



Preliminary Report

Community Action Plan

DECATUR, GEORGIA | NOVEMBER 12, 2015

In December 2014, the City of Decatur convened a diverse group of 19 residents and business people to guide the development of a Community Action Plan that would support the City's 2010 Strategic Plan by identifying specific actions that individuals, community partners, and local government could take to achieve one of the Strategic Plan's key principles: **Encouraging a diverse and engaged community.**

This initiative was named Better Together, and its volunteer steering committee was called the Better Together Leadership Circle. After meeting as a planning group for several months, the Leadership Circle invited the full community to join in developing the Better Together Community Action Plan. First, in July 2015, the Leadership Circle released a community survey to gauge respondents' perceptions of their community and invite them to share their ideas and observations about what made or did not make Decatur a welcoming and inclusive community. In six weeks, 729 people responded.

The second round of community participation was a facilitated conversation held Saturday, August 29, 2015 at the Ebster Recreation Center. More than 250 people attended, and the conversation centered on the broad theme of encouraging a diverse and engaged community plus two narrower but timely topics: racially-just community policing and diverse and affordable housing. Participants deliberated in small groups to develop specific action ideas and, combined, generated more than 625 ideas.

From the survey and the community conversation, six focus areas emerged:

- **Community participation and engagement**
- **Racially-just community policing**
- **Diverse and affordable housing**
- **Welcoming and inclusive retail environment**
- **Maximizing use of public spaces**
- **Low-cost transportation options**

Based on the outcomes of the survey and the community conversation, the Better Together Leadership Circle has drafted a three-year Community Action Plan around these six themes. The plan enlists individuals, community organizations, and the local government in a collaborative effort to make the City of Decatur a more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable city for people from all backgrounds and all walks of life.

Tonight, the Leadership Circle presents a draft of the Better Together Community Action Plan's action items to the community for review. The complete and final version of the plan will be presented to the Decatur City Commission on Monday, December 7, 2015.

Who Participated

Race	Survey	City of Decatur	Community Conversation
Asian	2%	4%	2%
Black or African American	16%	20%	32%
Hispanic or Latino	3%	1%	1%
Native American	1%	0%	0%
White or Caucasian	75%	73%	60%
More than one race	3%	2%	4%
Some other racial identity	0%	N/A	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

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Age	Survey	City of Decatur	Community Conversation
Under 10	N/A	14%	N/A
10-17	N/A	9%	10%
18-24	2%	9%	2%
25-34	9%	14%	5%
35-44	30%	17%	14%
45-54	22%	14%	16%
55-64	15%	12%	21%
65 and above	22%	11%	32%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Connection to Decatur	Survey	Community Conversation
I live in Area 1 - Northwest Decatur - Clairemont	17%	16%
I live in Area 2 - Northeast Decatur - Sycamore/Great Lakes	18%	17%
I live in Area 3 - Downtown	13%	20%
I live in Area 4 - Southwest Decatur - Oakhurst	26%	16%
I live in Area 5 - Southeast Decatur - Winnona Park	13%	13%
I work in the City of Decatur	11%	9%
I own a business in the City of Decatur	3%	0%
I frequently visit, dine, worship or shop in the City of Decatur	24%	9%
<i>Percentage totals not included because some respondents indicated more than one connection to the City.</i>		

