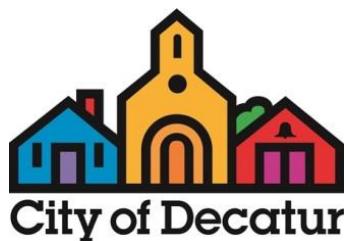




2014 Lifelong Decatur Survey

Final Report of Survey Results

Prepared March 2015



City of Decatur

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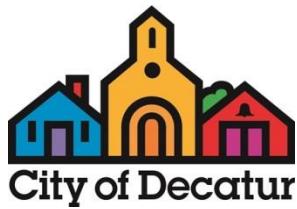


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities should be places where people of all ages and abilities can live as long as they desire. The City of Decatur is in the process of implementing the 2010 Strategic Plan, including numerous tasks related to establishing the City of Decatur as a Lifelong Community (LLC) that encourages people to be residents throughout their lives. The City Commission established a Lifelong Community Advisory Board in July 2013 to provide guidance to the City Commission to help citizens stay in their homes and participate in the community.

One of the components of an LLC is the ability to Age in Place. The City of Decatur values its senior residents and plans to ensure a high quality of life for them. Programs, services and strategies to assist the ability of older adults to continue to live in Decatur would ultimately enhance the lives of succeeding generations, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. It would also encourage these younger cohorts to envision Decatur as a place to live as they age.

A survey of Decatur residents was conducted in November and December of 2014. The survey was designed to obtain information from City of Decatur residents about current and future needs of its citizens. A total of 638 people completed the survey.

The majority of survey respondents indicated that they have a strong desire to continue to live in their homes in the City of Decatur. They also recognized that there are factors that might hinder their ability to stay in their current home. Many respondents utilized opportunities to offer additional comments throughout the survey. Recurring themes in their comments regarding numerous survey questions, especially Question 29 that offered the opportunity for open-ended responses, were related to the desire for more housing options; affordability concerns (including taxes and the ability to maintain a diverse population); and transportation and mobility issues (including walkability and traffic concerns).

Survey answers and additional comments provided by respondents further support the Principles, Goals and Tasks in the 2010 Decatur Strategic Plan. The components of the Strategic Plan were developed as a result of a series of roundtable discussions and community academies. It is currently at the midpoint of implementation. A number of correlations exist between the Lifelong Decatur survey and the tasks in the Strategic Plan's Principle B: Encourage a diverse and engaged community and Principle D: support a safe, healthy, lifelong community. The desires of the 2014 Lifelong Decatur

survey respondents closely dovetail with the tasks that are in the process of being implemented from the 2010 Strategic Plan.

METHODOLOGY

The primary method of survey completion was online. The SurveyMonkey online survey link was publicized through a wide variety of avenues, including the *Decatur Focus* publication, the official newsletter of the City of Decatur; City of Decatur website; neighborhood listserves; City of Decatur blogs; and independent local blogs.

In order to obtain information from residents without internet access, hard copies of the survey were distributed. Hard copy distribution methods included providing copies to the Decatur Housing Authority for distribution to residents; individual requests for hard copies; and hand delivering copies to senior citizens living independently in Decatur, primarily those living in the Oakhurst neighborhood. The senior citizens living independently in the community had previously been identified through other city programs. There were approximately 50 hard copies that were completed.

Several questions in the survey offered opportunities to provide additional comments. Question 29, the last question, was an open-ended question that asked what other thoughts or ideas the Lifelong Community Advisory Board should consider that were not covered in the survey. A total of 156 respondents offered a variety of well thought out opinions.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Survey respondents who provided demographic information were almost equally distributed between the age groups of 30 to 45 (27.5%), 46 to 60 (33.5%) and 61 to 75 (33%). Respondents aged 29 and younger totaled 1% and 5% were 76 and older.

