

THE DECATUR 202s

SUMMARY REPORT

**KEY THEMES, CONCERNS, AND AMBITIONS
AS EXPRESSED BY PARTICIPANTS**

TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY: NOVEMBER 19, 2020

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY: DECEMBER 10, 2020

EQUITY & RACIAL JUSTICE: JANUARY 14, 2021

CLIMATE CHANGE: FEBRUARY 11, 2021

DESTINATION:2030

2020 STRATEGIC PLAN | DECATUR, GEORGIA

INTRODUCTION

Emerging from the Citizen Roundtables that occurred between February and September of 2020, four overarching and interconnected challenges seemed to be on everyone's minds: How to better position Decatur to address climate change, racial inequities, affordable housing gaps, and the need for expanding choices for getting around.

To better understand and delve into these topics, the Decatur 202 sessions—a series of focused, online discussions—were held over a three month period between November, 2020, and February, 2021.

Each combined an hour's worth of presentation and panel discussion featuring a mix of national and local experts with breakout conversations in which participants could explore the issues in greater detail.

The sessions sought to put a finer point on topics too big to fully tackle in the context of the Roundtables, and to begin the process of reconciling conflicting opinions from participants.

FOUR BROAD TAKEAWAYS THAT EMERGED

- » The topics were the right ones. The four selected topic areas—Mobility, Housing, Racial Equity, and Climate Change—were affirmed as key categories for policymaking over the next decade. Even when there was disagreement about specific approaches, there was no hint of concerns or priorities that could not be connected to one or more of those four themes.
- » Participants got the everything's-connected message. In almost all of the facilitators' notes, there was recognition that two or more of the topics are connected and that planning requires considering strategies through multiple lenses—notably the lenses of affordability and racial equity.
- » Participants approve of the City's stated commitments and affirmed the ambition that Decatur should be seen as a leader on these topics. When offered the chance to affirm or reject current City priorities, such as housing affordability or human-scaled mobility options, participants affirmed—at least at high altitude—the City's priorities.
- » But the pressure is on to move faster. Compared to discussions leading to the last Strategic Plan, there's clearly a growing sense of urgency to reverse—or at least address—troubling trends. Especially at the intersection of racial equity and affordability. Bottom line: There are rising expectations that meaningful action is forthcoming.

SESSION ONE: TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Thursday, November 19, 4-5:30pm

Registered participants: 117

Speaker panel: Jen Price, Sycamore Consulting; Jack Kittle, Decatur Active Living Board; Heather Alhadeff, MARTA; and Charles Brown, Rutgers University.

Presentation and panel discussion archived at: <https://decatur2030.com/resources/>

As expected, given the car-centric realities of the Atlanta Metro, participants yearn for a balance between expanding bike, pedestrian, and transit options AND assuring smooth car traffic “flow” and access to convenient (and low cost or free) parking.

However, it’s clear advocates for alternatives to car dependence have gained traction over the last decade. That’s particularly true when the transportation topic is linked with racial equity, housing affordability, and climate change.

When asked to rank goals for transportation policymaking, groups prioritized safety, accessibility, bike and pedestrian uses, and the environment over cars. And there were helpful suggestions for getting more data to inform decisions (mapping current destinations and travel modes, for instance).

Still, there were dissenters in most groups when potential strategies were likely to inconvenience car drivers or if solutions require increasing the burden on taxpayers. There’s the recurring call for a circulator bus connecting MARTA stations with neighborhoods and the downtown. And there’s general agreement that the bus or trolley should be an EV, that it should be free, and that taxpayers shouldn’t shoulder all the costs.

SESSION TWO: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Thursday, December 10, 4-6:15pm

Registered participants: 152

Speaker panel: Geoff Koski, Bleakly Advisory Group; Elke Davidson, Decatur Affordable Housing Task Force; and James Alexander, Mercy Housing Southeast

Presentation and panel discussion archived at: <https://decatur2030.com/resources/>

Participants were nearly unanimous in supporting affordability as a priority. And most connected the priority with the increasing concern about racial equity and diversity.

