

Suitability Analysis: Decatur, GA

Meryl Pawlick, Thomas Pharr, Harrison Siegel

Intro to Land Use

CP 6112

November 16, 2025

I. Urban Farm (Harrison)

The criteria for the urban farm plan for Decatur are separated into a 4-category point system for three selected sites. The categories are population location, soil quality, food accessibility, and property value. The sites chosen were open green spaces seen while on site visits for assignment 1 & 2. Each criteria column in each location was given a rating between 1-3 based on high population, higher yield soil quality, lower food accessibility, and lower property value. All these criteria were used to culminate a site with the closest score to 12.

Site Locations

The three site locations consist of a western site, a central site, and an eastern site. These were chosen in accordance with the project minimum of 5 acres while maintaining current surrounding structures. The western site runs along College Ave and Howard Ave between the MARTA rail lines. This site was chosen due to the open space and city owned property. The central site was chosen adjacent to Decatur High School towards downtown Decatur. This site was chosen specifically as the largest and largest open space. The eastern site was chosen adjacent to Columbia Dr and the Decatur Legacy Park. The site was chosen for low tree density and park infrastructure. The sites can be seen in detail in figure 1.



Figure 1

Population Location

This data was directly taken from the City of Decatur's GIS hub. The population in Decatur is skewed towards the west of downtown, the northeast of the city limits, and southeast. The central and western sites are surrounded by higher population block groups. The highest populated block groups surround the central site. The eastern site is near lower populated block groups. The central site gained three points, while the western and eastern sites gained two and one points. As seen in figure 2, the central site is located near larger groups of people than the other sites. Population location is crucial for urban farm engagement and usage. Ideally residents near and far will work together on the farm, but a larger sized community adjacent to the farm can help provide a healthy work force for the farm.

Population Per Census Block Decatur, GA

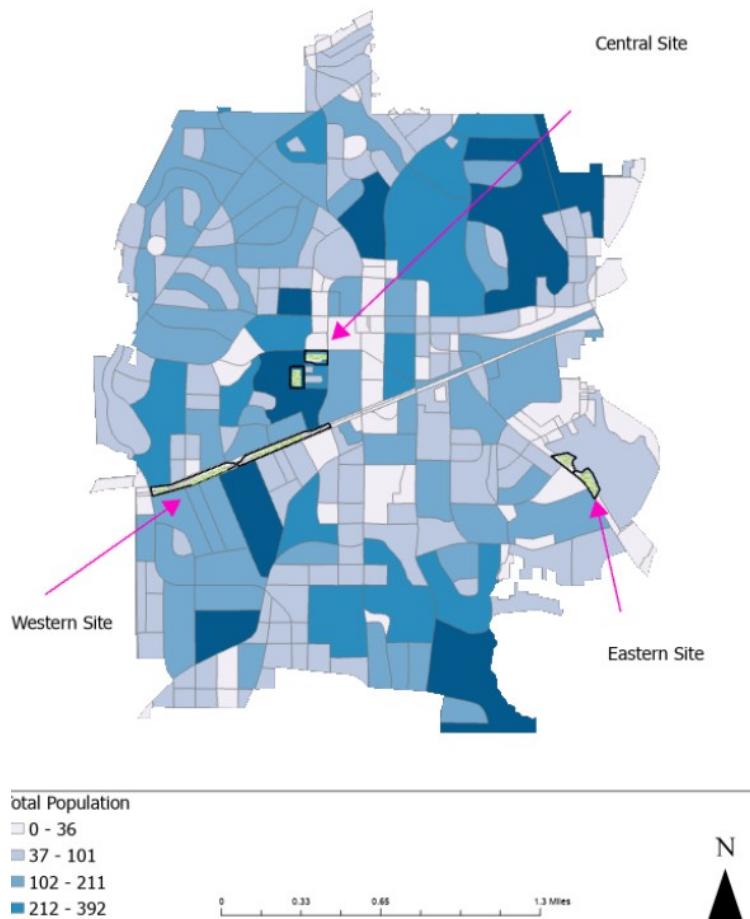


Figure 2

Soil Quality

The soil quality data was taken from the USDA soil quality database, and this soil quality was last tested in 2023. The data I chose to use was non-irrigated soil readings, meaning soil without extra water supply was tested. The breakup of soil quality is in 8 classes as described by the USDA. Class 1-4 is soil used for growing while 5-7 is non-suitable for crop growth. For this metric I chose to exclude any soil above class 4 as it was deemed non-suitable. Decatur has soil classes between 2-4 (figure 3) with most of the soil being in class 3. The western site is class 3 soil, the central site is non-suitable soil, and the eastern site is class 2. The eastern site had the strongest metric and therefore gained 3 points, followed by the western site with 2 points, and the central site with 1 point. It is important to note that soil quality can be altered with new soil or fertilized soil at an extra cost.

