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SUMMARY

- 4 From the Editor: Some interesting findings from our supporter survey
- 6 PHOTOS: Into the great wide open
- 9 ACLU declines to act as deputy registrars for DeKalb Co Elections Board
- 10 PHOTOS: Trump, Biden voters hold competing rallies near DeKalb Farmers Market
- 12 Reopening plans prove premature for local school districts
- 14 Happy dance lands employee and her new boss spot on 'Ellen' show
- 15 Fulton County closes two schools within days of returning to full-time in-person learning
- 16 Decatur teachers concerned about return to classrooms consider options
- 18 Dear Decaturish: Letters to the Editor
- 19 George on Georgia: So, apparently, I'm a racist
- 21 Tucker business owner receives CARES Act funds to help DeKalb students cope with emotions
- 22 Kirkwood author finds success with Spanish-language kids' books
- 23 Avondale Estates City Commission approves speed cameras
- 24 News in Brief
- 25 Small Business Spotlights
- 27 Kirkwood businesses power through pandemic

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On the cover: An empty local playground at Talley Street Elementary. Photo by Dean Hesse.





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LITTLE 5 POINTS • BUCKHEAD • EAST COBB

Some interesting findings from our supporter survey



Dan Whisenhunt
Editor & Publisher

Dear valued Decaturish supporters,

Welcome to our third Decaturish.com e-edition, a product created exclusively for you, the people who

make monthly or yearly contributions to support local news in and around Decatur, GA. It's been quite a month, as you'll see when you flip through this month's issue.

While I would normally use this space to brag on our writers or tell you meaningless anecdotes about my tomato garden, I have something more interesting than that on my mind.

Recently 482 of you took time to respond to our second Decaturish.com supporter survey. This survey lets us know what we are doing right and places where we can improve.

I'm happy to report that most of you are generally satisfied with what we are doing. But I've never been someone to rest on my laurels. Our goal is always to produce quality local journalism that can stand shoulder to shoulder with any community newspaper in the country.

Here are the most notable findings from our recent survey:

- **Most of our supporters are female.** About 66 percent, according to the survey. That's a good thing for Decaturish long term. As Forbes notes, "Women are the world's most powerful consumers, and their impact on the economy is growing every year."
- **Most of our supporters are white.** Inclusion matters to me. We have a predominantly white supporter base, accounting for 91.5 percent of our supporters. About 2.7 percent of our supporters are Black, 1.9 percent are Hispanic, 1.5 percent are Asian American, and 2.5 percent are multi-racial. I will note that this is a slight increase from our last survey, which found that about 95 percent of our supporters are white. While we value all our supporters, I do want our readers of color to know that Decaturish strives to be inclusive in our coverage. This year we did update our editorial and ethics policies to better serve all members of our community. I know there's still room for improvement, and I welcome additional feedback from our supporters of color on how we can better serve you.
- **The majority of our supporters – 84 percent – are 35 or older.**
- **Our supporters are educated.** Ninety-two percent of you have a bachelor's degree or higher. Almost 19 percent of you have a PhD and 34 percent of our supporters have a master's degree.
- **The majority of our supporters – more than 50 percent – live in the**

city of Decatur. About 15 percent live in the Medlock Park / North Decatur community, 11.6 percent live in metro Atlanta, 1 percent live in Stone Mountain, 4 percent live in Tucker, 2.1 percent live in Clarkston, 2.5 percent live in Druid Hills, and 5.8 percent live in Avondale Estates. One statistic of note: 1.2 percent of our supporters live outside of metro Atlanta and 1.2 percent live outside of Georgia. To put it another way, 2.4 percent of our paying supporters live in places we don't cover.

- **Ninety-one percent of our supporters own their home.**
- **Sixty percent of our supporters don't have anyone under the age of 18 living at home.** In find this one particularly interesting given that more than 50 percent of our supporters live in Decatur.
- **Seventy-two percent of our supporters own or foster pets.**
- **Things that interest our supporters include travel, reading, gardening, sports, arts and music, health and fitness, technology and video games.**
- **Almost 50 percent of our supporters dine out at a local restaurant at least once a week.** The survey found that 23 percent of our supporters eat out three times a week or more.
- **We asked about job losses related to COVID-19. "Has your household been affected by a full-time job loss due to / associated with COVID-19?" Eighty-eight percent of supporters who responded answered "no" while 12 percent answered "yes."**
- **Most people who responded to the survey are new supporters.** According to the survey, 44 percent of our supporters have been with us for less than one year, while 33 percent have been with us for one to two years.

We are still mulling over the data, but those are the pieces of information that jumped out at me. The results of our survey have been given to our freelance writers, too. They're crafting pitches based on the responses you provided.

I wanted to thank all of you who took time out of your day to help us improve our coverage. The feedback you provided will be put to good use. If you have any additional feedback that didn't make it into the survey, you can contact me any time at editor@decaturish.com.

I hope you will enjoy this month's edition. We wrote it just for you.

And if you haven't voted yet, please vote on Nov. 3.

— Dano

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Into the great wide open

PHOTOS BY DEAN HESSE

DeKalb County, GA — The health benefits of a walk in the woods are well documented. It can lower blood pressure and re-energize and refocus our minds. With Halloween events canceled, a visit to Arabia Mountain with its otherworldly landscape and Constitution Lakes Park with its Doll's Head Trail may be especially timely to help lift your spirits.

Arabia Mountain is a former granite quarry on the far southeast corner of DeKalb County in the city of Stonecrest. It is part of the protected 2,500-acre Davison-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve and in addition to its moon-scape like topography, it is home to many rare and endangered plants.

Doll's Head Trail is located in DeKalb County's 200-acre Constitu-

tion Lakes Park at 1305 South River Industrial Blvd. S.E., Atlanta, just off Moreland Avenue. Local carpenter Joel Slaton created the folk-art inspired installation with objects found in the park, including many doll parts.

At 200-acres, Constitution Lakes Park also features scenic wetlands ideal for bird watching and walks on paved and unpaved trails. Both parks are free and open dawn to dusk. The two main lots for parking at Arabia Mountain are the AWARE lot at 4158 Klondike Road and the Nature Center lot at 3787 Klondike Road. (Note: they tend to fill up so visit the website for alternatives.)

[Click here](#) for more information about Doll's Head Trail and visit www.arabiaalliance.org for more on Arabia Mountain.

For more photos from this set, visit decaturish.com.



ABOVE, TOP: Martini Salien reads a book and Porsha Stallings relaxes during their first visit to Arabia Mountain.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Timmesha Burgess sits along the Mountain Top Trail at Arabia Mountain. Burgess said being there made her feel unrestricted. BOTTOM LEFT: Large granite outcropping along a trail at Arabia Mountain. BOTTOM RIGHT: Fine art photographer Steve Director passes a dinosaur head on Superman's body along the Doll's Head Trail after photographing wildlife at Constitution Lakes Park.





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ACLU declines to act as deputy registrars for DeKalb County Elections Board

By Dan Whisenhunt

DeKalb County, Ga. — The ACLU has confirmed to Decaturish that it will no longer provide assistance to the DeKalb County Elections Board for the Nov. 3 election.

The DeKalb County's elections board voted 3-2 to accept additional help on Election Day, Nov. 3, allowing in-person voters to cancel their absentee ballots at the polls. Notably, the board's Chair, Sam Tillman, voted against the plan.

Volunteers, attorneys recruited by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), offered to serve as deputy registrars at each polling place to ensure the proper cancellation of absentee ballots.

Christopher Bruce, Political Director with the ACLU of Georgia, said that's no longer happening.

"We never had an agreement with them and they were being difficult, so we said we're not doing anything regarding our deputy registrars program," Bruce said.

The DeKalb Elections Board did not return messages seeking comment.

The difficulties working with the Elections Board have been an ongoing complaint in the run-up to the Nov. 3 elections. Volunteers and other organizations have said they have not been able to provide the board with the assistance it needs to conduct a successful election.

Indivisible GA 04, a voter advocacy group, has offered to relieve staff by bringing food and help with office tasks. Erica Hamilton, director of voter registration and elections for DeKalb County, said no. Problems with the Elections Board also have frustrated DeKalb County Commissioners. Tillman has said the county has denied the board's requests for extra help, but county commissioners say they have opened the county's checkbook to provide the Elections Board with any assistance they require.

The dysfunction at the DeKalb Elections board could have national implications. As Decaturish columnist George Chidi noted yesterday, DeKalb County trends heavily Democratic and thousands of votes here could determine the outcome of U.S. Senate races in Georgia and, consequently, control of the U.S. Senate.

Lane Flynn with the county GOP said that the office hasn't started reviewing absentee ballots ahead of time, even though the secretary of state's office cleared them to start on the 19th. Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said volunteers could begin reviewing ballots on Oct. 19, but DeKalb County began allowing reviews on Oct. 26.

The Vote Review Panel is staffed equally by Republican and Democrat volunteers who review absentee ballots that cannot be read by scanners.

Flynn blames a lack of transparency and

Haven't voted yet? Nov. 3 is election day. Polls will open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

To look up your polling place visit: <https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov/MVP/mvp.do>

You can also use this website to check the status of your absentee ballot.

You have to be 18 to vote.

People who wish to vote early and in person will need to bring one of the following forms of identification, according to the Georgia Secretary of State's office:

- Any valid state or federal government-issued photo ID, including a free ID Card issued by your county registrar's office or the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS)
- A Georgia Driver's License, even if expired
- Valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency, or entity of the U.S. Government, Georgia, or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state
- Valid U.S. passport ID
- Valid U.S. military photo ID
- Valid tribal photo ID

The polls offer audio ballots for voters who are blind or have low vision, and booths for voters in wheelchairs. If you need help with your ballot, you can ask a family member or friend to come with you to the polls and fill the ballot in with your choices.

Please vote on Nov. 3.

communication from the elections office for volunteers being unable to review votes. He said volunteers were sent home early, and removed from their responsibilities.

"We received no communication from the elections office about these changes or the reason for them," Flynn said. "As of a week before Election Day, it is unknown to me whether or how many absentee ballots have been scanned, what if any process is in place for handling ballots that cannot be read by the scanners, who is processing any such ballots, or whether or when our volunteers will be permitted to review any such votes as required by law. As a result, I cannot say with any degree of confidence whether absentee ballot counting can be finished by Nov. 13, also as

required by law."

Hamilton said in her report at the Oct. 28 meeting, "As of last night the team let me know they had scanned 53,000 votes into the system."

Flynn also called into question the non-partisan members of the Vote Review Panel. DeKalb elections board Vice Chair Baoky Vu previously said the reason non-partisan volunteers are on the panel is due to a law about state senate elections.

John Jackson with the DeKalb County Democrats has called on Hamilton and Tillman to resign, warning that the county is headed toward a disaster on Nov. 3.

Writer Logan C. Ritchie contributed to this story.



PHOTOS BY DEAN HESSE

TRUMP, BIDEN VOTERS HOLD COMPETING RALLIES NEAR DEKALB FARMERS MARKET

By Zoe Seiler, contributor

Scottdale, Ga. – Several people gathered on Sunday, Oct. 4, to raise money for President Trump's medical bills following his COVID-19 diagnosis and hospitalization.

Supporters of former vice president Joe Biden quickly gathered across the street to hold a rally of their own. The small,

civil demonstrations occurred about a month before the Nov. 3 general election.

Organizers of the pro-Trump rally later clarified that raising money for the medical bills was a joke and that the money would actually be donated to the Trump re-election campaign.

For more of this story and more photos, visit [decaturish.com](#).



OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: Standard Electric Recorders Co. owner Damon Moon, on left, formed a drum line on E. Ponce de Leon Avenue after he said the volume of the music coming from the Trump event across the street left him unable to record in his studio. He was joined by passers-by who brought Biden-Harris and Black Lives Matter signs. TOP RIGHT: Joe Gargiulo organized the event at a property he owns on E. Ponce de Leon Avenue in Scottdale to show support and raise funds for President Donald Trump. BOTTOM LEFT: Tonia Gargiulo on left and Stephanie Gargiulo give a thumbs up beside a life-size Donald Trump cardboard stand-up during the event. BOTTOM RIGHT: DeKalb County Police Officers arrive at the request of the owner of Toyota Forklifts to disperse Biden-Harris supporters who were demonstrating in front of his property on E. Ponce de Leon Avenue.

THIS PAGE, TOP RIGHT: DeKalb County Police arrive as Sydney Dward holds a sign reading "Honk if You Hate Fascists" across the street from the Trump event on E. Ponce de Leon Avenue. RIGHT: Lissa Daris drums across from the Trump event in Scottdale. BOTTOM: Merchandise was available for purchase at the event in Scottdale to raise money and show support for President Donald Trump.



REOPENING PLANS PROVE PREMATURE FOR LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

By Sara Amis, contributor

Atlanta, Ga. – The beginning of October saw local school districts tentatively plan to reopen, citing a downward trend in the spread of COVID-19.

Schools have been closed since March due to the pandemic.

The school districts relied on a specific metric to announce reopening plans: the number of coronavirus cases per 100,000 people for the previous two weeks. Anything less than 100 was deemed a green light to begin the discussion of bringing students back to in-person learning.

On Oct. 6, DeKalb County had 97 cases per 100,000 people. Fulton County had 98 cases per 100,000 people on Oct. 1.

Those low numbers didn't last long. Fulton County forged ahead with its plan to return to full person learning, 5 days a week, on Oct. 14.

On Oct. 13, a day before Fulton County Schools reopened for in-person learning five days a week, the cases had increased to 132 per 100,000 people, according to the state Department of Public Health.

Fulton's reopening didn't last a full week without two school closures. As of Oct. 25, Fulton County Schools had 70 positive test results among students and staff. The school district reports that 724 students and staff have had to quarantine themselves due to the positive cases.

DeKalb County Schools, City Schools of Decatur and Atlanta Public Schools decided against reopening due to the increase in COVID-19 cases, with City Schools of Decatur and Atlanta Public Schools delaying in-person learning until January. DeKalb County Schools has simply delayed reopening but has not said when schools might conceivably reopen.

As of Oct. 26, there were 141 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in DeKalb County over the previous two weeks. In Fulton County, it was 150 cases per 100,000 people.

Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta Public Schools on Oct. 16 decided to delay in-person learning until January, according to Atlanta INtown.

According to Atlanta INtown, "The decision, announced Oct. 16 by Superintendent Dr. Lisa Herring, came after more 3,800 concerned parents, teachers and staff members signed a letter under the name 'We Demand Safety APS.'"

In a press release, the school district cited "health data that is trending unfavorably" as a reason for its decision to delay reopening classrooms for now.

"The decision to further delay the in-person opening of our schools was difficult," Superintendent Lisa Herring said. "But after



consulting with our teachers, staff, students, families, and public health officials, I decided this is the right approach at this time."

The district will provide "monthly health data checkpoints" for the School Board and the public. The next update is due on Nov. 2.

"APS will continue to look forward to a phased approach for a return to face-to-face teaching and learning that will remain rooted in COVID-19 health data for the community," the press release from the school district says.

DeKalb County Schools

Superintendent Cheryl Watson-Harris told the DeKalb Board of Education on Oct. 20 that community spread of COVID-19 has not dropped low enough to justify a return to in-person learning.

"The safety of students and staff is our number one priority, and we will not be moving forward with a return to face-to-face until the data suggests that we are safe to do so," said Watson-Harris.

Some board members expressed concern about adequate preparations for a return to the classroom even after COVID-19 case numbers have dropped.

"We've got to protect people, because if we don't have people here to teach, and we don't have children to come, we won't have schools at all," said School Board member Joyce Morley.

Board member Stan Jester asked how the superintendent planned to fill the need if there were not enough teachers willing to return to the classroom. Watson-Harris said that her office would make that determination based on both the staff survey and the intent to return forms that parents are filling out, depending on the difference if any.

"Is our current plan to just keep going on and on using the current formula, even if it

takes years?" asked Jester.

"This is an ever-changing situation. I would hope and pray that it isn't something that is going to go into years or even the winter months, but we would have to explore the recommendations and guidance of the health department, the CDC, and our stakeholders at that time. I don't anticipate us going into years with our current plan," said Watson-Harris.

City Schools of Decatur

During the Oct. 13 Decatur School Board meeting, district officials announced that students would not return to classrooms until Jan. 5 at the earliest.

The school district backed away from a controversial plan that would've seen staff return to the building on Oct. 19, with students gradually returning after that.

The plan faced mounting criticism from teachers and parents. There were three public protests against the plan. The school district's birth to three-year old students returned on Oct. 12 and the adapted curriculum special education program returned on Oct. 19.

Superintendent David Dude acknowledged that both the plan to re-open the schools and the decision to stay closed for now faced vocal opposition.

"We are divided in a way that I've not seen with other challenges we've had to face," Dude said.

Dude criticized the lack of guidance and coordinated response from state and national governments.

"The lack of leadership from the highest levels of our government institutions have caused chaos, and left local leaders scrambling to build an airplane while flying it, only to find out months later that we didn't need an airplane, we needed a submarine, or maybe a space ship. We're still not sure," said Dude.

Beacon Hill, Decatur students host rally to remove cannon from Decatur Square

By Zoe Seiler, contributor

Decatur, Ga. – The Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights hosted an event on Sunday, Oct. 11, to celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day and protest for the removal of a cannon located in front of the old DeKalb County courthouse on the Decatur Square.

Some states have started recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day to celebrate Native American culture and history. It replaces recognition of Columbus Day, which many say "glorifies an exploration that led to the genocide of native peoples and paved the way for slavery," according to USA Today.

The local event was primarily planned by a group of Decatur High School seniors who are working with Beacon Hill's Confederate monument removal committee. About 100 people gathered to hear stories of indigenous people from artists of color.

"We're here to tell stories from a different perspective, from the perspective of artists of color and the indigenous community itself to make sure that the perspectives of the people of Decatur are fully heard," Decatur High School senior Koan Roy-Meighoo told Decaturish.

Those in attendance listened to song, spoken word and storytelling, which included guest speaker John Winterhawk, a member of the Muscogee-Creek Nation.

The cannon was placed in Decatur in 1906 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and memorializes the removal of indigenous peoples following the Creek Indian War of 1836. The war was a consequence of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which President Andrew Jackson strongly supported, according to a report from the National Park Service.

In 1821, Georgia forced the sale of half of the remaining Creek land, including the land that is now the city of Decatur, which was taken by white settlers in a land lottery, LaDoris Bias-Davis said during the event.

"For these 114 years, it has propagated a hateful, one-sided and white supremacist version of history. Despite it doing this for so long we still face push-back for prominent figures in Decatur and organizations when we try to remove it," he said.

"Today we gather because we must realize that this issue cannot be pushed to the side. We must realize that this cannon does not solely affect indigenous people and we must realize that its removal is a universal human rights issue," Roy-Meighoo added.

Winterhawk recounted that this type of cannon was used by the soldiers on the Trail of Tears, the infamous forced relocation of Native Americans in the Southeast during the 1830s that resulted in thousands of deaths.

"The cannons came after us and followed us all the way out there," Winterhawk said. "The cannon that you see on the Square today was along those trails with us. They would come as a warning sign not to leave, not to turn back, to keep going."

Winterhawk also advocated for the removal of the cannon from the Decatur Square.

"I wanted to ask if the government of the city of Decatur would put away the cannons, put them in storage and take away the weapons of war and make peace with us again and live a peaceful life. Peace is the only thing that will support living because we can't live without peace," he said.

Responsibility for removing the cannon would fall to the DeKalb County government.

A Confederate monument, that was placed in Decatur in 1908, was removed from the Decatur Square on June 18; however, the cannon was not ordered to be removed at that time.

Superior Court Judge Clarence Seeliger ruling addressed the Confederate monument as city officials claimed it had become "a flashpoint, a danger to the community, and a burden on the city of Decatur," Decaturish previously reported.



Decatur Resident Steve Parker attends the rally on Oct. 11, and holds a sign in support of removing the cannon from the Decatur Square. Photo by Zoe Seiler.

"I think with the significance of the obelisk coming down, which was basically a marker glorifying slavery and the Civil War, I thought well there's something right next to it that also signifies hate but especially for another group of people," Genesis Reddicks, a senior at Decatur High School, told Decaturish. "It's so important to recognize all of the terrible things that have occurred to all groups of people that are often overlooked. We couldn't just take down one monument of hate. We have to take down all of them."

Julian Fortuna, Decatur High School senior, also said that events locally, including among the student body, and nationally have highlighted a need for community education.

Fonta High, co-chair of the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights, said that community education is something the Confederate monument removal committee is working on. She added that there's so much work to be done around people's understanding of indigenous issues.

Beacon Hill is at the forefront of the effort to take down the cannon, as it was for the removal of the Confederate monument. The group is sponsoring a petition to request that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners pass a resolution to remove the cannon.

The petition currently has 415 signatures out of a goal of 500.

"We have created a petition to reflect the demands of Decatur and to advocate for the removal of this cannon, accept that we place the cannon into the hands of local Muscogee leaders, and advocate for the change that we need to see in our community," Fortuna said.

Happy dance lands employee and her new boss spot on 'Ellen' show

BY DAN WHISENHUNT



In this photo released by Warner Bros., a taping of "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" is seen at the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank, Calif. (Photo by Michael Rozman/Warner Bros.)

Greater Decatur, Ga. — Kallayah Jones's moment of pure joy after nailing a job interview became a viral sensation and landed her a different kind of interview, seated across from Ellen DeGeneres.

Jones and her new boss, Dakara Spence, appeared on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" on Oct. 12. According to "People" magazine, Jones struggled with homelessness for two years prior to interviewing for a job at The Spot Sports Bar and Grill in greater Decatur.

Jones said prior to the job interview, she had gone through "a very hard time."

"I didn't have any clothes," she told Ellen. "... I didn't have any sneakers or any flats or anything like that, so I came in slippers, and I was hoping and praying that she did not turn me away, because I needed this job. Like, I needed it. And when she didn't turn me away, she said, 'Come on, let's go do the interview.' I looked at her. I was like for real? Like are you serious? And she was like, 'Yeah, come on.'"

Spence saw the dance on a security camera

video when Jones left the interview and stood in the parking lot. The video, posted on TikTok, has racked up millions of views and has been featured in several news articles.

"I'm not here to judge nobody," Spence told ellen. "My grandmother and my mother always said never judge nobody, because you never know what they're going through."

If there's a lesson to be gleaned from the video, it's an old one: don't give up.

"Just because you're going through a hard time, doesn't mean that you can give up," Jones said. "You can still dance your way through life and still act like nobody's watching, and I promise you somebody is going to watch you and you'll be OK."

The segment ended with the show's sponsor, Shutterfly, giving Jones and Spence a check for \$15,000 to help them fulfill their dreams of returning to school to further their educations.

To view the segment from "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," [check out this story online here](#).

DECATUR AIMS TO ESTABLISH IMPACT FEE PROGRAM

By Alex Brown

Decatur, Ga. — The city of Decatur wants to use impact fees to offset the impact of new developments on the city's infrastructure.

On Monday, Oct. 5, the Decatur City Commission discussed an upcoming community input session about creating the impact fee program.

