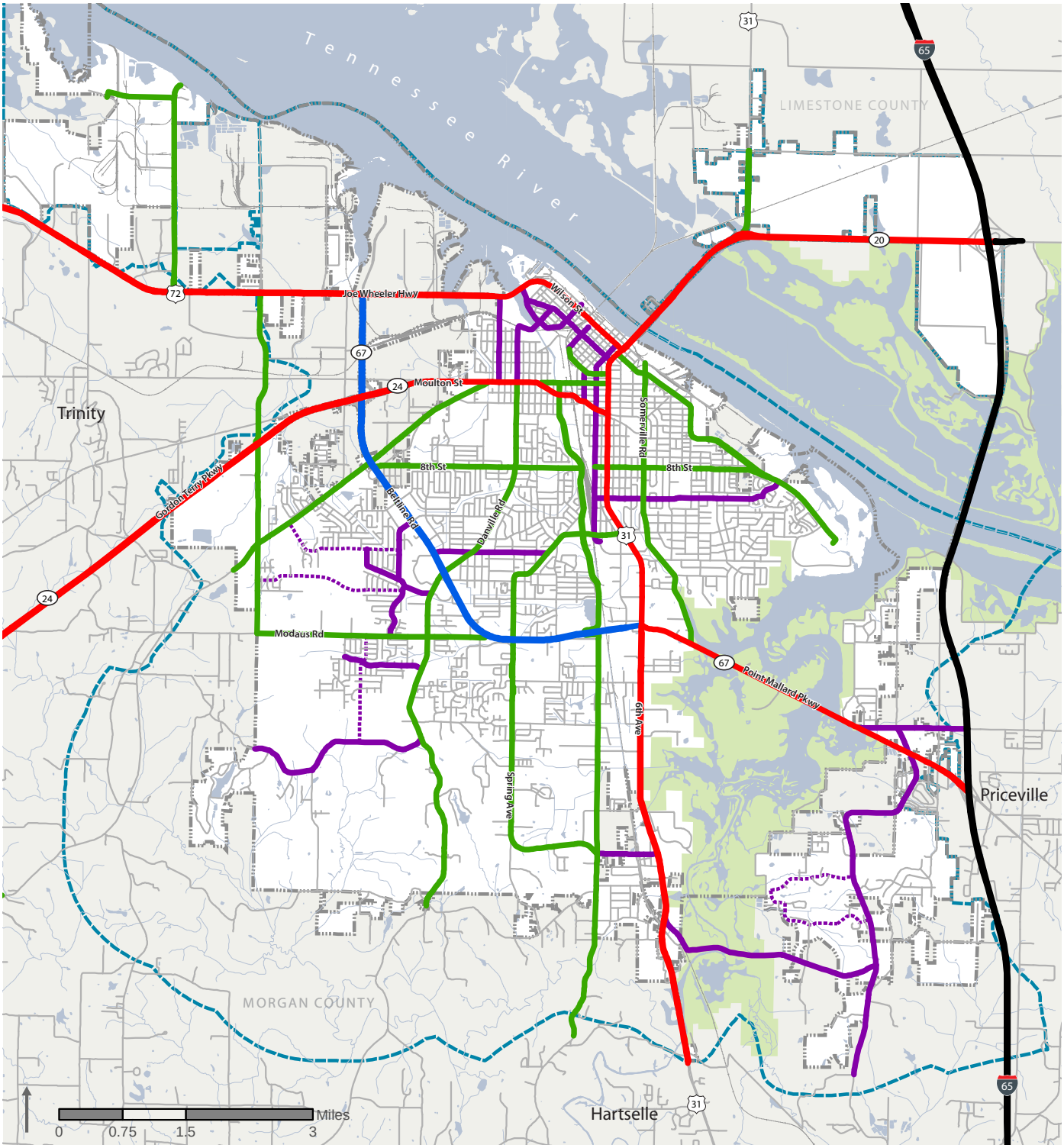
Functional Classification: Collector / Minor Arterial
Example: Carridale St SW, 11th St SE, Bank St NE
Typical Section: 2-3 travel lanes



LOCAL

- Local, slow-moving streets in primarily residential neighborhoods
- Other than sidewalks, dedicated multimodal facilities may not be necessary due to lower traffic volumes and slow speeds

Functional Classification: Local
Example: 16th Ave SE, Betty Street SW, Stratford Rd SE
Typical Section: 2 travel lanes



Street Types

- Freeway
- Workhorse
- Beltline
- City Connector
- Neighborhood Connector
- Future Neighborhood Connector
- Local

Decatur City Limits

Street Design in Context

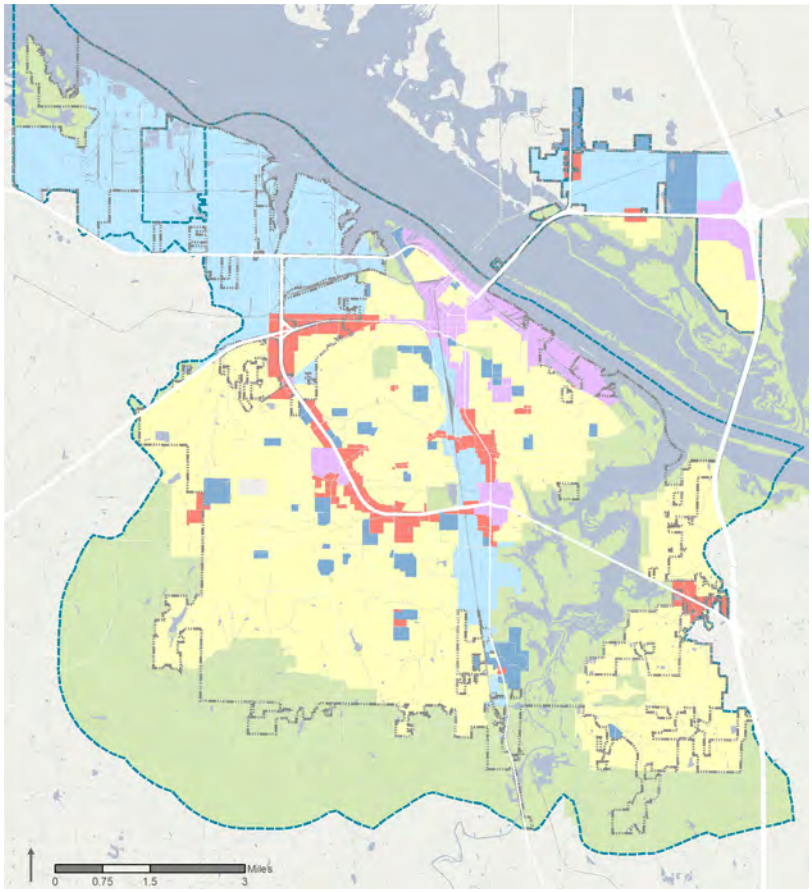
Streets should attempt to serve a diversity of users and support the desired character in which they exist. While vehicular movement is a component of mobility, it should not be the only consideration when street improvements are proposed. Different kinds of places require a different set of design priorities to create a "place" as well as to achieve desired mobility objectives (travel speeds, walkability and transit readiness). The degree of priority for each of these considerations changes depending on where you are in the community.

Consolidated Land Use

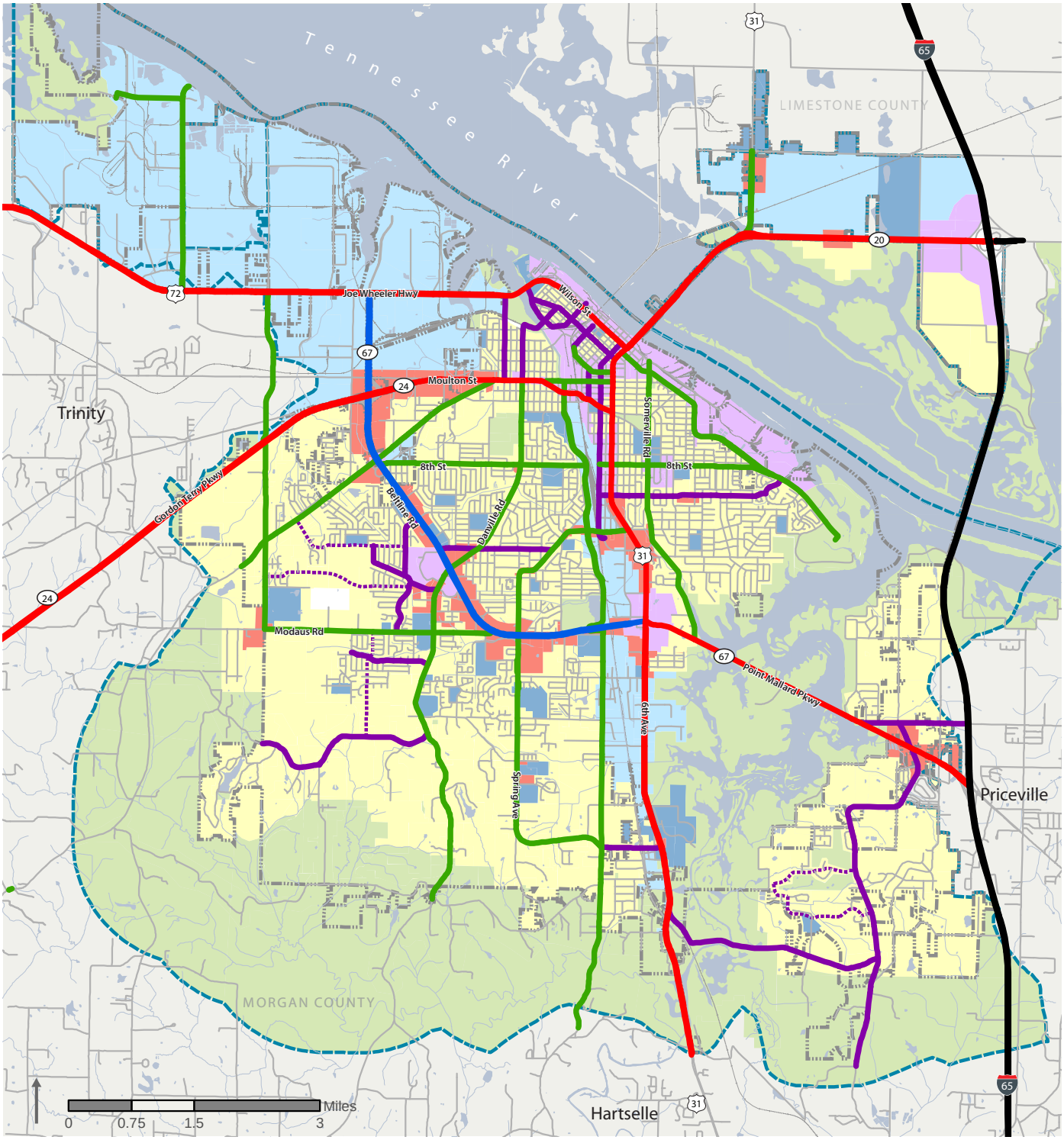
The consolidated land use character categories shown here are based on the Future Land Use and Character Map. The 15 land use character types have been consolidated into six categories for simplicity and to reflect different types of uses that place different demands upon street design.

Street Typology

The Street Typology is determined by overlaying the street types (e.g., Interstate, Beltline, Workhorse, City Connectors, Neighborhood Connectors, and Local) on the consolidated land use categories (e.g., Mixed Use, Commercial, Industrial/Employment Center, Residential, Institution, and Rural/Open Space). The Street Typology Map is shown on the following page.



Consolidated Category	Land Use Character Area
Mixed Use	Urban Core (downtown)
	Urban Edge
	Regional Mixed Use
	Riverfront Mixed Use
Commercial	Neighborhood Commercial
	Community Commercial
Industrial/ Employment Center	Flex Employment Center
	General Industrial
Residential	Urban Neighborhood
	Residential (low-density)
	Residential (med-high density)
	Mixed Neighborhood
Institution	Major Institution/Civic Campus
Rural/Open Space	Rural Edge/Agricultural
	Parks/Open Space



Street Typology

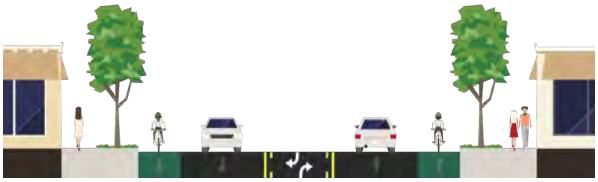
- Freeway
- Workhorse
- Beltline
- City Connector
- Neighborhood Connector
- Future Neighborhood Connector
- Local

- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Industrial / Employment Center
- Residential
- Institution
- Rural / Open Space
- Decatur City Limits

- Decatur Police Jurisdiction

Street Design Priority Matrix

The Street Design Priority Matrix provides guidance for making difficult design decisions when dealing with limited right-of-way. The matrix reveals which design elements receive a certain level of priority (high, medium, and low) for a variety of design characteristics organized by street realm (Travelway, Pedestrian Zone, and Other). The matrix serves as a guide when considering new street improvement projects or developments that affect the right-of-way. For example, City Connectors and Neighborhood Connectors make excellent multimodal connections, and the matrix shows that improvements along these corridors should accommodate on-street or off-street bicycle facilities in most areas.



Pedestrian Zone | Travelway | Pedestrian Zone

Travelway (Curb to Curb) The travelway includes the portion of the street that accommodates vehicular activities. These include driving and parking as well as green infrastructure. Typical travel zones might include a parking area, a primary automobile travelway

Pedestrian Zone (Curb to Building) The pedestrian zone involves the portion of the street that accommodates non-vehicular activities. It typically includes a frontage area, a primary pedestrian walkway and a roadway buffer (area between the curb and primary pedestrian walkway).

Priority Designation
High
Medium
Low

		Mixed-Use					Commercial					Residential					Industrial/ Employmnent Center					Rural/Open Space				
		Workhorse	Beltline	City Connectors	Neighborhood Connectors	Local	Workhorse	Beltline	City Connectors	Neighborhood Connectors	Local	Workhorse	City Connectors	Neighborhood Connectors	Local	Workhorse	Beltline	City Connectors	Neighborhood Connectors	Local	Workhorse	Beltline	City Connectors	Neighborhood Connectors	Local
Travelway	Number of travel lanes	H	H	M	L	L	H	H	M	L	L	M	M	L	L	H	H	H	L	L	M	M	M	L	L
	Narrow travel lanes	L	L	M	H	H	L	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	H	L	L	L	L	H	L	L	L	L	M
	Higher intersection capacity	H	H	M	L	L	M	H	M	L	L	M	L	L	L	H	H	H	L	L	M	M	L	L	L
	Design for large vehicles	H	M	L	L	L	M	H	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	H	H	H	H	L	H	L	L	L	L
	Multimodal design	M	L	H	H	H	M	M	H	H	L	M	H	H	H	L	L	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	L
	On-street parking	L	L	M	M	H	L	L	L	M	L	L	L	M	H	L	L	L	M	M	L	L	L	L	L
Pedestrian Zone	Landscaping / street trees	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	L	L	L	L	M	M	M	M	L	L
	Buffer zone	H	H	H	M	L	H	H	H	H	M	H	H	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
	Street furniture	M	M	M	H	M	M	L	M	H	M	M	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
	Wide sidewalks	H	M	H	M	L	M	M	H	H	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
	Standard sidewalks	M	H	M	H	H	H	H	M	M	H	M	M	H	H	M	M	M	M	H	L	L	L	L	L
Other	Medians	H	H	M	L	L	H	H	L	L	L	H	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	M	M	L	L	L
	Access management	H	H	M	L	L	H	H	M	L	L	H	M	L	L	H	H	L	L	L	M	M	L	L	L

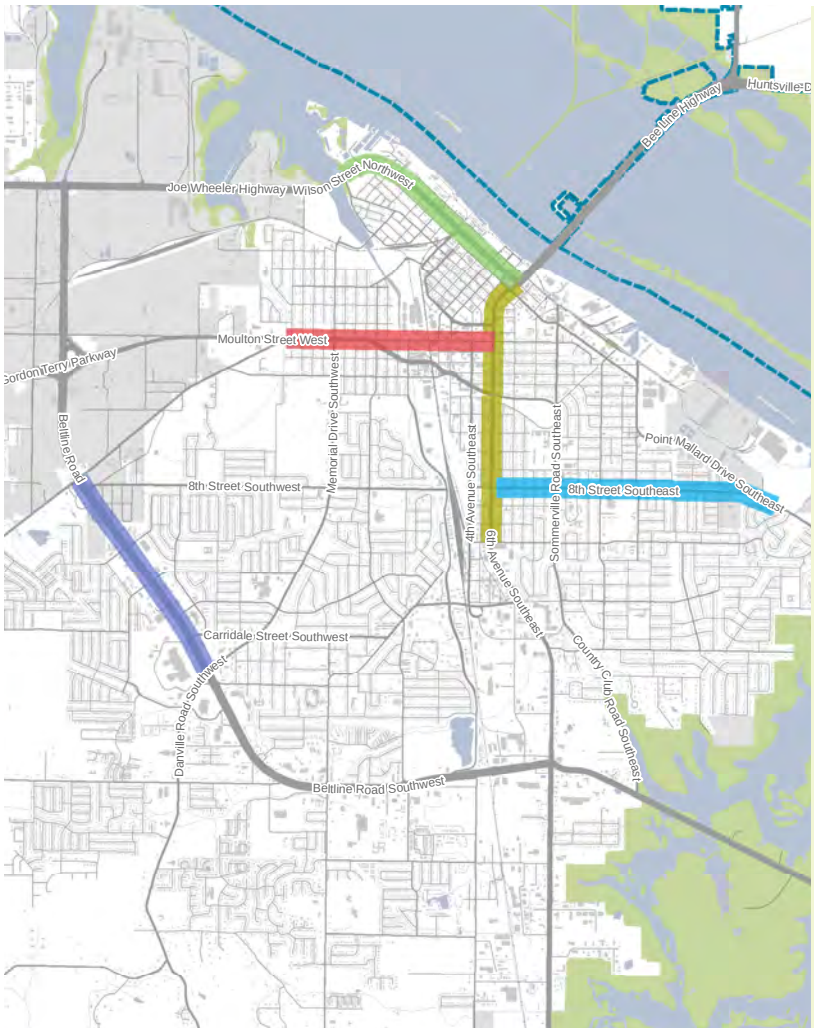
Street Classification Summary

Street Type	Design Distinctions	MPO Classification	Typical Features: Travel Speed	Average Daily Traffic	Right-of-Way	Total Lanes	Lane Width
Interstate Controlled access highways that move more traffic at higher speeds over longer distances.	Limited access	Interstate	65 mph+	35,000+	Up to 250'	4 min.	12'
Workhorse Multi-lane roadways that connect regional destinations with minimal travel interruptions.	Multiple travel lanes with limited on-street bicycle facilities	Principal Arterial	45 mph	15,000+	100'	3 to 4	12'
Beltline Multi-lane roadway that serves commuting or regional travel needs with minimal travel interruption.	Multiple travel lanes with repurposed excess ROW	Principal Arterial	45 mph	15,000+	150' to 200'	4+	12'
City Connector Mid-range streets that provide connections to city destinations and offer context-based multimodal accomodations.	Often exist in constrained environments that limit re-design	97% Minor Arterial; 3% Principal Arterial	35 mph	5,000 to 15,000	60' to 100'	2 to 4	11' to 12'
Neighborhood Connector Lower speed multimodal streets that link neighborhoods to local destinations or to higher order streets.	Multimodal accommodations and on-street parking where appropriate	59% Collector; 31% Minor Arterial; 10% Local	25 to 35 mph	3,000 to 5,000	50' to 60'	2 to 3	10' to 11'
Local Lower speed streets in primarily residential areas.	Limited need for on-street bicycle facilities due to lower travel speeds	82% Local; 18% Collector	25 mph	Less than 3,000	50'	2	10'

DEMONSTRATION CORRIDORS

The Mobility Actions and Street Design Priority Matrix are supplemented with a set of demonstration corridor exhibits. Five corridors have been identified throughout the City to show how recommendations for these corridors can address broader goals and objectives for transportation. These corridors are:

- **6th Avenue SE**—11th Street SE to Wilson Street (1.8 miles)
- **8th Street SE**—6th Avenue SE to Point Mallard Drive SE (1.7 miles)
- **Beltline Road SW**—Old Moulton Rd to Danville Rd SW (1.5 miles)
- **Moulton Street W**—6th Avenue SE to Old Moulton Road SW (1.4 miles)
- **Wilson Street**—Davis Street NW to 6th Avenue NE (1.5 miles)



Citywide Recommendations

While the demonstration corridors are intended to provide specific strategies that respond to local needs and conditions, many of the recommendations reflected on the following pages could be applied throughout the City.