The majority (76%) of those who provided a response indicated they live in single family homes, 9.5% in condominiums, 7% in townhomes, 4% in apartments, and 2% in senior housing. Most of the respondents (67%) live in their own home with a mortgage payment, 23% in their own home with no mortgage, 9% are renters, and 2% live with family or friends and do not pay rent. A total of 21% live alone.

Survey takers were also asked whether their place of worship, place of employment and social activities were inside or outside of the City of Decatur. A total of 25% of

responses to the question of the location of their place of worship identified it as being in the City of Decatur and 26% as outside the City of Decatur. Only 22% identified their place of employment as being inside Decatur and 46% outside. A total of 71% reported the majority of their social activities taking place inside the city and 26% outside of Decatur.

Those who identified their neighborhood predominantly live in Oakhurst (23%), the largest geographic neighborhood, followed by Downtown Decatur, a densely populated area, and Winnona Park.

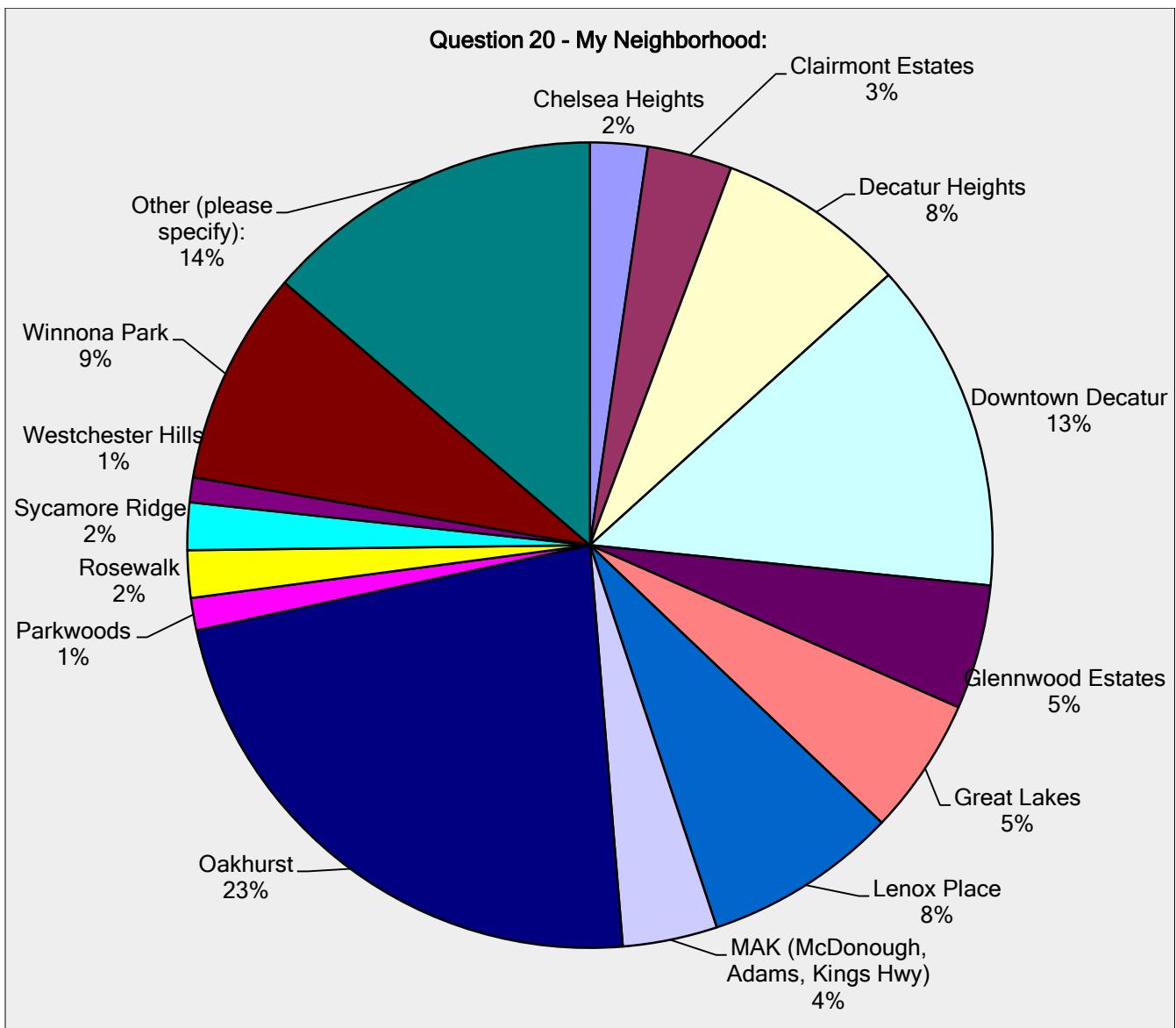


Figure 1

KEY FINDINGS

Desire to Continue Living in Decatur

When asked in Question 1 to consider future living options, 80% of those who took the survey indicated that they planned to continue living in Decatur.

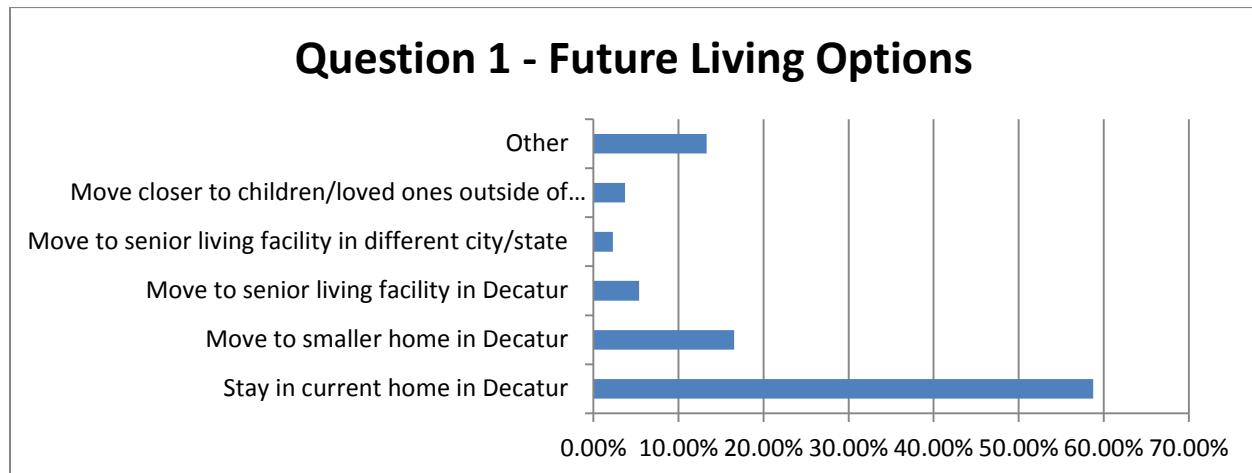


Figure 2

Many of the people who completed the survey recognized that external factors might impact their ability to continue to live in Decatur and in particular their ability to remain in their current home. The most significant future challenges were no longer having the ability to physically maintain their home (48%); no longer financially able to afford their home (47%); and when their health fails (38%).