The rationale behind impact fees is that new developments mean new residents, which increases the local burden on services like fire,

transportation, recreation, and police. Impact fees would compensate the city for the cost of providing more services.

According to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the Georgia Development Impact Fee Act became law in 1990.

One of the goals of the Impact Fee Act is to, "Promote orderly growth and development by establishing uniform standards by which municipalities and counties may require that new

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growth and development pay a proportionate share of the cost of new public facilities needed to serve new growth and development."

The Decatur impact fee study is planned to take place over the next six to eight months.

The general public will be invited to virtually attend two state-mandated public hearings held by the City Commission, as well as all four advisory committee meetings. For more information, [read the full story here](#).

FULTON COUNTY CLOSES TWO SCHOOLS WITHIN DAYS OF RETURNING TO FULL-TIME IN-PERSON

By Dan Whisenhunt

Fulton County, Ga. — As DeKalb County and city of Decatur schools have grappled with whether to allow students to return to in-person instruction, parents in favor of a return have pointed to Fulton County Schools.

If Fulton County Schools can re-open for in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the parents ask, why can't we?

But recent developments within Fulton County show that reopening schools for in-person learning can be a disruptive experience, too. Students returned to full in-person instruction, five days a week, on Oct. 14, allowing families to choose whether to return or learn virtually. The reopening didn't last a full week without two school closures.

The district closed Banneker High School in College Park two days after reopening after six cases were reported at the school, according to WSB-TV. Students there resumed virtual learning. On Monday, Fulton County Schools announced the closure of Cambridge High School in Milton after three or more cases were detected there, the Atlanta Journal Constitution reported.

A spokesperson for the district, Brian Noyes, told the AJC that the cases were expected with the reopening.

"We fully acknowledge there are going to be cases from time-to-time that will require us to act," Noyes told the AJC.

Decaturish spoke with two Fulton County Board of Education members regarding the district's decision to reopen for in-person learning.

Board member Katie Reeves said there were passionate disagreements about whether reopening for in-person learning was a good idea. Ultimately, she said, the board stuck with its plan to return to school once two-week average of COVID-19 cases fell below 100 per 100,000 people. DeKalb County and City Schools of Decatur were using a similar metric, but backed off of re-opening plans when the cases per 100,000 people increased again. In Fulton County, there are now 140 cases per 100,000 people. On Oct. 1, that number was 98 cases per 100,000 people. On Oct. 13, a day before Fulton County Schools reopened for in-person learning five days a week, the cases had increased to 132 per 100,000 people, according to the state Department of Public Health.

When asked if the school district would reconsider its plans if cases continued increasing, Reeves said the school's closing plans, called a "matrix" by the district, is not the same thing as its reopening plans.

"The closing matrix is not the opening matrix in reverse," she said.

According to Fulton County's plan, the closures start at the school level first and that only occurs when three or more students or staff members are infected. If the spread is high enough, the district would consider zone-wide or district-wide closures.

So what's different about Fulton County compared with DeKalb County or city of Decatur Schools?

Reeves said the school board deferred to its superintendent, Mike Looney, who didn't waver from the reopening plan.

"The superintendent came up with the matrix and he made the call," Reeves said.

She also said the district believes parents should have options.

"In Fulton we are a big believer in options. We're a charter district," she said. "We're a large district. One would hope you provide options for people."

She said schools have taken steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms. The district has removed hand dryers, installed more sanitation stations, set up specific traffic patterns within hallways, taken away student lockers, reorganized drop offs and pickups, and in some schools put plexiglass dividers around desks.

Masks, she said, are non-negotiable.

"Everybody has to wear a mask. They're serious about the mask,"



Fulton County students return to school for in-person class instruction.
CREDIT / COURTESY OF FULTON COUNTY SCHOOLS, OBTAINED VIA WABE

Reeves said. "If you're not wearing a mask, you're going home."

Reeves advised school boards to make their decisions without worrying about making everyone happy.

"The best advice I think I can give is if you can make the decisions outside the political arena," she said. "Everybody's going to disagree. We have a lot of people both sides who aren't happy.... It's difficult to make people happy in this particular environment. Every school district is doing the best to serve their districts in the best way they can in a situation that was thrust on them."

Fulton County School Board President Julia Bernath said the district's decisions are based on the data.

"Dr. Looney has always based his decisions on the data, from the CDC and Fulton Department of public health he and his staff had developed an opening matrix," she said.

She said the district's teachers have a variety of opinions, like the parents.

"We had teachers who said, 'I can't wait to be back in the classroom' and we had teachers who said, 'Please don't put us in a perilous situation.' It's been a balancing act," Bernath said. "The only thing we knew for certain is there would be people who were unhappy with whatever decision we made. This is all new territory for everyone."

She said about 60 to 65 percent of Fulton County's students decided to return to school, and the rest decided to remain virtual. She said offering virtual options for students might persist long after the pandemic is over.

Decaturish asked if Bernath how she felt about the possibility that a student or teacher could become severely ill or die due to COVID-19.

"It's a difficult question to answer," she said. "I hope none of us have to face that. I know that we can as a district we can help control the environment within our buildings or on our sports fields and we can hope that students and staff members are taking proper precautions when they are away from school. Once anybody leaves our buildings, we don't know what they do. We have to hope they make good decisions to keep them safe, and hope they won't transmit to other people."

Lisa Morgan, president of the Georgia Association of Educators, said that teachers don't trust the data published by school districts that choose to reopen.

"Nobody really knows as far as on a system-wide detail what is working and what's not working, because educators do not trust the data that is being disseminated from the systems," Morgan said.

She said she personally knows a teacher in Gwinnett County who was hospitalized due to COVID-19 but there have been no cases reported at the teacher's school.

"That's what I'm hearing all over the state, that reports don't match what's going on," Morgan said.

She said she also personally knew of a teacher in Fulton County Schools who found out a student tested positive from that student's parent, not the school district. Morgan said mistrust of the data is a "statewide issue."

"An AJC article said only 70 percent of schools are reporting to [the state Department of Public Health], and it's supposed to be mandatory," she said. "When I hear it's going well in a school system I believe it's going well because absent the facts of the situation, an assumption is being made that lack of relevant data means there is no data."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

Decatur teachers concerned about return to classrooms consider their options

BY LOGAN C. RITCHIE, CONTRIBUTOR

Decatur, Ga. — Some teachers in City Schools of Decatur were considering resigning over what they say was an inadequate plan to return to in-person learning. Concerned for their health, and the health of their families, teachers are “terrified” of exposure to COVID-19 in schools.

Many of these teachers spoke to Decaturish but all asked to be anonymous because they feared retaliation for speaking publicly.

During the Oct. 13 School Board meeting, the district announced it would delay its reopening until next year, citing an uptick in cases.

In a September survey sent to 10,000 stakeholders consisting of teachers, staff, parents, and upper-grade students, 62 percent of teachers polled said they want to continue virtual learning for the foreseeable future. Only 5 percent said the district should switch to hybrid in the coming weeks “if virus levels remain at current levels or below.”

A lot has happened since that survey.

Teachers and staff were due to return to classrooms on Oct. 12. That has been pushed to Oct. 19. CSD Superintendent Dr. Dave Dude said teachers concerned about returning were instructed to apply for accommodations, a means by which concerns could be reviewed and addressed.

“Teachers (and other employees) may request accommodations based on their needs, such as additional PPE, safety measures, virtual work settings, etc. Supervisors are working with employees to determine what accommodations we can put in place,” Dude wrote in an email to Decaturish.

If a school is unable to accommodate the request, Dude said, “CSD teachers and staff that qualify may be granted paid leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). If an employee is not eligible for FFCRA leaves (Emergency Paid Sick Leave [EPSL] and Expanded Family and Medical Leave Act [EFMLA]), all other leaves that are available may be requested in accordance with the leave policy. Leave provisions have not changed and are still available for employees to request and use.”

But teachers worried the request for accommodations will be denied, and hesitate to resign because of a clause in their contract: Leave your job mid-year, and risk losing your teaching certificate and pay an \$800 fine.

The clause states:

“The Employee without the written consent of the Employer shall not terminate this contract. In the event that the Employee does terminate this contract, whether by formal notice or by willful failure or refusal to continue duties without such written consent, Employee shall pay to the Employer Eight Hundred Dollars

(\$800.00) to compensate Employer for injury by reason of such breach, it being impossible to ascertain or estimate the exact cost, damage, or injury that Employer will sustain by reason of such breach. In addition to exercising any legal or equitable remedies available to it, the Employer may recommend to the agency designated by state law to investigate complaints of ethics violations by educators that action be taken against the Employee’s certificate or application for certification.”

One veteran CSD teacher was denied a request to continue teaching from home in order to care for her ailing mother. Another teacher resigned last week, and more are contemplating resignation or early retirement.

Teachers who cannot afford to risk their health also cannot afford to lose their paycheck.

“The fact that I have to choose between a paycheck and my safety is hard,” said one elementary school teacher who described the pandemic as very challenging. Living with Type 1 Diabetes, she has been wearing a mask, socially distancing, and using hand sanitizer daily. She has not seen many friends or family, and she has not been inside a grocery store or restaurant since March.

Other school districts in Georgia have experimented with reopening during the pandemic.

In Paulding County, 228 positive cases of COVID-19 were reported the first month of school. A lawsuit filed by the Georgia Association of Educators (GAE) filed last week claims Paulding County officials were reckless in opening school buildings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

President of GAE Lisa Morgan, also a Kindergarten teacher, said, “Georgia’s 1.8 million public school students deserve to be safe and healthy in all school settings. They should be in spaces that do not risk their health and by extension, the health of their family and friends.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control, students and teachers are at a high level of risk when they engage in in-person learning, mix minimally between classes, and share objects while practicing social distancing, mask wearing, and frequent hand washing.

CSD teachers are worried about small classrooms, aging HVAC systems, and overcrowded spaces like cafeterias, hallways, and stairwells.

“My classroom is the size of a closet,” said one teacher, who said the CDC’s recommendation to stay six feet apart will be impossible when students return.

Carrying signs with slogans like, “I [heart] my students. I want them safe. We need a plan for lunch,” CSD teachers, parents, and students protested on Oct. 9.

It was the second of three protests held about the reopening plans.

Sharon Shahaf, mom of two CSD students, attended the protest. She said teachers are afraid of retribution, angry, and confused.

The protest was held the same afternoon CSD updated a manual for schools “to effectively mitigate the spread of COVID-19 once students and staff return to our buildings for in-person, face to face instruction.” The manual is anything but effective, according to parents and teachers.

The manual has too much room for interpretation, they say. One section states that face masks are to be worn at all times in addition to “maintaining appropriate physical distance” and also says “schools will provide 6 feet of physical separation between individuals to the extent possible,” but the responsibility to make that happen lies on the shoulders of principals.

When asked about how the district’s plan will be implemented, a teacher said her principal replied, “I don’t know the answers to your questions. We are in this together.”

“Teachers want people to understand this is risky,” said one elementary school teacher. “We are being told, ‘It’s back to school with all the kids or nothing.’ For some of us, there’s a chance of dying. We are being asked to choose between our health and our careers. Teachers should have a voice and a right. Our fate does not get to be in the hands of one person.”

The manual is authored by Dude and 11 staff members, and was reviewed by community members in public health, epidemiology, and health care.

Will Ratcliff, Georgia Tech professor of biological sciences and dad of two CSD students, provided feedback on the manual. Ratcliff describes himself as overly cautious. “I’m the guy in grocery store wearing chemical lab goggles and a mask.”

He is “absolutely not sending [his] kids back to school.”

“Dr. Dude called me and we had an extensive discussion,” he said. “Rather than making excuses, he is trying to do the right thing. One thing [Dude] said, ‘We are not just trying to open because parents need to go to work. We are trying to give the least worst option.’”