- Current City efforts to relocate streetlights behind sidewalks and improve their appearance should be expanded to enhance walkability, aesthetic appearance, and maintain continuity throughout the City.
- Where possible, above-ground utilities should be consolidated or moved underground to reduce the visual impact of overhead utility lines and improve safety.
- Pedestrian crossing facilities should be improved or installed at key locations to improve the City's walkability.
- Where necessary, gaps in the City's sidewalk network should be addressed to create a continuous pedestrian connection between City destinations. Existing sidewalks may need to be improved to ensure they are a consistent width throughout the City (See MO 3.1).

6th Avenue SE

11th Street SE to Wilson Street

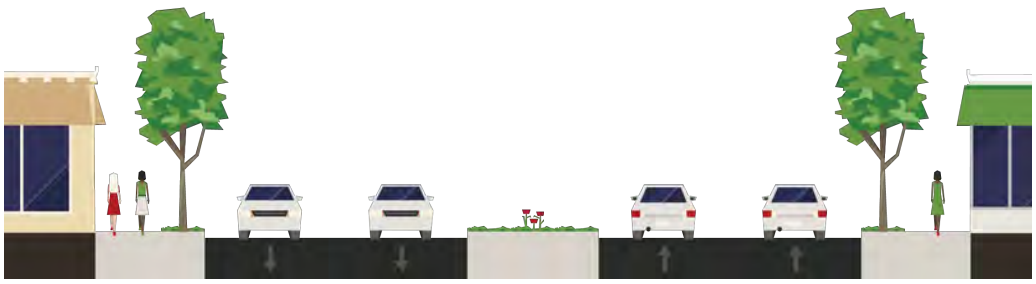
Challenges and Opportunities

This section of 6th Avenue SE is a major commercial corridor and a gateway to downtown Decatur. High traffic volumes, high travel speeds, a continuous left turn lane, and unrestricted driveway access contribute to unsafe travel conditions for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The lack of safe crossing opportunities and unpredictable turning movements create a barrier and make it difficult for customers to access businesses along the corridor. This corridor is characterized by multiple conflict points given the frequency of driveways and their proximity to each other and adjacent intersections.

As a gateway into Decatur, this corridor would benefit from aesthetic treatments and enhanced streetscaping. Improving the operations, safety, and appearance of this corridor would help to encourage redevelopment and investment while improving the area's connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods. On-street bicycle facilities are not recommended for 6th Avenue due to the high traffic volumes and the presence of a viable low-stress bicycling route parallel on 4th Avenue. However, connections across the corridor will be crucial to developing a comprehensive bicycle network throughout the City. Bicycle and pedestrian solutions should be considered as the City and state begin working toward a new US 31 bridge.

Existing Cross Section

Recommended Cross Section



6th Avenue SE Recommendations

- Coordinate with state access management standards, construct a non-traversable median with intermittent turn lanes at major intersections to aid in access management and improve safety
- Fill gaps in sidewalk to create a continuous pedestrian connection and encourage patrons to walk from the surrounding residential areas to local businesses
- Improve corridor aesthetics through landscaping efforts, wayfinding signage, and gateways to welcome visitors to Decatur
- Install pedestrian crossings at all major intersections to improve accessibility and flashing pedestrian beacons at select locations near the hospital and schools to improve safety
- Designate 4th Avenue SE as a north-south bicycle route and install signage to encourage riders to utilize this connection to downtown

The table below shows the types of improvements that should be prioritized to improve operations, aesthetics, safety, and multimodal accessibility.

Design Priorities		
Access Management	Driveway length	X
	Driveway consolidation and cross access	X
	Non-traversable median	X
	Left-turn storage lanes	
	Offset left-turn treatment	X
	Dotted line markings	X
	Intersection and driveway curb radii	
	Minor street approach improvements	X
Multimodal Access	Wide sidewalks	
	Standard sidewalks	X
	Crosswalks and pedestrian signals	X
	On-street bicycle facility	
	Off-street bicycle facility	
Streetscaping	Gateways & monumentation	X
	Enhanced Street Lighting	X
	Branding & wayfinding	X
	Street furniture	
	Decorative crosswalks	X
	Landscaping & hardscaping	X
Traffic Calming	Flashing beacons	X
	Permanent radar speed display signs	X
	Speed humps	
	Chicanes	
	Bulbouts	X
	Traffic circles	
Technology	Coordinated traffic signals	
	Adaptive signal control	X
	Emergency vehicle pre-emption	X

8th Street SE

6th Avenue SE to Point Mallard Drive SE

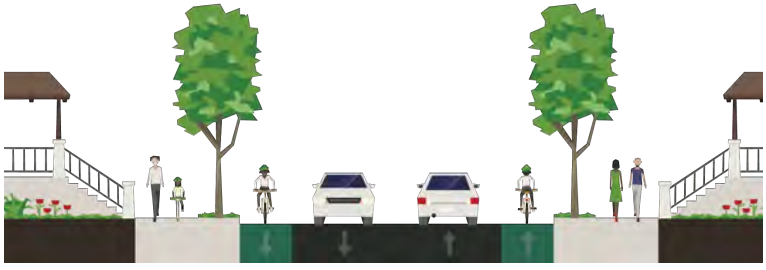
Challenges and Opportunities

8th Street SE is a major east-west connector that links the 6th Avenue commercial district with Point Mallard Drive. This street is mainly residential in context, with connections to Decatur Morgan Hospital, Decatur High School, the industrial employment center, and select other commercial uses throughout the corridor. The road currently is mostly three lanes with some sidewalk facilities.

As a low-stress neighborhood connector street, 8th Street provides a good opportunity for a bicycle connection between downtown Decatur and the existing trails on Point Mallard Drive. A road diet that thins the road to two lanes would allow a portion of the street to be reallocated for on-street bicycle lanes. The on-street bicycle facility would improve through trips and enhance mobility between the high school and residential neighborhoods. Additionally, connected sidewalks throughout the corridors would improve pedestrian mobility, and the addition of crossing facilities and flashing beacons at critical points along the corridor would improve safety for those crossing north-south.

Existing Cross Section

Recommended Cross Section



8th Street SE Recommendations

- Implement road diet that thins the road to two lanes
- Install on-street bicycle lanes to create an east-west connection between Point Mallard Drive and the 6th Avenue corridor
- Construct continuous sidewalks to improve pedestrian mobility
- Install pedestrian crossings at all major intersections to improve accessibility and flashing pedestrian beacons at select locations near the hospital and schools to improve safety

The table below shows the types of improvements that should be prioritized to improve operations, aesthetics, safety, and multimodal accessibility.

Design Priorities		
Access Management	Driveway length	X
	Driveway consolidation and cross access	X
	Non-traversable median	
	Left-turn storage lanes	
	Offset left-turn treatment	
	Dotted line markings	X
	Intersection and driveway curb radii	X
	Minor street approach improvements	
Multimodal Access	Wide sidewalks	
	Standard sidewalks	X
	Crosswalks and pedestrian signals	X
	On-street bicycle facility	X
	Off-street bicycle facility	
Streetscaping	Gateways & monumentation	
	Enhanced Street Lighting	X
	Branding & wayfinding	X
	Street furniture	X
	Decorative crosswalks	X
	Landscaping & hardscaping	X
Traffic Calming	Flashing beacons	X
	Permanent radar speed display signs	
	Speed humps	
	Chicanes	X
	Bulbouts	X
	Traffic circles	X
Technology	Coordinated traffic signals	X
	Adaptive signal control	
	Emergency vehicle pre-emption	X

Moulton Street W

6th Avenue SE to Old Moulton Road SW

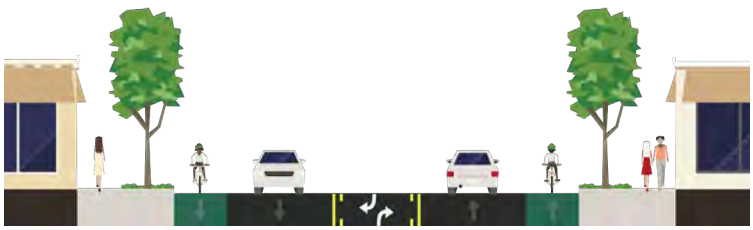
Challenges and Opportunities

Moulton Street W is a commuting corridor and collector road that provides a major route into and out of downtown Decatur. Currently, the road mainly serves as a vehicular thoroughfare, with disconnected sidewalks and a lack of safe crossing facilities. The road currently is not connected to the City's bicycle trail network.

Portions of this corridor are underutilized with several vacant or underdeveloped properties throughout its length. Streetscape improvements and gateway features would enhance the corridor's role as a gateway to downtown. This is a significant need to improve bicycle and pedestrian access to downtown Decatur, and as one of the few roads that crosses the railroad, Moulton Street is a good candidate to provide this candidate. A road diet to convert the road to two through-lanes and a center turn lane would allow space for dedicated bicycle lanes, while allowing sufficient space for vehicles. Improved pedestrian facilities, such as enhanced crossings and filling gaps in the sidewalk network, can enhance connections to surrounding residential areas.

Existing Cross Section

Recommended Cross Section



Moulton Street W Recommendations

- In coordination with the state department of transportation, implement access management through the consolidation of driveways and curb cuts and some restriction of turning movements to improve safety for all users within the corridor
- Enhance streetscaping with landscaped planting strips, street lighting, and continuous sidewalks
- Install pedestrian crossings at all major intersections to improve safety and enhance the corridor's connections to the neighborhood

The table below shows the types of improvements that should be prioritized to improve operations, aesthetics, safety, and multimodal accessibility.

Design Priorities		
Access Management	Driveway length	X
	Driveway consolidation and cross access	X
	Non-traversable median	X
	Left-turn storage lanes	
	Offset left-turn treatment	
	Dotted line markings	X
	Intersection and driveway curb radii	X
	Minor street approach improvements	X
Multimodal Access	Wide sidewalks	
	Standard sidewalks	X
	Crosswalks and pedestrian signals	X
	On-street bicycle facility	
	Off-street bicycle facility	
Streetscaping	Gateways & monumentation	
	Enhanced Street Lighting	X
	Branding & wayfinding	X
	Street furniture	X
	Decorative crosswalks	X
	Landscaping & hardscaping	X
Traffic Calming	Flashing beacons	
	Permanent radar speed display signs	
	Speed humps	
	Chicanes	
	Bulbouts	X
	Traffic circles	X
Technology	Coordinated traffic signals	X
	Adaptive signal control	
	Emergency vehicle pre-emption	X

Beltline Road SW

(Old Moulton Road to Danville Road SW)

Challenges and Opportunities

Beltline Road, designed as a higher speed automotive-centric corridor, serves as a connector between major highways in the City. Essentially functioning as a bypass around the south and west sides of Decatur, the corridor includes an interchange at Gordon Terry Parkway and experiences peak hour traffic volumes in line with what should be expected for a retail and destination corridor. Access management along the corridor features frontage roads, though some developments have direct access from the mainline.

While through mobility must be maintained and traffic volumes are not likely to decrease, future widening is not anticipated. Safety and mobility can be improved through a combination of lower cost short-term solutions and large-scale strategies tied to potential significant redevelopment. The extensive right-of-way provides an opportunity, however, the frontage roads are not continuous so corridor-wide improvements likely will require additional right-of-way.

Currently, no bicycle or pedestrian access is provided to businesses in this corridor, and improving those conditions will be a significant challenge. High traffic volumes and travel speeds make this corridor uncomfortable for bicycling and walking, so a separated facility is the best option for encouraging non-motorized transportation along the corridor. The width of Beltline Road and its frontage roads makes this a major barrier for transportation from the surrounding neighborhoods. Therefore, crossing improvements will need to be safe, attractive, and convenient to effectively connect residential areas to the commercial corridor.

Many communities are working to remove these types of frontage roads due to them being inherently dangerous and expensive to retrofit in ways that make them function correctly. At a minimum, driveways for contiguous developments should be consolidated to minimize curb cuts and resulting conflict points. Additional landscaping and gateway treatments could improve aesthetics along this corridor, and sustainable natural plantings could both improve drainage and cut down on maintenance costs by eliminating the need to mow grassy medians.

Beltline Road SW Recommendations

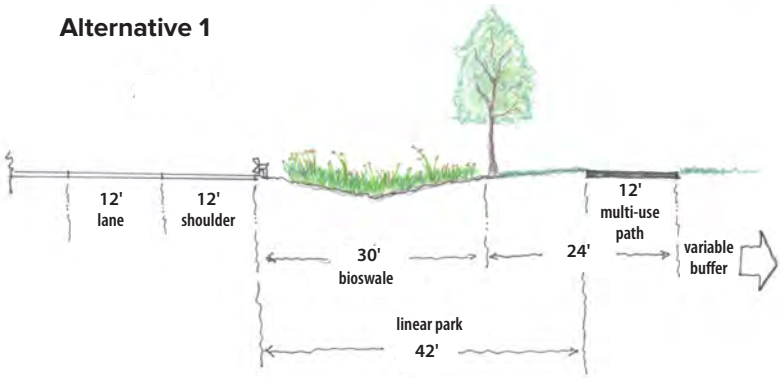
- Coordinate with the State department of Transportation to improve access management and safety throughout the corridor by consolidating driveways and eliminating conflict points on the Beltline and frontage roads
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian crossings at intersections and major access points
- Replace traditional grass medians with native plantings that are drought resistant and aid in drainage to minimize the City's maintenance efforts and improve sustainability
- Implement streetscaping improvements and gateway features consistent with other corridors throughout Decatur to maintain a consistent branded identity throughout the City.
- Study the feasibility of making the corridor changes described below as long-term opportunities

Long-term opportunities

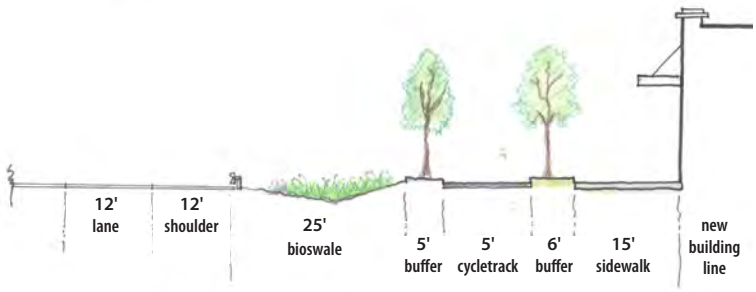
- Remove channelized right-turn lanes at signalized intersections due to their contribution to rear-end collisions, disruption to bicycle and pedestrian travel, and limited benefit to traffic performance
- Allow all parcels to have access to Beltline Road, eliminating the need for the parallel frontage roads
- Consolidate driveways and limit access to Beltline Road to the extent possible
- Convert frontage roads and fill gaps to create a multiuse path (Alternative 1) or cycle track and sidewalk (Alternative 2)
- Use the median area dividing the mainline from the frontage roads (proposed cycle track) as bio swells given the amount of impervious area in the corridor
- Use the power transmission easement if possible to improve the connectivity to the neighborhoods east of the corridor and west of downtown and to connect to the park near the railroad (Morgan Lake)

Existing Cross Section

Alternative 1



Alternative 2



The long-term improvements assume the corridor evolves from highway commercial over time. For both alternatives, motor vehicle use of the frontage roads is removed to allow bicycle and pedestrian activity. What intersection points do occur absent a signal, both approaches (multiuse path/cycle track and driveway) should stop. Either side of the corridor could redevelop first, so the cross section can be adjusted accordingly. The long linear park with wide sidewalks and a cycle track running along the entire corridor in Alternative 2 in particular would prompt a change in land use. Note: Due to the overall width of the corridor, only a single direction of the roadway is shown in the cross-sections. The recommendations are assumed to be the same or similar on both sides of the roadway.

The table below shows the types of improvements that should be prioritized to improve operations, aesthetics, safety, and multimodal accessibility.

Design Priorities		
Access Management	Driveway length	X
	Driveway consolidation and cross access	X
	Non-traversable median	X
	Left-turn storage lanes	
	Offset left-turn treatment	X
	Dotted line markings	X
	Intersection and driveway curb radii	
	Minor street approach improvements	X
Multimodal Access	Wide sidewalks	
	Standard sidewalks	X
	Crosswalks and pedestrian signals	X
	On-street bicycle facility	
	Off-street bicycle facility	X
Streetscaping	Gateways & monumentation	X
	Enhanced Street Lighting	X
	Branding & wayfinding	X
	Street furniture	
	Decorative crosswalks	
	Landscaping & hardscaping	X
Traffic Calming	Flashing beacons	X
	Permanent radar speed display signs	X
	Speed humps	
	Chicanes	
	Bulbouts	
	Traffic circles	
Technology	Coordinated traffic signals	
	Adaptive signal control	X
	Emergency vehicle pre-emption	X

Wilson Street

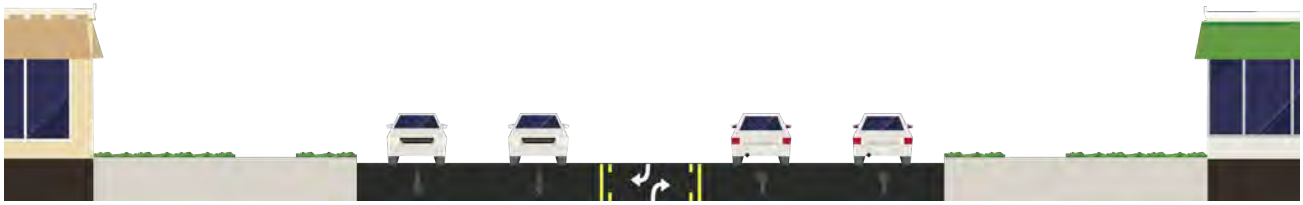
Davis Street NW to 6th Avenue NE

Challenges and Opportunities

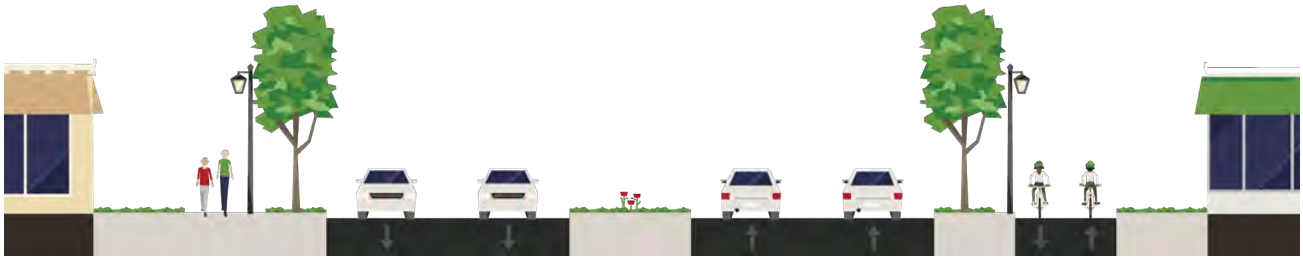
Today, Wilson Street is a five-lane road that carries high traffic volumes and significant truck traffic catering to nearby industrial districts. Though the street also serves surrounding residential neighborhoods and commercial properties, the discontinuous sidewalks, high travel speeds, and lack of crossing facilities makes the pedestrian experience uncomfortable and vehicle turning movements dangerous.