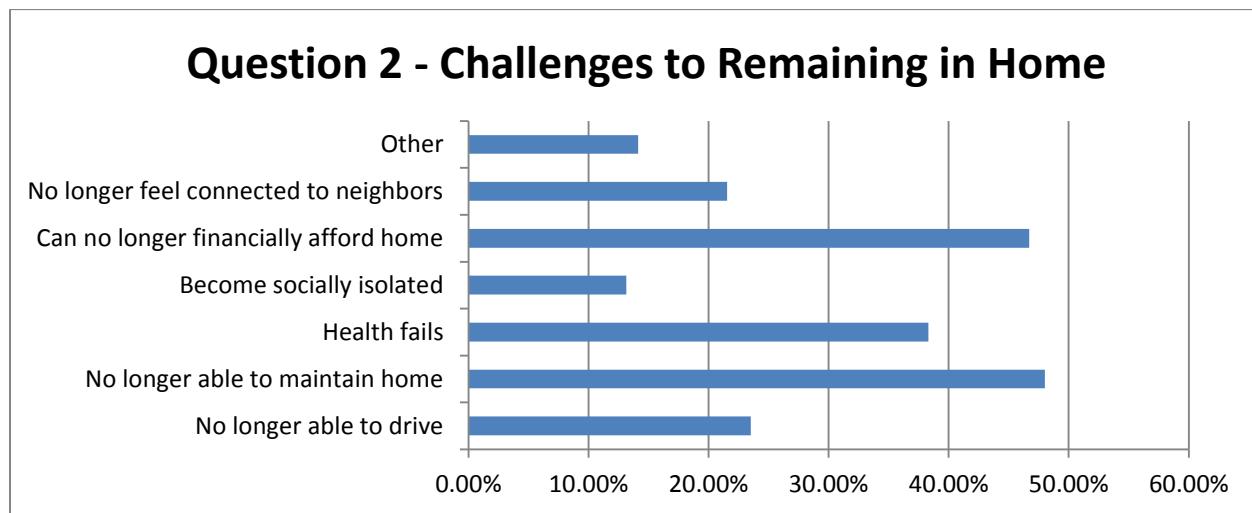


Figure 3

A total of 86 people provided additional comments to Question 2 regarding challenges that would effect their decision to remain in their home. A total of 23% of these comments were related to the impact of taxes on the affordability of living in Decatur. There were 14% who were concerned about mobility issues within their homes. These concerns were predominantly related to apprehension about the ability to use stairs in homes with more than one level.

There are opportunities to build awareness of services available through the city, county, state, nonprofit organizations and other entities. Only 8% considered themselves “very aware” of these services. Decatur does offer a myriad of social, recreational and other activities to enhance the quality of life. However, only 27% answered they were “very aware” of these opportunities.

Desired Programs and Services

There was a definite correlation of responses to Question 7 regarding the ranking of programs, services, amenities and goals considered most important to making Decatur a Lifelong Community and those responses that were included in the 2010 Decatur Strategic Plan. Respondents ranked connected and safe sidewalks, as well as walkability and transportation options as the most desired options. These responses align with the Strategic Plan’s Principle D, Goal 14 to enhance mobility options in Decatur. This was followed by the desire for neighborhood retail and services within walking distance, variety of housing options, high speed internet service, housing built for handicap accessibility or Visitability and senior independent living facilities. Affordable housing is a component of Principle D, Goal 15 to expand the variety of high quality housing to meet the needs of a diverse community.

A total of 67 people offered additional comments regarding ways to make Decatur a Lifelong Community. Affordability was the most frequent response in 25% of the comments. Suggestions to make Decatur more affordable included reducing taxes for senior citizens in order to slow down gentrification, so lower income senior citizens could continue to live in their homes. A wider variety of housing options was desired by 18% of those offering comments, including more affordable housing choices, higher density single-family homes, modification of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) restrictions, and the addition of small cluster cottages with shared community space. There was also a desire for additional traffic calming measures to slow down or decrease vehicle traffic and congestion. Many people expressed interest in the City continuing to utilize bike safety strategies. These recommendations included the addition of more bike lanes on “bikeable” streets.