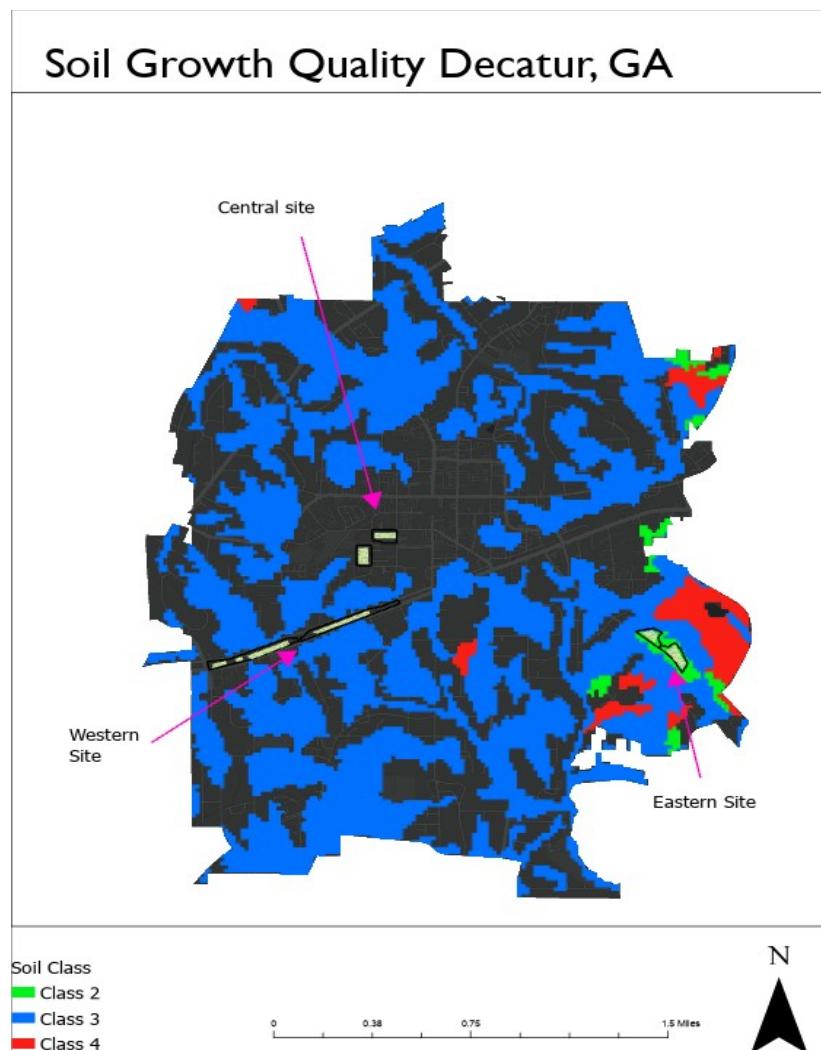


Figure 3

Grocery Accessibility

The grocery store data was created by me and selected via online research of surrounding full-service grocery stores surrounding Decatur. The network analysis was created for walking towards these grocery stores broken down into 5-minute breaks starting from 0-5 and to 15-20. A large portion of Decatur can be considered to be in a food desert as seen in figure 4. The site furthest away from walkable grocery stores is the west site followed by the central site, and the eastern site. Therefore, the western site gains 3 points, central 2, and eastern 1. The urban farm aims to fill the gaps of grocery stores in Decatur, and the western site fulfills the largest gap.