The street has the potential to act as a gateway to downtown Decatur as well as to highlight the City's riverfront. However, significant investments will be needed to slow traffic, improve safety, and encourage active transportation. Wilson Street was the subject of a 2014 corridor study that identified ways to improve circulation, safety, and aesthetics and to encourage redevelopment in this underutilized area. These recommendations should be implemented as funding becomes available and opportunities arise.

Existing Cross Section



Recommended Cross Section



Wilson Street Recommendations

- Implement access management through the addition of a landscaped median to restrict turning movements at most intersections
- Enhance streetscaping with landscaped planting strips, street lighting, and continuous sidewalks to give the street a feeling of being a gateway to the City
- Install pedestrian crossings at all major intersections to improve safety and encourage crossing the street to access the riverfront
- Study the feasibility of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over Wilson Street to provide access to the riverfront
- Construct a multi-use path along one side of the street as a low-stress bicycle route

The table below shows the types of improvements that should be prioritized to improve operations, aesthetics, safety, and multimodal accessibility.

Design Priorities		
Access Management	Driveway length	X
	Driveway consolidation and cross access	X
	Non-traversable median	X
	Left-turn storage lanes	
	Offset left-turn treatment	X
	Dotted line markings	X
	Intersection and driveway curb radii	X
	Minor street approach improvements	X
Multimodal Access	Wide sidewalks	X
	Standard sidewalks	
	Crosswalks and pedestrian signals	X
	On-street bicycle facility	
	Off-street bicycle facility	X
Streetscaping	Gateways & monumentation	X
	Enhanced Street Lighting	X
	Branding & wayfinding	X
	Street furniture	
	Decorative crosswalks	X
	Landscaping & hardscaping	X
Traffic Calming	Flashing beacons	X
	Permanent radar speed display signs	X
	Speed humps	
	Chicanes	
	Bulbouts	X
	Traffic circles	
Technology	Coordinated traffic signals	X
	Adaptive signal control	
	Emergency vehicle pre-emption	X

"I work in Decatur and wish to see it attract young professionals that will contribute to the growth of the City."

— participant

4

ADVANCING OUR PROSPERITY

Economic health is at the core of a community's prosperity. Decatur's ability to attract growing industries with desirable jobs and support a strong workforce will be critical to achieve many of this plan's aspirations. Several of Decatur's most pressing economic development and prosperity issues relate directly to challenges in the physical environment explored in the previous two chapters. This chapter focuses on Decatur's competitive advantages, target industries for recruitment and retention, community branding, and housing market opportunities that are essential to recruit and retain the workforce needed to ensure Decatur's sustainable future.

Goal

A thriving economy that offers a variety of jobs, attracts new businesses and residents, and provides a diversity of retail, entertainment, and housing options.

Objectives

1. Expand the number, diversity, and wage level of employment opportunities.
2. Strengthen the existing labor force.
3. Encourage entrepreneurship and expand support for small businesses.
4. Encourage a variety of housing options that are competitive and serve the needs of a diverse population.
5. Enhance infrastructure to leverage economic growth.
6. Promote a collaborative brand/image.

Chapter Organization

- Key findings
- Target Industry Opportunities
- Housing Market Opportunities
- Actions

KEY FINDINGS

The following is a summary of key findings from a Baseline Economic Assessment, Target Industry Analysis and Housing Market Analysis conducted as inputs to One Decatur. Details of these analyses can be found in Appendix B.

Competitive Advantages

Decatur has a number of positive advantages that make it competitive for attracting and retaining many different types of businesses. These include:

- **Existing industrial base.** The City has a solid, stable industrial base with a long history of building contract and downstream supply networks throughout the area.
- **Transportation.** Decatur retains its strong transportation network, especially river and rail systems along with interstate highway access, that help make the City competitive for heavy industry as well as distribution. Highway networks also help provide regional market access to Huntsville as well as to Nashville, Atlanta, Memphis, and Birmingham.
- **Costs.** Operating costs are generally lower in Decatur when compared with Huntsville and larger cities. Real estate, power, wages and the supplier base are all competitive when compared with larger cities in the region.
- **Collaboration.** Decatur is said to offer a more "collaborative" environment, where businesses help support one another and build relationships with each other.
- **Downtown, historic neighborhoods, natural and cultural amenities.** Downtown Decatur has emerging vitality and assets that contribute to its continued revitalization, thereby adding to the City's amenity base along with parks and natural resources, arts activities, and historic neighborhoods.
- **Existing Programs.** Programs like Best and Brightest Decatur and incentives offered by economic development agencies help enhance the City's regional competitiveness for attracting business.

Competitive Challenges

Businesses and entrepreneurs have identified various challenges to operating in Decatur, whether through the surveys, focus groups, or other venues. These challenges can be aggregated into four groups as follows:

- **"Livability" Factors.** Issues relating to the schools, housing, retail activity and physical character are all impacting the City's competitiveness for attracting and retaining business.
  - Schools – Negative perceptions of school competitiveness
  - Housing – Lack of new housing choices
  - Retail – Lack of specialty, entertainment
  - Character – Gateways, industrial riverfront
- **Competition from Huntsville / Madison.** There is direct competition from Huntsville and Madison for industry, housing, and schools. Overall there is generally a lack of "regional vision" and collaboration between the various entities, although attempts are being made to bridge that gap. There is also a lack of available competitive business locations in Decatur to compete with other sites and buildings in the region.
- **Lack of Entrepreneurship.** Some businesspeople have expressed an issue with the perceived lack of entrepreneurship in Decatur. But there are efforts underway to leverage entrepreneurs and small business development through the Decatur Entrepreneurial Center and programs like Best and Brightest.
- **Negative Imaging (Media, Politics).** Businesses have noted a serious issue with negative imaging and the need for a solid, positive branding campaign.

Metropolitan Context

The Decatur Metropolitan Area comprises all of Morgan and Lawrence counties, straddling the south side of the Tennessee River. Relatively recently, the U.S. Census Bureau recognized the emerging regional commutation patterns linking Decatur, Athens and Huntsville and designated a new Huntsville-Decatur-Albertville Combined Statistical Area (CSA). The recognition that Decatur and Huntsville's commuter-shed has merged is significant in that it provides Decatur with a larger regional labor force and market base for marketing and business development purposes. The Combined Statistical Area has a total population of 768,033, making it the 65th largest CSA in the country. Ultimately, the consolidated metro definition creates larger and more diverse economic opportunities.

Approximately 8,600 people live and work within Decatur, while 14,500 commute out of Decatur to work elsewhere in the region. Meanwhile, 22,400 people commute in from someplace else to work in Decatur. While people working in Decatur commute from a broad region, Madison County is the prime source of Decatur workers beyond Morgan County, even though Madison is not technically part of the Decatur MSA.

Commuters in to Decatur tend to be younger (more than 50% are under the age of 30), and earn higher salaries than the average Decatur worker. This suggests that some higher-wage workers are not finding the housing or lifestyle that they want in Decatur. More than one-half of commuters work in trade and transportation jobs, while lower-wage jobs in manufacturing or services tend to be held more often by Decatur residents. There are a number of competitive housing locations outside of Decatur that have attracted higher-wage workers.

Employment Base

Decatur has a local labor force of about 26,450, growing at a rate of 0.9% per year. Employment tops 25,000 and is growing by 1.2% per year. So, the job base is growing faster than the labor force as the City and the nation continue to recover from the financial crisis and recession of 2008-10.

Labor force refers to the population who have jobs or are seeking a job.

Employment (or jobs) base refers to the jobs located within a place.

Decatur has a relatively diverse employment base, although manufacturing still leads the economy, with nearly one in five jobs. Employment is largely distributed among five key sectors including manufacturing (18%), health care (14%), retail trade (14%), accommodation & foodservice (10%), and administrative services (9%). Other important sectors include education (6%), construction (5%), government (4%), professional & technical services (4%), wholesale trade (3%), and finance (3%). Relatively under-represented in the local economy are information services, real estate, arts & entertainment, mining, and utilities.

Decatur MSA vs Huntsville MSA.

Employment in the Decatur MSA also very closely resembles of that of the neighboring Huntsville MSA, except for two sectors: manufacturing and professional & technical services. The Decatur area has a much higher share of employment concentrated in manufacturing, while Huntsville's economy is much more weighted to professional, scientific, and technical services. Huntsville is home to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and the U.S. Army's Aviation and Missile Command at Redstone Arsenal. These government entities along with their various contractors yield one of the largest concentrations of engineers in the United States.

Ultimately, these two sectors define and differentiate the economic character of the two cities, with Decatur retaining a traditional heavy manufacturing economy dependent on river and rail transportation and Huntsville oriented to the development of fast-changing technologies. Huntsville's high concentration of engineering jobs offers high salaries in a relatively affordable market, yielding more disposable income.

Employment growth

Decatur has seen slow but steady employment growth between 2002 and 2014. Overall, the City has added about 1,700 jobs or 5.4% during that 13-year period. While total employment has grown, there is significant variation between sectors. Only seven sectors saw employment growth since 2002, led by manufacturing, which added almost 2,000 jobs. Management services, professional & technical services, transportation, and accommodation & foodservice also added jobs since 2002. Growth in accommodation and foodservice provides an indicator of tourism, which has grown independently of local economic trends.

Eleven other sectors have seen a net decrease in employment between 2002 and 2014, led by retail, finance, information, wholesale, real estate, and other services. Some sectors, like retail, administrative services, utilities, and transportation have gained back many of the jobs they lost between 2002 and 2010. Administrative services has gained almost 700 jobs since 2010, and growth in this sector appears to be accelerating.

On a regional basis, Decatur has been performing better in terms of job growth in management and administrative services, arts & entertainment, and professional & technical services. Huntsville has generated faster job growth in real estate, finance, retail, and information services (e.g., media).

Existing industry concentrations

An analysis of existing industries and sectors was conducted to identify clusters and concentrations of employment and business establishments. Concentrations provide an indicator of the types of industries for which Decatur already has some competitive advantages for attracting industry.

Decatur has increasing concentrations in several sectors, including manufacturing, arts, management services, agriculture, and professional & technical services. At the same time, the City's concentrations in information services, real estate, other services, wholesale, health care, and financial services are declining.

The City also has a number of concentrations within specific industries (whereas sectors are made up of multiple industries). The most significant concentrations are in steam energy (hydro-electric power), wood preservation, industrial sands, and electrical equipment. But in general, most of these specific industries share a common characteristic: they are representative of *heavy, capital-intensive businesses.* They represent such heavy industries as power, pipelines, chemicals, metals, quarries, heavy civil, recycling, and required testing. Many of these industries are *bulk users of river and rail transportation,* meaning that they are dependent on river and rail to ship bulk materials like coal, lumber, petrochemicals, stone, etc. Decatur has historically and through today retained competitiveness for businesses that rely on river and rail for bulk shipping needs.

Regional industry growth projections

Based on employment projections generated for Workforce Development Region 2 by the Alabama Department of Labor and on employment growth data from the U.S. Department of Labor, the following sectors are expected to experience relatively high employment growth through 2022 (within Region 2).

> Construction	2.44%
> Health Care	2.27%
> Prof/Tech/Scientific	2.23%
> Administrative	2.00%
> Wholesale Trade	1.44%
> Arts & Recreation	1.38%
> Other Services	1.35%
> Real Estate	1.03%
> Accommodation/Foodservice	1.02%

There is already a shortage of skilled labor in the Decatur area's construction, health care, and professional services sectors. So, growth could be hampered somewhat by the skills gap that is already plaguing local businesses. Administrative (e.g. office administrative, processing, and other business services) are less-dependent on the existing base of skilled labor.

Housing market conditions

A recurring theme heard in stakeholder and public input was the challenge with lack of housing. Decatur has had very little new housing development in the past 20 years and much of its existing housing stock is aging and in need of upgrading. This issue is critical to economic development as the City lacks sufficient and appropriate housing to attract and retain workers along the entire spectrum of the labor force. The following are key findings from the Housing Market Analysis detailed in Appendix B.

Regional Context

Decatur is situated within the Huntsville-Decatur Combined Statistical Area (CSA), and the City's housing market is increasingly integrated with the broader regional labor market. Since 2000, the number of households in Decatur increased by about 1,650 out of the CSA total of 50,000, capturing just 3.3% of the region's household growth. Decatur is not alone in losing market share to Huntsville. All other cities in the CSA have experienced slower housing growth since 2005 while Huntsville's share of housing growth has increased. However, Decatur has been the most negatively impacted by this shift to Huntsville, having seen the largest decline in growth.

Construction Trends

Between 1996 and 2003, the City averaged construction of about 260 units per year, but that fell to 144 per year between 2004 and 2008 (during an economic boom), and to just 47 per year between 2009 and 2011 (during recession). Most distressing is that construction during the economic recovery period (2012 through 2016) averaged only 32 units per year, lower than during the height of the recession. This number is not sufficient even to ensure replacement of existing housing stock that is lost due to fire, disaster, and other demolition. Overall, just 250 new housing units have been built in Decatur in the seven years since 2010. During the same time, over 3,000 housing units were built in Huntsville.

Housing Sales Patterns

An estimated 45% of the Decatur housing market is currently driven by "move-ups" from within Decatur. These are existing Decatur homeowners purchasing homes that are larger or newer or otherwise more appropriate than their current residence. Another 30% are first-time buyers and 15% are "empty nesters" moving down from larger homes to smaller houses or condominiums. Only about 10% of sales are generated by those relocating to Decatur for work, returning home from another city, retiring, or drawn by the Tennessee Valley lifestyle.

Those relocating to Decatur for work often find few

options for purchasing homes, as well as for short-term rental, and end up living in Madison or Huntsville. Once they establish networks and roots in those places, they are less likely to move over to Decatur even to be closer to work. There are many buyers who relocate to the region for jobs in Huntsville, but few purchase homes in Decatur.

Housing prices in Decatur have increased by about 7% (not adjusting for inflation) since 2005 from $115,000 to $123,000. Decatur's housing prices are now among the lowest of communities in the three-county area. Huntsville-area average prices are nearly $100,000 more than those in Morgan-Lawrence counties. It would be nearly impossible to build new housing at prices under $100,000 in today's market, given the basic costs of construction.

Rental Trends

In general, Decatur has seen little new apartment construction in recent years. The current vacancy rate in Decatur is estimated at 8.3%, which is 652% higher than Decatur's vacancy rate in 2007 (1.1%), A vacancy rate at or below 5% signals a healthy market, so Decatur's rising vacancy at 8.3% suggests that the City's rental properties are performing below market standards.

A similar pattern with rents again suggests that Decatur's rental properties are lagging behind state and national trends. Current Decatur contract rents are averaging $597 per month, which is down by 3.2% from a peak of $617 in 2008. Meanwhile, average Alabama rents are now close to $730 per month (up 6.1% since 2014) and nation-wide rents are averaging $959 (up by 9.5% since 2014). The fact that rents are moving down at the same time that the national economy (and rental market) is growing, clearly indicates weakness in Decatur's rental housing.

Growth Projections

Morgan County is expected to add about 340 households within the next five years (not including "job-induced growth" that might spur new household formation). The Baby Boom generation (roughly age 55-74) will continue to generate a large share of household growth and, as such, will continue to drive demand in the housing market. Morgan County alone will add nearly 1,250 households led by householders aged 65 to 74 over the next five years. The county will also add more than 400 households led by householders aged 75 and over. Again, this number does not include growth relating to any pro-active effort to attract retirees or those relocating for work. Morgan County's growth will include nearly 400 more homeowners, but 30 less renters (without any pro-active marketing strategy). By comparison, Madison County is expected to add about 6,300 households over the next five years and Limestone County will add 2,400.

Housing product demand and competitive context

As noted previously, the for-sale housing market has been stronger in Huntsville and surrounding areas than in Decatur. New residential communities located throughout Madison and Limestone counties are highly competitive with any new housing offered in Decatur. Particularly competitive are newer residential communities on the west side of Madison, such as Moore's Creek, Palmer Place, Stillwater Cove, Greenbrier Woods, Brighton Park, Shiloh Run, and others where prices range from the mid-200,000s to low 400,000s). The Village of Providence (off University Drive) and other traditional neighborhood developments (TNDs) are also highly competitive with new housing in Decatur because they offer not only superior location but also high amenity value. However, such TNDs are aimed at the higher end of the market, with houses in the $500,000-$700,000 range and condominiums in the $150,000-$200,000 range.

There is a growing interest nationally in "maintenance-free" living, which lends itself to smaller houses, less yard, and "walk-able" neighborhoods.

Among the more competitive rental products are newer apartment communities situated along I-565 near Madison and Huntsville International Airport. For example, the 288-unit Limestone Creek Apartments in Madison attracts about 30-40% of their renters from among those relocating to the region for jobs in Decatur. Units rent for $700 to $885 per month for 715 to 1,102 square feet. Occupancy is high, at 96.5%, since this project is relatively new, offers key amenities and is well-located near key highways to access jobs in Huntsville, Madison, Decatur, and Athens.

TARGET INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Input gathered through the various streams – whether analytical or through stakeholder processes – point to a clear opportunity for Decatur to attract, retain, and grow businesses that serve the growing regional market base. The City has a competitive advantage for supplying services and products to Huntsville and the broader region because of its relatively low cost of real estate and business operations, its superior transportation network, and access to a regional labor force. In other words, a key approach for Decatur's economic development should be on attracting those businesses that seek access to the regional market base, government contracting opportunities, and labor force. Industries that can supply material and services, and are expected to grow and prosper in this region include the following:

Business & Administrative Support Services. This sector includes client or contract services (such as for Government and military agencies), administrative processing (human resources, accounts, etc), back office, building maintenance services, web & other design services, data entry, and information tech support services. Again, Decatur is competitive because of its relatively low costs, access to Huntsville, and growing regional labor force.

Construction Trades. Construction is a growth sector in the short-term and Decatur is well-placed as a hub for construction services seeking lower-cost operating space, access to construction materials, and a relatively low-cost labor market. Constraints on the skills base within the City could hamper growth, and longer-term prospects suggest a downturn in cyclical construction industries.

Professional, Scientific and Research Services. This is already a growth sector in Decatur, in part because of the City's low costs and proximity to government contractors in Huntsville. There are various opportunities to expand and diversify the mix of businesses in this sector by focusing on Decatur's relative strengths including cost, access to materials, and access to regional engineering skills/contractors. Key target industries might include testing laboratories and services, materials research & development, and environmental services.

Tourism. Decatur is well-placed to continue to grow its tourism sector. Enhancing downtown amenities and destination venues is key, along with improving linkages with gateway districts and building on the City's overall brand and image.

Retail and Entertainment. As with other industries, Decatur has the opportunity to expand its retail and entertainment industries by recruiting businesses based on access to the growing regional Huntsville-Decatur CSA market. Decatur's demographics alone are likely insufficient to support extensive new retail development, especially in an era of draw-back for some traditional brick-and-mortar retail chains. But by building on the regional market base and focusing on sites with regional exposure or in destination locations (like Downtown), the City can more successfully market to retailers with a broader market "net."

Arts and Recreation. Similar to above, Decatur has an opportunity to build on the momentum in its downtown and parks that already include a growing concentration of arts and recreation activities. Again, such activities can draw from a growing regional market base.

Electronics/Aerospace. While the engineering component of these industries is highly concentrated in Huntsville, there are clearly opportunities to build on the testing, product development, supply and support services associated with both electronics and aerospace.

Transportation Equipment/Robotics & Services. Decatur is already a hub for transportation services, and is located within the nation's transportation equipment manufacturing corridor (extending from Detroit south into Alabama and Mississippi). Decatur is well-positioned as a supply hub for transportation equipment industries. The State's efforts to build on robotics development can help position Decatur for product development and manufacturing but the programmatic linkages with industry and local economic development efforts need to be strengthened.

HOUSING MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

The overall potential for housing development in Decatur was determined within the competitive context of the regional market. Potential for both rental and for-sale housing was determined along with the target market niches, pricing, and likely product. Capturing a larger share of any of the target markets will require the right housing products and a marketing effort.