Question 7: Most important programs, services? Rank by Rating Average from High to Low:						
Answer Options	1 - Not Needed	2 - Somewhat needed	3 - Important	4 - Absolutely Essential	Rating Average	Response Count
Connected and safe sidewalks	7	19	116	398	3.68	540
Walkability	9	26	130	376	3.61	541
Transportation options	11	33	126	368	3.58	538
Neighborhood retail & services within walking distance	13	36	164	326	3.49	539
Variety of housing options	15	40	170	308	3.45	533
High speed internet	17	65	176	279	3.34	537
Housing built for handicap accessibility or Visitability	20	68	231	220	3.21	539
Senior Independent Living facilities	18	77	223	221	3.20	539
Skilled Nursing Care	26	88	240	182	3.08	536
Social group activities	12	97	264	155	3.06	528
Multi-generational programs & opportunities	21	104	236	171	3.05	532
Walk In Medical Clinics	16	97	262	150	3.04	525
After School Program	65	67	177	213	3.03	522
Assisted Living facilities	33	92	241	164	3.01	530
Meals on Wheels	27	116	240	152	2.97	535
Volunteer programs (like MLK Service Project)	26	123	252	137	2.93	538
Adult Respite Care in the home	39	109	260	122	2.88	530
Caregiver support groups	36	134	251	114	2.83	535
Community Gardens	35	156	244	102	2.77	537
Topical education classes and groups	27	163	248	89	2.76	527
Regular check in phone calls/phone buddy system	39	169	235	93	2.71	536
Adult Day Care	61	162	216	93	2.64	532
Trips for senior adults	47	207	211	72	2.57	537

Figure 4

Question 10 had responses from 117 people who indicated that they provided unpaid assistance to an adult living in the City of Decatur. This assistance predominantly consisted of transportation to appointments, grocery store, pharmacy and other shopping; housekeeping and minor home repairs; and meal preparation, medication reminders, phone calls and visits, and help with managing personal finances.

One unexpected result of this question was the discovery that there are a number of parents of children with developmental disabilities who live in the City of Decatur. Several of these parents contacted the Lifelong Community Coordinator to express concern that their issues might not be properly reflected in the survey. They were advised to add comments regarding concerns related to their children. One of their most critical issues was whether their children would be able to continue to live in Decatur when they reached adulthood, without living in their parents' homes. They desired housing models that would allow their adult children to live more independently in the City of Decatur.

Open-Ended Responses – Other Thoughts and Ideas Not Covered

There were 156 responses to Question 29, which requested other thoughts or ideas the Lifelong Community Advisory Board should consider that were not covered in the survey. These responses predominantly reflected the following themes:

- Address concerns that Decatur is becoming unaffordable for many fixed income residents and retirees due to high taxes, as well as work to keep Decatur an affordable and diverse City for all income levels and to retain its history.
- Support intellectual, social, cultural, recreational, arts, fitness programs and activities for older adults.
- Desire for more affordable, but comfortable, “downsize housing.”
- Make Decatur more “elder & childless friendly” – a truly multi-generational community.
- Continue to improve safety of walkers and bikers in Decatur, including finding ways to slow down or decrease vehicle traffic and congestion in the City to increase safety in downtown areas and neighborhood streets.
- Develop neighborhood-based support groups/programs, such as the senior village concept, and create a Lifelong Community resource center or ombudsman.
- Include needs of people with developmental disabilities as part of Lifelong Community planning.
- Consider creating more green spaces, parks and public meeting places, as a way to continue Decatur's smart growth planning record.
- Increase availability of transportation options within the City.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Lifelong Community Advisory Board plans to use the survey results in conjunction with the 2010 Decatur Strategic Plan to research innovative solutions and best practices in other communities. Recommendations will then be made to the City Commission regarding this research. The survey results will provide opportunities to make recommendations to and to work with a variety of City of Decatur departments to implement changes. The board will also work to educate residents and other stakeholders.

Survey answers and additional comments provided by respondents fell in line with many of the Goals and Tasks in the 2010 Strategic Plan, which are currently at the midpoint of implementation. This is particularly evident in Principle B: encourage a diverse and engaged community. The charge of Goal 5 in Principle B is to maintain and encourage diversity of race, ethnicity, income, culture, age, family type, and other kinds of diversity. This includes Task 5A related to promoting Decatur as a Lifelong Community that supports the ability for older residents to age in place. Task 5E further requires that support programs should be offered to assist low-income elderly residents and other residents to stay in the community. The addition of Visitability standards (zero step entry, wider doorways, and bathroom on the main floor) are the core components of Task 5F, which encourages housing options for current and future residents, including both senior citizens and people with disabilities. As the Baby Boom generation is on a trajectory to become the largest elderly generation in history, the availability of appropriate housing options is even more compelling.