Walk-time Towards Grocery Stores Decatur, GA

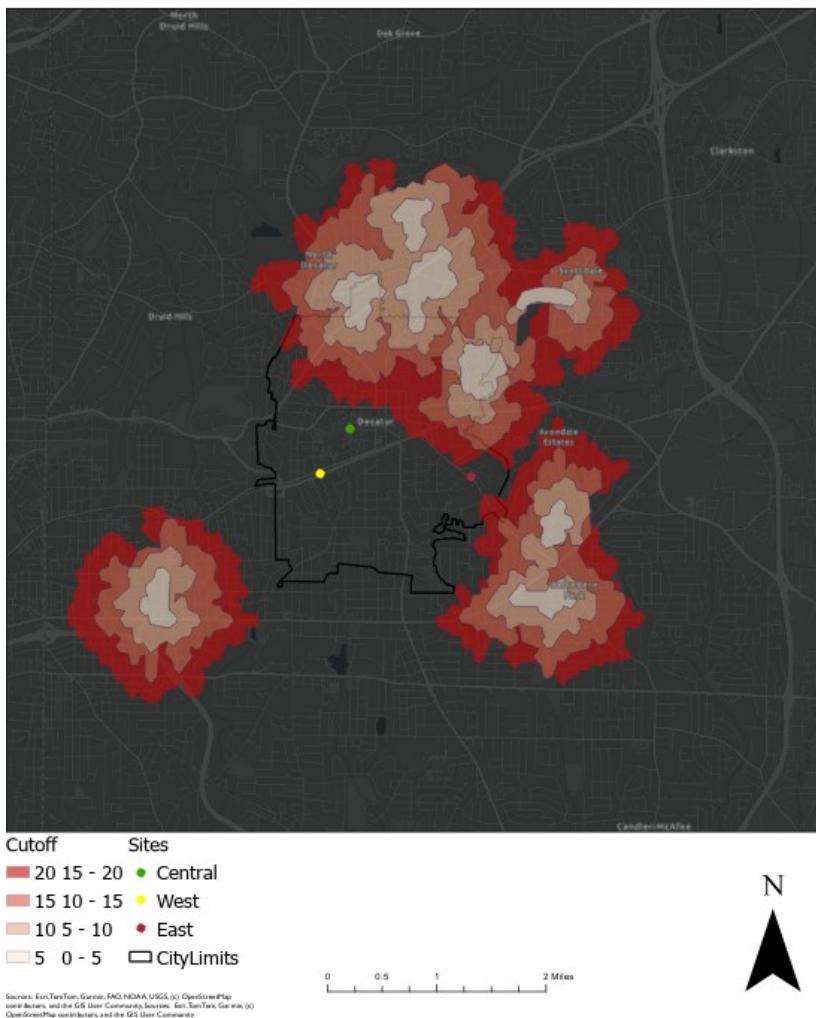


Figure 4

Property Value

Property value was taken from the DeKalb County parcel viewer along with the parcel feature layer. Due to large gaps between values, the property values have undergone a logarithmic function to normalize the data. Due to data restrictions, only adjacent properties were considered. Property value is an important metric for any new development, and urban farms generally increase property value, according to the US EPA. Fortunately for all three sites, the land is owned by a level of government. Examining the western site (figure 5), the property values are moderate with 3 major outliers. The central site has high property values on all adjacent parcels with outliers on the southern end where the Decatur High School lies. Lastly, the eastern site has a high property value as well. The eastern site is surrounded mostly by park land owned by the government while there are some lower valued private properties across the street. Overall, the choice for property value growth is the western site. The property is more moderately valued and mostly privately owned compared to other sites. The western gains three points, the eastern site gains 2, and the central gains one.