Housing Market Targets

Within the broad market area, the following categories of people most likely to purchase or rent housing within Decatur should be targeted:

- **Decatur Job Relocations**. People relocating to Decatur for work in the City. Many of those who now relocate for Decatur jobs are settling in Huntsville or Madison due to the lack of available and appropriate housing, combined with lifestyle factors. Even under current conditions, this niche comprises at least 10% of sales within Decatur.
- **Decatur Workers or Business Operators Living Elsewhere**. People who currently work or operate a business in Decatur but live elsewhere (due to some of the same reasons as those given above) are another target niche opportunity for housing in Decatur. These individuals already have employment and connections in Decatur, and some may wish to live closer to work if appropriate housing were provided under the right circumstances (e.g., lifestyle, location, etc).
- **Huntsville/Madison Employment Growth**. Employment growth in Huntsville and Madison County is attracting people to relocate to the region for work. While most of these transplants currently locate in Huntsville or Madison, there are some that might consider living in Decatur if the appropriate housing product were provided under the right circumstances (lifestyle, location, etc). This is especially true for singles and DINKs (dual-income households with no kids) that are less concerned about the reputation or perceptions of schools.
- **Retirement/Empty Nesters**. Decatur is affordable and has amenities that can attract retirees and other empty nesters who, like singles, are not as concerned about perceptions of schools or other issues that drive families to suburban locations like Madison.

5-year demand potential

Decatur has potential to capture demand for 2,700 to 4,300 rental units by 2022. This number includes 1,100 market-rate units and 2,200 to 3,400 "workforce" units for those making less than the area median income (AMI). Key niches for this housing include relocating workers, young professionals, recent graduates, and retirees. Rents for market-rate units would range from $650 to $1,500 per month, and those for workforce housing would range from $250 to $700 per month.

There is market potential in Decatur for up to 150 for-sale housing units by 2022, including more than 100 market-rate units. Target niches include move-ups, relocating workers (following a rental period), and mid-level professionals. Market-Rate housing prices would range from $240,000 to $367,000 and over.

If the City's capture of workers relocating to Decatur for work increases from 30% to 50% and its capture of housing for North Alabama job relocations increases to 5%, there would be additional job-generated demand for about 380 rentals and 250 for-sale housing units.

Marketing & Development Concepts

In order to capture this demand, there are several marketing and development concepts that have been identified.

- **I-65/565 Mixed-Use "Decatur Gateway" Site.** There is excellent exposure at this location to promote Decatur and raise its profile in the region. It provides one of the best opportunities in the Decatur area for mixed-use (commercial exposure) including retail and community amenities like recreation facilities.
- **Amenity-Driven / Downtown Project(s).** As key demographics (empty nesters and millennials) seek out housing in mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods, the Downtown area in Decatur becomes more attractive as a housing location, particularly as cultural amenities and access to the riverfront are enhanced. Infill residential or mixed-use projects would be most appropriate.
- **Move-up Program.** Housing infill and redevelopment provides an opportunity for the City to capture further housing demand in inner-city neighborhoods. Programs could be designed to assist landlords and those living in low-quality housing with links to new workforce housing development.

ACTIONS

The following projects, policies, and programs support the goal for Advancing our Prosperity:

A thriving economy that offers a variety of jobs, attracts new businesses and residents, and provides a diversity of retail, entertainment, and housing options.

Objective 1. Expand the number, diversity, and wage level of employment opportunities.

PR **1.1** **Complete a business recruitment and marketing strategy.** Using the target industry assessment, develop a strategy for marketing and attraction of desirable industry sectors. Marketing and business recruitment should focus on the following competitive advantages.

- **Focus on Decatur's affordability**. Decatur's relative affordability within the region, including lower operating costs for real estate, power, wages, and supplies is a competitive advantage. Providing data and direct cost comparisons can be an important part of Decatur's business recruitment strategy.
- **Emphasize the growing metropolitan market.** Despite the declining local demographics, Decatur is part of a growing regional market known as the Huntsville-Decatur CSA (the 64th largest in the nation). That growth should be emphasized by "capturing" more new businesses that serve or contract with clients in Huntsville and Madison or other parts of the greater region.
- **Continue to emphasize accessibility.** Transportation access has defined Decatur's past development and continues to contribute to its future potential. The City is blessed with excellent river, rail, and road access. More emphasis should also be given to Decatur's proximity to Huntsville International Airport. HSV offers non-stop service to eight major markets and is located mid-way between Huntsville and Decatur. The City is less than two hours from international airports in Birmingham and Nashville.
- **Continue to develop and market broadband capacity.** Such access and capacity is critical for attracting many of the industries for which Decatur is competitive, such as administrative support and back office functions. (See Enhancing Our Amenities Objective 1)

pr 1.2 **Diversify Decatur's industry recruitment targets.** With Decatur's relative affordability within the region, the City is an attractive location for a diverse set of businesses serving clients in other parts of the region (such as NASA / Redstone contractors, high-tech firms, equipment suppliers, technical and professional services, etc). The County Economic Development Association (EDA) has done well in the past recruiting large industrial employers to Decatur, but future recruiting should focus on specific target industries identified in the Target Industry Opportunities section. Additional 501(c)(3) marketing and networking organizations (or Chamber divisions) can be formed to support the City's primary economic targets.

Target Industries

- **Business & Administrative Support Services**
  - Client / Contract Service
  - Administrative processing – HR, accounts, etc
  - Back Office, Building Services, etc
  - Web & Other Design Services, Data Entry, IT Support
- **Construction Trades**
- **Professional, Scientific and Research Services** (broaden and re-define the local technology development strategy and build on existing assets through collaboration).
  - Testing Laboratories & Services
  - Materials R&D
  - Environmental Services
- **Tourism** (Heritage, Recreation)
- **Retail & Entertainment** (Drawn by the regional trade area)
- **Arts & Recreation** (building on momentum)
- **Electronics/Aerospace (NASA/ Arsenal-related)**
- **Transportation Equipment/ Robotics**
- **Transportation Services**

PR **1.3** **Consider criteria for business incentives.** Consider basing incentives for industrial projects partly on the job creation, wages, and target industry of the particular employer. Formalize a set of criteria for evaluating proposed incentives.

PR **1.4** **Create regulatory fast-track program.** Streamlining the regulatory path for existing business expansion and new business development is critical. The City should continue to enhance the approval process and staff training. Examine each regulatory hurdle (e.g., business licensing, sign ordinances, building and permits, etc) to determine where consolidation and fast-tracking can occur. Consider designating one City staff member as an ombudsman or business advocate to meet with and assist businesses. Link fast-track incentives to job creation, wages, and target sectors.

What else?

- Continue to develop housing, amenities and infrastructure. (See Objectives 4 and 5)
- Focus on Employee & Owner Recruitment. (see adjacent box)

Objective 2. Strengthen the existing labor force.

Strengthening the existing labor force is an investment in the City's future. There are opportunities for the City to engage more pro-actively with the public schools as well as with industry and the community college system to enhance existing resources and programs.

PR **2.1** **Target Workforce development efforts on "Skills for the Future."** While there is an effort to engage industry to identify current skills needs, there is as yet only limited attention paid to future skills requirements and development of the next generation of workers. Demand for the following skills has been identified for the region:

- Construction
- Tech/IT
- Management
- Professional Services
- Office Administrative Support

PR **2.2** **Collaborate with public schools to expand vocational programming.** Pro-active efforts are needed to develop programming geared to skills development from an early age. There are various examples of this type of programming nationwide. In Memphis, the City funds a non-profit that engages 4th grade students in software coding, for example. Support vocational-education programs already being developed in the public school system in collaboration with Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT) and the tech sector.

Employee & Owner Recruitment

Decatur needs a high-quality labor force to attract and retain business. Yet some businesses in Decatur have faced challenges with recruitment. Several current initiatives (e.g., "Best and Brightest Decatur") help to address this issue. Additional initiatives detailed in other sections of this plan include:

- **Facilitate Workforce and Executive Housing Development.** Decatur lacks sufficient and appropriate housing resources to attract and retain workers along the entire spectrum of the labor force. Housing initiatives, including incentives for housing development, should be considered part and parcel of the City's economic development. *See Objective 4.*
- **Re-Brand and Market Decatur Schools.** The success of Decatur schools is critical to the future of both housing and economic development in the city. Address negative perceptions of public schools through marketing initiatives that promote pride in local schools, partnerships with business and industry, collaboration with municipal government agencies, and programs focused on education preparedness. Highlight and promote the school district's many success stories and emphasize the positive story of Decatur's schools. Decatur schools should "define themselves" rather than having others (e.g., websites) tell their story. Also disaggregate test score data to explain and highlight the English language component and how Decatur's diverse schools are educating a generation of proud new Americans and tomorrow's work force. *See Strengthening our Community Objective 1.*
- **Strengthen and Develop Amenities**. Focus on strengthening the City's assets including arts and culture, Downtown, the river and area parks and recreational facilities, places for networking and interchange, and mixed use communities with entertainment.

PR **2.3** **Establish partnerships with industry to expand workforce development opportunities.** Develop new programs in partnership with local and national industry. For example:

> Create a local coding program in schools in partnership or through grant applications with Apple.

> Utilize the AIDT training resources available in this area for robotics in establishing strategic partnerships.

> Develop mentorship programs and guilds to help build appropriate skills to meet the demands of industry for a skilled labor force. Such efforts can be undertaken through the non-profit organizations or Chamber divisions oriented to specific industry clusters, as noted previously. An industry cluster organization can focus its membership on workforce development, marketing, networking, and contract relationships.

PR **2.4** **Strengthen Ready-for-Work Programs.** Local businesses have identified a serious deficiency in workforce readiness, soft skills and essential skills. While there are efforts underway to close this gap, there is a need for more program operating resources in this area. For example:

> The Decatur Public Library Training Center offers important information technology (IT) assets and assistance for those seeking employment and building basic skills such as in computer literacy. The center was initiated in part through a grant from the Institute of Museum & Library Sciences (administered by the Alabama Public Library Service), but there will be ongoing requirements for operating funds and it is recommended that a public-private partnership be formed to include area businesses that will benefit local industry by enhancing basic literacy and growing technology-based skills in the community. By securing funds for operation and expansion of DPLTC programs, the community will be investing in its future economic success.

What else?

> **Promote Workforce Housing Initiatives.** Housing is a crucial part of economic development in Decatur. Ensuring safe and affordable housing resources is crucial to the welfare of workers and the education of their children. (see Objective 4)

Objective 3. Encourage entrepreneurship and expand support for small businesses.

Some have identified a lack of "entrepreneurship" in Decatur. There are existing programs trying to address this issue, such as the Entrepreneurial Center (EC), which provides affordable incubation space and assistance. A substantial share of the EC client base is retail-oriented, but there are opportunities to grow the number of technical service providers, suppliers, business and office administrative functions (e.g., processing operations), and other businesses as identified in the target industry assessment.

PR **3.1** **Expand Small Business Infrastructure and Incentives.** Aside from the EC, there is a need to enhance Decatur's small business infrastructure, including soft programs or incentives (fast-track, financing, training, and technical assistance) as well as "hard" infrastructure (e.g., affordable building space and broadband infrastructure) to accommodate the needs of "location-independent businesses" like IT consultants, web designers, and artisans.

PR **3.2** **Develop a Entrepreneur Mentorship/Partnership Program.** Existing industrial businesses contract with a variety of suppliers and services, and there are opportunities for expanding mentorship and partnership programs that match large businesses with emerging entrepreneurs.

PR **3.3** **Market business development opportunities in Decatur's HUB zones.** Six U.S. Census Tracts comprise the Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Zone in Decatur and Morgan County. The Small Business Administration (SBA) designates the zone for the purposes of providing a leg-up in federal contracting opportunities for small businesses or their employees who are located within these zones. Given the large-scale federal contracting opportunities in this region, Decatur can more pro-actively market its HUB zone designation for attracting businesses and potential contractors. Adding to the competitiveness of the zone is the availability of significant office space within the downtown area. Partnerships between the Downtown Decatur Redevelopment Authority and building owners could help package these assets for broad-based business recruitment.

Objective 4. Encourage a variety of housing options that are competitive and serve the needs of a diverse population.

Several of Decatur's most pressing economic development and education issues relate directly to challenges in the physical environment, including housing and infrastructure. There must be a focus on creating more workforce and executive housing resources to retain and recruit the labor force and ensure Decatur's sustainable future.

PR **4.1** **Recruit High-Value Housing/Mixed-Use Development.** Decatur has seen a dearth of new housing development in recent years. There is an effort to recruit developers, but various challenges remain. Several strategies are geared to resolving key marketing issues as explained below.

> **Promote the Regional Market / Marketing Strategy**. As noted earlier, Decatur now forms part of the Huntsville-Decatur CSA. This larger housing market base should be the focus of developer recruitment efforts that can plug into a broader, regional growth market.

> **Focus on Target Markets**. Focus housing development on target markets described in detail in Housing Market Opportunities section (summarized to the right).

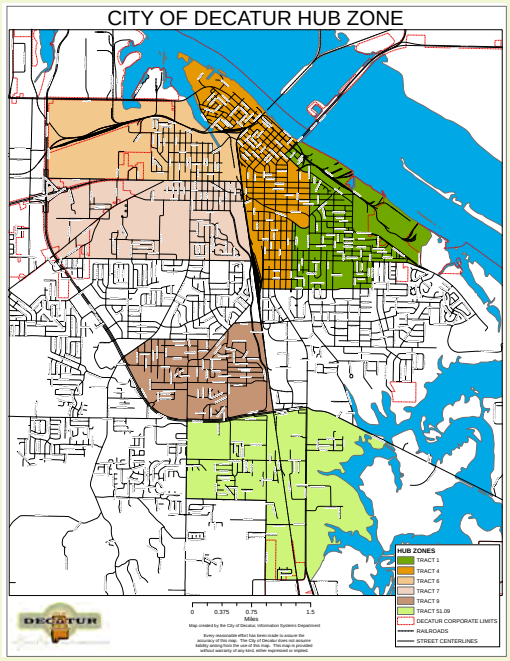
Decatur's SBA Alliance and HUB Zones

In August 2017, Decatur became the first north Alabama City to sign a strategic alliance memorandum with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The agreement gives the City's small businesses access through the federal agency to information about the available financial help, free mentoring and education in business management through the E-center. The SBA also connects the E-center with resource partners like the Small Business Development Centers, SCORE and the Women's Business Centers. Clients will be able to attend SBA-sponsored events and training.

Information and resources regarding the HUB Zone program (and other programs for small businesses) can be found at:

- US Small Business Administration (www.sba.gov)
- Alabama Small Business Development Center Network (www.asbdc.org)



Housing Market Targets

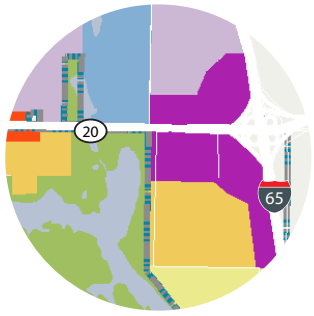
The following target housing markets have been identified:

- Decatur Job Relocations
  - Truck/Freight Handlers
  - Nursing
  - Assemblers
  - Admin Services / Customer Sales/Support
  - Accounting
  - Aerospace engineering/Prof/tech services
- Decatur Workers or Business Operators living elsewhere
- Huntsville/Madison employment growth
- Retirees/Empty Nesters

PR **4.2** **Facilitate North-of-the River Development.** Facilitate efforts to attract a regional/national developer to establish a strong "brand" for Decatur through development of a high-value mixed-use project near the I-65/565 interchange. This project can be part of a broader concept for recreational and retail amenities that serve the broader community.

> **Develop a site plan and RFP package to recruit developers.** The City would work closely with Limestone County and with private property owners to develop a Site Master Plan, support Highway 20 infrastructure improvements, remove encumbrances, ensure proper zoning and land use policies are in place, and create an RFP package for recruiting master developers. By working with property owners to assemble land, providing services, and generating a site plan concept, the City can save prospective developers time and money, thus creating an incentive for them to invest.

> **Consider financial incentives as secondary.** Certainly fiscal incentives like tax abatements can "sweeten the pot," but ultimately, the focus should be on site assembly, infrastructure, and developer recruitment. A "return-on-investment" (ROI) analysis is appropriate to gauge the requirement for (or level of) infrastructure investment needed to leverage developer interest. Returns might be measured in part through increased fiscal (property and sales tax) revenues generated over time. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is another approach for leveraging such investment while minimizing risk to the taxpayer. The fiscal and economic return-on-investment should also be determined for recreational facilities or other public amenities packaged as part of this larger mixed-use community.



The Future Land Use map identifies the area at the I-65/565 interchange as a regional mixed use center with nearby mixed housing neighborhoods, civic and employment uses.

PR **4.3** **Create developer packages to market sites.** Assemble developer-targeted marketing material for certain development-ready sites. This material should include, site specifications such as acreage, zoning, and any current studies or plans. These packages should act as a prospectus for each area and be marketed to specific developers.

PR **4.4** **Facilitate Downtown Housing Development.** Build on Downtown's growing asset base and potential to capture the Millennial and Empty Nester markets focused on walk-ability. New projects like 307 Second can act as a model for further infill and redevelopment.

> Use existing mechanisms already established through the Downtown Decatur Redevelopment Authority (DDRA) to leverage rehabilitation and new development through site assembly, historic building rehabilitation, and shared parking infrastructure development. Priority should be given to recruitment of specialized downtown developers.

> Remove or reduce regulatory hurdles through "fast-track" mechanisms as discussed previously as an incentive for downtown revitalization and housing development.

> Tourism and entertainment assets would need to be further developed as a pre-requisite or incentive to establish the environment for capturing housing demand.

> State and federal historic tax credits can be utilized to encourage rehabilitation of historic downtown buildings.

> As noted above, tax abatements (ad valorem or sales taxes) can be offered as fiscal incentives, but should be viewed as secondary components of "packaging" for recruitment of developers to ready sites.

PR **4.5** **Evaluate the state of building code requirements relative to Decatur's competitiveness within the region.** There is a vast range of building code standards in use by cities in the region. While Decatur has historically adopted the most current standards available, other communities have not. This situation, where Decatur is often enforcing higher standards, fuels perceptions that development in Decatur is relatively difficult. The City should review its obligations under State law and consider whether a moratorium on the enforcement of certain codes (such as the energy code) that exceeds the 2003 code (of both the IRC and IBC) should be put in place until all municipalities within counties bordering Morgan County adopt and enforce the most recent codes as adopted by the State of Alabama or the State code itself is modified. City leaders should also work with the elected State delegation to pass legislation that either appeals or put a moratorium on said State-wide codes until such time as the State has the staff, resources and will to level the playing field for all counties and municipalities in the adoption and enforcement of such code legislation.

PR **4.6** **Establish Housing Rehabilitation Programs.** There is a need for "carrot and stick" approaches to improve housing conditions throughout the City but especially in target neighborhoods, for example in northwest Decatur.

- Code enforcement is critical to manage over-crowding and other issues, but such efforts can be balanced with incentives for owner-occupants and landlords, such as façade improvement programs and tax abatements for home improvement.
- Historic tax credits should be utilized wherever possible to encourage rehabilitation of historic buildings in the City.
- Tax abatements or other fiscal incentives might be appropriate for encouraging rehabilitation of existing rental housing stock so long as it met certain requirements. Such incentives could help leverage improvements and upgrading to existing stock to enhance its overall competitiveness. That being said, the City suffers from an overall dearth of new market-rate and workforce rental stock, so an emphasis might be better placed on the development of new housing and relief of over-crowded conditions.
- A housing conditions assessment is recommended as a first step for understanding the key issues in both for-sale and rental housing, and for targeting resources such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

Objective 5. Enhance Infrastructure to Leverage Economic Growth.

Several targeted infrastructure investments are recommended to support economic development.

PR **5.1** **Establish Industrial Parks and Sites.** While there are large industrial sites, there is a lack of designated parks in the City that are branded and can accommodate high-value industrial uses. Industrial areas along the railroad should be given more "definition" through signage, branding, and marketing for emerging industrial, service and mixed-use.

What else? The following investments are also discussed in other sections of this plan.