In discussions on both housing and equity, many expressed worries that Decatur is fast becoming an enclave for wealthy white families only. Subsidies for teachers, City workers, and others whose incomes can’t match Decatur’s rising household incomes are probably required, some offered. The same with incentives for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and “Missing Middle” infill (multifamily housing at neighborhood scale). And it’s important, some volunteered, to expand the affordability conversation to include the costs of transportation and other family budget categories.

But many also expressed frustration that no solutions seemed free of impacts they hoped to avoid, like higher taxes. Many agreed that developers should pay impact fees to offset

subsidies for lower-income housing opportunities. And perhaps bolstering partnerships with non-profits and other government agencies (like the school district) could create opportunities for sharing costs.

SESSION THREE: EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE

Thursday, January 14, 6-9pm

Registered participants: 170

Speaker panel: Ed Lee, EdD, Senior Director of the Alben W. Barkley Forum for Debate, Deliberation, and Dialogue, Emory University, and Co-Chair of Decatur Better Together Advisory Board; Fonta High, Mawuli Davis, and Genesis Reddicks, Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights; Dr. Mari Ann Banks, City Schools of Decatur District Equity Coordinator; and Dr. Yves-Rose Porcena, Agnes Scott College Vice President for Equity & Inclusion
Presentation and panel discussion archived at: <https://decatur2030.com/resources/>

The 2020 summer of Black Lives Matter protests and Decatur-focused conversations about the impacts of systemic racism clearly elevated priorities to recognize that history and to commit to change. But what does that change look like, especially at the policy level? This session, conducted in partnership with the Better Together Advisory Board and serving as both a Strategic Plan 202 session and the conclusion of the City's Anti-Racism Speaker Series, sought answers.

All the groups struggled with that question. "Maybe," one participant said, "the right question is, 'How can I make a difference?'" So in almost every group and in the after-session free-floating discussion, the conversation focused on how change might take place first on the personal level.

Evident throughout were worries that the issues were so much more complicated than many imagined and that frustration and cynicism about the pace of change might endanger policymaking at the speed and scale required. Some commenters, however, suggested there might be a carryover bonus for diminishing the frustration, if an equity lens were applied to strategies targeting affordability, mobility, and climate change.

SESSION FOUR: CLIMATE CHANGE

Thursday, February 11, 6-9pm

Registered participants: 119

Speaker panel: Jen Price, Sycamore Consulting; Dr. Michael Black, Chair, Decatur Environmental Sustainability Board; Bahiyyih Grant, Decatur Youth Council; Dr. Brian Stone, Georgia Institute of Technology; and Kelly O'Day Weisinger, Emory University
Presentation and panel discussion archived at: <https://decatur2030.com/resources/>

Group breakouts on this topic seemed to involve the most informed conversations. That was, more than likely, because of high participation by the City's Environmental Sustainability Board members and by young people inspired by sustainability and resilience curricula in their schools.

There was near unanimous support for setting ambitious goals for the City's conversion to renewable energy. And there were more specific policy recommendations than in any

other 202 topic discussion. Among the suggestions: Electrify the City's fleet of cars, trucks, and buses; eliminate gas appliances, and reflect that goal in building codes; flip parking minimums to maximums; require fees for residential tear-downs to fund sustainability subsidies; undertake energy audits for low-income families and provide energy-saving improvements at low or no cost; create a climate dashboard to report progress toward climate goals; pass a robust tree conservation ordinance with strong enforcement teeth; and leverage density, particularly in proximity to transit, to foster walkability, encourage car-free or car-lite living, and reduce energy consumption and carbon impacts per capita.

There also emerged perspectives to clarify in order to prioritize meaningful strategies: The role of mobility policy (how to "balance" car-dependent status quo with alternative means for getting around); realities of small city in giant metro (regional advocacy and partnerships); and the realistic potential of tree conservation/planting (species, location, likely impacts measured against other goals and strategies).