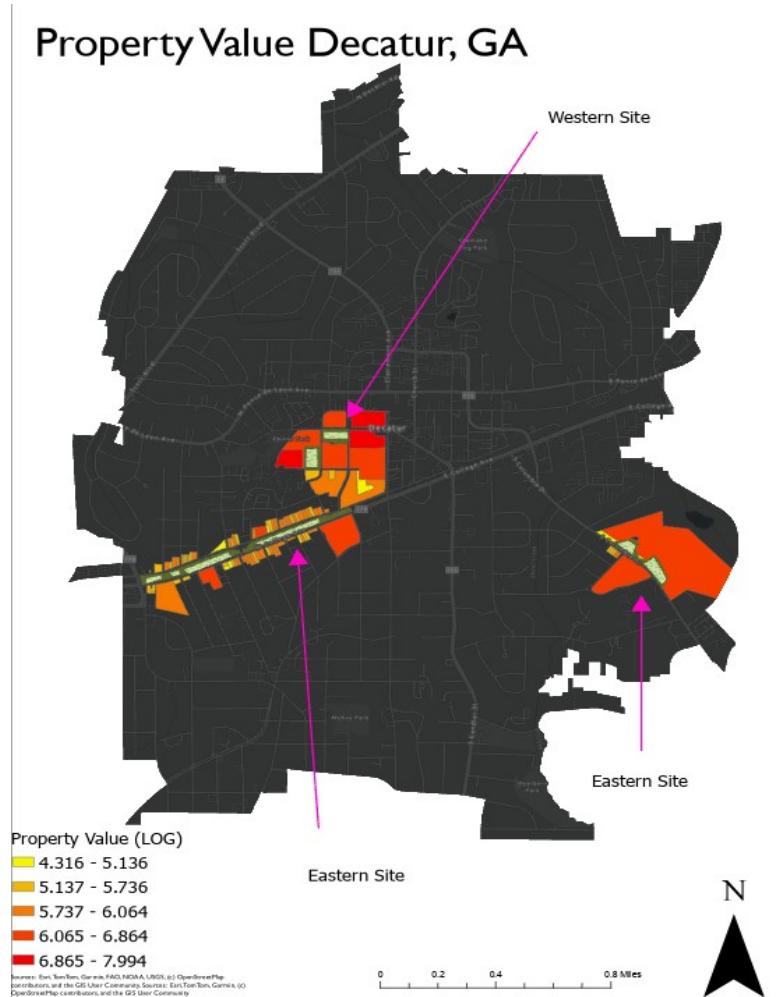


Figure 5

Summary

After examination of the chosen criteria, the site with the highest score was the western site (figure 6). This site gained the most points based on high population, lowest property values, moderate soil, and worst grocery access. This site would be ideal for urban farm development. The soil rating can be improved via nutrients or purchasing new soil. The surrounding population was not the highest but is adjacent to the highest site. An investment such as an urban farm could possibly increase the adjacent population. The total size of the site is just over 5 acres and has room for vertical expansion. The land is owned by the city of Atlanta; this could produce a public private partnership for the entrepreneur. Overall, this site is the best match and would produce the best outcomes based on the criteria.

Criteria	Eastern	Western	Central
Property Value	2	3	1
Population	1	2	3
Soil	3	2	1
Grocery Access	1	3	2
Total	7	10	7

Figure 6

II. Music and Cultural Venue (Meryl)

Through the criteria discussed in the prompt, namely that it should be accessible, particularly to young people, the following metrics for a suitability analysis were identified: population density, appropriate zoning, consideration of single-family areas, walkability access to transportation and walkability was considered less formally as a metric. Below is a population density map of Decatur where areas of high density were identified.

Population Density

We began by identifying areas of Decatur that have a higher population density to help identify areas that could be particularly disruptive for residents, and/or areas to maximize resident's access to the cultural venue. Displayed below is a representation of the population by census block, with the 30 most populated blocks identified in red. This knowledge helps contextualize where people are located within the city for later criteria identification.

High Population Per Census Blocks, Decatur, GA

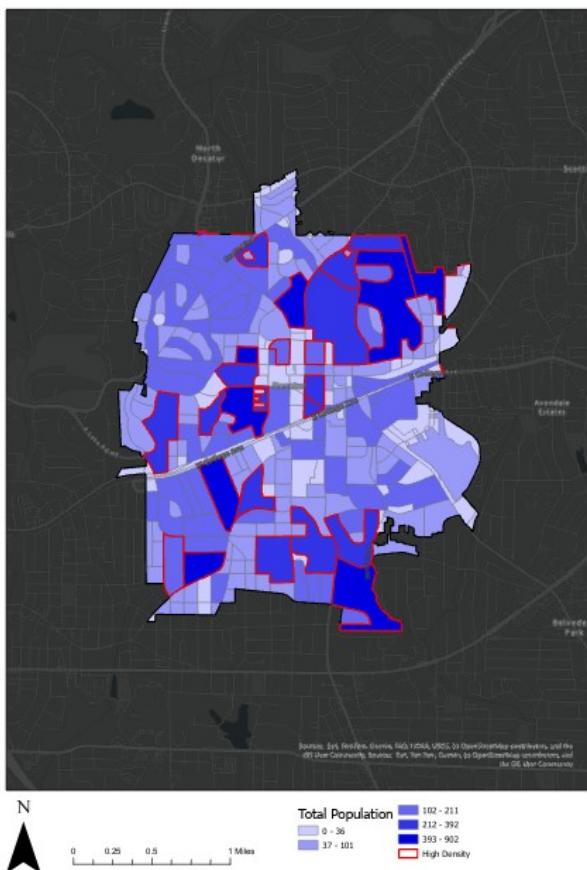


Figure 7

Zoning

To expand upon the knowledge of the population distribution within Decatur, we analyzed zoning maps provided by the City of Decatur's open access GIS portal. First, we identified areas that are mixed-use and commercial as potential sites for development, which is represented below.