But Dude has not responded to all stakeholders equally, teachers and parents say. Critics of Dude say the controversy surrounding the reopening plans should be a wake-up call. They say the superintendent was improvisational and dismissive during the Sept. 30 town hall meeting with teachers about the plan.

A letter written by Jeff Staton and Tom Clark voicing concerns about the reopening plan was sent to Dude and the school board on Sept. 28. School board members Jana Johnson-Davis and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

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Morgan predicted that more teachers will leave Fulton County now that the district is forging ahead with its plan to resume learning five days a week.

Decaturish asked Morgan how long schools can remain closed for in-person learning before the situation becomes unsustainable. While virtual learning works for some families, it doesn't for others.

"Are we talking about reopening schools, or are we talking about reopening school buildings? School has been open every day on the calendar since March 12," Morgan said. "School buildings have not been open. I'm not saying that virtual instruction has been optimal. I'm not saying it works as well as face to face instruction. But with virtual instruction, we do not have students and staff becoming ill because they were in a school building. Educators can close the gaps if students have academic gaps when this is over. We cannot bring back staff or students or the families who become seriously ill or heaven forbid pass away. We have to be realistic about the severity. This is a life-threatening illness, but we do not have any clue about the long-term impacts on our children."

But what about the long-term impacts of virtual learning on children?

"If your No. 1 concern is the health and safety of students, then yes we have to remain virtual," Morgan said. "Because that is the only way we can know that we are not setting them up for an unknown future of complications."

She said it won't be possible to close academic gaps at all if a child dies due to COVID-19 exposure.

But isn't there some kind of compromise or happy medium that teachers and parents could reach that would allow a return to in-person learning?

Morgan said that can't happen unless school districts provide the resources to mitigate the spread of the virus.

"And in many cases, those resources are not being provided," she said.

Morgan said there are still questions about whether school buildings have adequate ventilation systems. She said not every district has provided effective barriers in front office areas and there usually aren't barriers between students in the classroom. Social distancing – providing six feet between each student – is nearly impossible.

"The most I have heard any educator say they're able to separate their student is two to three feet," Morgan said. "If we're going to do the six feet, we're going to have to have smaller classes. That means either more teachers and more space. How do we expand our buildings? Or we have the hybrid models where students are coming one to two days a week. That's really where we are."

Morgan acknowledged the situation is frustrating.

"The frustration is real for everyone involved and there are no good answers," she said. "Teachers are extremely frustrated because they don't believe there's accurate data, and in the hybrid models, teachers are doing two jobs

every day, teaching virtually and teaching those that are in person."

She said many parents expect that when students return to the classroom they will get the same education they were receiving in March when schools closed, but that's not the case.

"Everything has been reconsidered about how we are teaching and how we are doing school, everything from how students line up, where they're eating their lunch. Everything has been reconsidered, to make it less dangerous," Morgan said. "Nobody can say the danger is not there, particularly with the lack of data."

But absent a vaccine, which could be months away, what can be done to offer complete assurances to teachers that it's safe to enter a classroom?

"I think about the fact our college football players can be tested daily in some instances," Morgan said. "If we had a rapid test where our students could be tested daily then we could say, 'OK, everybody lines up, you get your test as you walk in and we're pretty sure everybody is safe.' But we don't have that."

Bernath, the Fulton County School Board President, acknowledged the fear that teachers feel.

"It's difficult for teachers I know who want to be back in school but are worried about their own health," Bernath said. "We're standing in quicksand and we're trying to find solid ground, and the ground is continuing to shift and will until we get a vaccine that's proven to provide some protection."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

James Herndon replied, but Staton said neither central office nor Dude has responded.

In an email, Staton told Decaturish, "... while I very much appreciated receiving the note from Jana Johnson-Davis on Sep. 30 acknowledging receipt and looking forward to a comment from David Dude, I believe it is quite fair to say that the questions raised in the letters have been ignored by the Superintendent and his staff. I don't know how else to describe not receiving a response."

Herndon, who joined the school board in January, said he has received scores of letters about this topic.

"The thing I want to respond to these emails with is, 'I hear you. I'm bringing it up in conversation.' The board is a collective, though, and emails and feedback sent to the group should be addressed by the group and not individuals," he said. "We read and listen to everything people send us and say to us. I respond to as many as I can that are sent to me. Many times, I call the individuals that reached out. School board members are listening, bringing it up in conversations, pushing towards change, constantly negotiating. We don't have the day to day oversight over the school system's operations and reopening plan."

School board members have power over the final budget and the superintendent's contract, and they function as a final judicial body for

student and staff conduct.

"I know the school board appreciates the feedback from the staff and the community. We have adjusted the [Oct. 13] Board meeting structure to allow more time for us to hear and address public comments and feedback," he said.

In a meeting at Fifth Avenue Upper Elementary School last week, teachers in a breakout group were asked to make a list of measures to keep everyone safe, according to a teacher who attended the meeting. The teacher said everyone sat in silence.

"One teacher stood up and said, 'Look, I am not putting my name on this document because I don't want it traced back to me. It seems like an acceptance of what's going on, and I don't believe in going back and I don't want to do it,'" reported a teacher who left DeKalb County School District for CSD because she thought she would feel heard here. "Another teacher said it was like a lamb leading himself to his own slaughter."

The elementary school teacher added, "We have been working 10- and 12-hour days since July [in planning meetings, trainings and creating lesson plans]. Isn't that that the job of central office to figure this out? I'm working. You need to figure this out. My job right now is to engage my students. Shouldn't you guys be working out the plan?"

After this article was published, F.AVE Principal Karen Newton-Scott disputed the descrip-

tion of this meeting in a comment posted on Facebook. She said the teachers were not asked to brainstorm safety measures at that meeting.

"They were asked to review a document that detailed processes and procedures that the F.AVE leadership team drafted for specifics around our school and provide feedback, ask questions and offer other considerations," Newton-Scott said.

The teacher who attended the meeting stood by their account of what happened after Decaturish shared Newton-Scott's comments.

When asked what action Decatur residents can take to help teachers, Shahaf said, "I feel helpless. I feel we don't really have options. I have lost trust in the decision-making process."

"We were not going to send our kids in anyway because I need the numbers to be way lower than what Superintendent Dude talked about. We are Israeli, and we have seen what happened in Israel where they had it under control well beneath what we are seeing in Georgia. They sent kids back to school and now they're in a second, worse shelter-in-place order," Shahaf said.

Melissa Kacalanos, mom of one homeschooled and two CSD students, signed up to speak against the reopening plan at the Oct. 13 school board meeting.

"I don't want to be part of this death machine," she said.

Letters to the editor

Editor's note: We are aware this author is likely using a nom de plume. But we're going to let it slide, because his letters are funny.

Dear Decaturish,

Given the recent controversy surrounding Legacy Park, I thought it prudent to throw my hat into the ring. While I respect the opinions of both sides and the myriad forms of impassioned action and commitment to the conversation that have evolved, I think it's time that someone says what everyone in Decatur is thinking: The grass in Legacy Park is far, far too green.

With a name like "Legacy," do you imagine lush, wide fields, teeming with life? I thought not; you imagine an arid wasteland with Mad Max style bandits in slipshod clunkers fighting over stale bread with a flock of carrion birds. It's not called "Modern Park" or "New Park" for a reason, and the state of the vegetation there needs to reflect that.

While the paved roads and the gravel are in sufficient condition, the rest of the park is not. I don't even need a machete to whack my way through the trail in the woods, nor do I need to watch out for starving alligators near the pond. I can safely bring a picnic to eat there with my family in peace any day of the week – that is unacceptable. Anytime I take my grandkids there, they always ask me: "Gampa, where are the dust devils? Where are the tumbleweeds?"

Would you, dear reader, be able to look into their eyes and tell them: "Sorry kids, but this park is verdant and bursting to the seams with healthy plants and happy people." It brings tears to my eyes every time those words cross the trembling barrier of my quivering lips. Where are all of Decatur's many displaced and



desperate coyotes, jackrabbits, rattlesnakes and cacti supposed to live? Why are there so many trees?

If we must keep the nature trails, I suggest we divide Legacy Park into two distinct areas: Unnavigable rainforest jungle with giant mosquitos (and I mean GIANT), and sci-fi dystopian badlands. Not only will this give the park some much needed character, but it will also better

befit the name. As well, it will save the city a lot of money, which we can use to improve other areas (such as the train tracks; namely, removing them).

The community should be ashamed at the thought of the state of this park. It is clearly looked after with great care and attention to detail, with blatant disregard to the very idea it was founded on. "The grass is always greener on the other side." Well, Legacy Park is not on the other side. It's right here in our community. We ought to respect that, and the solution is simple.

I propose we cease all lawn care operations at the park until the plants are adequately devoid of all life and vibrancy, and that we should release at least two-dozen piranhas into the lake, as well as a litany of jaguars and other jungle creatures into the woods immediately whilst regularly spraying the desert area with potent weedkiller. We are better than this.

Letters to the editor are opinions of the authors of the letter, not Decaturish.com.

Everyone has an equal opportunity to submit a letter to the editor. So if you read something here and don't like it, don't jump on our case. Write a letter of your own. All letters must be signed. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and content.

To send your letter to the editor, email it to
editor@decaturish.com

Sincerely,
- Eugene Footrest

GEORGE ON GEORGIA



So, apparently, I'm a racist

BY GEORGE CHIDI, CONTRIBUTOR

So, apparently, I'm a racist.

That's one way to read the message of "Welcome to Pine Lake," airing on CBS' online platform. It premiered Sunday night. It's how a lot of people who live here are reading it.

And ... I'm chewing on that. Honestly. No serious idea should be beyond reasonable consideration, and the idea that this Black man might be complicit in acts of racial oppression and white supremacy as a participant in governance is a serious idea.

Pine Lake. Population 760 or so on a good day. I moved here in 2007. I've lived here longer than in any other place. I'll be buried here, I think. And, frankly, this hurts. I take it personally. But let's talk about it.

The documentary had initially been constructed around the all-female leadership of Pine Lake, which is a remarkable thing. But it appears that two things happened over the course of 18 months of filming. The filmmakers saw and heard what people from around here have seen and heard for generations: that Pine Lake gives out a lot of tickets, mostly to Black drivers. And the Black Lives Matter movement began to eclipse the Women's March as a driver of public discussion.

Thus, a pivot toward the questions of racial justice raised by the city's court, police and ticketing.

The film doesn't get into any numbers. There's no real context offered, except for Pine Lake's tiny courtroom crowded with Black bodies pleading for mercy, and parenthetical reference to how most people who live near Pine Lake are Black, while most people who live in Pine Lake are white, present company excluded.

Here's what wasn't said.

DeKalb County police fields about 860 officers — theoretically. They're never at full strength. About half are in the uniform division, so 430. Those officers are on traffic enforcement duty about half the time, so 210 (I think the practical figure is lower). The county takes in about \$9 million a year in traffic citations, or about \$42,000 per patrol officer doing enforcement.

Pine Lake has about five full-time equivalents on its police force. It takes in an average of \$210,000 a year, so about ... \$42,000 a year

per patrol officer doing enforcement.

Pine Lake hasn't written a speeding ticket in years. It doesn't have a speed gun. Most of the citations are for expired plates, lack of insurance, or suspended licenses. The cops write fewer than two tickets in an eight-hour shift, on average.

This issue is near to my heart. I served for about four years in two broken terms on the Pine Lake city council, first in 2010, then again in 2014. And I have spent more time looking at the racial dynamics of policing in Pine Lake, and probably DeKalb, than almost anyone. I've offered testimony in the state legislature about police conduct. I wrote body camera rules for the city that have been used as model legislation. I have worked on criminal justice reform issues on the ground level for most of the last decade.

