

STATE OF THE CITY 2019

Recognize County Commissioners, School Board members,
Superintendent, Former Mayors and Commissioners, City Staff

Recognize and thank City Commissioners

Each Commissioner brings a level of depth of leadership and expertise that is unsurpassed. Please join me in thanking them.

Finally, I want to recognize my husband, Gary. He truly supports and encourages me – and gets to hear me analyze and process things out loud.

School Board Chair, Lewis Jones will now share some remarks about City of Decatur Schools. Our partnership with the schools continues to get stronger every year and we look forward to another productive year.

Let's celebrate our successes of 2018

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1. You probably already know this but Decatur was named an ALL AMERICA CITY by the National Civic League. (SCARF)
The All-American City Award recognizes communities that leverage civic engagement, collaboration, inclusiveness and innovation to successfully address local issues. What a great description of our city! Recognized for our Better Together Initiative, Community Policing efforts and the We are Decatur Photography project, we were one of 10 communities in the entire country that was selected. If you have not seen our presentation video – it is must see TV or actually YouTube – starring Chief Mike Booker, local photographer of the We Are Decatur Project, Beate Sass, Decatur High School grad, Agnes

Scott student and young aspiring poet, Faiza Haji, our own Mayor Pro Tem Tony Powers and others. Go home and watch it – it will make you proud!!

Slides

2. Plans, Plans, Plans – We Adopted our Updated Community Transportation Plan in August, Adopted the East Lake MARTA LCI study and just recently adopted the Decatur Legacy Master Plan, following planning workshops, civic dinners and lots of community input to refine the plan, a Final Concept Plan was adopted. Over the next year, we will be seeing more activity at Legacy Park as we consider Affordable Housing, Recreation, Creative and Environmental opportunities. We are partnering with the Decatur Housing Authority for short term housing of residents as Swanton Heights is renovated and we appreciate the opportunity to work collaboratively with DHA in this way.

Slide with logos

3. New Business news –
Let's welcome new businesses that have opened in 2018:

Savi Market, Dog Towne Franks, The UPS Store, D92 Korean BBQ, in the downtown area as well as Brave and Kind Books, Element Funding Decatur, Vivid Hair Salon, Ammaza Pizza and opening under a new concept, Son of a Bear Korean Tavern in Oakhurst.

In addition, Kelly's Market just opened last week; owner Sean Crotty is here.

If any representatives from any of these businesses are in attendance, please stand and let us recognize you.

Slide

I also want to recognize and thank Pope and Land (Kirk Billings) for the new pocket park and mural at the West Court Square building.

Slides

Task Force for Global Health expanded their presence in Decatur with a transformation of the Clark Harrison building – recognize leadership. We are proud to have this amazing international non-profit and leader in global health right here in Decatur. Their number one mission is Healthy, Productive Lives for All.

Courtyard Marriott is completing a total renovation. Hotel Manager, Scot Gladstone, is here tonight – he serves on our Tourism Board and he and his employees promote all things Decatur to their guests.

Coming soon in 2019:

The Deer and the Dove with Chef Terry Koval from Wrecking Bar and George Frangos of Farm Burger – will be opening in the former Cakes and Ale space.

I believe the owners of this restaurant space are also in attendance this evening. I would like to recognize members of the family of Louis Pichulik who are here this evening: sisters Suzanne Pichulik and Jeanette Pichulik Zucor. Much of what we enjoy in downtown Decatur today can be attributed to Louis and his family's commitment to downtown Decatur and a continued

dedication to preserving historic buildings and supporting locally owned businesses. Mr. Pichulik received the Georgia Cities Foundation Renaissance Award in 2015 – the award recognizes a person or organization who has made a significant contribution to revitalizing one of Georgia’s cities – a well-deserved honor. THANK YOU to the Pichulik family.

Also opening in 2019 – Hampton Inn and Suites – Director of Sales Shakela Ayton, Terry Pierce, General Manager and Heather Brinson, Regional Director of Sales for Vision Hospitality are with us this evening.

Pho King Vietnamese Restaurant, Spot for Dogs – Doggy Day care; The Olive, Wild Crab, Sceptre Brew Pub, Haven Hygge House and Lennox Cupcakes

If any representatives of these other businesses are here, please stand.

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92 Affordable Senior Housing Units

We celebrated the opening of 92 affordable senior housing units as a part of the mixed use transit oriented development project at the Avondale MARTA station. Columbia Residential partnered with the Development Authority of Decatur, DeKalb County Community Development and the Housing Authority of DeKalb County. This Earth craft certified development is one of the first affordable senior communities in the metro area to be located next to transit. In addition to the senior housing, construction continues on market rate apartments and retail space – partners

are Columbia Ventures, the Decatur Development Authority and Courtland. Current estimates are that some portion of these apartments will be ready for leasing and move in later this spring.

Development of the Callaway property downtown is continuing. The parking deck is complete, the western residential side is progressing and construction of the office building has started.
Drone PHOTOS

Several downtown businesses suffered losses due to fire. We are happy to report that Tres Jolie has reopened; Fresh to Order will soon re-open as will Noodle. Java Monkey experienced extensive damage and it will be bit longer before they are able to re-open. Stop by these businesses and show them some love - we will be glad to have them all back as a part of our downtown offerings.

If you represent any of our new business partners, please stay for a few minutes for a photo op!

Other big news from 2018

1. We hosted our first ever HOUSING SUMMIT in November; over 100 people attended.

Slide

- We know that affordable housing is a metro wide problem – I serve on a Regional Task Force for Affordable Housing at the Atlanta Regional Commission but we wanted to establish a shared understanding of Decatur’s housing context and to define Decatur-driven strategies that reflect community expectations about affordable and inclusive housing. Even

though the city has added over 200 affordable housing units since 2016 through density bonuses and tax credit assistance, we must do more to address affordability in Decatur. Lots of ideas and strategies were discussed and the City Commission is committed to looking at options and opportunities.