Viable Zoning in Decatur, GA

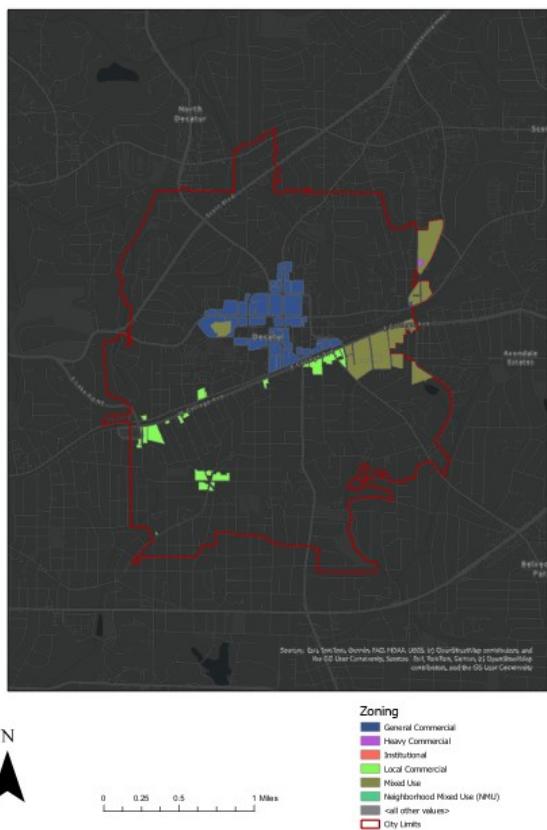
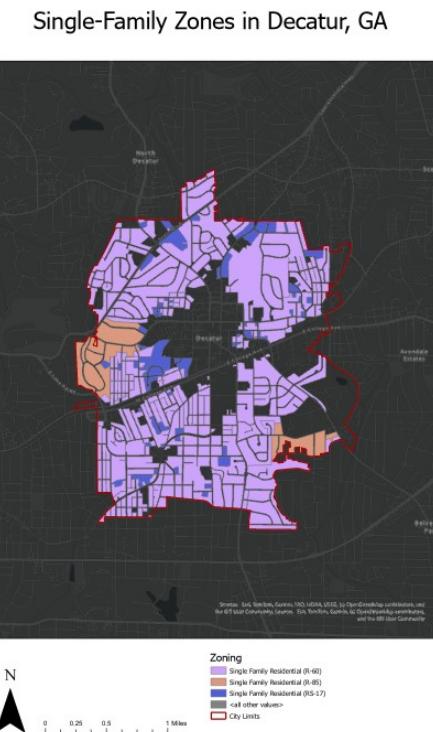


Figure 8

Family/Neighborhood Consideration



Additionally, because this will be a concert venue and noise, traffic and festive activity will likely occur in the vicinity and we wanted to be mindful of its location to families, which we generalized as being Single Family zoned parcels. We mapped Single Family zones in Decatur to identify areas we should avoid when developing the venue, and to make sure there is an adequate buffer between these zones and the final site.

Figure 9

Walkability to MARTA

Access is essential for a successful entertainment venue. We plotted the MARTA stations within the Decatur city limits, which is the Decatur Station, the Decatur Transportation (bus) Station and Avondale Estates Station. A $\frac{1}{2}$ mile buffer was applied, because this is a reasonable walking distance, as it takes an average person ~7-10 minutes to walk this distance. We filtered parcels so that they were greater than 1-acre in size, and that fell within the identified walking radius to public transportation.

Target Parcels and Parking Lots in Decatur,
GA



Figure 10

Parking Lots

From Decatur GIS data, we identified parking lots in the city center that met the minimum 1-acre size requirement. Parking lots in the urban core of Decatur could be better utilized to serve the public with a venue, and would not require the demolition of existing structures to develop the land. Parking lots would be excellent targets for the concert venue.