- **Gateways**. Enhance the City's gateways and major streets to improve community image. In particular, there is a need to focus on the 6th Avenue gateway as well as the linkages between 6th Avenue and Downtown. Improving exposure for Downtown from 6th Avenue, through wayfinding and signage, at a minimum, to support tourism efforts. The Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) should be relocated closer to Downtown and/or near the US 31 bridge.
- **Industrial Riverfront**. Industry clustered along the river is an important component of Decatur's economic base. However, the river is also the City's brand and lifeblood. Every effort should be made to enhance the riverfront aesthetic value and public access.
- **Broadband Speed/Capacity**. Enhance and promote the City's broadband capacity as an economic development tool and to help support location-independent businesses. (see Strengthening our Amenities Objective 1)

Objective 6. Promote a positive and coordinated brand/image.

Decatur offers many positive assets including a rich heritage, culture, and exceptional people. But the City also suffers unfairly from a negative image in part because of a lack of positive branding. There is also a series of boundaries, geographic and otherwise, that contribute to the negative imaging. Recommended strategies include:

PR **6.1** **Conduct a Summit on Collaborative Branding.** There are many entities involved in communicating (to internal audiences and/or external audiences) about the Decatur community. Other places have demonstrated significant benefits by bringing the brand and marketing efforts of various entities into alignment. A community brand gets to the authentic core of the place's attributes and aspirations. An aligned community brand goes beyond coordination and collaboration to achieve a unified vision and consistent voice that links destination marketing, economic development and community pride. Ultimately a successful brand will be voiced through each person, business, and organization that supports the community. A summit on collaborative branding would be conducted with entities involved in branding and marketing to explore the benefits and challenges of leveraging individual work to create a stronger community brand. These entities include the Chamber of Commerce, Decatur-Morgan County CVB, Economic Development Association, Downtown Redevelopment Authority, the City, Decatur City Schools and others.

PR **6.2** **Lead or Create a Regional Vision.** While the collaborative branding mentioned above would focus on Decatur's identity and marketing, a related effort should look at integrating the City's brand into a regional vision. Decatur is part of a growing metropolitan region and it should promote development of a regional vision as well as a positive role for itself in the region. The City/County can take a leadership role in collaborating with Huntsville, Madison, Athens and other communities on this vision. But if that spirit of collaboration does not take hold, Decatur can still develop its own vision for the region that can be marketed to the City's benefit. As noted before, the market and economic development opportunities relate to capturing regional share.

PR **6.3** **Establish and sustain strong collaboration through the region.** Continue to build upon many existing relationships to promote economic development and resolution of key challenges. This effort may be aided by the engagement of a community-wide foundation. The collaboration should involve the following relationships.

- City/County-Industry
- Schools-City-County
- Vocational-Schools-City-Region-Industry
- Cities in Region

What is a brand?

A brand is deeper than logos and taglines. It is a set of ideas that reflect emotions people might have about a particular product, service, organization or place. Brand identity and marketing are expressions of the brand that consist of visuals and written and spoken messages. A key element of a successful brand identity is clarity and consistency. Like a brand for a product or service, a strong community brand identity attracts new people to the brand (place) while strengthening the emotional attachment that existing residents have to their community. When branding a place, collaboration between many entities is essential. A strong community brand should align with how organizations speak and write about the community, the visuals used to convey those messages, and how and where those messages are applied (internal and external).

Branding and economic development

While Decatur would benefit from a stronger and more coordinated brand, that effort should accompany other recommendations in this plan. Investments in physical infrastructure, programs and targeted marketing approaches aimed at specific issues (e.g., schools) or opportunities (back office administration or new mixed-use residential developments) will pay higher dividends than broad branding efforts alone.

Chattanooga provides a successful and relevant nearby example of a community that made significant efforts to clean up its heavy industrial waterfront, strengthen its broadband infrastructure, and add amenity value (e.g., the hugely-successful Tennessee Aquarium, a major hiking/biking recreation system) without relying solely on a new "brand" to promote itself. The city has not only diversified its economic base but strengthened its traditional manufacturing sector and attracted global brands like Volkswagen.

Marketing and Recruitment Outreach and Collaboration

There are already a number of distinct entities engaged in marketing and recruitment for Decatur and the surrounding area. It would not be wise to create another new economic development entity, but rather, to encourage more collaboration between the City and these various entities on issues of common concern. For example, the City might collaborate with Limestone County's EDA on site planning, assembly, and developer recruitment for the North-of-the-River site. The DDRA would collaborate with the City, the Chamber, and the MCEDA on administrative service industry (targeting vacant office space) and housing recruitment in the Downtown area.

- The **Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce** is engaged in networking and assisting all local business and industry; with a particular focus on retail and small business development and on training and business recruitment.
- The **Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority (DDRA)** is an official Main Street organization empowered to act as both a development and marketing agency to recruit businesses and people to downtown Decatur.
- The **Morgan County Economic Development Association (MCEDA)** in collaboration with the Decatur-Morgan County Port Authority, the North Alabama Industrial Development Association and the economic development division of the Tennessee Valley Authority represents Decatur and Morgan County for recruiting and retaining business and industry through a variety of programs and incentives.
- The **Limestone County Economic Development Association** is also engaged in business retention and recruitment. Part of Decatur is situated in Limestone County.
- The **Decatur-Morgan County Convention and Visitors Bureau** works on the development and strengthening of the area's tourism, hospitality, and meeting industries.
- The **Decatur-Morgan County Entrepreneurial Center** acts as a small business incubator and support mechanism for the area.
- **Decatur Utilities** works closely with MCEDA and other economic development entities to assist new and expanding businesses.
- **Decatur Corridor Development** is a collaborative effort to identify key real estate, quality of life, and economic expansion initiatives. Among the efforts underway are Startup Decatur and a STEM-focused young professional recruitment program known as the Best and Brightest Initiative that is already showing signs of success.

"I'm excited to help Decatur reach its full potential."

— participant

5

ENHANCING OUR AMENITIES

The quality of a community's public services, parks, cultural institutions and other amenities are key to defining a place's quality of life. Having high quality amenities is important to serve existing residents, attract businesses and maintain a strong local economy. This chapter addresses City services and facilities, parks and recreation amenities, cultural institutions and health services that support a prosperous place.

Goal

A wide variety of modern City services, outstanding parks and recreational facilities, well-supported cultural institutions, and access to health services that support the needs of our community.

Objectives

1. Expand the range of public services.
2. Continue to improve the effectiveness of the City's safety services (police and fire).
3. Provide parks and recreational facilities that meet the needs of residents.
4. Maintain competitive facilities that attract tourism.
5. Improve recreational access to the river and Wildlife Refuge.
6. Strengthen support for community and cultural institutions.
7. Improve access to quality healthcare and social services.

Chapter Organization

- Key Findings
- Actions

KEY FINDINGS

This section contains a summary of conditions and key opportunities covering Decatur's essential city services, library, parks and recreation and cultural amenities. While these may seem to be very disparate topics, they all provide invaluable services to the community and are essential to Decatur's prosperity.

Public Services

Decatur provides competitive public services for a city of its size. There were relatively few public comments related to service needs (that were not related to traffic control as mentioned in Chapter 3 or code enforcement mentioned in Chapter 2).

Public input did point to a desire for improving or expanding the availability of high speed internet and wi-fi. The City recently partnered with Mobile-based Southern Light to expand broadband internet service in Decatur providing data speeds of 100 gigs per second throughout much of the City. The City offers free access to wireless networks (wi-fi) within City facilities, but there is interest among the community for broader access.

Recycling service was another area of notable mention. The City provides residential recycling pickup for residential areas but not for commercial properties. Also recycling facilities could be provided Downtown and during community events.

Police & Fire Safety

The Decatur Police Department (DPD) provides a wide range programs and services in addition to its law enforcement role. Services such as youth programs, neighborhood watches and volunteer academy are designed to prevent crime and strengthen relationships between officers and the community.

DPD has also been encouraging Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) practices throughout the City to great effect. CPTED is a multidisciplinary approach to deterring criminal behavior through environmental design.

DPD recently hired a crime analyst. The department will be using more analysis and mapping to analyze patterns of criminal activity throughout the City in order to better target programs, outreach, and enforcement.

As the City continues offer more special events and retail, DPD needs to grow with it. To continue to be effective and to stay competitive with other cities, DPD needs equipment and software upgrades.

The Decatur Fire Department (DFD) provides fire suppression and prevention and emergency medical services (EMS). The City has a class 3 ISO rating for its service. As of 2014, only 49 cities in the State had a class 3 rating or better. Development north of the River would likely require a new fire station to serve that area and maintain the City's ISO rating. DFD also provides technical rescue and hazardous material mitigation in response to the City's industrial facilities.

Like DPD, the Fire Department needs capital equipment, facility repair and replacement.

Parks, Open Space, and Recreation

Decatur offers a wide range of parks and recreational assets, ranging from small neighborhood parks to regionally competitive recreational facilities. Overall, Decatur has 27 designated parks and 17 playgrounds. The school playgrounds and ballfields also serve as neighborhood parks. These major assets include:

- **Jack Allen Recreation Complex.** Located in SW Decatur, the complex is home to 10 international size soccer fields, locker and shower rooms, two championship fields, fully equipped press box, concession stand, restrooms, playground area, disc golf course, and walking trail. Jack Allen hosts many regional soccer tournaments.
- **Point Mallard.** Located on the Tennessee River, Point Mallard features a water park, batting cages, driving range, recreation center, tennis center, baseball fields, outdoor stage, Civil War reenactment space, prayer chapel, golf course, ice complex, campgrounds, bike trails, and an amphitheater. Point Mallard is a major regional draw and is profitable.
- **Wilson Morgan Park**. Located in southern Decatur, Wilson-Morgan Park boasts a tennis complex, soccer field, lake, walking trails, pavilion and playground, batting cages, softball and baseball fields, and an adventure park. The park hosts local and regional tournaments for softball and baseball. Wilson Morgan Lake serves a critical role in flood control for southern part of Decatur but also offers potential

for recreational use. A study is currently underway to assess the long-term needs to maintain the lake's primary purpose and other opportunities.

- **Ingalls Harbor/Pavilion.** Located on the Tennessee River, Ingalls Harbor has a boat launch and attracts many nationally-acclaimed sport fishing tournaments. The 27,000 square feet pavilion doubled the City's capacity for hosting large events. A hospitality tax pays for this facility.
- **Neighborhood Parks.** The City is well-served by neighborhood-scale parks through a long standing agreement with Decatur City Schools in which school playgrounds and ballfields are open to the public. However, in some areas, there is limited awareness that school facilities serve as neighborhood parks. In several neighborhoods, the City owns park land and facilities adjacent to a school site.
- **Recreation Centers.** Various recreation centers are located throughout the City.

The Parks and Recreation department sees their role as an economic generator for the City and has emphasized the creation of best-in-class facilities to attract visitors.. This larger focus is unique, as most cities' parks and recreation facilities do not draw visitors and do not make money for the City.

However, funding is a concern. Recent City budget cuts have reduced staffing and made maintenance a challenge. Although park facilities generate revenue, that money goes into the City's general fund. The department is challenged to convince City leadership of the positive economic impact of the City's parks/recreation to ensure adequate funding.

There is no citywide parks and recreation plan, however there is an existing plan for trails and greenways that is managed by the Planning and Grant Writing.

Needs

While the City's parks system is a strength, public input in One Decatur has pointed to various needs including:

- More park locations and facilities that meet community needs. There are perceptions that park facilities cater to tourism at the expense of local needs. Some areas of the City such as Southwest Decatur have relatively poor access to regional-scale parks. The City has been converting some vacant property to parks recently, including Jones Park, Casa Grande Park, and Lee Street Park. There is also public desire for special facilities such as dog parks and an indoor sports complex.
- Improved access to the River and Refuge waterways. Kayak and canoe rental is available at Point Mallard, but few in the community are aware of that amenity. Boat access is provided at Ingalls Harbor.
- The City's bike network could be expanded with bike lanes, trails, promotion, etc. The City's bike culture lags behind that of many cities, but it is growing. The City's investment in bike infrastructure includes the Bill Sims bike trail, which is planned to go all the way across the City eventually (More on this topic in Chapter 3)
- Greater competition from other facilities in the region and state mean that the City needs to continually expand existing facilities to stay competitive and continue to support tournaments and other events. For instance, the department sees a need to expand Jack Allen Complex with additional turf fields.

Library

The Decatur Public Library serves all of Morgan County, but about 72 percent of their patrons come from the City of Decatur. The current facility was built in 1973 and is inadequate for the library's growing needs. Maintenance is an issue, as is parking, with overflow into nearby lots. The library does not have a safe space in case of a storm and must close if there is a tornado warning. However, the library's programs and services continue to grow – e-book usage is up 190 percent; Internet usage is up 39 percent, and program utilization is up 57 percent. There is high demand for community meeting space at the library, which is very limited. Other space is also limited, with few places for patrons to plug in their devices or gather for study sessions.

There is also demand for a branch library in SW Decatur, but the staff is concerned that the resources do not exist to operate a separate branch. A branch library would offer similar services available at the main library such as materials (books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs) public computers and Wi-Fi, and programs like story times and book clubs; and customer service. There has been a southwest branch in the past (located in the Mall) that was not sustainable.

The Library's funding comes primarily from the City (45%) and TVA (30%), and the Friends of the Library bookstore brings in about $30,000 per year. TVA funding is dwindling. The Library is opening a computer training center to offer free computer classes to the public. Many patrons complain that they cannot access the library's needed services because of a lack of transportation.

Arts and Culture

Decatur has a wealth of arts and cultural assets for a City of its size, including programs that are entirely unique in the State of Alabama. Major assets include:

- **Princess Theatre.** A historic theatre located in downtown Decatur. The theatre hosts a variety of events: films, concerts, live theater, lecture series, etc. The theatre also boasts a robust youth audience program.
- **Carnegie Visual Arts Center.** An arts center located in the City's historic Carnegie library building. The center hosts a variety of art exhibits and cultural events, including the Carnegie Carnival, held every year around Mardi Gras.
- **Alabama Center for the Arts (ACA).** A collaborative program between Calhoun Community College (CCC) and Athens State University (ASU). Students spend first two years at CCC and last two as ASU students, but spend most of their time at the campus in downtown Decatur. Enrollment is approximately 200 students total. No student housing is currently provided.
- **Alabama Arts Hall of Fame.** Housed at the ACA, the Alabama Arts Hall of Fame honors native and resident Alabamians who have made significant contributions to their field of endeavor.
- **Cook Museum.** The Cook Museum of Natural Science is currently under construction in downtown. When it open in 2018 the museum will provide an interactive experience for all ages and will become one of Alabama's most valuable community resources.

Decatur has many arts assets in addition to the major ones listed above. The arts can be an economic generator for the City, but it needs more promotion and intention. ACA is a potential powerhouse for the City, attracting students from across the state to downtown Decatur.

There is no central strategy with regard to the arts, even though there is a lot of talk about being an "arts economy." Arts leaders in the City see the Newberry Opera House in Newberry, South Carolina as a potential model. The Newberry Opera House, located about forty miles from Columbia, South Carolina, serves as a regional draw for the smaller City of Newberry with performing arts and music events. Many visitors stay in Newberry overnight after taking in a show at the Opera House.

Healthcare and social services

Based on public and stakeholder input there are a number of health and social service needs in the community:

- Decatur's main medical center Decatur Morgan Hospital provides a wide range of in-patient and out-patient services at multiple campuses in the City. However there are perceptions within the community of limited access to medical specialists.
- The closing of State-run mental health service providers including North Alabama Regional Hospital in 2015 is part of a long-term State initiative to promote community-based programs over large institutions. This initiative has led to a significant increase in the number of group homes in Decatur without a clear way to regulate how and where these facilities operate.
- The City has a large proportion of people living below the poverty line (roughly 17% overall and more than 30% for African Americans and children). While this fact is unfortunately common to many cities, this segment of the population faces many challenges such as proper nutrition, healthcare services, access to jobs, access to childcare among other needs.
- There are existing social services to address most critical community needs but there is a lack of awareness about how to access these services. Alabama 211 is a existing service that provides telephone assistance within Alabama, connecting callers with a wide range of services.

ACTIONS

The following projects, policies, and programs support the goal for Enhancing our Amenities:

A wide variety of modern City services, outstanding parks and recreational facilities, well-supported cultural institutions, and access to health services that support the needs of our community.

Objective 1. Expand the range of public services.

AM **1.1 Establish partnerships to improve access to high speed internet.** Access to high speed internet is an important economic development amenity but is increasingly seen as an essential service. The City recently partnered with Mobile-based Southern Light to expand broadband internet service in Decatur providing data speeds of 100 gigs per second throughout much of the City. As technology and public expectations evolve, the City should continue to seek opportunities to improve high speed internet access.

AM **1.2 Evaluate the feasibility of establishing public wi-fi in key locations.** Access to the internet is a vital part of modern life. The City offers free access to wireless networks (wi-fi) within City facilities, but there is interest among the community for broader access. City wi-fi would serve as a convenient amenity and also provide an essential service to some in the community who lack access. The cost-benefit of municipal wi-fi programs in other cities varies. Decatur should consider models in peer cities nationwide and within Alabama to evaluate the feasibility of expanding wi-fi in areas including Downtown and parks.

Public WiFi in Alabama

Cities in Alabama that offer public wi-fi include:

- Mobile: Bienville and Cathedral Squares downtown
- Fairhope: Downtown and public buildings (limited access to 30 minutes free per day)
- Birmingham: multiple parks, all libraries
- Huntsville: courthouse square downtown, Big Spring Park, and in all parks and recreation centers
- Mountain Brook

AM **1.3 Evaluate the feasibility of expanding recycling service.** While the City provides recycling pick-up for residential properties, it does not offer commercial recycling pick up, but there are drop off locations that commercial enterprises can use. A pick-up program or service would encourage more recycling by making it easy for businesses. Another way to encourage recycling is the use of recycling facilities at large public events such as festivals; the City could use divided trash bins so that recycling is convenient and accessible for attendees.

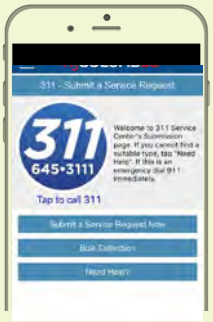
AM **1.4 Implement a 311 system.** A 311 system is a non-emergency phone number that people can call in many cities to find information about City services, make complaints, or report problems like graffiti, litter or road damage. In recent years, traditional phone-based citizen information and reporting systems have given way to online and mobile platforms. For example, a citizen could use the system to report a potential code violation or simply determine which day their next recycling pickup would occur. The advantage of such a system is that it empowers citizens to report issues and better connects them with City government. It also provides a large amount of useful data that can be used to better target City resources efficiently. The system should be regularly evaluated to assess citizen expectations and staff response.

311 Service Center

The City of Columbus offers one of several examples of a 311 service center. The 311 is a single point of contact for requesting all non-emergency City services. Residents, businesses, and visitors can call 311, visit the website or use the City's mobile app to submit service requests such as: reporting a broken street light, requesting a bulk trash pickup, reporting litter, high grass or weeds, graffiti, or requesting repair of a pothole. All service requests are automatically directed to the appropriate department to address.

The system also helps City officials provide efficient service delivery by allowing them to focus on their core missions, manage workloads efficiently, obtain insight into the needs of residents, and measure how well services are delivered.

https://311.columbus.gov/



Objective 2. Continue to improve the effectiveness of the City's safety services.

AM **2.1 Create a long-term plan for police, emergency and fire safety services.** As Decatur grows, police and fire coverage must grow with it. Development north of the River has created a potential need for a fire station in this area. A master plan for these services can provide a detailed assessment of needs based on existing development and predict needs based on future development. Both Fire and Police Departments indicate a need for capital purchases of equipment, facilities, etc., and a master plan can analyze these needs and prioritize them to provide effective safety coverage while utilizing City resources effectively.

Objective 3. Provide parks and recreational facilities that meet the needs of residents.