Photos

2. In partnership with the Decatur Arts Alliance, 6 new sculptures were placed in Oakhurst, next to the Public Works facility and one in partnership with a private business owner at the High House – thanks to Williams-Teusink.

Photos

3. Speaking of Sculptures, we celebrated and honored the service of Peggy Merriss as City Manager at a Peggy Palooza in December. To honor her tremendous impact on the city and particularly to recognize her commitment to the arts as bringing untold value to the city, the Decatur Arts Alliance in cooperation with the Decatur City Commission is spearheading a community fund-raising effort to purchase a piece of public art to honor Peggy. The piece is being created by local female artist Corrina Sephora and will be placed at Legacy Park. Please help us honor Peggy in this way – visit the Decatur Arts Alliance website.

Slides for each:

4. I want to give a brief shout out to the DPD who hosted Cocoa with the Popo
5. Our Fire and Rescue Department – who are the proud owners of a new mini pumper – which is a bit more maneuverable on our streets

6. Active Living/Children and Youth Services – Basketball, programs/activities for seniors, indoor soccer, outdoor soccer, after school programs -you name it – if you are looking for a way to start the new year in a healthier way, AL is there for us all. Our own Greg White was elected to serve as Vice President of the Georgia Recreation and Park Association.
7. I want to highlight our Public Works Department that includes Design, Environment and Construction as well– 232 trees were planted this year; we also gave away over 200 seedlings toward our goal of 1000 new trees planted by 2023 – our bicentennial year! Decatur was also recertified as a Platinum level Green Community by the Atlanta region. There are only 2 cities certified at the Platinum Level by ARC – Decatur and Norcross. We will also begin electronic permitting this year.
8. And in terms of administrative and financial services – another unmodified or clean audit report. The City also maintains a Standard & Poor's AA+ bond rating and a rating of Aa1 from Moody's.

What can we expect for 2019

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- A. We have a new City Manager! (Recognize Andrea; background)
- B. Have already mentioned some of the new businesses that will be coming soon as well as new residential units.

Sometimes the buzz around town is that Oh My Goodness – what's happening -businesses are closing.

Although retail and restaurant turnover is normal, we still hate to lose businesses. But I want to dispel the myth that our retail/restaurant market and interest is waning.

Here are some numbers to consider:

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1. Recent data shows us – our retail vacancy rate in the downtown business district is 3%, yes 3 %, compared to the national average of 10% (Source: ICSC – International Council of Shopping Centers); 9% office vacancy rate
AND 70% of our businesses are independent type enterprises.

What is the main reason downtown businesses give for closing?
(parking)

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2. More numbers/another myth:

17

131

679

10,532

17 parking decks

131 surface lots

679 street spaces

10,532 parking spaces in the downtown parking boundary (which is less than 2 square miles)

The City received a Community Choices grant from the Atlanta Regional Commission to support a parking inventory update and the data presented is from that report.

We are planning to update the parking signage at parking decks; new signs will also be lit at night

- C. We signed an interim agreement with Lime Scooters and will be looking an ordinance not just to regulate but to also accommodate alternative modes of transportation particularly last mile connectivity. We may soon see e-Bikes coming to Decatur.

Slides

3. Legacy Park –

We'll be celebrating Earth Day at Legacy Park this year; Children and Youth Services summer camps will take place on the property; Decatur BBQ Blues and we are partnering with the Decatur Housing Authority for providing a location for housing of residents on Legacy Park property as Swanton Heights renovations occur, hoping to provide the least disruption as possible during this time – and to bring an energy and vibrancy to the property with families living there. We also were just notified that the city has received a grant from the Atlanta Local Food Initiative – which is housed in the Atlanta Regional Commission- that we will be receiving fruit trees to plant in the orchard area of Legacy Park. And our Decatur Youth Council will be taking the lead on the actual planting of the trees.

Slides

4. Planning continues in 2019:

- A. Our Stormwater Master Plan update is underway; 2 stormwater academies have taken place and another input session is planned

for Wednesday, May 1. More details will be available closer to time but recent heavy rains continue to remind us that creative solutions continue to be needed.

- B. Special Purpose Option Local Sales are being used to finance improvements to the Atlanta Ave/W Howard/W College intersection. Atlanta Avenue RR Crossing community input sessions have also begun.
- C. But nothing will be as important for us or for our community as the 2020 Strategic Plan – your participation is crucial. I have mentioned so many master plans tonight – Budget priorities come from the Strategic Plan. Of the 89 tasks outlined in the 2010 Strategic Plan, 93% have been completed. You can also provide input on the remaining 7% by answering questions on Open City Hall regarding remaining Budget Priorities. Look for new and innovative ways the City will be reaching out to engage the public as we begin our 2020 Strategic Planning process later this year.
- 5. In closing, I'm proud to announce that the City Commission at its annual retreat last week committed to appointing a Citizen Task Force on Affordable Housing. This was a collective recommendation that arose from the Housing Summit. The group will be able to explore strategies that could be used, can collaborate with the Atlanta Regional Commission to remain knowledgeable on regional housing efforts and will then report its findings to the City Commission. We will begin taking Statements of Interest very soon. Look for an announcement in the FOCUS but even sooner, through social media.

As I begin my 4th year of serving this amazing city as Mayor, I am honored to do so and again want to express my appreciation to my awesome colleagues on the Commission – there are none better.