Final Selection

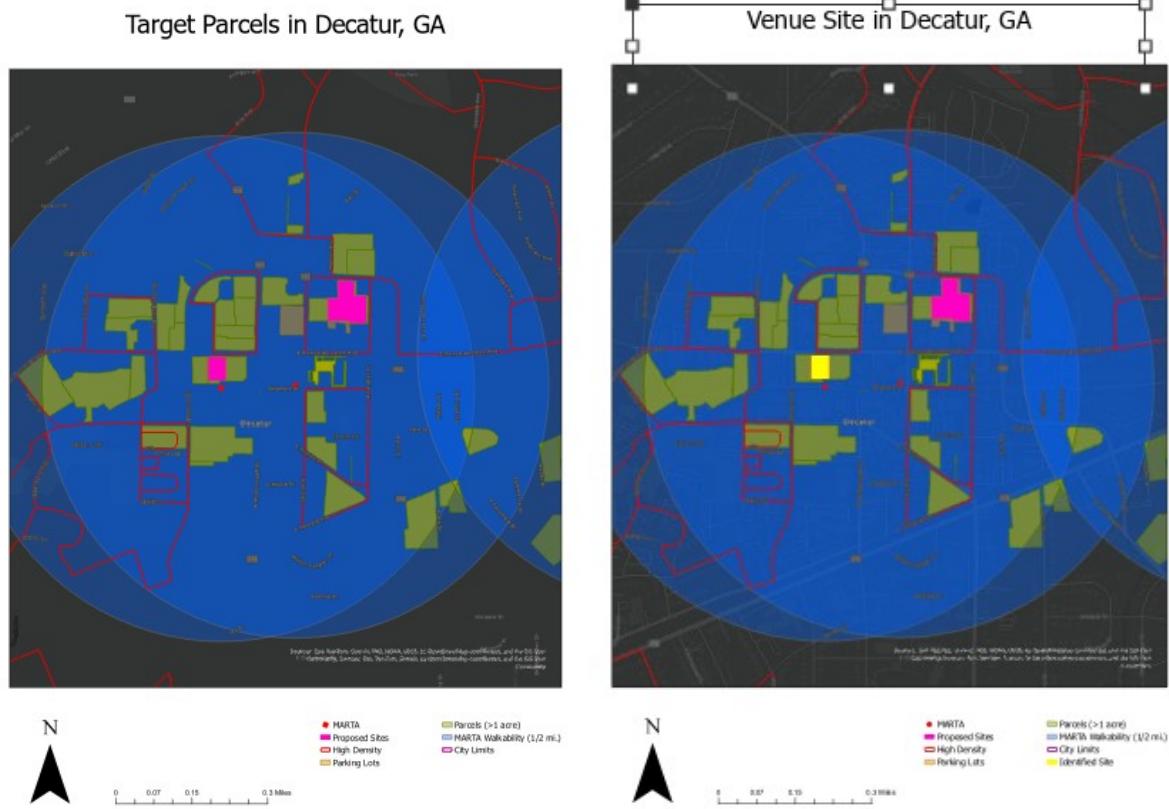


Figure 11

Figure 12

Finally, combining all of the criteria independently outlined above (appropriately sized and zoned parcels, appropriately sized parking lots, within walking distance of MARTA that have been buffered for single-family zoning consideration, high population density), we identified the following two parcels, both of which are currently parking lots, as locations for the venue. However, upon further exploration of the area we found that the one parcel is the parking lot of a medical center and near a church – this would not be an appropriate location for an outdoor venue.

The other parcel, which is our final selection, is the current site of a parking garage located to the immediate west of Decatur Square that lies along the Decatur Station *and* Decatur Transportation Hub and is to the north of the County Courthouse and within proximity of dining options. We propose constructing the concert venue at the site of the existing parking garage or building on top of the existing parking deck to maintain parking accessibility. Building upwards, rather than razing the parking deck, does fit the typology of the medium-rise buildings that surround it, such as the courthouse. This site is heavily buffered from Single Family residences, and the concern about noise and interfering with municipal offerings should not be an issue, as the timing of courthouse operations and the timing of concerts held on evenings or weekend will not overlap.

By infilling the center of Decatur with additional entertainment options that are accessible via MARTA to the greater Atlanta Region, as well as being an 8- minute walk from Agnes Scott College (a target audience of young concertgoers) and located along an already vibrant central area of the city, its strategic location will help cultivate a stronger economy and community in Decatur.

III. Park (Thomas)

When choosing the location of a new park, there are various factors to consider in determining a suitable location. It is important to make sure that the park is usable, located in a convenient area for many residents, and does not cause too much disruption in the neighborhood. Another goal is to limit the acquisition of private land and work with land that is either owned by the city or another public entity. Since a specific goal is to have the park cater to children and the elderly, accessibility and safety for pedestrians are also important. We also want to make sure that the park serves an area that is currently underserved by parks or does not have a large park nearby.

Accessibility and Safety

By these metrics, a good location for a new park in Decatur would be located right next to Avondale Station, bordering it to the north. This area is currently a surface parking lot designed for commuters to park their cars and ride MARTA's Blue Line. However, since the construction of Cortland Decatur East on the south side of College Avenue, commuters now have a free parking option in a parking deck attached to the station via a pedestrian bridge. This means that the current surface parking lot can be redeveloped without much impact to commuters.

The new park, given the working title of "Station Park", is located just to the south of dense, single-family residential and Glenwood Elementary School. This makes Station Park within walking distance of many families and children, and current sidewalk connections help promote accessibility. The one major concern with accessibility and safety for children is the park's proximity to a large intersection at East Ponce De Leon Avenue and Arcadia Avenue and a smaller one at East Ponce De Leon Avenue and Sycamore Street. However, due to the residential nature of these streets, featuring low speed limits, speed bumps, and parked cars, traffic mitigation will most likely not be a large concern.