Goal 7 urges the City of Decatur to support, expand and develop programs and opportunities that promote a stronger sense of community. Task 7A of this Goal calls for continued support of the Martin Luther King Jr. Service Project that provides home repairs and yard work for low income senior citizens to assist them with remaining in their homes and A Season of Giving/Christmas Decatur, a program that provides holiday gifts for low income children and senior citizens. Both of these programs align with the ability of our low income and elderly residents to continue to live in Decatur.

Principle D requires that the City support a safe, healthy, lifelong community. Goal 14 encourages enhancing mobility options within and to Decatur. The foundation of Goal 15 is the expansion of the variety of high quality housing options to meet the needs of a diverse community. This goal includes Task 15B, which allows for smaller homes and other creative housing options that provide affordable housing opportunities. Housing options are also included in Principle A, which addresses managing growth while

retaining character. Task 3B encourages mixed-use development, senior housing and other housing options. In addition, the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) that was recently approved by the City Commission has updated and added a number of housing-related components that fit in with both the Strategic Plan and the Lifelong Decatur survey. In particular, the ability to build cottage court homes will provide more housing options for those who desire smaller homes.

The Lifelong Community (LLC) Advisory Board recently developed its own strategic plan utilizing the Lifelong Decatur survey results. The Lifelong Decatur goals are:

1. Investigate new and existing transportation/mobility options. Identify stakeholders, including city staff, boards and committees, to creatively address these needs.
2. Investigate affordable housing options and a variety of housing types for all ages, economic status and abilities. Look at existing housing options and incentives, best practices, and ways to encourage different types of property development.
3. Investigate taxation and its relationship to affordability. Educate the community about exemptions and the complexity of taxation, while incorporating information regarding the impact of exemptions on schools.
4. Develop a strategy around these goals to communicate the Lifelong Community perspective throughout the city, including with city staff and boards, especially as programs, projects and issues arise or are modified.

The LLC Advisory Board has formed new committees to research these goals, make recommendations to the City Commission, and collaborate with city departments, boards and commissions, and other stakeholders to address residents' preferences. The transportation and mobility committee will investigate best practices and creative solutions in other cities. The LLC Advisory Board is sharing information with the Active Living department and Active Living Advisory Board, especially that board's Pedestrian Committee. Since Active Living has already taken the lead on walkability and other mobility issues, the LLC Advisory Board will assist with promoting the relationship between safe sidewalks and walkability and a Lifelong Community.

The LLC Advisory Board has formed a second committee to work on exploring housing options, including Visitability standards. The third committee is the taxation committee. An important component of this committee is education. The taxation committee will utilize the LLC Third Thursday talks and other avenues to provide information to homeowners regarding the various homestead exemptions currently in place, especially the exemptions tied to age and income. They will work with the school system to provide information regarding the importance of taxes to fund the school system and

how City Schools of Decatur's robust system benefits everyone in the community. Finally, the board recognizes the necessity of developing a communication strategy to convey the LLC concept and its importance to all life stages, not only for senior citizens. It is also important to educate the city staff and boards regarding the LLC mindset and the importance of considering how new and revised programs are related to a Lifelong Decatur.

APPENDIX A: Resources

City of Decatur 2010 Strategic Plan

<http://www.decaturga.com/index.aspx?page=590>

Decatur Lifelong Community Advisory Board

<http://www.decaturga.com/index.aspx?page=702>

City of Decatur Unified Development Ordinance

<http://www.decaturga.com/index.aspx?page=734>