AM **3.1 Establish a parks and recreation master plan.** A parks and recreation master plan will assess needs, create goals, and determine priorities for Decatur's parks and recreation system, examining these facilities as an interconnected whole. As Decatur's parks and facilities act as a regional draw, a master plan will outline future development to further develop the economic benefits and possibilities of these facilities, balancing the needs of the system as an economic generator and the needs of Decatur's citizens who use the facilities for a variety of activities, improving their quality of life. This plan should incorporate the trails and greenways plan that exists and make recommendations for the expansion and development of that system as well. It should consider:

- **Conducting community satisfaction and needs surveys.** The best way to determine the needs of the community is to ask. While the public engagement process of this plan determined greater need for parks and upgraded facilities, more detailed surveys can determine where needs are greatest and how those needs can best be met. Decatur's parks and recreational facilities are a tremendous asset

for the community, but certain areas lack the amenities available in other areas, or have facilities that are not open to the public at all times. Community satisfaction and needs surveys can help establish priorities and ensure that community needs are addressed.

- **Creating a dog park and other specialized parks/facilities as determined by needs surveys.** Many of those involved in the public engagement process indicated a desire for a dog park for use by Decatur's dog owners, but community surveys may reveal a need for other specialized parks, such as an accessible park for children with special needs. Needs surveys can also help determine the best locations for these facilities.
- **Connecting Riverfront and Downtown.** Highlighting the need for a strategy to connect Ingalls Harbor to other river front properties including the Mcentire and Dancy Polk houses and railroad depot.
- **Continuing to utilize school park facilities.** Maintaining the existing relationship between the Decatur City Schools facilities and Decatur parks where school playgrounds and ballfields are open for public use.

Objective 4. Maintain competitive facilities that attract tourism.

AM **4.1 Track the economic impact of travel sports events to the City.** With facilities such as the Jack Allen Recreation Complex, Point Mallard, and Ingalls Harbor/Pavilion, Decatur is a regional hub for travel sports and recreation, particularly large tournaments and events. These events have a major economic impact on the City beyond just the fees generated for the facilities that they use. Tracking this economic impact can inform priorities for future development of facilities in the parks and recreation master plan and help the City understand the advantages that these facilities offer and develop strategies and priorities to capitalize on these assets.

The Decatur Morgan County CVB tracks the impact of special events to the City and County and presents these studies monthly. However, understanding the direct return on investment to the City may require further analysis that factors in revenue from event fees and hospitality taxes, an assessment of related economic activity within the community by measuring changes in retail sales, and direct costs such as additional staffing, policing, or maintenance required by such events. The City may also consider gathering information to establish a baseline against which to measure economic impact, for example by gathering data on restaurant sales.

Economic impact of Parks and Recreation Tourism

The most common approach to assessing the economic value of park and recreational programs and facilities is what is generally called economic impact analysis. Economic impact analyses provide estimates of the value of new spending as the dollars for goods and services move through the regional economy.

However, as pointed out in a 2010 study sponsored by the National Recreation and Park Association, often these analyses reflect a "gross benefit" rather than a "net benefit." A net economic impact should "not include direct spending by public agencies, and only count non-local visitor spending for a subset of visitors."

The following resources should be considered in evaluating the City's economic impact models.

- Report: *The Economic Impact of Local Parks* (National Recreation and Park Association, 2015)
- Report: *Measuring the Economic Impact of Park and Recreation Services* (John Crompton, National Recreation and Park Association, 2010)

Other resources include:

- The National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC) provides an economic impact calculator to its members
- Report: *Inexpensively Estimating the Economic Impact of Sports Tourism Programs in Small American Cities* (Indiana Business Review, Spring 2015)

AM **4.2 Plan for an indoor sports facility.** While Decatur has several outstanding outdoor sports and recreation facilities, the City lacks a public indoor sporting complex. Public input revealed a desire for a facility for indoor recreation that would serve both community needs and those of organized sports including aquatic sports.

AM **4.3 Explore the feasibility of an event space for year-round activities in or near Downtown.** There is a strong desire among the community for a venue such as a conference center, auditorium or flexible multi-purpose facility that can accommodate a variety of indoor events. The City should first consider options for better utilizing or improving upon existing facilities such as Ingalls Pavilion (expansion, retrofit, air conditioning). If there is perceived strong support or demand for a new facility, then a return on investment analysis should be prepared to assess the fiscal impact of such an investment. Ideally such a facility is located in or near Downtown, perhaps in the Dry Creek area or Riverfront. To maximize return on investment, a strong and consistent effort will be required to program events to fully utilize the venue (new or existing).

Objective 5. Improve recreational access to the river and Wildlife Refuge.

AM **5.1 Establish a water trail (blueway) through the refuge.** As the Refuge offers incredible wildlife viewing opportunities, a blueway accessible to canoes and kayaks through it is an opportunity to attract a greater variety of visitors and provide access to all areas of the Refuge while maintaining the essential protections in place. Establishing such a trail would primarily involve the creation of access points and maps to direct visitors. As kayaks and canoes are available to rent at Point Mallard, the blueway could be a partnership between the entities to promote both. Recognizing the conservation mission of the Refuge, access to trails and blueways may be seasonal.

AM **5.2 Market kayak/canoe rental at Point Mallard.** There is limited public awareness that kayaks and canoes area available to rent at Point Mallard. This service could be more utilized if made available outside of the water park facility and more deliberately marketed in connection to a blueway system in the Refuge.

AM **5.3 Develop the trail network within the Refuge.** Plan and continue to build out trails within the Refuge property. Create additional trail heads and parking areas to support hiking/biking on those trails. Publicize the Refuge trail system through maps available in print and online.

Blueways

Water trails (also known as blueways) are marked routes on navigable waterway such as rivers, lakes, canals and coastlines for recreational use

Source: RoanokeRiverBlueway.org

AM **5.4 Establish a multi-use path and bridge across Flint Creek.** Create a multi-use path and bridge across mouth of Flint Creek, connecting Point Mallard Park to the extensive network of trails that exist in the northern part of the Wildlife Refuge and provide a connection to the Hickory Hills / Rolling Hills neighborhood. This path could consist of a wooden boardwalk that includes one or more bridge spans of adequate height for boats to pass beneath.

AM **5.5 Conduct an awareness-building effort about recreational opportunities in the City's natural areas.** Such an initiative would involve a marketing campaign to spread awareness about the Refuge and other natural areas with public access around Decatur. It would also encourage the Refuge management and/or City to thin vegetation along major roads to improve views into the Refuge.

Flint Creek Bridge

An existing path and bridge near Highway 67 is a precedent for a bridge in the northern part of the Refuge.

Objective 6. Strengthen support for community and cultural institutions.

AM **6.1 Evaluate the feasibility of relocating the library or establishing a branch library.** The library's current facility was built in 1973 and is inadequate for growing needs and programs, with maintenance, parking, and access all cited as issues. While the Downtown location is desirable for access and centrality, it may prove difficult to expand in this location. The City and the library should explore possibilities for a new (relocated) library or an additional branch library. A branch library would be expected to offer or similar services available at the main branch including media, public computers and wi-fi, programs like story times and book clubs, and customer service. Former school facilities could offer options for a new or relocated facility. Alternatively, evaluating all alternatives may provide solutions for expanding the library in its current location. This evaluation should involve experts in library planning.

AM **6.2 Participate in Decatur City Schools capital planning efforts.** The City should continue to participate in facility planning efforts with DCS to ensure that critical factors such as infrastructure availability and future land use plans are understood. Coordination may also help identify potential future uses for obsolete school facilities.

AM **6.3 Form an arts council to promote arts in Decatur.** An arts council would be an umbrella organization representing the various arts organizations in Decatur including the Princess Theater, Carnegie Visual Arts Center, Alabama Center for the Arts, Decatur Arts Guild and other groups. The council would serve as a unified voice to convey information about arts in the City, promote arts venues and events, and coordinate educational opportunities such as workshops and festivals.

AM **6.4** **Create a public art initiative.** Art and design can have a significant impact on a community's character, sense of place, and civic pride. An "art in public places" initiative should be explored in collaboration with public and private partners like Alabama Center for the Arts. One example of this is the recent efforts by Carnegie Visual Arts where temporary or permanent, large-scale art installations, such as sculptures and murals, were placed in prominent locations throughout the City. One of these installations is located near the Farmer's Market at the concrete embankment beneath the Gordon Drive overpass. Another potential location is along Lee Street across from the jail.

AM **6.5** **Enhance the Decatur Farmers Market.** Work with leaders of Decatur Farmers Market to evaluate opportunities for enhancement. Those opportunities could involve making the building more attractive and ADA compliant, expanding the market season to year-round, adding features such as a cafe or demonstration kitchen, or considering alternative locations for the market.

Objective 7. Improve access to quality healthcare and social services

AM **7.1** **Coordinate social services.** Many challenges to receiving social services could be mitigated with a better coordinated delivery. A one-stop-shop should be developed to better support residents seeking health care and other services. Functionally a one-stop-shop would involve a single website or phone number that people could contact to obtain assistance with a range of social services including healthcare needs, nutrition assistance and financial aid. This action could also be achieved by promoting the existing 211 service in Alabama which is a partnership with United Way.

AM **7.2** **Communicate to State agencies the impact of closing State-run mental health facilities.** The closing of State-run mental health service providers including North Alabama Regional Hospital in 2015 is part of a long-term State initiative to promote community-based programs over large institutions. This initiative has led to a significant increase in the number of group homes in Decatur without a clear way to regulate how and where these facilities operate. There is also concern that some people in need of mental health services are not getting the care they need. The City should continue to communicate these challenges to State and seek potential solutions.

AM **7.3** **Create a healthy community initiative.** A healthy community initiative would spread information about health services and the specific health problems faced by the Decatur community. It would also promote healthy lifestyles and celebrate the organizations and individuals who are working to create a healthier community.

Public Art Examples

Austin's Art in Public Places program collaborates with local and nationally-known artists to include the history and values of the community into cultural landmarks that have become the cornerstones of Austin's identity. By ordinance, two percent of eligible capital improvement project budgets are allocated to commission or purchase art for that site. The city's public art collection is found at sites such as the airport, convention center, libraries, parks, police stations, recreation centers, and streetscapes, enhancing public spaces for all residents and visitors to the city.

The Boston Art Commission (BAC) commissions and approves innovative and transformative artworks that engage communities, enrich and enliven the urban environment, are driven by a clear artistic vision, enhance the diversity of the existing collection, respond directly to a specific environment, and possess durability appropriate to the lifespan of the work. These artworks, both permanent and temporary, range from traditional and new media public art pieces to municipal design elements, such as way-finding systems and artistic lighting. The BAC also provides educational programs such as Public Art Walks, featuring historic and contemporary art installations throughout the neighborhoods of Boston. There is an extensive and informative gallery of all public art in Boston on the BAC's website: publicartboston.com

Public Art Precedents in Decatur

Decatur has several existing examples of public art. Most recent are the bike rack sculptures in downtown.

AM **7.4 Establish a task force on poverty.** A significant number of Decatur's citizens struggle with poverty. While there are a number of organizations and institutions that work to combat it, a task force on poverty would coordinate efforts, raise awareness about the challenge and establish an overall strategy for addressing poverty and those it affects in Decatur. Such a task force should include the Community Action Partnership of Alabama, other non-profits, institutions such as churches, safety and health services, Decatur Housing Authority, City staff, etc.

Alabama 211

Alabama 211 is a existing service that provides telephone assistance within Alabama, connecting callers with a wide range of services. Callers who dial 2-1-1 can get information about the following types of services:

- Basic Human Needs Resources: food banks, clothing, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance
- Government information: City, County, State services and programs. Many people are not sure what government office to contact and so 211 helps point them in the right direction.
- Health and Mental Health Resources: health insurance programs, maternal health, medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention and rehabilitation
- Employment Support: financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs
- Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities: adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, home health care, transportation, homemaker services
- Support for Children, Youth and Families: child care, after-school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services
- 211 also provides incident specific information in coordination with local emergency services during times of disaster, including road closures and shelters

Single Stop

Single Stop is a non-profit organization that aims to reduce poverty and promote economic mobility for low-income families and individuals by connecting people to government and nonprofit programs, benefits and services. Through a unique one-stop shop, they provide coordinated access to a safety net of services —connecting people to the resources they need to attain higher education, obtain good jobs, and achieve financial stability.

With over 100 sites across 9 states (none currently in Alabama), Single Stop partners with organizations that serve low-income families to provide wraparound services and ensure their clients have access to all the major anti-poverty resources available.

Single Stop is also building an online tool that will extend its reach. (http://singlestopusa.org/)

"I want to be involved and make a difference in my community. I want Decatur to be a place my kids want to come back to."

— participant

6

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

From the beginning of the One Decatur planning process it was clear that an important outcome would be to build a stronger, more engaged and collaborative community. Indeed, collaboration is essential to achieving many of this plan's aspirations. This chapter addresses opportunities to engage the diverse groups in Decatur and create a stronger sense of community. At the top of the list of collaborative opportunities is strengthening education and perceptions about Decatur's schools, which is fundamental to the community's identity, sense of pride, and economic competitiveness.

Goal

A united, proud, and confident community that embraces everyone, has highly competitive schools that prepare youth for success in life, and where residents and institutions are meaningfully engaged.

Objectives

1. Strive to make Decatur City Schools a highly competitive school system that is competitive on a state and national level.
2. Celebrate our community's diversity.
3. Encourage civic participation, mentoring and volunteerism.
4. Improve communication and cooperation between citizens, institutions, and government.
5. Improve inter-governmental coordination and cooperation.

Chapter Organization

- Key Findings
- Actions

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

—Helen Keller (Author and activist born and raised in Tuscumbia, Alabama)

KEY FINDINGS

This section contains a summary of conditions and key opportunities related to education, diversity, inclusion and collaboration. These interrelated issues all relate to community attachment which has been correlated to economic prosperity.

Schools

Public input in One Decatur revealed strong perceptions that Decatur City Schools (DCS) is inferior to competing districts, which many in the community believe to be a principle challenge for the City's competitiveness. Such perceptions are shaped by a recent history of underperformance on State achievement tests, a relatively high number of students that qualify for free/reduced lunch programs, and several transitions in the district's top leadership. Unfortunately these negatives often overshadow the district's strengths.

Information from the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) and input from school officials shows that DCS performance is similar to statewide averages and has improved in test scores and graduation rates in the past five years. The recent struggles DCS has experienced in test scores seems partially related to the ACT Aspire standardized test, for which many schools statewide were not adequately prepared. This test is being phased out.

While the district has challenges to address, it is clear that one is communication and awareness- building. DCS has a great many strengths and recent accolades including:

- Leon Sheffield Magnet School was awarded the prestigious national Blue Ribbon School Award in October of 2008 and 2017;
- 35 National Board Certified teachers and is in the top ten school systems in the state with the most National Board certified teachers;
- An Environmental Learning Center that is a unique partnership between public schools and BP, a local industry;
- An Engineering Academy in both high schools and an Elementary Engineering Program.
- Both high schools score above the state and national averages on the ACT college placement exams; and
- Decatur City Schools Foundation that has contributed over 1 million dollars for the schools.

The schools cite the following challenges:

- **Poverty, ESL students and school readiness.** Over half of DCS students qualify for free/reduced lunch, which reflects a slightly higher rate of youth poverty in Decatur compared to Limestone County and Morgan County. Studies show that children living in poverty can be nearly a full year behind their peers when they enter kindergarten and that gap often widens as students age. Also, the enrollment of Hispanic students has significantly increased (from 1% in 1996 to close to 30% of enrollment in 2017). These students typically enter the school system with very limited English skills and limited formal education but are expected to complete standardized tests. The increase in these types of students has increased the district's costs and brought down test scores. The district has very few Hispanic administrators and teachers which is an obstacle to serving these student's needs.
- **Housing conditions and growth in certain industries.** The rapid growth in the Hispanic population is believed to be related to job availability in certain industry sectors and an abundance of low-cost housing in Decatur. Economic pressure, cultural tendencies, and lack of knowledge about City codes or renter rights, drive some immigrant families to live in overcrowded and unsafe conditions. As noted elsewhere in this plan, there is a lack of new attractive housing options to encourage families to move to Decatur.

While there is a strong public perception that the reputation of Decatur City Schools is a primary obstacle to the City's growth, market research conducted for this plan contradicts that belief. Lack of new and desirable housing is a more significant factor.

- **Funding.** While per-pupil expenditures and teacher pay rank near the top of districts in Alabama, there are limitations and needs that make funding a challenge. State funding is determined based on enrollment numbers rather than on student or district needs. Research indicates that to teach students in poverty, English language learners, and students with special needs requires additional resources. At the same time, the district has facilities that are underutilized and consolidation could reduce expenses and qualify the district for additional funding.
- **Strategic planning.** Recent transitions in district leadership have made adapting to rapidly changing needs more difficult. The school district is undertaking a strategic planning process to address both programs and facilities. For example, there is currently no defined

feeder system between the elementary schools,middle schools, and the high schools which makes long-term curricula planning unnecessarily complex.

Like the One Decatur process, the schools planning can be strengthened by partnerships and community buy-in, and there are opportunities for partnerships. DCS has been supportive of One Decatur and recognizes the importance continued community, City, and schools collaboration.

Community diversity and inclusion

While there are physical divisions in Decatur, there are also divisions between segments of the community's population. Decatur's population has become more diverse since 2000. The African American population grew by 14%. The Hispanic population more than doubled in the last decade. Today, Hispanics represent 13% of the population in Decatur (compared to 4% Statewide). Hispanics and African Americans are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and disconnected from many community amenities.

There was a strong sentiment from public input in One Decatur that the best path forward is to embrace Decatur's diversity and to strive for more inclusion from minorities in civic and community life.

Civic engagement, collaboration and governance

One Decatur revealed a strong desire among citizens to have a voice in shaping their community's future. It was clear that the City should strive to continue to offer opportunities for citizen input, improve communication, and to create partnerships to more effectively meet community needs. Opportunities include:

- Promoting volunteer opportunities
- Improving communication about City services
- Promoting community events
- Engaging neighborhood groups
- Sharing or consolidation of urban services between jurisdictions
- Achieving better representation in County government
- Sharing information regularly between various government and institutional entities in the region on shared issues

Community Attachment, Quality of Place, and Economic Prosperity

In 2010, The Knight Foundation released the findings from their Soul of the Community report. The study was conducted over three years in 26 cities across the United States where Knight Foundation is active. The study was designed to find out what attaches people to a community — what makes them want to put down roots and build a life there. The study found that the factors people assume are the primary drivers of where people choose to live —such as jobs, the economy, and safety — are not the top reasons. Instead, people rate factors related to quality of life at the top.

The three top factors most closely correlated to community attachment were:

- **Opportunities for socializing** — Places for people to meet each other and the feeling that people in the community care about each other
- **Openness to all people** – How welcoming the community is to different types of people, including families with young children, minorities, and talented college graduates
- **Community aesthetics** – The physical beauty of the community including the availability of parks and green spaces

Communities with the highest levels of community attachment had the highest rates of gross domestic product growth. Data presented as part of the study makes it clear that highly attached residents are more likely to want to stay in their communities. When this is true for college graduates and other productive residents, it increases the number of talented, highly educated workers that positively affect economic growth. Further, when residents enjoy their community's offerings, they are more likely to spend their money on local activities and businesses, directly benefiting the local economy.

"Community attachment is an emotional connection to a place that transcends satisfaction, loyalty, and even passion. A community's most attached residents have strong pride in it, a positive outlook on the community's future, and a sense that it is the perfect place for them. They are less likely to want to leave than residents without this emotional connection. They feel a bond to their community that is stronger than just being happy about where they live."

Soul of the Community Findings Report

ACTIONS

The following projects, policies, and programs support the goal for Strengthening our Community:

A united, proud, and confident community that embraces everyone, has highly competitive schools that prepare youth for success in life, and where residents and institutions are meaningfully engaged.

Objective 1. Strive to make Decatur City Schools a highly competitive school system on a state and national level.