Decatur Population Density Map and Relevant POIs

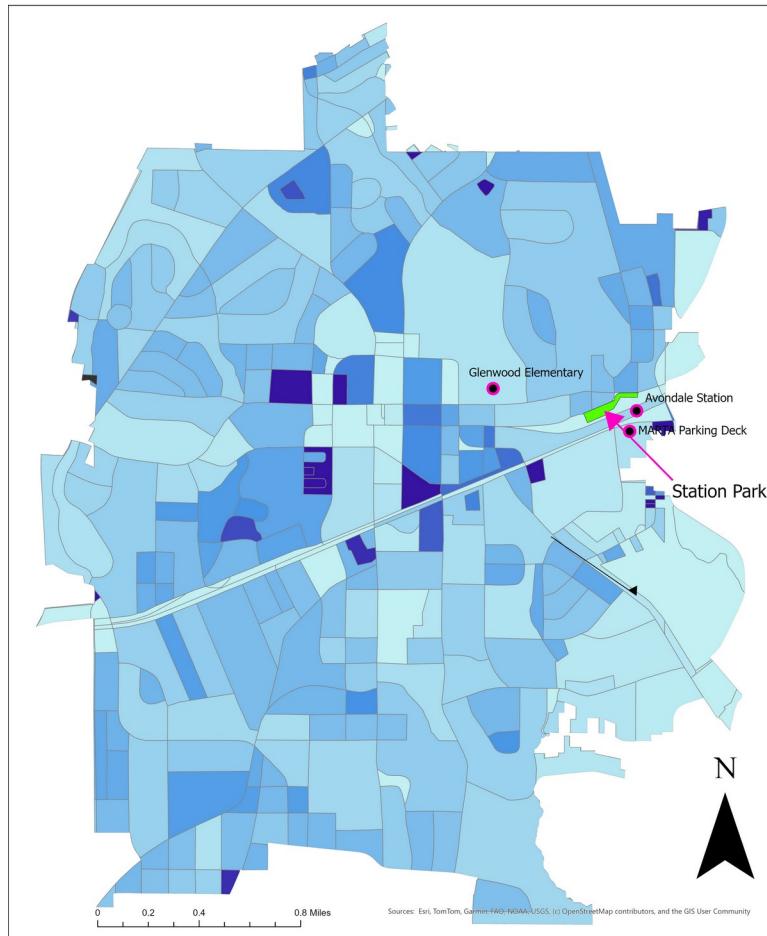


Figure 13

Ease of Land Acquisition

We looked at publicly owned land to minimize disruption to the surrounding neighborhoods. Land will only need to be acquired from MARTA, and surrounding homes and businesses will remain untouched.

Parcels Owned by City of Decatur, DeKalb County, or MARTA (Highlighted in Blue)