While serving I made a point of looking for ways to monitor traffic enforcement and ensure that abuses were not occurring. Pine Lake's reporting system in place is there because I wanted to have it. It was one of the animating reasons for my service.

I carefully compared the rate of ticketing of Pine Lake's police to that of the county at large and to other peer cities and found it comparable or lower. Traffic fines in Pine Lake were lower. The rates of nonpayment were lower. The rates of dismissal were higher.

In every case, I asked myself what the likely result of shifting over to the county police would be, and in every case, it became clear that replacing a Pine Lake officer with a DeKalb County officer would result in less responsiveness, less justice and higher cost for Black people.

The issue of social justice isn't about whether Pine Lake's cops give out too many tickets. It's whether any cops should be giving out tickets at all.

That's an important discussion at the heart of the Black Lives Matter movement. To what degree do police perpetuate crime by exacerbating poverty, instead of alleviating it?

Everyone has to do better. It does not mean that the widening discussion about police reform — shifting police budgets into social services — is unmerited: far from it.

I am perfectly aware of how screwed up criminal justice is for Black people here and in America.

The key problem in my view is how the justice system uses probation in Georgia.

But laying the weight of this moral question on Pine Lake is a cop out that excuses the wider community of its own moral failings around racial justice and policing, because the racial composition of DeKalb County's recorder's court cases are more or less identical to Pine Lake's court and no one seems ready to hold the county's 70-percent majority Black voters accountable for that, either.

I note in passing that if you draw a circle four miles wide around the center of Pine Lake, you have roughly 4 percent of DeKalb County's territory, 25 percent of its murders and 15 percent of its aggravated assaults. Someone emptied four full magazines of a handgun on Sunday night within earshot of my house. We regularly do the "was that fireworks" discussion as we debate calling the cops or not.

Pine Lake homeowners pay a millage rate of 21.53 — the highest municipal tax rate in Georgia — to maintain a police department that answers to the city.

Still, I suppose a long-winded, statistically-laden defense for how Pine Lake operates relative to other police departments and court systems is both inadequate and beside the point. There is a big, structural problem in America — Black people are discriminated against in jobs and housing and, yes, the policing system and even the most optimized and ideal process in Pine Lake changes none of that.

It's clear the filmmaker, Elisa Gambino, wanted to reflect her earlier premise about women's political empowerment and matters of racial justice as ideas. I think her work here is nuanced and fair, even though it's not always flattering. It's also not some heavy-handed personal condemnation of the city. There are no villains. The documentary spends at least as much time talking about how city leaders are wrestling with how to change Pine Lake's posture toward a majority-Black neighboring community as it does in court or at the city's raucous public celebrations.

Of course, that's not how it's marketed.

More people may read this column than watch the 80-minute film. But a million people will see the tagline, and the tagline reads "Documentary reveals how a small Georgia city's history of over-policing belies its liberal image."

Over the course of the next year or two, the public in Pine Lake will be having a fairly serious conversation about racial justice and policing, one that has been going on regularly since the late '90s. I am of the opinion that we should remove the financial consideration entirely and send all the revenue to the county. But the actual operations aren't abusive, relative to those of the county at large or our common expectations of policing.

Are those expectations changing? Probably. And perhaps that's for the best. If we want to talk about whether people should be getting tickets at all ... OK. I'm down for that. Should license plates be free for poor people? Maybe. Should there be some way to subsidize car insurance for poor people? Maybe.

But that's all a very different conversation than "Pine Lake cops are abusing Black people."

Facile criticisms won't solve an extraordinarily complex problem. But ... perhaps those criticisms will create the political conditions for other people to solve those problems.

— George Chidi is a political columnist and public policy advocate.

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Hawaiian shirts and blood on the carpet

BY GEORGE CHIDI, CONTRIBUTOR

Guys in Hawaiian shirts make my teeth itch even on a good day, unless they're playing a ukulele. Better, when those shirts aren't covered in Glocks. These days, I am paying much more attention to the sartorial choices of people picking fights, especially when they're local. And I'm not alone.

Sunday afternoon, a group of Black Lives Matter protesters in Savannah drew the attention of Fredrick James, 34, of greater Decatur. He rolled up to the protest as they were closing down an intersection in an act of civil disobedience. James was captured on video throwing what people learned later was a smoke bomb into the middle of the crowd laying in the street.

When people started pelting the truck with whatever was handy, he got out with a gun in his hand.

We've seen this play before.

Their Boogaloo Boy uniform of choice, oddly enough, is the Hawaiian shirt. It's absurd. So much is absurd today. This is the one James was wearing.

James caught an aggravated assault charge. He has been denied bond. Police in Savannah aren't offering much more than what is on their initial incident report.

Both I and the collective commentariat have their antennae raised high out of fear that the election will bring political violence. The chatter seems to be getting louder, and the incidents more frequent. But a few things about this strike me as particularly odd.

What was James doing in Savannah at all when he lives in a house in south DeKalb?

I can speculate: he wasn't just in Savannah on a lark. Did he go there deliberately looking for a Black Lives Matter protest to intimidate with armed violence?

James, it seems, probably should never have been legally allowed to have a weapon in the first place. His possession of a weapon at all – if it even turns out to have been legally so – speaks to the failures of the system.

You see, he changed his name in 2010. He used to be named Fred David Hendricks, according to the publication record of the Gwinnett Daily Post. The birthdays line up.

As a young man in Gwinnett, Fred Hendricks got into a lot of trouble. He has multiple convictions for weapons violations. The last conviction, for carrying a concealed weapon on school property in 2010, should have been a felony conviction. Prosecutors accepted a plea deal to reckless conduct.

A few hours after the attack, footage taken from a nearby building made its way to far right websites and Facebook groups, which seem to have been built recently with the intent of promoting this violence.

The "Savannah Freedom Exchange" described this as "a male pick-up truck driver

decided to toss harmless green smoke, common in emergency kits, into the middle of the cluster of concrete-lying individuals," and the guy with a gun as "[i]n perfectly legal defensive posture, the owner of the vehicle warned the individuals to get away. They failed, so he exited the vehicle and drew his conceal-carry weapon."



JAMES

for the alt-right.

And the response to this act of violence is ... well, what we might expect at this point. Line after line calling for social justice protesters to be murdered in the street.

I should have something uplifting to say about how we will all come together after this is over, to repudiate the hatred in our midst. But I cannot help but notice how all of this is affecting me. I've been just that much more ready to bite someone's head off in a conversation about this stuff. Ignoring what is happening is what got us to this point; exposure to it slowly makes it easier to adopt the stridency of others. A willingness to fight wins attention, more than a desire to build bridges does.

Even now, I am giving air to the fire.

Four years ago, after I watched a clueless upper-middle class white woman from Candler Park pantomime at voter outreach with some black kids on the street, I wrote "We have a country run by high-achievers who are both risk averse and hold the public in contempt. The result is an economy serving their interests well – one that rewards extraordinary achievement while ignoring everyone else."

We have the politics we do because we are a people with very strong views who can't figure out how to talk to one another anymore, despite the most robust communications tools known to humanity. The politics we have reinforce strong views and bury moderating influences.

My great fear isn't that Joe Biden won't win. He's probably going to win. It's that he will win and will be inadequate to the task. What conventional political biography prepares an American leader for a country ready to tear itself apart at the seams? For all my desire to see the grifters and incompetents of the Trump Administration replaced with wide-eyed workaholic 20-something Princeton graduates, I fear that too few of them will understand how to keep 500 Kyle Rittenhouse from tracking blood across America's pavements.

Legacy Park Voice survey is misleading

Dear Decaturish,

I have been following the dialog between the newly formed group, Legacy Park Voice, and the City of Decatur City Commissioners. Legacy Park Voice has come out strongly against the Legacy Park housing addendum. What has been concerning is that they have spread misinformation and have not educated themselves on the facts as it relates to affordable housing in general and also as it relates to the master plan for Legacy Park. I am aware that our mayor, Patti Garrett, along with other City of Decatur commissioners have met with members of Legacy Park Voice to answer their questions and to provide factual information. In addition, the Coalition for Diverse Decatur and Coalition for Diverse Dekalb wrote a letter to the editor of Decaturish which was published on September 23, 2020. The letter did an excellent job of providing facts about the proposed affordable housing at Legacy Park as outlined in the housing addendum to the master plan. I assumed that after our neighbors from Legacy Park Voice were made aware of the facts, that their fears and misconceptions would have been put to rest; that does not appear to be the case.

Last week, a small lime green flyer was taped to my mailbox. The headline of the flyer read, "Take the Legacy Park Survey." It was being distributed by the Legacy Park Voice. Directly underneath, a question was posed in large letters, "Do you want Greenspace, Recreation, or 175 Housing Units at Legacy Park?" These three options are not exclusive to the other. As the Legacy Park master plan now stands, there is green space, space for recreation, and space set aside for affordable housing. The planners thoughtfully located potential housing at the corners of Legacy Park, where buildings already exist and housing would not be in direct competition with other uses.

I decided to look at the survey and was disappointed that most of the questions were slanted and were predicated on misinformation. As written, the survey questions and accompanying commentary are misleading and designed to evoke a desired set of responses. Community members should not have their views misrepresented by such a biased survey.

The City of Decatur in partnership with a consultant invested funds, energy, and time in conducting thoughtful and productive public input sessions to provide the Decatur community the opportunity to provide feedback as to what we all wanted Legacy Park to become. Hundreds of residents spent countless hours engaging in this process. In the end, I believe a plan was developed that struck a balance among multiple interests, supporting and celebrating artists, athletes, affordable housing advocates, naturalists, gardeners, youth services, non-profits, and more.

At a time when our country is so divided, it seems to me that our community should come together to support each other and to work out our differences truthfully and respectfully. I expect that of Decatur and its residents.

Sincerely,
Beate Sass

TUCKER BUSINESS OWNER RECEIVES CARES ACT FUNDS TO HELP DEKALB STUDENTS COPE

BY LOGAN C. RITCHIE, CONTRIBUTOR

Tucker, Ga. — A DeKalb County commissioner committed this week to allocate Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to a Tucker business owner who is addressing students' social and emotional learning (SEL) around COVID-19.

Commissioner Nancy Jester's office told Pamela McNall that her education company, Respectful Ways, a SEL program for students in Kindergarten to 12th grade, will receive \$25,000 of the \$125 million in CARES Act funding being distributed by DeKalb County before the end of the year.

CARES Act funds provide assistance for personal protection equipment (PPE), food outreach programs, public health initiatives, rent assistance, essential workers and small businesses. Respectful Ways' newest curriculum addresses overcoming trauma, transforming emotional pain, and navigating anxiety related to the pandemic.

"We are in a race against time. Children have been greatly affected by COVID-19, and they need a trauma-informed social and emotional learning program to help them transform emotional pain to healing," said McNall, an award-winning journalist and active volunteer in DeKalb County.

Respectful Ways promotes perseverance, respect, responsibility, and compassion. It's delivered online by educators and school counselors, so it works whether students are in person or learning virtually. At home, families tap into digital tools ranging from videos that feature Atlanta hip-hop artists to conversation cards for continued family learning. Interactive content is offered in English and Spanish.

With CARES Act funds, McNall plans to hand out 100 educational modules to dozens of schools throughout DeKalb County.

The current mental health of parents and children is suffering due to social isolation, school and childcare closures, and psychological distress, according to a recent study.

Published in September by the American Academy of Pediatrics, a study shows that since March, 27 percent of parents' mental health had worsened, and 14 percent of their children's behavior had intensified. More than 1,000 parents were asked to share ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the physical and emotional well-being of parents and children.

Disrupted routines are hard on children — particularly those with behavioral problems — and the pandemic may have worsened their behavior because of challenges in accessing both office- and school-based mental health services during school closures.