The identity of any community is significantly shaped by its schools. Throughout the One Decatur process, improving the competitiveness of Decatur City Schools (DCS) was a recurring theme—indispensable to advancing personal and community prosperity. But, like many communities, Decatur's public schools are independent from City government, so addressing schools must be a collaborative effort. The Steering Committee recognizes that the responsibility for strong schools must not rest solely on teachers and administrators. Others in the community should play a supportive role in advancing academic success throughout Decatur. To address this important need, the Comprehensive Plan includes the following recommendations for consideration.

co **1.1** **Establish an Education Advisory Group.** An advisory committee made up of school officials, school foundation representatives, City leaders, and education advocates in the community could help to foster a positive academic experience at the City's schools as well as improve communication between the schools and City. This committee could be led by a key leader within the schools who is tasked with identifying best practice approaches that focus on improving student achievement through innovation, leadership structures that focus on success, and partnerships with the community. The committee could be a forum for sharing practices and successes from other districts and be tasked with advising on various initiatives such as:

- **Conduct peer-to-peer visits.** Encourage DCS representatives to identify schools or districts beyond the region that have found success overcoming similar challenges (improving standardized test scores despite high poverty rates, English Language Learners (ESL) students, etc.) and arrange visits for the purpose of peer learning and information sharing. Likewise DCS should look for opportunities to share its progress and work toward establishing itself as a nationally recognized model of success.
- **Create a strategic plan with measurable results.** Encourage the schools to develop a strategic action plan with measurable goals to improve student achievement. A strategic plan will identify specific needs to address, benchmarks to track progress, and programmatic solutions to address goals. A 5-year strategic plan with annual progress reports to the community will help promote accountability.
- **Identify resources in the community that can be utilized to ensure success in plan implementation.** With the Advisory Group invested in the process, the potential of connecting to community resources to ensure objectives are met may go up significantly. Resources could include community volunteers, organizational partnerships, marketing assistance, or funding sources.
- **Continuing to promote school readiness.** Support ongoing initiatives to expand early childhood education and kindergarten readiness. Another readiness initiative targets the special needs presented by older students who enter the school system as English Language Learners and/or students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education.

> **Supporting efforts to increase parental involvement.** Research and intuition support that increased parental involvement in education produces better outcomes for students. As recently mandated by the State of Alabama, coordinated effort should be undertaken to support parents and their participation in school and at home activities with their children.

CO **1.2** **Establish an incentive program to attract, develop and retain more high achieving principals and teachers.** A community incentive program should be explored that would focus on attracting, retaining, and developing the best principals and teachers for Decatur City Schools. This program could be funded by businesses that have a keen interest in stronger education outcomes, including graduates that are ready for post high school opportunities.

CO **1.3** **Conduct a coordinated and long-term marketing effort to improve Decatur school's image.** While addressing measurable school performance is important, attitudes and perceptions about the schools are often slower to change. A coordinated marketing effort should be made to raise awareness about the successes of DCS. This effort should involve an internal component, aimed at Decatur residents, and an external component aimed at visitors, prospective investors, businesses, or new residents. An online component should target real estate searches within the region. To partially address this need, DCS has hired a media / public relations specialist for 2017.

CO **1.4** **Continue to emphasize skills for the future.** Build upon existing programs to become a recognized leader in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. As an example, programs could include expanding computer coding courses. (See Advancing our Prosperity, Objective 2)

CO **1.5** **Continue to emphasize career and vocational education.** Continue to develop programs that provide technical education and career pathways, especially as it relates to robotics and STEM jobs. This emphasis should also be featured in the district's marketing effort. Individual stories should be highlighted, all revolving around the same central brand / theme.

> Approximately 600 DCS students are dual-enrolled at Calhoun Community College or in some kind of career technical class. DCS should continue to work with Calhoun Community College to develop and promote these partnership opportunities.

> Develop and promote the new Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT) workforce training facility at Old Austin.

CO **1.6** **Evaluate feeder patterns.** Evaluate the benefits of establishing clear school feeder patterns between elementary, middle, and high schools. A clear feeder system would better enable individual schools to anticipate and tailor programming to the needs of their students.

CO **1.7** **Conduct city-schools joint work sessions.** To continue to develop a positive city-schools relationship, City Council and the School District should meet once or twice a year in a joint work session to share progress and make sure goals are aligned.

CO **1.8** **Lobby the State to update its school funding model.** Alabama schools rely heavily on State funding yet several high profile studies have determined that school funding in Alabama is neither adequate nor equitable. State funding is determined is based on school size rather than on student or district needs. Research demonstrates that to teach students in poverty, English language learners, and students with special needs requires additional resources. Decatur should join the voices in advocating for school funding reform at the state level.

Re-Brand and Market Decatur Schools.

As explained in Advancing our Prosperity, the City, DCS, and the region's economic development entities should collaborate on a marketing effort to address negative perceptions of public schools.

> Promote pride in local schools by highlighting uniqueness, history, and diversity

> Cultivate and promote partnerships with business and industry

> Disaggregate test score data to explain and highlight the English language component and how Decatur's diverse schools are educating a generation of proud new Americans and tomorrow's workforce. Highlight successful, high achieving students (such as students who made perfect or very high score on ACT, students admitted to competitive colleges and are successful, etc.)

This marketing effort should be coordinated with a Citywide brand and marketing effort as described in Advancing our Prosperity (PR 6.1)

Objective 2. Celebrate our community's diversity.

CO **2.1** **Create new arts and cultural events.** Utilize the wealth of arts and cultural resources available in Decatur — Princess Theatre, Carnegie Visual Arts Center, Alabama Center for the Arts, and Alabama Arts Hall of Fame — to develop arts and cultural events that will attract both residents and visitors to partake in this abundance of resources. A coordinated strategy among these and other groups can provide the foundation for an arts economy in Decatur, with a wide array and diversity of events throughout the year.

CO **2.2** **Create an online City events and cultural calendar.** Decatur offers a variety of festivals and events throughout the year, including many diverse cultural opportunities. A central event and cultural calendar can allow groups to coordinate events to avoid overlap or duplication, and it can aid residents and visitors alike in seeing all of the activities, festivals, and events offered in Decatur.

CO **2.3** **Create a commission on diversity and inclusion.** Decatur's population, while fairly diverse, still struggles with inclusion in various areas. A commission on diversity and inclusion could help ensure that all are able to participate fully in civic discourse, decisions, and activities in Decatur. Furthermore, a commission would be able to expand outreach efforts for various City and organizational processes in order to hear a variety and diversity of opinions and promote civic participation.

Objective 3. Encourage civic participation, mentoring and volunteerism.

CO **3.1** **Create an awareness effort about available volunteer opportunities.** There are many existing opportunities for interested citizens to volunteer through the City of Decatur, various faith-based organizations, and through the Volunteer Center of Morgan County. Nevertheless, community input indicated a lack of awareness about these opportunities. A campaign that includes traditional and online media could raise awareness and expand participation in volunteer activities in the community.

CO **3.2** **Expand mentoring programs offered through Decatur youth services.** Mentorship was frequently mentioned as a means to address many social and economic challenges that exist in Decatur. Decatur Youth Services (DYS), an existing City department, provides many vital programs that improve the quality of life and potential for at-risk youth in the community. The City should continue to provide necessary support for DYS and seek opportunities to expand the reach of its programs, particularly the existing mentorship program.

Objective 4. Improve communication and cooperation between citizens, institutions, and government.

CO **4.1** **Hire a community relations / public information officer.** Public information officers (PIOs) are the communications coordinators or spokespersons of government organizations. A PIO would help to improve communication between the City and external audiences by overseeing the creation of marketing collateral or other written communication, as well as setting protocols to guide the interaction between other City officials and the public. A PIO would also cultivate strong relationships with the media and public by answering queries promptly, arranging interviews or speakers when requested and being a familiar and involved presence at community events.

CO **4.2** **Create an ongoing forum for community input.** Using the One Decatur steering committee or an expanded platform, create an ongoing committee or forum for community input. The group would meet periodically to provide input on City policy and needs. They would also act as City champions or ambassadors to reach out to the community to obtain input and spread success stories. There could be multiple groups or task forces established to help with implementation of this plan's action items.

CO **4.3** **Create a council of neighborhoods.** A council of neighborhoods is an umbrella organization that would consist of representatives from Decatur's various neighborhood groups or formal neighborhood associations. Liaisons from each of Decatur's neighborhood associations would meet regularly to share information, ideas, and collaborate on initiatives of common benefit. The council would also work with the City and other agencies to advocate on neighborhood issues and thereby provide an effective forum for bringing such issues to public attention.

CO **4.4** **Conduct citizen surveys.** City government delivers a diverse range of services that are directly tied to quality of life and prosperity. To track the effectiveness of City services, many communities conduct routine community surveys to measure satisfaction. A statistically valid citizen survey conducted every two to five years would help Decatur identify ways to improve the delivery of services and track progress.

Objective 5. Improve inter-governmental coordination and cooperation.

One Decatur encourages a new era of cooperation and coordination among local governmental and quasi-governmental entities – at both the city and the county level. As demands increase for scarce public funds, these entities must seek new and better ways to deliver essential services as efficiently as possible. Furthermore, our City leaders must ensure that Decatur's interests are represented at a level commensurate with the City's population and funding provided. Specific recommendations for exploration:

CO **5.1** **Establish formal information sharing relationships/protocols.** Review existing mechanisms and establish policies to improve information-sharing with regional organizations, institutions, and neighboring jurisdictions. Such sharing would include land use policies, infrastructure plans and other initiatives of mutual interest. Establish regular staff-to-staff meetings between the City and critical jurisdictional and institutional partners. Formally invite other institutions and organizations that have missions and programs that could align with Decatur's goals to construct mechanisms for collaboration.

CO **5.2** **Conduct leadership roundtables.** Establish regularly scheduled meetings of Decatur's leadership and leaders from partner organizations and jurisdictions to share information and discuss topical issues. These meetings could include elected officials, City department heads, and organization board members. They could occur annually or semiannually.

CO **5.3** **Look for opportunities to consolidate and share services.** Identify and evaluate opportunities that may exist where Decatur and Morgan County can more efficiently deliver services under joint management. This approach has been successfully implemented in the joint city/county jail. Decatur and Morgan County should now search for other potential areas of cooperation and joint administration. Potential areas include information technology, joint purchasing, sanitation, road maintenance, parks and recreation, etc.

CO **5.4** **Evaluate Decatur's representation by Morgan County Commission.** It has been many years since a resident of Decatur was elected to one of the five seats on the Morgan County Commission. Yet, over half of the County's population and revenue comes from Decatur. The City should review Act 258 of 1973, under which Morgan County currently elects commissioners using the "at-large, Numbered post" election method. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of Alabama counties elect county commissioners by district. Currently, approximately 60% of Morgan County's residents live in District 1, while each of the other three districts contain fewer than 20% of county voters. One Decatur encourages the City to research potential improvements to Morgan County's current method of electing county commissioners that would potentially provide for more equitable allocation of Commission seats and County resources based on County population.

Morgan County currently has extreme deviation from the "one man, one vote" ideal for democratic representation.

"I look forward to experiencing and contributing to the vision of Decatur's growth."

— participant

7

ACHIEVING OUR VISION

The Comprehensive Plan is a long term policy guide and action agenda for Decatur. Implementation of this plan will involve a host of City departments, boards and commissions, non-profits, businesses and citizens. This implementation chapter includes guidance on managing and using the plan and a summary of its actions that assigns anticipated timing and responsibilities to each. While much care has been given to the plan's actions, the City should be opportunistic in pursuing other actions that would support its vision and goals.

The implementation strategy is summarized by the following:

Collaborating

A large share of implementation of the Comprehensive Plan rightfully falls to the City. However, it is not intended to be solely implemented by government. Many actions will require the coordinated efforts of individuals and organizations representing the public, private, and civic sectors of the community. An active citizenry will help to ensure those actions are included and pursued as part of the public agenda.

Monitoring

The Comprehensive Plan should be monitored on a regular basis for implementation effectiveness and relevancy. This review should happen on a formal basis no less than once per year. A status report/newsletter should accompany this review and be promoted throughout the community. An annual public meeting could take place to share progress and attract additional participants to move the implementation forward.

Updating

A major update of the Comprehensive Plan should be scheduled by Council following a formal recommendation from the Planning Commission. The update should be considered at least every ten years. In the interim, key milestones may be reached which necessitate an update sooner than a ten-year cycle. Such milestones should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

There may be circumstances that warrant formal amendment of the plan. Amendments to the plan should be made only with careful consideration and compelling justification. The Steering Committee that crafted this plan was clear that the recommendations of the plan represented a strong, long-term vision and that changes should not be made lightly.

Chapter Organization

- How to use the plan
- Implementation Actions
- Summary of Actions

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be used on a daily basis as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment, capital improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting Decatur. The following is a summary of how decisions and processes should align with the goals and actions of the plan.

Annual Work Programs and Budgets

Individual departments, administrators, boards and commissions should be cognizant of the recommendations of the plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets.

Development Approvals

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals, including rezoning and subdivision plats, should be a central means of implementing the plan. Decisions by the Planning Commission and City Council should reference relevant Comprehensive Plan recommendations and policies. The zoning code and subdivision regulations should be updated in response to regulatory strategies presented in the plan.

Capital Improvement Plan

The City should prepare a formal capital improvement plan (CIP) that is consistent with the plan's recommendations.

Economic Incentives

Economic incentives should be reviewed to ensure consistency with the recommendations of the plan.

Private Development Decisions

Property owners and developers should consider the goals and strategies of the plan in their land planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will be using the plan as a guide in their development deliberations such as zoning matters and infrastructure requests. Property owners and developers should be cognizant of and compliment the plan's recommendations.

Consistent Interpretation

City Council should collaborate with the Planning Commission to ensure clear and consistent interpretation of major items in the plan.

Summary of regulatory actions

Many of this plan's actions involve updating City regulations. The following list of regulatory actions could potentially be undertaken together:

- QP 1.1 Reform the city's zoning and land development codes.
- QP 2.5 Strengthen development regulations regarding aesthetics citywide.
- QP 5.1 Require that neighborhoods have a well-connected street network and walkable blocks.
- QP 5.2 Ensure that the zoning code defines and permits a wide range of housing types.
- QP 5.3 Allow mixed housing types within new neighborhoods.
- QP 5.4 Evaluate open space provisions in proposals for new neighborhoods.
- QP 7.1 License rental properties (rental unit certificate of occupancy program).
- QP 7.2 Create more robust regulations for housing, safety and nuisances.
- QP 7.3 Regulate short-term or transient rentals.
- QP 8.1 Develop an expedited review process for historic properties.
- QP 8.4 Require Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) review prior to demolition.
- QP 9.2 Adopt low-impact development standards.
- MO 2.3 Establish corridor appearance standards or guidelines with an emphasis on sustainable landscaping.
- PR 1.4 Create a regulatory fast-track program.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

Outlined below are four objectives and 13 actions to support implementation of the plan.

Objective 1. Promote awareness and understanding of the plan and its recommendations.

VI **1.1** **Engage non-governmental partners to assist with implementation.** Identify and engage various civic organizations, neighborhood groups, institutions, and businesses to assist with implementing key strategies in the plan.

VI **1.2** **Provide copies of the plan throughout the community and online.** Upon adoption, the plan should be made available at multiple locations such as the library, community centers and on the City's website.

VI **1.3** **Provide ongoing staff training and professional development opportunities.** The Comprehensive Plan references many innovative development concepts, programs, and policies. City staff should be supported in obtaining training to more effectively undertake the plan's recommendations. Staff, commission members, and elected officials should conduct visits to other communities to observe examples first-hand.

VI **1.4** **Develop a formal training program for commission and board members.** Training should focus on land use law, meeting procedures, organizational dynamics and how to use the plan.

Objective 2. Monitor and share implementation progress.

VI **2.1** **Establish an implementation task force.** Decatur should consider establishing a community-based task force to assist with implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. This task force could involve members of the One Decatur steering committee. City staff will identify the task force's responsibilities which may include coordinating specific action items or simply meeting semi-annually to monitor and report on plan progress.

VI **2.2** **Prepare and share an annual report.** An annual report should be prepared that identifies the status of plan implementation and outlines annual accomplishments and priorities. This report would include a summary table of the plan's actions and the status of each (completed, underway, ongoing, no longer relevant).

VI **2.3** **Share a summary of the annual report with media and public.** A annual summary of major accomplishments should be issued to the media and presented at a public meeting.

Objective 3. Require concurrence with the Comprehensive Plan.

VI **3.1** **Update regulations and establish new regulatory tools.** Development regulations including zoning, subdivision regulations, building codes and related ordinances will be updated to reflect the plan's recommendations.

VI **3.2** **Require concurrence in rezoning and other major development approvals.** Major rezonings and development approvals will concur with applicable policies of this plan. Actions by City boards, commissions and staff will document concurrence in all decisions.

VI **3.3** **Require staff reports to reference the Comprehensive Plan.** All staff reports related to development applications, code amendments, rezonings, policy recommendations, annual work programs and budgets will reference relevant plan recommendations.

Objective 4. Provide resources for implementing the plan.

VI **4.1** **Establish and regularly update a multi-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).** A multi-year Capital Improvements Plan should be adopted and maintained. The CIP is a fundamental management document that outlines projected capital needs, priorities, funding estimates and sources, and time-frames for completion.

> **Scope:** Typical Projects included in the CIP are related to (but are not limited to) streets, traffic management, pedestrian and bike paths, parks, recreation, City facilities, drainage, etc. A CIP will typically include clearly defined project categories. The CIP may be established for a period of three to ten years and is typically updated annually, but could be updated quarterly.

> **Responsibility:** It is the responsibility of the City's CFO and Planning staff to establish, maintain and update the CIP. The development of the CIP should involve all City departments and may also include input from outside consultants.

> **Considerations:** The following items should be considered when developing and updating the CIP:

- Capital Needs and Projects
- Departmental Needs and Projects
- Total Project Budget (Capital Improvements Budget (CIB))
- Prioritization and Schedule of Projects (Capital Improvements Schedule (CIS))
- City's Resources
- Funding Sources

> **Budget:** A Capital Improvements Budget (CIB) should be established and updated alongside the CIP. The CIB is an overall budget for the projects included in the CIP. The CIB should include individual budgets for each project. It is critical the CIB contain reliable cost estimates. For some projects, this could require obtaining detailed estimates from a third party. A reliable budget should include hard costs, soft costs, tax, insurance and contingency. Budget estimates for projects that may be undertaken in future years should consider the anticipated future project costs.

> **Evaluation/Prioritization Criteria.** The CIP would contain projects to be undertaken over many years, but is typically funded on an annual basis. Criteria should be established for evaluating projects to be included in the CIP and when they should be funded. Criteria could include:

- Infrastructure criticality — The current condition of the infrastructure, improvement cost versus the cost of inaction
- Project viability — The degree of understanding about the project, existing planning, or potential risk involved
- Community benefit — Benefits to the greater City, both direct and indirect (how many benefit and how)
- Strategic Alignment — Consistency with the comprehensive plan

> **Schedule:** A Capital Improvements Schedule (CIS) should be established alongside the CIP and CIB, and should be updated quarterly. The CIS is a tool for tracking projects included in the CIP. The CIS should track start date, completion date and other milestones of each project. The CIS should also reflect the prioritization of projects by date.

VI **4.2** **Prepare annual departmental work programs with awareness of the Comprehensive Plan.** Departmental work programs and associated budget requests should demonstrate consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

VI **4.3** **Identify and secure funds for prioritized initiatives.** Funding sources could include grants, tax measures, bonds, private investments, public-private partnerships, etc.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

The following table summarizes the plan's objectives and actions. The table is organized by chapter and indicates the reasonable time-frame for completion and the party or parties responsible for each action.