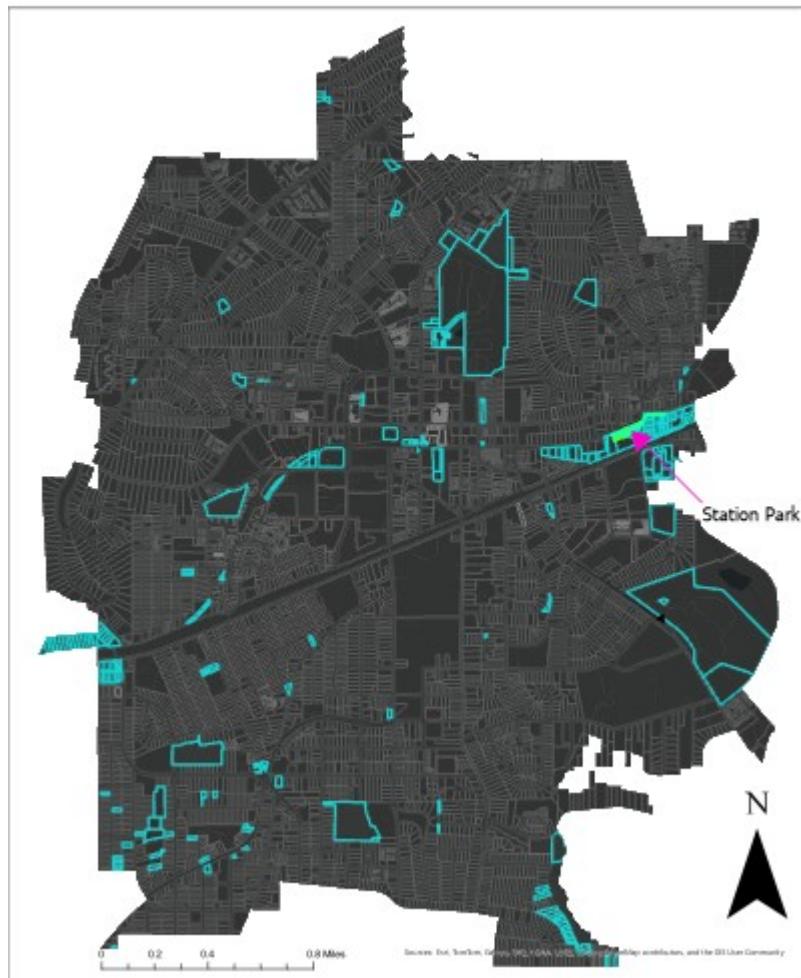


Figure 14

Proximity to Other Parks

Ideally, our new park will be located far enough away from other parks so that it can serve an area that is currently underserved by parks. Ideally, this would be at least 0.25 miles away. As is seen in the following map, parts of Station Park are located within 0.25 miles of another park. The nearest park to Station Park is Sycamore Park, which has some areas located less than 0.25 miles from the proposed location. However, Sycamore Park is small and has no room for expansion due to being surrounded by roads, train tracks, and private property on all sides. It also lacks amenities that other parks in Decatur have, such as playgrounds. Station Park will supplement Sycamore Park by offering new amenities and a larger surface area.

Areas Within 0.25 Miles of an Existing Park

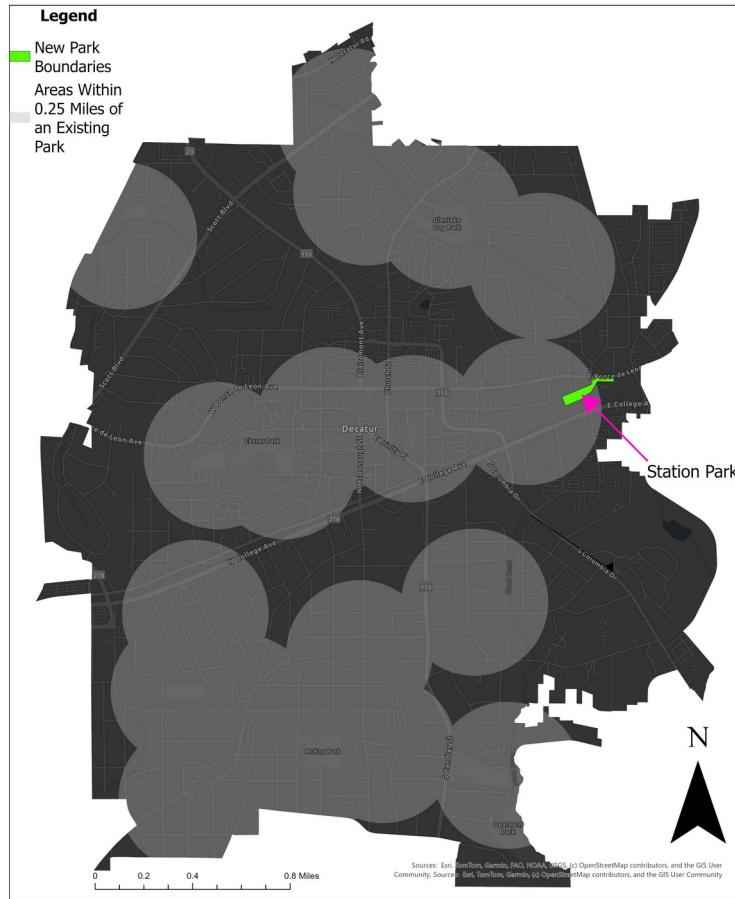


Figure 15

Final Selection

Based on ease of land acquisition, population characteristics, and proximity to other parks, the selected site, while not a perfect match, is the best option for a new park in Decatur. The parking lot can be torn up and replanted with grass, trees, and other vegetation, and any facilities such as benches, a playground, or a garden can be constructed. Commuters will need to be informed of the alternative parking location, but ideally nothing new will need to be constructed to offset any impacts that the park creates.

IV. Conclusion

While the three different scenarios do require separate analyses to be successful, there are some commonalities between them. A common factor between our criteria was population density.

Overall, that was the most impactful of the three scenarios. Based on our research, criteria evaluation, and examinations of Decatur we feel our selected sites fit best.

Sources

City of Decatur, GA. (n.d.). *Open Data Portal*. Retrieved November 16, 2025, from <https://data-decaturga.opendata.arcgis.com/>

Urban Agriculture | US EPA. (2025, March 26). US EPA.
<https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/urban-agriculture>