While parents and administrators are at odds over returning to school, students still need access to social and emotional learning (SEL).

Locally, Respectful Ways is already in schools in Gwinnett, Carrollton, Jasper, Pickens, and Coweta counties, as well as private schools.



Pamela McNall of Tucker is the creator of Respectful Ways, a digital program that addresses the social and emotional needs of K-12 students. Photo provided to Decaturish

The benefit of a program like this, according to Laura Morse, a psychotherapist in private practice in DeKalb County, is that SEL gets kids talking about and recognizing their feelings.

"It is necessary to get back to basics. Kids need to learn how to identify and understand their feelings," she said. "We need to give kids the tools to talk about their feelings because it can help build resiliency, manage stress, and increase compassion."

She added, "Things have been so hard, and often times kids don't know how to deal with their emotions. Parents tend to shelter kids because they don't want kids to be anxious or sad or hurt. SEL is about building resiliency: Sending the message that it is okay to ask for help; to identify when you need something and somebody."

Angela Barnett, mom of five, has two students in DeKalb County schools.

At the elementary school level, she said parents are seen as partners. Once students reach middle school, students receive SEL content at school while parent-teacher associations typi-

cally address parents separately.

The older grades focus on heavier issues like social media, suicide prevention, drugs and alcohol.

At the elementary school level, there is a way to bring kindness and sharing to every lesson, Barnett said.

"The PTA works hard to develop programs that teach kids to be empathetic," she said, citing programs on civic engagement with homeless, refugee, and elderly community members.

DeKalb County is the third largest school district in Georgia. With more than 100,000 students in 140 schools, DeKalb County has provided SEL support through curriculum, professional development for all staff, parent meetings, and publications.

A district spokesperson said, "We have student support personnel assigned to schools that work in support district efforts. School counselors, social workers, nurses/student health professionals, psychologists and other staff play an integral role in supporting students and families."

Kirkwood author finds success with Spanish-language kids' books

BY PATRICK SAUNDERS, CONTRIBUTOR

Atlanta, Ga. — When Kirkwood resident Janike Ruginis's son was born, she couldn't find Spanish-language books appropriate for his age — so she created her own.

Janike and her sister Alexis started the small press Veoleo (Spanish for "I see, I read") in 2018 to help readers up to age three celebrate their Latin American and Caribbean heritage.

Janike was born in Columbia and raised bilingual, and she wanted her son to have "that gift of being bilingual" as well, she told Decaturish.

"Teaching a language has to start early," she said. "And it's not only about teaching a language, but teaching a culture."

Janike, a lecturer in the Spanish Language Program at Spelman, wanted her son to be immersed in the language. She had a background in the publishing industry and Alexis, a New York City resident, is a lawyer. They came up with the idea for the first book, wrote it, found a printer and found an illustrator from Puerto Rico named Eduardo Espada. And "Donde Esta El Coqui" became their first release.

"It's like a 'Where's Waldo' kind of situation. It's simple enough for a child learning Spanish and all about the present tense," Janike said. "We did incredibly well."

They used Kirkwood and parenting Facebook groups to promote Veoleo's mission.

"I would just post, 'Meet me at the park, I'm doing Spanish storytime,'" Janike said. "It was all about putting ourselves out there and creating a community. It's not just about selling books."

Pandemic forces a Veoleo pivot

They sustained themselves for the first year on in-person sales at books fairs and by partnering



Janike Ruginis and her sister Alexis started the small press Veoleo (Spanish for "I see, I read") in 2018.

Photo provided by Janike Ruginis

with Brave & Kind Bookshop in Oakhurst to do readings. Then the pandemic hit.

"All of a sudden all of these things were not available anymore," Janike said. "We had two books in the making. We had to put that on hold and pivot in some way to continue to offer enrichment programming, but also having a sustainable business."

So they began offering Spanish-language storytimes, art classes and yoga classes through their Instagram page. They also hired Latinx artists to create coloring sheets emblematic of Latin American culture and made them available for free on the Veoleo website.

"Our source of revenue is books, but we want to be able to support our community with materials for free that would be available," Janike said. "We

didn't want our families to feel lost and without resources to do what they wanted to do at home."

They've since released a second book through Veoleo called "Pensamientos," meaning "thoughts."

"It's about teaching children about emotional awareness and emotional intelligence," Janike said. "It's so hard for us still to process and share and digest all of these mixed emotions that we're feeling and we really need to support our children in a way that's developmentally appropriate for them in these uncertain times."

"We're incredibly grateful for having a community on Instagram that has supported us throughout a very uncertain time, and we are so grateful to our families to welcome us to their homes through these different resources," Janike added.

Amplify My Community announces \$36,500 in gifts to charitable organizations in 2020

Decatur, Ga. — The nonprofit organization Amplify My Community announced \$36,500 in gifts to three community-based nonprofits addressing issues surrounding homelessness and poverty, a press release says.

Amplify had to cancel its annual music festival and fundraiser this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2020 gifts were made possible by Amplify's sponsors and supporters, who helped raise funds despite cancellations of the organization's largest 2020 events due to COVID-19.

The gift recipients are:

- \$30,000 to Decatur Cooperative Ministry (DCM)

- \$5,000 to Family Connections-Community in Schools of Athens (FC-CIS)

- \$1,500 to Decatur-area Emergency Assistance Ministry (DEAM)

The gift to Decatur Cooperative Ministry is especially noteworthy because many ticketholders declined to accept ticket refunds for the canceled Amplify Decatur Music Festival. The festival was scheduled to feature Indigo Girls, Son Volt, Blind Boys of Alabama, The Cactus Blossoms, and Michelle Malone. With this gift, Amplify has directed more than \$265,000 to Decatur Cooperative Ministry.

Amplify is especially grateful for the continued support of its corporate sponsors, including:

- Lenz
- Eddie's Attic
- Leafmore Group
- Decatur Package Store
- Iris and Bruce Feinberg

Additional supporters include Oakhurst Realty Partners, Natalie Gregory and Co., Plumb Works, Verisail Partners, and Dynamo Swim Club.

During the pandemic, Amplify has focused on socially distant music events, including its Streaming Series and the upcoming Drive-By Flatbed Truck Concert featuring Kevin Kinney of Drivin N Cryin. For more information on upcoming events and to donate to Amplify My Community, please visit AmplifyMyCommunity.org.

CITY OF DECATUR PLANS TO FORGIVE SMALL BUSINESS LOANS, PROVIDE MORE GRANTS WITH CARES MONEY

By Dan Whisenhunt

Decatur, Ga. — Small business owners in Decatur struggling with the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic will stand to benefit from a cash infusion provided by the city of Decatur and the federal government.

The city plans to use money from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act to forgive existing loans provided under an old program and provide additional money for small business grants. The City has received \$2,914,000 in federal CARES Act funding to handle expenses related to COVID-19.

In April, the City Commission allocated \$400,000 for a small business loan program. The city's Downtown Development Authority also kicked in \$100,000. The Decatur Legacy Project, the nonprofit board overseeing Legacy Park, raised an additional \$63,400. All of that money is gone, with the city giving out 28 loans out of 45 businesses that applied for it. The awards were decided using a lottery process. In full disclosure, Decaturish applied for a loan but lost out during the lottery process.

Under the terms of Memorandums of Under-

tanding approved by the City Commission on Monday and subsequently approved by the Downtown Development Authority on Thursday, those loans would be repaid using the CARES money, effectively turning the loans into grants. A separate MOU, also approved by the City Commission and DDA, uses \$400,000 in CARES money to establish a new small business grant program.

The new grant program will have some new parameters that will make it easier for businesses to apply. It will allow applications from businesses that are owned and staffed by sole proprietors and increase the employee number limit from 30 to 50.

Applicants can request \$5,000 per full-time employee, up to a maximum of \$25,000. In the likely event that there are more requests than money available, a lottery process will be used again.

During the Thursday DDA meeting, board members discussed using the \$100,000 it will be reimbursed for its previous contribution to add to the new \$400,000 grant program.

Details about how to apply for the grants were not immediately available.

That information will be published on Decaturish when it is released by the city.

TUCKER WORK SESSION MEETING INCLUDES DISCUSSION ABOUT FUTURE

Tucker, Ga. — The two-hour Tucker City Commission work session on Oct. 26, followed by a regular City Council meeting, covered a lot of ground about the future of Tucker.

Council heard presentations on the Tucker Summit Community Improvement District's plan for mobility improvement on the Mountain Industrial Boulevard corridor, stretching from Jimmy Carter Boulevard at Lawrenceville Highway to Mountain Industrial Boulevard at East Ponce de Leon Avenue.

The cost will be split between Tucker Sum-

mit CID, city of Tucker, and the Atlanta Regional Commission. The CID's goal is to begin projects in 2021 or 2022.

Ideas included both short- and long-term projects, including road improvements like wider turn radii and longer turn lanes; and pedestrian safety like flashing beacons at crosswalks and access to public transit. After a revision by Tucker Summit CID, council will approve the plan at a later date. For more Tucker news, [read online here](#).

—Logan C. Ritchie, contributor

PANDEMIC DOWNTURN FORCES CLOSURE OF AMMAZZA PIZZERIA

Decatur, Ga. — Ammazza pizzeria on Oct. 16 announced it was closing its Decatur location.

The restaurant, based in Edgewood, opened in Decatur in 2018 offered antipasto and past as well. But the company said the Decatur location wasn't sustainable.

"Unfortunately sales took a sharp decline at the start of pandemic and when we reopened they never returned," a spokesperson for the company said. "We tried holding on as long as we absolutely could."

The company's Edgewood location is still open.

Ammazza was located at 314 East Howard Avenue, across from Kimball House. The space was previously home to the Marbar and Twisted Soul restaurants.

— Dan Whisenhunt

Avondale Estates City Commission approves speed cameras

By Zoe Seiler, contributor

The Avondale Estates City Commission on Oct. 26 unanimously approved a contract with Blue Line Solutions to install speed cameras in the school zone along U.S. 27 near Avondale Elementary School.

The cameras will only be located within the school zone and warning signs will be placed near the equipment so drivers know they are entering the school zone and know they are being monitored.

The city will partner with Blue Line Solutions to administer the program and provide the equipment. The city will also establish a speed threshold and anyone who exceeds that limit more than once would be subject to a citation.

Currently, the city cannot give a citation unless someone is going 10 miles per hour over the speed limit so the minimum threshold for the cameras would be 11 miles per hour over the speed limit.

The city has yet to determine when the cameras will be on, City Manager Patrick Bryant told Decaturish. The cameras could be on only during the time when parents drop off and pick up their children or it could be for the length of the entire school day.

In other business, the City Commission voted to approve the new historic preservation guidelines by a 3-2 vote. The overall goal of the rewrite was to make the guidelines more clear and objective in order to provide a clear, concise framework for homeowners. To [read the full story, click here](#).



PHOTO BY DEAN HESSE

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kimball House disciplines employees, apologizes after photo surfaces of dead rabbit nailed to pole

Decatur, Ga. — The owners of the Kimball House restaurant in Decatur are apologizing after a photo circulating on social media showed a dead rabbit nailed to a pole outside of the restaurant's garden.

The photo and accompanying post originally appeared on the Nextdoor website. The post, which was forwarded to Decaturish, said, "Today as I was walking past Kimball House's garden it was pointed out to me that a dead rabbit had been nailed to a post right next to the garden. Now I was told by some anonymous people that the rabbit had died from poison that was placed near the garden to keep animals out of the garden, but apparently, some employees at Kimball House thought it would be funny to nail the dead rabbit to a pole."

In a statement to Decaturish, the Kimball House owners did not dispute the photo but said the rabbit was likely killed by a predator and not poison. The employees involved are being disciplined, the restaurant said.