Focus Area I: Support community participation and engagement among all members of the city's population	
A. Individuals	
1	Attend public meetings, read relevant publications, and/or utilize resources available through the City website to learn about local issues and the City's decision-making process.
2	Make a point to welcome new neighbors and introduce yourself to others whom you do not know.
3	Share important community news and information through social media platforms like Facebook and NextDoor and relay news to neighbors who do not use social media.
4	Bring your perspective to community events and celebrations by volunteering to serve on planning committees.
5	Participate in your neighborhood association.
B. Organizations	
1	Organize small, diverse groups of residents to get together socially (i.e., supper clubs, book clubs, play groups).
2	Make studio space available for adults and youth to create and display art.
3	Develop a storytelling tradition by organizing opportunities for citizens from different walks of life to share their stories in different ways, such as audio/video recordings, open-mic nights, photography exhibits.
4	Provide guidance and training for community members and groups on how people can have respectful, meaningful conversations across differences.
5	Offer learning and training opportunities utilizing a variety of regional and national resources, including guest speakers, video/film, and books.
6	Establish system for delivering welcome packets with information about the neighborhood and the City to new community members.
7	Host community conversations on race, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Refer to the Better Together Community Conversation Tool Kit for discussion questions and resources.
8	Assess organization's leadership and membership base and reach out to key groups or demographics that are underrepresented.
C. Local Government	
1	Conduct an equity assessment of the City's internal structures, processes, policies, and outcomes. Review baseline data and establish specific goals for a more equitable local government.
2	Provide City department leaders with the training, professional development and coaching needed to apply an equity lens to their work.
3	Create a system for addressing community members' concerns and complaints related to issues of equity and inclusion. Ideally this system could be accessed online and by phone and would insure that problems are thoroughly documented and responded to quickly by a designated staff person.
4	Work with a diverse group of citizen volunteers to develop a strategic, integrated citywide communications and outreach plan aimed at involving a broader spectrum of community members in city life.
5	Ensure that all online forms and applications (i.e., MyDecaturGA app for reporting problems) are augmented with dedicated phone numbers for those who do not have internet access.
6	Engage citizens in creating a new tagline that reflects the City's commitment to inclusion and equity.

7	Include questions in the City's biennial community survey to measure diverse community members' attitudes and perceptions related to equity and meaningful inclusion. Share results by mail, online and in the City's annual report.
8	Grow participation in Volunteer! Decatur (volunteer clearinghouse program) through expanded outreach to diverse community members.
9	Through a relevant and compelling outreach effort, invite a more diverse group of residents to submit statements of interest for serving on volunteer boards and commissions and applying to participate Decatur 101.
10	Complete asset mapping to ensure an up to date list of community resources including contact information for each asset. Enlist neighborhood associations, houses of worship, and other community-based organizations as conduits for broader civic participation.
11	Utilize Decaturnext.com for timely sharing of information on upcoming events; updates from the Better Together Leadership Circle; and tools and activities used in different settings over the course of the initiative. Add contact information for key staff providing a way for community members to get involved.
12	Create a new resident packet and make it available on the City's web site. Encourage individuals and neighborhood associations to print and share with new neighbors.
13	Establish Better Together as a permanent City initiative to nurture and sustain a culture of inclusion, equity and justice.
14	Designate a City staff position to manage and advocate for Better Together Community Action Plan implementation and Strategic Plan accountability.
15	Establish the citizen-led Leadership Circle as a permanent group of volunteers to guide Better Together, learn together, and build their capacity to host ongoing conversations in the community.
16	Establish an ongoing Better Together column in the Focus and other local media outlets to keep community members informed of progress on the Community Action Plan, Strategic Plan, and other initiatives and ways in which they can support them.
17	Create a Better Together Network of residents, partner organizations, and community leaders to sustain the effort and implement the plan. Host quarterly or bi-annual gatherings.
18	Partner with an anchor organization to support the implementation and evaluation of the Community Action Plan and the ongoing work of Better Together.
19	Partner with a foundation to begin a small grants program to support community members taking creative action together to further the goals of Better Together.
20	During the mayor's State of the City address, share an update on Better Together achievements.
21	On the City website, provide a printable calendar listing of recreational, educational and social activities for seniors.
22	Develop a Welcoming Decatur Checklist for planning city-sponsored events in order to guide organizers in creating events that are inclusive in terms of volunteer participation, entertainment, activities, and costs.

Focus Area II: Prioritize racially just community policing by improving relationships between community members and law enforcement and ensuring all community members are treated in a just way with equity and respect	
A. Individuals	
1	Educate yourself about racial profiling and the role citizens play in community policing.
B. Organizations	
1	Using resources provided by the Police Department, share information with neighbors regarding community policing and when to report suspicious activity and/or a possible crime.
2	Invite or continue to invite police officers to participate in neighborhood events in order to build relationships.
C. Local Government	
1	Post anti-racial profiling policy and procedures on front page of the police department's section of the City website. Make sure that this information is stated in language that is simple and straightforward.
2	On a quarterly basis, post on the department website information (including demographics) on arrests, stops and related data and indicate how those statistics compare to DeKalb County, Metro Atlanta and/or other jurisdictions as appropriate.
3	Publish and distribute a flyer with guidance for citizens on when and how to report suspicious activity and/or a possible crime. Post prominently on website also.
4	Freely share information with citizens about training officers receive, especially as related to diversity, community policing, and mental health.
5	Require the Fair and Impartial Policing training course for all officers.
6	Help the community get to know its officers and the police department by including in its annual report a department snapshot detailing the number of officers, police force demographics, priorities for the year, etc. Ensure that the annual report is posted online as soon as it is released and that the community is notified of its availability via the Decatur Focus and other usual outlets.
7	Through a relevant and compelling outreach effort, invite more people of color to participate in the Citizen Police Academy.

