

District 1 Post A- Mr. Lewis Jones
District 2 Post A- Mrs. Bernadette Seals
District 1 Post B- Mr. C. Garrett Goebel
District 2 Post B- Mrs. Julie Rhame

Mayor, At-Large Commissioner – Jim Baskett
Mayor Pro Tem, District 2 Commissioner – Kecia Cunningham
District 1 Commissioner – Fred Boykin
District 2 Commissioner – Patty Garret
District 1 Commissioner – Scott Drake

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, Decatur City Commissioners and Decatur Board of Education:

On March 21, 2014, we received a letter stating that a hearing would be held on April 7, 2014, regarding a petition to annex our home into Decatur. We, like some of the other affected families, will be out of town due to DeKalb County School System semester break. A request to move the hearing was denied, therefore, we ask that you consider our written comments regarding annexation.

Our home is on E. Parkwood Road, on the boundary line with Decatur in the Parkwood neighborhood that has submitted the petition for annexation of 76 homes. We have lived here for 23 years and are the parents of a junior at Druid Hills High School and a college age daughter. We carefully chose our home and decided that, for us, the Fernbank/Druid Hills schools were the best option for our family. However, as you can tell from our email address - we've always appreciated the excellence of the COD and the CSOD just next store and have felt a kindred spirit with our CSOD neighbors. We have thrived in our chosen school community. My children love their school and the friends that they've had since pre-K. As you as parents have no doubt experienced, the school community becomes an extension of your family. We have been exceptionally involved as parents, serving on the PTSA Boards and Auction committees in lead roles for more than 15 years. Lisa currently serves as the Druid Hills High School PTSA President and has been individually cited by the DeKalb County Board of Education for her meaningful contributions to the schools. We are invested in our school community and are grateful for what this exceptional school has done for our children. Our daughter now thrives at Elon University in North Carolina. In just a year's time, my son will be on his way to college, as well.

We have heard that Decatur has supported this petition since the start and acknowledge that fact. We acknowledge that we are in the minority of those that did not sign (54 homeowners signing and 22 not signing.) Despite those facts, we ask for your consideration in both clarifying the date of annexation and delaying the effective date until to January 2015 to give families time to plan and adjust.

This is important as the timing of Decatur's annexation will significantly impact our son. When we were informed that a petition was to be filed we checked with the DHHS Principal about continuing at the school. She in turn, asked for a determination from the DeKalb County School System. We have now been notified that after the effective date of annexation that there are no provisions for us to remain in the school - even for our son to finish his final year of high school. We hope that you can understand how devastating that would be to our family.

Neither the letter to our home nor the City of Decatur Service Delivery Report (March 24, 2014) state what the effective date of annexation would be. The letter contains very little information and no information on possible effective dates. On page 1 of the Service Delivery Report, it states that the City would be, "creating tax bills for the 2015 first installment payment..." (without clarification as to whether that is the tax year or calendar year.) but on page 5 refers to the first installment payment "due on June 1st" with no year specified.

Without clarification as to the effective date, we would like to respectfully ask that the effective date of annexation be no earlier than January 1, 2015. That timeframe would provide some time for parents of school age children to adjust to this significant change. We ask for your thoughtful consideration of this proposal as both City Schools of Decatur Board member, City of Decatur Commissioners and as parents for the reasons specified below.

Cityhood initiatives failed and the urgency to annex this year has been eliminated.

The urgency that was promoted by the neighbors was the desire to control their own destiny during the current period of Cityhood mania. Their hope was to be well on their way to becoming Decatur before the 2014 Georgia Legislature could pass bills allowing the creation of the City of Briarcliff and/or in case Atlanta attempted to annex the neighborhood. As you are well aware, two things changed since the petition was filed. First, before even getting to the legislature, Briarcliff changed the boundary for reasons that were never publically transparent to remove our neighborhood. Second, no cityhood initiative emerged successfully from the legislative session. That is, *the urgency to annex during calendar year 2014 has been eliminated.*

A delay provides some stability and planning time for children who will have to switch schools.

Since we live so close to the City boundary, we have always followed annexation carefully, but there was never any mention of annexing our neighborhood during any of the public meetings held in 2012 or 2013 by COD. Late in 2013, the City Manager publicly presented a long-term plan for reviewing the boundaries of the City to the City Commissioners. That plan included our neighborhood for the first time, but indicated the plan would extend for several years – providing a reasonable plan with reasonable time frames. In December, when we heard that our neighbors planned to circulate a petition and had received assurances of the 'desirability' of our neighborhood from Decatur, we contacted CSOD Superintendent Edwards. She assured us that she was unaware of any plans to annex our neighborhood. Yet within a couple of months, we received notice from my neighbors that the petition was submitted and that it would be approved by April 2014 and Superintendent Edwards suggested current DCSS families attend registration for the Fall 2014 – all before the public process had even begun. This is incredibly stressful for families with DCSS students who do not choose to transfer. Please consider that when annexations are not unanimous, additional time could be allowed for families to adjust to the change.

The delay allows more planning time for the influx of children to CSOD.

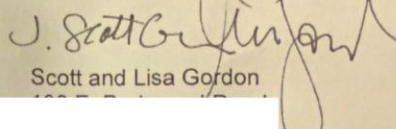
This delay also allows for more time for CSOD to plan for the influx of children, as well. This annexation would be the largest annexation of homes into the school system in years – perhaps decades. As you may imagine, the demographics for any group of 76 homes in the Druid Hills area include a significant number of children – with increasing numbers each year. As CSOD are already at or beyond capacity, delaying the effective date of annexation would allow the CSOD time to plan for the additional children and to get a complete and accurate count of school children for purposes of calculating services and the associated costs.

The delay could be done such that it accommodates all needs.

Just as we are anxious to have our child remain at his school for his final year, there are many other parents in our neighborhood who are anxious to have their children start at CSOD, including all of the young children who may soon be of age for kindergarten and those who are at a good age to transition into CSOD. If you contemplate allowing the delayed effective date, you could include a provision to allow the Parkwood students to pay tuition to attend CSOD beginning in the Fall of 2014. While you have discontinued tuition students, these would be children that you were planning to bring in anyway, so it would be different than allowing open tuition. For those families, it would be akin to paying the taxes that will begin to pay once the annexation occurs. It would, in effect, allow for a more gradual transition on both sides of the equation which might work in the favor of all of the parents (for choosing schools) and for CSOD (less children transitioning in to the schools immediately.)

We have always both loved our DeKalb County neighborhood as well as felt a kindred spirit with our many Decatur friends who helped to make CSOD great over the past 15 years. In fact, in the early days, we went to many of the CSOD auctions to support our neighbors – a smaller crowd back then we can assure you. Those CSOD families have been incredibly supportive of our family during this stressful time and we ask for your support as well. Please consider how you would feel as a parent to have to so quickly move your child out of your chosen school. Please consider this request for the time to make this enormous transition with an effective date of no earlier than January 1, 2015, which would allow one additional year at the school system for which our home is currently districted. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Scott and Lisa Gordon