Time-frame

The time-frames are defined as:

- Immediate: begun in 2018
- Short-term: within 2-5 years
- Mid-term: within 6-10 years
- Long-term: beyond 10 years

(CODE REFORM)

Indicates actions that could be undertaken as part of a major update to the City's zoning and development regulations (QP 1.1)

Chapter Abbreviations

- QP: Creating a Quality Place
- MO: Improving our Mobility
- PR: Advancing our Prosperity
- AM: Enhancing our Amenities
- CO: Strengthening our Community
- VI: Achieving our Vision

Responsibility Key

The following are common abbreviations used to indicate responsible parties:

- BOZA: Board of Zoning Adjustment
- CC: City Council
- CFO: City Chief Financial Officer
- Chamber: Decatur Chamber of Commerce
- CVB: Decatur-Morgan County Convention and Visitor's Bureau
- DCS: Decatur City Schools
- DDRA: Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority
- DU: Decatur Utilities
- Hospital: Decatur Morgan Hospital
- HPC: Historic Preservation Commission
- MCEDA: Morgan County Economic Development Authority
- MPO: Metropolitan Planning Organization
- NARCOG: Northern Alabama Regional Council of Governments
- Refuge: Wheeler Wildlife Refuge
- PC: Planning Commission
- PIO: City Public Information Officer

City Departments/Divisions:

- Development Departments
  - Building
  - Community Development
    - Code Enforcement
    - Grants
  - Planning
  - Engineering
- Fire
- IS / GIS: Information Services
- Legal
- Mayor's Office
- Parks and Recreation
- Planning
- Revenue
- Street and Environmental Services
- Police
- Youth Services

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
CREATING A QUALITY PLACE				
Objective 1. Promote desirable and fiscally beneficial development patterns.				
QP 1.1	**Reform the city's zoning and land development codes.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning	PC
QP 1.2	**Create a task force to consider various incentives for development.**	Short-term	CFO	PC, CC
QP 1.3	**Conduct a 'return on investment' analysis for major development proposals.**	Short-term, Ongoing	CFO	Planning, PC, CC
QP 1.4	**Adopt a strategic annexation policy.**	Mid-term	Planning, Legal	PC, CC
QP 1.5	**Collaborate with Decatur Utilities to evaluate infrastructure funding models.**	Short-term	DU, CFO	Planning, PC
Objective 2. Improve the appearance of public and private property throughout the city (particularly gateways).				
QP 2.1	**Redefine the 6th Avenue Gateway.**	Short-term, Ongoing	DDRA, Planning	PC, EDA, Various property owners
QP 2.2	**Recognize and award business and homeowners who enhance their properties.**	Mid-term, Ongoing	Community Development	Planning, Building, Engineering, CC, PC
QP 2.3	**Relocate utilities from view of primary streets.**	Mid-term, Ongoing	DU, Engineering	Planning, PC
QP 2.4	**Create a tree planting and street tree replacement program.**	Short-term	Parks and Recreation	Planning, PC

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
QP 2.5	**Strengthen development regulations regarding aesthetics citywide.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning	PC, CC, BOZA
Objective 3. Encourage redevelopment in strategic locations.				
QP 3.1	**Initiate zoning map updates to targeted areas.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning, GIS	PC, CC, BOZA
QP 3.2	**Create a riverfront redevelopment task force**	Short-term, Ongoing	Planning, CC	PC, Development departments, DDRA
QP 3.3	**Meet with key property owners.**	Short-term, Ongoing	Planning	Various property owners
QP 3.3	**Seek resources to remediate brownfield sites.**	Ongoing	Grants, Mayor's Office	CC, PC, Planning, Building
Objective 4. Stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods.				
QP 4.1	**Develop a "maintain, revitalize, redevelop program for neighborhoods."**	Ongoing	Community Development	Planning, CC
QP 4.2	**Expand community-based neighborhood enhancement programs.**	Ongoing	Community Development	Planning, CC
QP 4.3	**Create a housing upkeep community education program.**	Ongoing	Community Development	Planning
QP 4.4	**Continue the blight abatement program.**	Ongoing	Community Development	Building
QP 4.5	**Establish a land bank system.**	Mid-term, Ongoing	Planning, DDRA	Various non-profits
QP 4.6	**Create a mow-to-own program.**	Mid-term, Ongoing	Community Development	Planning, Legal, CC
QP 4.7	**Establish Neighborhood Branding Programs.**	Mid-term	Planning, PIO	PC
Objective 5. Establish standards to ensure that new residential areas exhibit strong neighborhood qualities including walkable blocks, integrated open space (parks), and a variety of housing options.				
QP 5.1	**Require that neighborhoods have a well-connected street network and walkable blocks.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning	PC
QP 5.2	**Ensure that the zoning code defines and permits a wide range of housing types.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning	PC
QP 5.3	**Allow mixed housing types within new neighborhoods.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning	PC, CC
QP 5.4	**Evaluate open space provisions in proposals for new neighborhoods.**	Short-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning	PC, CC
Objective 6. Continue to support current revitalization efforts Downtown.				
QP 6.1	**Facilitate Downtown Development.**	Ongoing	DDRA	Planning
QP 6.2	**Create a Downtown Business Improvement District (BID).**	Mid-term	Legal, Planning	PC, CC

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
QP 6.3	**Continue to acquire land in Dry Creek to support creation of Decatur Commons.**	Ongoing	DDRA, Planning	PC, CC
QP 6.4	**Maintain the historic trolley tracks on upper Bank Street and Church Street.**	Short-term	Engineering, Street and Environmental Services	DDRA, HPC
QP 6.5	**Expand railroad "quiet zones."**	Mid-term	Engineering, DDRA	
Objective 7. Improve code enforcement tools.				
QP 7.1	**License rental properties (rental unit certificate of occupancy program).**	Immediate, Ongoing **(CODE REFORM)**	Legal	Planning, Building, Code Enforcement, Revenue
QP 7.2	**Create more robust regulations for housing, safety and nuisances.**	Short-term, Ongoing **(CODE REFORM)**	Legal	Community Development
QP 7.3	**Regulate short-term or transient rentals.**	Immediate, Ongoing **(CODE REFORM)**	Legal	Planning, Building, Code Enforcement
QP 7.4	**Upgrade the city's tracking system.**	Short-term, Ongoing	Development departments	IS, GIS
QP 7.5	**Adopt a cooperative compliance model.**	Ongoing	Code Enforcement	Development departments
QP 7.6	**Continue to provide educational material about code compliance.**	Ongoing	Development departments	PC, CC
QP 7.7	**Recognize landlord responsibility**	Short-term, Ongoing	Legal, Revenue	CC, Development departments
Objective 8. Maintain historical assets.				
QP 8.1	**Develop an expedited review process for historic properties.**	Immediate **(CODE REFORM)**	Building, HPC	Planning
QP 8.2	**Designate other local historic districts.**	Mid-term	Planning, HPC	PC, CC
QP 8.3	**Educate property owners regarding historic designation.**	Short-term	Planning, HPC	Development Departments
QP 8.4	**Require Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) review prior to demolition.**	Mid-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning, Legal	HPC, PC, CC
Objective 9. Protect watersheds and conserve sensitive habitat.				
QP 9.1	**Develop more runoff restrictions for areas adjacent to waterways that drain to the Wildlife Refuge.**	Mid-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Engineering	Legal, Refuge
QP 9.2	**Adopt low-impact development standards.**	Mid-term **(CODE REFORM)**	Planning, Engineering	Legal, Refuge
QP 9.3	**Create a pilot project to test stormwater filtering techniques.**	Short-term	Engineering, Street and Environmental Services	CFO
QP 9.4	**Promote environmental education programs through the Refuge and River as major assets, important for protection and preservation.**	Short-term, Ongoing	DCS, Refuge	

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
QP 9.5	**Maintain Wilson Morgan Lake for flood control.**	Short-term, Ongoing	Engineering	Parks and Recreation, CC

IMPROVING OUR MOBILITY

Objective 1: Design street improvements to balance mobility, accessibility, land use, and desired development character.

MO 1.1	**Adopt a Complete Streets Policy.**	Short-term	Planning, Engineering	MPO, CC, Streets and Environmental Services
MO 1.2	**Design streets with considerations for the surrounding context and various users.**	Mid-term, Ongoing	Planning, Engineering	

Objective 2: Improve the appearance and condition of the city's streets.

MO 2.1	**Undertake strategic improvement projects in demonstration corridors.**	Mid-term	Engineering, MPO	Planning, CC (budgeting)
MO 2.2	**Fully utilize GIS software to track, plan and prioritize street maintenance and drainage improvements.**	Short-term, Ongoing	GIS, Engineering	
MO 2.3	**Establish corridor appearance standards or guidelines with an emphasis on sustainable landscaping.**	Mid-term	Planning	PC, Development departments

Objective 3: Increase efforts to make the city more walkable and bike friendly.

MO 3.1	**Create a sidewalk repair/retrofit program.**	Short-term	Engineering, Planning	
MO 3.2	**Update and formalize a plan to connect the urban trail system.**	Ongoing	Planning, Engineering, Parks and Recreation	
MO 3.3	**Seek funding to implement trail and path connections.**	Ongoing	Grants	
MO 3.4	**Increase marketing and wayfinding efforts to support the urban trail system.**	Ongoing	Parks and Recreation, Engineering	

Objective 4: Expand access to shared-ride transit options.

MO 4.1	**Reevaluate the feasibility of a Downtown Circulator.**	Short-term	NARCOG transit	DDRA, Planning
MO 4.2	**Establish a transit connection between Calhoun Community College and Downtown.**	Short-term	NARCOG transit	Calhoun Community College and Athens State
MO 4.3	**Establish an express connection to Huntsville.**	Mid-term	NARCOG transit	

Objective 5: Improve Downtown mobility.

MO 5.1	**Develop a Downtown parking strategy to address changing parking needs.**	Short-term	Planning, Police, DDRA	
MO 5.2	**Evaluate the feasibility of reestablishing strategic connections across the railroad.**	Short-term	Engineering	

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
Objective 6: Support strategic efforts to improve regional connectivity.				
MO 6.1	**Plan for a new bridge.**	Long-term	Planning, MPO	
MO 6.2	**Establish regional trail connections.**	Mid-term	Launch2035, Planning	CC
MO 6.3	**Establish a bicycle and pedestrian crossing over the Tennessee River.**	Short-term, Long-term	Planning	Development departments
MO 6.4	**Consider the viability of regional passenger rail service at the restored Decatur Depot.**	Long-term	NARCOG transit, Planning	
ADVANCING OUR PROSPERITY				
Objective 1. Expand the number, diversity, and wage level of employment opportunities.				
PR 1.1	**Complete a business recruitment and marketing strategy.**	Short-term	Chamber, Planning	
PR 1.2	**Diversify Decatur's industry recruitment targets.**	Ongoing	MCEDA, Planning	
PR 1.3	**Consider criteria for business incentives.**	Short-term	CFO	
PR 1.4	**Create a regulatory fast-track program.**	Ongoing, Long-term	Development departments	
Objective 2. Strengthen the existing labor force.				
PR 2.1	**Target Workforce development efforts on "Skills for the Future."**	Ongoing	DCS, Calhoun Community College, Athens State	
PR 2.2	**Collaborate with public schools to expand vocational programming**	Ongoing	DCS, Entrepreneurial Center	
PR 2.3	**Strengthen Ready-for-Work Programs.**	Short-term	DCS, Entrepreneurial Center	
Objective 3. Encourage entrepreneurship and expand support for small businesses.				
PR 3.1	**Expand Small Business Infrastructure and Incentives.**	Short-term	CFO	
PR 3.2	**Develop an Entrepreneur Mentorship/Partnership Program.**	Short-term	Entrepreneurial Center, DCS	
PR 3.3	**Market business development opportunities in Decatur's HUB zones.**	Ongoing	Development departments, MCEDA	
Objective 4. Encourage a variety of housing options that are competitive and serve the needs of a diverse population.				
PR 4.1	**Recruit High-Value Housing/Mixed-Use Development**	Immediate, Ongoing	Development departments	Development Community
PR 4.2	**Facilitate North-of-the River Development.**	Short-term	Development departments	Property owners, Development Community

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
PR 4.3	**Create developer packages to market sites.**	Short-term	Development departments	
PR 4.4	**Facilitate Downtown Housing Development.**	Ongoing	Development departments, DDRA	
PR 4.5	**Evaluate the state of building code requirements relative to Decatur's competitiveness within the region.**	Ongoing	Building	Home Builders Association
PR 4.6	**Establish Housing Rehabilitation Programs.**	Short-term	Code Enforcement	
Objective 5. Enhance Infrastructure to Leverage Economic Growth.				
PR 5.1	**Establish Industrial Parks and Sites.**	Long-term	MCEDA	
Objective 6. Promote a collaborative brand/image.				
PR 6.1	**Conduct a Summit on Collaborative Branding.**	Short-term	Development departments	DCS, CVB, Chamber, MCEDA, County
PR 6.2	**Lead or Create a Regional Vision.**	Mid-term	Mayor's Office	Planning, DCS, CVB, Chamber, MCEDA, County
PR 6.3	**Establish and sustain strong collaboration through the region.**	Ongoing	Launch2035	County
ENHANCING OUR AMENITIES				
Objective 1. Expand the range of public services.				
AM 1.1	**Establish partnerships to improve access to high speed internet.**	Mid-term	IS	
AM 1.2	**Evaluate the feasibility of establishing public wi-fi in key locations.**	Short-term	IS	
AM 1.3	**Evaluate the feasibility of expanding recycling service.**	Mid-term	Street and Environmental Services	
AM 1.4	**Implement a 311 system.**	Mid-term	IS	
Objective 2. Continue to improve the effectiveness of the city's safety services.				
AM 2.1	**Create a long-term plan for police, emergency and fire safety services.**	Short-term	Police, Fire	
Objective 3. Provide parks and recreational facilities that meet the needs of residents.				
AM 3.1	**Establish a parks and recreation master plan.**	Short-term	Parks and Recreation	Planning
Objective 4. Maintain competitive facilities that attract tourism.				
AM 4.1	**Track the economic impact of travel sports events to the city.**	Ongoing	CFO	
AM 4.2	**Plan for an indoor sports facility.**	Short-term	Parks and Recreation, Planning	

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
AM 4.3	**Explore the feasibility of an event space for year-round activities in or near Downtown.**	Mid-term	DDRA	Development departments, Mayor's Office, CC
Objective 5. Improve recreational access to the river and Wildlife Refuge.				
AM 5.1	**Establish a water trail (blueway) through the Refuge.**	Mid-term	Refuge	Planning, Community Development
AM 5.2	**Market kayak/canoe rental at Point Mallard.**	Short-term	Parks and Recreation	
AM 5.3	**Develop the trail network within the Refuge.**	Mid-term	Refuge	
AM 5.4	**Establish a multi-use path and bridge across Flint Creek.**	Long-term	Refuge	Mayor's Office and other City departments
AM 5.5	**Create an awareness-building effort about recreational opportunities in the city's natural areas.**	Ongoing	Refuge, City PIO	
Objective 6. Strengthen support for community and cultural institutions.				
AM 6.1	**Evaluate the feasibility of relocating the library or establishing a branch library.**	Mid-term	Library	Mayor's Office and other City departments
AM 6.2	**Participate in Decatur City Schools capital planning efforts.**	Short-term	DCS	Mayor's Office and other City departments
AM 6.3	**Form an arts council to promote arts in Decatur.**	Short-term	Alabama Center for the Arts, Carnegie Visual Arts Center	Planning
AM 6.4	**Create a public art initiative.**	Short-term	Arts Council (once established)	
AM 6.5	**Enhance the farmer's market.**	Short-term	City, County	
Objective 7. Improve access to quality healthcare and social services.				
AM 7.1	**Coordinate social services.**	Mid-term	Planning	
AM 7.2	**Communicate to State agencies the impact of closing of State-run mental health facilities.**	Ongoing	Mayors Office	Development departments
AM 7.3	**Create a healthy community initiative.**	Short-term	Hospital	
AM 7.4	**Establish a task force on poverty.**	Ongoing	Community Development	Mayor's Office, CC
STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY				
Objective 1. Strive to make Decatur City Schools a highly competitive school system on a state and national level..				
CO 1.1	**Establish an Education Advisory Group.**	Short-term	DCS, CC	Planning
CO 1.2	**Establish an incentive program to attract, develop and retain more high achieving principals and teachers.**	Short-term	DCS and School Foundation	Chamber, CVB, MCEDA and City

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
CO 1.3	**Conduct a coordinated and long-term marketing effort to improve Decatur school's image.**	Immediate	DCS	
CO 1.4	**Continue to emphasize skills for the future.**	Ongoing	DCS	
CO 1.5	**Continue to emphasize career and vocational education.**	Short-term	DCS, Calhoun Community College, Athens State, Entreprenurial Center	
CO 1.6	**Evaluate feeder patterns**	Short-term	DCS	
CO 1.7	**Conduct city-schools joint work sessions.**	Immediate	DCS, CC	
CO 1.8	**Lobbying the State to update its school funding model.**	Immediate	DCS	Education Advisory Group, Decatur Schools Foundation, Mayor's Office, CC, Chamber, MCEDA, CVB
Objective 2. Celebrate our community's diversity.				
CO 2.1	**Create new arts and cultural events.**	Mid-term	Arts Council (once established)	Various community groups and agencies
CO 2.2	**Create an online city events and cultural calendar.**	Short-term	PIO, CVB	
CO 2.3	**Create a commission on diversity and inclusion.**	Short-term	Community Development	Police, DCS
Objective 3. Encourage civic participation, mentoring and volunteerism.				
CO 3.1	**Create an awareness effort about available volunteer opportunities.**	Short-term	Volunteer Center of Morgan County	Planning
CO 3.2	**Expand mentoring programs offered through Decatur youth services.**	Ongoing	Youth Services, DCS	
Objective 4. Improve communication and cooperation between citizens, institutions, and government.				
CO 4.1	**Hire a community relations / public information officer.**	Ongoing	CC	
CO 4.2	**Create an ongoing forum for community input.**	Short-term	Planning	PIO
CO 4.3	**Create a council of neighborhoods.**	Mid-term	Planning	PIO
CO 4.4	**Conduct citizen surveys.**	Short-term	Planning	PIO
Objective 5. Improve inter-governmental cooperation and coordination.				
CO 5.1	**Establish formal information sharing relationships/protocols.**	Short-term	Planning	Development departments
CO 5.2	**Conduct leadership roundtables.**	Short-term	Mayor's Office	Development departments
CO 5.3	**Look for opportunities to consolidate and share services.**	Mid-term	Planning	Development departments

ACTION		TIME-FRAME	LEAD COORDINATOR	SUPPORTING ENTITIES
CO 5.4	**Evaluate Decatur's representation by Morgan County Commission.**	Short-term	Mayor's Office, County	

ACHIEVING OUR VISION

Objective 1. Promote awareness and understanding of the plan and its recommendations.

VI 1.1	**Engage non-governmental partners to assist with implementation.**	Ongoing	Planning	
VI 1.2	**Provide copies of the plan throughout the community and online.**	Short-term, Ongoing	Planning	
VI 1.3	**Provide ongoing staff training and professional development opportunities.**	Short-term Ongoing	City	
VI 1.4	**Develop a formal training program for commission and board members.**	Short-term Ongoing	Planning	

Objective 2. Monitor and share implementation progress.

VI 2.1	**Establish an implementation task force.**	Short-term	Planning	
VI 2.2	**Prepare and share an annual report.**	Ongoing	Planning	
VI 2.3	**Share a summary of the annual report with media and public.**	Ongoing	Planning	

Objective 3. Require concurrence with the Comprehensive Plan.

VI 3.1	**Update regulations and establish new regulatory tools.**	Short-term	Planning, Legal	PC, CC
VI 3.2	**Require concurrence in rezoning and other major development approvals.**	Ongoing	PC, CC	PC, BOZA, CC
VI 3.3	**Require staff reports to reference the Comprehensive Plan.**	Ongoing	Planning	PC, CC

Objective 4. Provide resources for implementing the plan.

VI 4.1	**Establish and regularly update a multi-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).**	Ongoing	Planning, CFO	CC
VI 4.2	**Prepare annual departmental work programs with awareness of the Comprehensive Plan.**	Ongoing	Planning, PC	CC
VI 4.3	**Identify and secure funds for prioritized initiatives.**	Ongoing	CFO, Planning, Grants, Mayor's Office, CC	

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