In a joint statement, owners Matt Christison, Miles Macquarrie, Bryan Rackley and Jesse Smith said, "Kimball House has always respected animals on a level above and beyond what you find at most restaurants. We only source from farmers who use humane practices and we only serve sustainable seafood."

"We would like to sincerely apologize to anyone offended by the sighting of a dead rabbit in our garden," they said. "We were not aware that it was hung up, and as soon as we were alerted to the situation, we made sure it was removed immediately. Disciplinary actions for the individuals involved are being handled internally. We don't know how the rabbit died, but our guess is that it was from an owl or hawk, which are often near and on our property. The accusation of poisoning this animal couldn't be further from the truth. We would never put poison anywhere near our garden. There have never been any pesticides or used, and while we have not had it certified organic, we have always used organic practices over the past seven years. Again, we sincerely apologize to any Decatur friends and neighbors who were upset by this."

— Dan Whisenhunt

Decatur to temporarily allow open container alcohol sales

Decatur, Ga. — The Decatur City Commission at its Monday night meeting approved an ordinance to temporarily allow open container alcohol sales.

The measure is intended to help restaurants struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The City Commission also approved items related to the purchase of the Boys and Girls Club in Oakhurst, created a new program to help small businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and extended the city's face-covering ordinance.

The temporary container ordinance allows participating restaurants to sell alcohol for off-premise consumption Friday between 4 p.m. and 1 a.m. the following day, and Saturday, between 3 p.m. and 1 a.m. the following day.

Customers will be served alcohol in approved plastic cups with a logo reading "Keep it in Decatur" and will also be given wristbands.

The ordinance will be effective October 30 at 4 p.m. and expire Sunday, January 3, 2021 at 1 a.m.

The business districts where the open container ordinance is permitted are Decatur Downtown Business District, Old Depot District, West Ponce Business District, East College Business District, and the Oakhurst Business District.

For more, [read online here](#).

— Alex Brown

Legacy Park Voice leader accuses Decatur Mayor Pro Tem of hiring someone to smear her

Decatur, Ga. — During the requests and petitions section of the Oct. 5 City Commission meeting, Legacy Park Voice organizer Lynn Gathercole accused Mayor Pro Tem Tony Powers of hiring someone to conduct a background check on her.

Gathercole has provided no evidence to support her statement, and it was an accusation Powers firmly refuted during the meeting.

The accusation is the latest development in a debate about the future of Legacy Park on South Columbia Drive. In December, the Decatur City Commission publicly and unanimously approved an addition to the Legacy Park master plan.

During public comments at the Oct. 5 City Commission meeting, Gathercole started talking about recent actions of the Legacy Park Voice group and her plan to conduct a survey about the park. She then directed her comments to Mayor Pro Tem Powers.

"Commissioner Powers, are you familiar with someone named Patti Cobb? It has come to my attention, and I hope very much that it's not true, that you hired Patti Cobb to do a background investigation upon me in order to do a smear campaign on my integrity," said Gathercole.

Decaturish was unable to find anyone in Decatur named Patti Cobb who provides background investigations. A person named Jodi Cobb managed Powers' City Commission campaign, but Cobb said she has no idea what Gathercole is talking about.

Following the meeting, Gathercole confirmed she meant Jodi Cobb, but declined to provide evidence that Powers had hired her to conduct a background check.

"This is what I've been told by a number of people have told me about this," Gathercole said. "They told me about this before the meeting."

She declined to identify the people who told her that Powers hired someone to run a background check on her.

Gathercole later admitted that accusing Powers of hiring someone to smear her was a mistake.

Mayor Pro Tem Tony Powers said that the accusations that he hired someone to investigate Gathercole were false.

"Ms. Gathercole, I am sorry that you feel that I have personally come after you and trying to smear your name," he said. "But let me just be frank and clear. I've ran two campaigns against two people in this city against people who ran my name through the mud. ... I have not hired anyone to besmirch your character."

— Alex Brown

New building planned for former Java Monkey site

Decatur, Ga. — Two years after a fire destroyed a popular downtown Decatur coffee and wine bar, the property owner is moving forward with plans to rebuild with a new design.

"Our new building will be built, God willing, very soon," Joseph Ahlzadeh, the owner of Guardian Property and Management, said during Tuesday's meeting of the Decatur Planning Commission. "We have owned this property for 28 years now, and we are hoping to rebuild the area that Java Monkey had the cafe and restaurant with what we hope will be a similar use and will be a great addition to that area of downtown."

The new building will make better use of its small footprint by featuring a front wall made of cantilever glass doors that can either be closed or opened and moved aside to open the dining area to the outdoors completely, Ahlzadeh said. Where the old Java Monkey had a decorative metal divider separating its patio area, the new building will have a large planter that aligns with the outer west wall of Fresh to Order, with the entrance to the completely enclosed new space immediately behind it.

In order to rebuild, however, Ahlzadeh will need the city to grant the project two exceptions to the requirements

in the Unified Development Ordinance.

The first, would eliminate the requirement for the business to have at least two off-street parking spaces. The second exception would allow them to rebuild on the same footprint as the old building without allowing more of a buffer next to the sidewalk.

Although Java Monkey never had off-street parking, the building had been grandfathered in as a nonconforming use when the current UDO requirements were written. Since the old building will be completely demolished and a new one constructed, it is considered new construction and the new standards apply, clarified Angela Threadgill, Decatur's Director of Planning and Economic Development.

In a report accompanying Ahlzadeh's application for the exceptions, city planning staff recommended that the exceptions be granted.

Ahlzadeh noted that he had been a part of helping the city redesign that corner of Church Street to be more pedestrian-friendly several years ago.

The newer streetscape requirements that he is asking for an exception to are also not feasible for such a small middle-of-the-block building in that area, Threadgill added.

The members of the Planning Commission agreed, voting unanimously to recommend approval of the two requested exceptions.

The Planning Commission recommendation will be forwarded to the City Commission, which will make the final decision.

— Cathi Harris, contributor

New Tucker ordinances may help residents with stormwater issues

Tucker, Ga. — Tucker City Council at its Oct. 13 meeting passed three ordinances required by the state, which will affect residents who experience flooding, sinkholes, and other water-related issues. The ordinance gives city staff, police officers, and code enforcement offices the ability to inspect private property to ensure proper maintenance of stormwater drains.

Earlier this year, the sinkhole at Tucker Tire on 4147 Lawrenceville Highway was caused by a storm drain under private property. The property owner was held responsible for repairing the sinkhole.

Rules around stormwater management, litter control, and conveyance systems will help residents like Karen Young, who spoke at the meeting. After the weekend's heavy rain and tornado threats, Young experienced flooding. She's already lost ground on one side of her property due to poor drainage.

A breakdown in communication about stormwater maintenance often occurs after developers leave a subdivision the land is no longer under their purview, or when an HOA becomes defunct and no one takes on responsibility for community stormwater systems.

Homeowners need to be educated on the history of their property, said Councilmember Michelle Penkava.

Courtney Smith, Tucker's director of planning and zoning, suggested buying a survey when buying a house. She said the City of Tucker is available to help.

Assistant City Manager John McHenry presented a plan from Tucker's new Urban Redevelopment Authority to apply to the state for an Opportunity Zone for the city. By using data on criminal activity, demographics, and poverty, the Urban Redevelopment Authority can offer tax incentives for businesses in a designated area.

The state's Department of Community Affairs (DCA) likens Opportunity Zones to a booster shot.

"This designation will enable some of our state's struggling communities to attract much-needed private sector investment," said DCA Commissioner Christopher Nunn. "By giving an economic 'shot in the arm' to these communities, the goal is to boost investment where it's most urgently needed."

— Logan C. Ritchie, contributor



Michael Condon, who has been a chef for 35 years, purchased BaddaBing! Catering with his wife, Tanya Tveit, in 2004. Images provided to Decaturish

SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: **BADDABING! CATERING**

BY ZOE SEILER, CONTRIBUTOR

Decatur, Ga. – BaddaBing! Catering was once known for its soups, sandwiches and grab-and-go meals. The Decatur business switched to only catering a couple years after getting new owners 16 years ago. Now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BaddaBing! is shifting once more to offer a meal delivery service.

Michael Condon, who has been a chef for 35 years, purchased BaddaBing! Catering with his wife, Tanya Tveit, in 2004. However, BaddaBing! burned down in 2005 along with other businesses when it was located on College Avenue.

The catering aspect of the business grew after that, especially as Condon and Tveit catered an event out of their townhome days after their building burned down.

"We had to subsidize our business and still keep it on the map because if it's gone long enough, people start forgetting. That's when we started asking for a lot more catering from Emory because it was the only facet we had to make money," Condon said. "Trying to survive the summer of 2006 felt a lot like it does right now. We were just cooking out of our house and doing what we needed to do to make ends meet."

Condon and Tveit gained a lot of business with events, like Emory's medical school graduation, in 2019; however business slowed down earlier this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As caterers, they weren't mandated to shutdown during Georgia's stay-at-home order in March and April but they couldn't cater events. People were prohibited from gathering in groups and events were canceled.

BaddaBing! went through three months without having any sales when COVID-19 hit Georgia. The pair then came up with the idea of delivering meals to the residents of Decatur and surrounding areas.

"Once we started up, we came up with the idea of now bringing food to all the residents because we knew there was a need for that. People were stuck at home. We came up with the idea of doing almost like a bento box but it's all disposable and compostable," Condon said.

Tveit writes the menus for each week for people to order dinner online. The meals are cooked the same day, chilled and delivered to customers' doorsteps Monday through Friday.

"I feel like I know what a lot of people enjoy eating. We collaborate and come up with something that would be somewhat healthy, somewhat comfort as well," Tveit said. "If you communicate with us, if you have any dietary restrictions we will make and specialize the meal for you."

Meals are packaged in bento boxes, everything is labeled and cooking instructions are included. Condon blanches the food, cooks

it half way, to prepare it for delivery. The meals are also labeled as vegan, gluten-free and dairy-free when necessary.

"When we started, which was in July, we were doing six to eight meals the first week so it was pretty much a complete disaster," Condon said. "We both knew that if we just stayed the course, it would get better and better and better."

Tveit added that some people have ordered food for family members or friends when they want to send food for an occasion but don't necessarily want to cook it themselves.

Some customers have also bought gift certificates to give as gifts to provide food for others.

Many people used to only hear about BaddaBing! through events and only knew Condon and Tveit as good caterers, Condon said.

"Now, we have to put our money where our mouth is. We have to show up with the goods at your doorstep and you can be the judge whether we're good or not," Condon said.

"Also, I think when this whole thing blows over, which we don't know when that's going to happen, people are going to know us personally and intimately as far as our food is concerned. I love that aspect of it," he added.

BaddaBing! is also offering a butcher block program where Condon orders meat from local distributors, butchers the meat and makes marinades and dry rubs. He puts the butcher block together and it can be delivered the next day.

One thing Condon and Tveit are adamant about is the value they share with customers.

"Instead of doing a 16 ounces pint container we're doing a 26-ounce container and we're below on price. If it's mac 'n cheese, we're not going to give you a pint of mac 'n cheese. We're going to give you 24 ounces of mac 'n cheese because it's mac 'n cheese. We're not serving you fillet," Condon said. "We're giving the value where it's due. For soups, we're giving a full 48 ounces for \$12 which is a whole lot of soup."

"We know where we are as far as financial difficulty. We know what that feels like. I want to do this for people out there that are having the same issues and problems and with their kids at home. I want to be a service for sanity," he added.

Meals are delivered Monday through Friday from noon to 5 p.m. currently within 10 miles of BaddaBing!, which is located at 186 Rio Circle, but are open to serving many areas. They have delivered to areas such as Avondale Estates, Tucker, Morningside, Candler Park, Druid Hills and Midtown Atlanta.