Focus Area III: Ensure the availability of diverse and affordable housing in order to prevent the displacement of existing residents and provide for a variety of housing types and prices.	
A. Individuals	
1	Advocate for the General Assembly’s approval of the City’s proposal to increase its homestead exemptions for low- and moderate-income seniors.
2	Advocate for the General Assembly’s approval of the City Schools of Decatur property tax exemption.
B. Organizations	
1	Organize and train volunteers and host workshops to assist seniors in reviewing financial options that could make aging in place more affordable.
C. Local Government	
1	Update information on the City website regarding proposed annexation to include implications in terms of growth and diversity.
2	Improve upon the City’s existing density bonuses to encourage developers to build affordable condominiums and apartments.
3	Host community forums with experts to examine how other cities have managed growth to maintain cultural, economic and generational diversity and discuss feasible options for Decatur, including those the City is currently exploring.
4	Convene a task force to develop a plan for workforce housing (for police officers, firefighters, teachers, and other community public servants), based on a mix of zoning strategies, financing options, and incentives that have proven successful in other communities.
5	Produce a comprehensive guide that covers existing tax exemptions, forms of assistance, and other strategies for aging in place. Make it available in print, online and keep it up to date.
6	Utilize the Decatur Focus and other existing communications channels to regularly update citizens on these ongoing initiatives related to housing and property taxes.

Focus Area IV: Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive retail environment for serving a diverse clientele.	
A. Organizations	
1	Provide ongoing training for Decatur business owners and employees to cultivate a more welcoming and inclusive experience for customers.
2	Publish a "welcoming and inclusive" handbook and distribute to Decatur businesses that interact with the public.
3	Recognize businesses with signage or a window decal when their employees have completed diversity training and made other efforts to be welcoming and inclusive.
4	Educate business owners about handicap access and options for modifying their places of business to be more accessible.
5	Build awareness of the various roles that people with disabilities are capable of performing and encourage business owners to consider hiring disabled individuals.
6	Encourage existing businesses to expand their inventories to help address the basic needs of older residents.
B. Local Government	
1	Explore the possibility of bringing a variety store to downtown (i.e., Richards' Variety Store) to expand the range of "basics" available to residents.
2	Collaborate with property owners and leasing agents to offer a diverse array of dining and shopping options, representing different cultures, price points, and generations

Focus Area V: Maximize the use of public spaces for the enrichment and well-being of all Decatur residents, workers, and visitors.	
A. Individuals	
1	Take ownership of the community's public spaces by discarding trash in containers provided, picking up litter, and reporting maintenance problems through the MyDecaturGA mobile app or by calling/texting (404) 377-5571.
2	Help the City expand and diversify its public art program by supporting the Decatur Arts Alliance as a volunteer and/or financially.
B. Local Government	
1	Provide signage to direct downtown visitors to public restrooms and indicate when they are open
2	Consider installing more seating downtown and in other retail nodes, possibly in conjunction with public art installations.
3	As the county seat for one of the nation's most culturally diverse counties, utilize public spaces to honor cultures past, present, and future through art and signage.

Focus Area VI: Facilitate low-cost transportation options for people of all ages and abilities.	
A. Individuals	
1	Offer rides to elderly neighbors and others who do not drive.
2	Support assistance organizations like I CARE (Interfaith Companion And Ride Express) by volunteering and/or providing financial support.
B. Local Government	
1	Publish and distribute a guide to various public and private transit options available to seniors, youth and those who are disabled.
2	Increase awareness of and access to the Go60 Shuttle in order to better serve more seniors.