To order a meal, visit Baddabingcatering.com.

STACEY BETH SHULMAN OFFERS TRAUMA-SENSITIVE YOGA IN DECATUR

BY ZOE SEILER, CONTRIBUTOR

Decatur, Ga. – Trauma sensitive yoga focuses on the healing and breathing aspects of yoga. Stacey Beth Shulman has been teaching yoga full-time for about 10 years with the mission of bringing gentle movement and attention to breath to people of all shapes and sizes.

“It’s not fitness focused yoga, but the goal of trauma sensitive yoga is to gently bring you back into your body, even offer opportunities to befriend your body,” Shulman said. “Because when you’ve experienced trauma you get disconnected from your body and we often feel like our bodies have somehow betrayed us or we’ve betrayed our bodies.”

Shulman finished her yoga teacher training about 12 years ago and began teaching full-time when she was laid off from her human services job about 10 years ago.

The practice of trauma sensitive yoga uses rhythmic movement and pauses in various yoga poses as a different way to experience the body.

“It’s about becoming more aware of your body and becoming more aware of your breath rather than trying to make your body better. It’s really about trying to recognize and accept your body as it is,” Shulman said.

Her trauma sensitive yoga classes are for people experiencing trauma for various reasons, especially for those who struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder and complex PTSD.

A common example of PTSD is a soldier coming back with PTSD because they experienced a horrible accident or another traumatic event, and they have flashbacks of that one single incident, Shulman said.

“It’s almost like with single-incident PTSD, it’s like a bell starts to ring and ordinarily when we experience a traumatic incident, because we all do, the bell rings and then eventually it stops ringing,” Shulman said. “But with PTSD the bell continues to ring and it doesn’t ever really stop.”

Complex PTSD focuses on multiple incidents, such as physical or sexual abuse, so multiple bells may ring at the same time or at different times. Complex PTSD causes someone’s nervous system to be on high alert so that person never really calms down or relaxes, Shulman said.

“Trauma sensitive yoga has a positive effect on your nervous system that allows your body and your nervous system to begin to calm down,” Shulman said. “When your nervous system is calmer then you’re able to live a more satisfying and fulfilling life because you’re not always on high alert looking for danger.”

She also incorporates some elements of trauma sensitive yoga into her general yoga classes.

“I love my work so much. I love that I can offer something that every single person can do. They might do it differently than somebody else. It might not look the same as your neighbor across the street doing yoga but every single person can do yoga. I love that I can offer something that so many people can benefit from,” Shulman said.

Shulman teaches these general yoga and trauma sensitive yoga classes on her own as well as through Vista Yoga and Decatur Yoga and Pilates. All of her classes are online currently due to COVID-19.

Marti Yura and her husband opened Vista Yoga in 2009, located at 2836 Lavista Road, Suite D. Yura started out in the fitness industry and eventually began teaching yoga full-time.

“I really wanted (the studio) to be more of a center for people. I envisioned it like a holistic center,” Yura said. “I know the power of yoga just in my own body.”

Yura worked in Chicago with her yoga teacher a few years ago. While she was there she noticed a class called yoga for all bodies. Yura



Stacey Beth Shulman has been teaching yoga for about 10 years but her classes are a little different. She teaches trauma sensitive yoga which focuses on the healing and breathing aspects of yoga. Photo submitted by Stacey Beth Shulman.

met Shulman at an event shortly after and thought there was a niche that could be offered as Shulman teaches something similar.

“What Stacey does, which I think is great, is she brings in that therapeutic mindset but also includes all bodies,” Yura said.

Vista Yoga is opening up for in-person social distanced classes. The classes can have up to seven people and an instructor with 10 feet in between each mat. The studio also requires masks and has implemented a cleaning protocol. Classes are also available online.

Shulman additionally teaches classes at Decatur Yoga and Pilates. Debra Kelley opened her first location in 2003 in downtown Decatur and later opened a second location in 2018 located at 2570 Blackmon Drive, Suite 400.

She too left a corporate job to pursue yoga. After taking a partial leave of absence from her job in 2000 to become a certified teacher, she resigned from her job and began teaching yoga full-time. She also helped open some studios in the metro Atlanta area.

Kelley said the studio focuses on personal responsibility and acceptance. She invites people to be where they are, love where they are and move forward, she said.

“Yoga is really just about being in your body, closing your eyes, really connecting deeply and intimately with yourself, breathing, and it’s about acceptance,” Kelley said. “It is about accepting exactly where you are and allowing yourself to do what you can do and be okay with it.”

Kelley met Shulman when her studio hosted a teacher training that focused on therapeutic yoga. Shulman has been teaching primarily restorative classes at the studio, as well as classes geared towards trauma.

“She’s doing the essence of what yoga is because it’s all supposed to be therapeutic,” Kelley said. “If you look at the cover of a yoga journal and you see someone twisting into a pretzel, it’s a little off putting for a huge segment of people. Stacey was really bridging that gap from the beginning.”

Kelley only has one studio currently. Due to the coronavirus pandemic she decided to close the downtown Decatur location and is focusing on the remaining studio on Blackmon Drive.

She doesn’t plan to open the studio for in-person classes until it is safe to do so but she was able to shift to virtual classes that are live streamed and are available on demand. The studio is also offering classes outdoors by the lake in Avondale Estates.

The outdoor classes follow protocols such as temperature checks, wearing masks onto the mat, providing alcohol spray bottles to clean the pilates mats and staying six feet apart.

“My whole goal on this is to serve my clientele and keep them connected, for us to all stay connected,” Kelley said.

Kirkwood businesses power through pandemic

BY PATRICK SAUNDERS, CONTRIBUTOR

Atlanta, Ga. — Businesses throughout Kirkwood have applied for federal loans, offered virtual services and instituted a slew of safety precautions to make it through the coronavirus pandemic.

Amy Robbins closed down her counseling office on Hosea Williams Drive in mid-March both for business and personal reasons related to the pandemic — her husband tested positive for coronavirus.

"I immediately moved all of my clients to virtual therapy sessions," she said. "We got real from the get-go."

Seven months later, she still meets most of her clients virtually. But some request in-office appointments, triggering a host of safety precautions.

"Clients stay in their car until I open the door to welcome them in, I then give them hand sanitizer and they go into my office," she said. "I have a higher-end air purifier with virus protection in my office now. Once the client leaves, I spray down the room, couch and chair."

Robbins' in-office clients welcomed the safety precautions, and the others "really love" the virtual experience.

A Paycheck Protection Program loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration helped Robbins pay rent when business was affected at the beginning of the outbreak. But overall, she says the pandemic has had minimal impact on her bottom line.

And the whole experience has changed how Robbins will run her business in the future.

"I think moving forward I will do half of my time in my office and half of my time doing virtual counseling," she said. "I think it has opened the eyes to many to a new normal and a new experience that we would have not seen otherwise."

Indigo Wellness spa on Hosea Williams Drive shut down in mid-March and opened back up June 1 with new precautions in place for such up-close-and-personal services.

"We implemented having clients sign waivers, taking their temps upon entry, having them wash their hands and both clients and staff wears masks at all times," owner Paris Campeau said. "We also have a continuous cleaning protocol with specially



Le Petite Marche owner Marchet Sparks is one of the numerous business owners in Kirkwood trying to survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo provided to Decaturish

formulated cleaning agents."

But the pandemic has caused a major revenue hit, with sales down about 75 percent. An Economic Injury Disaster Loan from the SBA has helped keep Indigo Wellness's doors open.

The spa's staff is down to five of its usual 15-person team, but Campeau said that's by the employees' choice.

"I didn't permanently lay off any employees and everyone was welcome to come back to work when we open, but many chose not to," she said. "We would gladly welcome them back if they were ready to return."

The future for Indigo Wellness — like so many other businesses these days — is uncertain. The pandemic hit right as the spa's busy season was supposed to begin. The fall and winter are slower for business, and Campeau's feeling the impact. "I am hoping that our memberships and the loan money can stretch through the spring, as well as the support from my community to keep our doors open," she said. "Honestly, moving forward I have no idea what it is going to look like over the next six months."

Restaurants are among the hardest-hit businesses by the pandemic, and eateries in Kirkwood have not escaped that fact.

Both Le Petite Marche and Elmyriachi have yet

to open their dining rooms since March, opting for to-go orders only out of an abundance of caution.

Le Petite Marche shut down in early March, reopened six weeks later but shut down again for another two weeks after an employee tested positive for coronavirus.

No more than six guests are allowed inside the restaurant to place or pick up orders and face-masks are provided and required.

"Thankfully, we've received no push-back," owner Marchet Sparks said. "We want to provide a safe environment for the collective health of our staff and guests."

They've lost a big chunk of business due to going to-go only.

"Even with significant losses, I cannot in good faith re-open my dining room and increase exposure to this virus," Sparks said.

A small SBA loan helped Le Petite Marche cover payroll, and all but one staff member has been retained.

"I'm uncertain but hopeful as we push through the pandemic long-haul," Sparks said.

Elmyriachi switched to to-go orders only in March, but have started allowing people to eat those orders on the Mexican restaurant's patio.

Food and drinks are delivered through a to-go window, they offer plastic utensils only, pens are sanitized in-between each customer's use, all employees in service areas wear masks and gloves at all times and employees are screened before each shift to see if they're exhibiting coronavirus symptoms.

"We also have a dedicated customer bathroom that employees are not allowed to use, and dedicated cleaning employees who sanitize the bathroom in-between uses," chef and co-owner Jeff Dilbeck said.

They have not had to lay any employees off, but some opted not to return for their own safety. And the pandemic has affected the restaurant financially.

"But we have a responsibility to the community, and in our opinion, it is better to do the right thing than to just be out there grabbing money without a conscience," Dilbeck said. "We'll reopen completely when we truly feel comfortable to do so. We are not there at this time, and we will be able to survive this."

NEW BREWPUB WILL TAKE OVER BIG TEX SPACE IN DECATUR

By Sara Amis, contributor

Decatur, Ga. — Owners Rhett Caseman and Josh Johnson got the name for Inner Voice Brewing from the lyrics of a Funkadelic song. They have been planning to open a craft brewery together since before Senate Bill 85 passed in 2017. The bill, which allows direct sales to customers by breweries and distilleries, has ushered in a wave of new brewpubs in the Atlanta area generally.

Johnson said that the pair struggled with the right location until they started looking in Decatur and the former Big Tex location on West Ponce de Leon Avenue was the first place they found.

"We're very, very happy to be here. I've always loved being in downtown Decatur, and this just seemed like a great place for another brewery. Obviously it has a pretty good beer culture already, with Twains and Three Taverns and Wild Heaven and the new ones opening up like Lost Druid," said Johnson.

Johnson, who has a degree in hospitality management from Auburn Universi-

ty, met Caseman in 2013 working for Monday Night Brewing. Johnson went on to work at Heist Brewery in Charlotte, NC, then returned to Monday Night Brewing as lead brewer, a position Caseman also held. As their plans to open their own craft brewery progressed, they both worked part-time at Variant Brewing Company in Roswell, one of the first small breweries to open up after SB 85 went into effect.

Caseman pointed out that the new law allowed for a relatively small business model without the need for the scale of investment and production that a large brewery requires, with the result that more brewers were opening their own craft breweries.

Rather than having their own food menu, Inner Voice will provide space for pop-up vendors who may be rotated periodically. "We're looking for something that compliments beer," said Johnson.

The former Big Tex space at 308 West Ponce de Leon Ave. is being remodeled to expand seating and in preparation for the arrival of brewing equipment at the end of this year. The opening is planned for the spring of 2021.



Winter Wonderland



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