

DeKalb Neighborhood Survey - Comparing Possible Futures

This December 2018 survey of DeKalb County residents regarding possible futures was organized by the Mason Mill Civic Association and the Citizens of Victoria Estates.

Other central DeKalb neighborhoods were invited to participate, and several chose to do so (see listing in question 3 on page 2). Each neighborhood pursued its own path in informing its constituents about the survey, providing a link to the common survey.

Complete survey wording appears below; a summary of results appears on pages 7-17.

After the survey closed, each neighborhood's leadership was provided with address information (but no data) to help validate whether the address should be classified within their neighborhood. In addition, cleaning steps included removing duplicate entries, those who did not provide address information, and incomplete surveys. The data were then disguised to protect anonymity of respondents.

Complete data (with personal identifying information removed) and comments are available as Excel and PDF files.

PART 1: Background & Neighborhood Affiliation

As you probably know, the unincorporated areas of north-central DeKalb County that include our neighborhoods are still the subject of discussion and debate about future governmental structures.

Depending on the exact location of a neighborhood, its possible futures might involve:

- being part of a newly-formed city,
- remaining an unincorporated part of DeKalb County,
- annexing into an existing DeKalb city, or
- annexing into the City of Atlanta.

The purpose of this survey is to gather input from citizens, residents and property-owners in unincorporated neighborhoods, where multiple future visions intersect. It was created by the Mason Mill Civic Association and the Citizens of Victoria Estates, and made available to other unincorporated neighborhoods in our area (which explains the breadth of options for some questions).

Our objective is to help provide the planners and decision makers with better information about the hopes, concerns and general preferences of the people who would be affected by these visions.

Your responses do not represent a commitment by you, nor do they create any obligation for your neighborhood leaders. This is information and advisory only.

Our pledges to you:

1. We will not share any information that could be identified with any individual respondent, to protect everyone's anonymity and encourage directness and candor in responses.
2. We will share all aggregate information and all comments publicly, without bias toward/against any of these futures.

This survey contains 18 questions, plus some space at the end for you to add comments of your own. It should take only 5-10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for taking the time to provide your input!

[part 1 questions on next page]

PART 1: Background & Neighborhood Affiliation

Q1 Your name [CONFIDENTIAL. This is only for purposes of validating eligibility to be included in the survey results.]

Q2 Your Address [CONFIDENTIAL. This helps with validation, and also in analyzing differences in preferences by street and neighborhood.]

Q3 Your primary neighborhood affiliation

[drop down list: Mason Mill, Victoria Estates, Medlock Park, Clairmont Heights, Laurel Ridge Shamrock, Avondale Rockbridge, North Briarcliff, Leafmore, Briarcliff Woods East, Lindmoor Woods, Other (specify)]

Q4 Connections to the primary neighborhood you indicated above [check ALL that may apply]

- Residential property - **occupant** (I **live** in this neighborhood, in a home I either own or rent from someone else.)
- Residential property - **owner** (I **own** a **home** in this neighborhood, which I either reside in or rent to others.)
- Commercial property - **occupant** (I **operate** a business in this neighborhood, in space I either own or lease from someone else.)
- Commercial property - **owner** (I **own commercial space** in this neighborhood, which I either use or lease to others.)

Q5 Your immediate-family connections to the area's school systems. [Check ALL that apply.]

- I do not have school-aged children.
- I have school-aged children, but none of them reside in Atlanta or DeKalb County.
- I have children attending neighborhood DeKalb County schools.
- I have children attending other DeKalb County schools (through School Choice)
- I have children attending City of Atlanta schools.
- I have children attending City of Decatur schools.
- I have children being home-schooled.
- I have children in private schools.

Part 2: Assumptions to Make about Plans that Aren't Fully Formed

We want our elected officials to make decisions that represent the interests and preferences of the citizens in the affected areas. However, the absence of specific proposals presents some challenges in surveying public opinion!

For the purposes of this survey, we will ask you to make a few assumptions. Please consider the following definitions to be "placeholders" that represent the general concepts:

NEW CITY. At this time, there is a group developing plans for a new "City of Vista Grove." This would require both the interest and the approval of the State Legislature to proceed to a referendum. For the purposes of this survey, consider "New City" to represent a map that would include much of the unincorporated areas lying between Atlanta, Decatur, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Doraville and Tucker. Also assume that this new city would take responsibility for a subset of the services currently provided by the County. (For example: police, planning, parks, zoning and roads have been discussed.)

REMAIN UNINCORPORATED. Legislators involved in the past city-hood debates have stated opposition to leaving "islands," isolated pieces of unincorporated DeKalb County, resulting from the creation of new cities or re-drawing existing city lines. For the purposes of this survey, consider "Remain Unincorporated" to represent remaining unincorporated but not isolated. However, recognize the possibility of a New City having been incorporated nearby, and the possibility of existing cities having expanded nearby. (That is, this alternative is not exactly the status quo, but rather remaining in a changing Unincorporated DeKalb.)

EXISTING DEKALB CITY. Some existing DeKalb cities (Decatur, Chamblee, Tucker, Brookhaven, etc.) have been discussing a coherent plan for dividing up the unincorporated areas that fall between them, as an alternative to a potentially protracted, competitive and piecemeal process of incorporation and new city initiatives. Assume that proximity and preference would be factors in determining which existing city a neighborhood might fall into, if such a plan were even developed and approved.

ATLANTA. There is not an active push by the City of Atlanta to annex, but since the time of the last DeKalb city-hood initiative, the Emory/CDC area asked to be annexed into Atlanta, so the borders of the City of Atlanta have moved significantly closer. For the purposes of this survey, assume that the City of Atlanta would be open to annexing adjacent neighborhoods that are interested in joining.

Ready to answer some questions? Go to the next page to begin!

Part 3: INITIAL MATCH-UPS: HYPOTHETICAL COMPARISONS

First, let's look at "head to head" comparisons between each of the possible futures. (All the combinations are listed, so in some cases you may find yourself comparing two alternatives, neither which is your overall preference.)

In answering this first page of questions, to focus on attitudes about governance and affinity, temporarily set aside two important issues and assume the following:

1. Your overall taxes and fees would remain roughly the same, and
2. Your children's school assignments would not change immediately, if at all.

[In the next section, that is, the questions that will immediately follow these, you will be given an opportunity to express opinions, hopes and concerns about the issues of changing schools and taxation, and any others that are on your mind.]

Note for Questions 6 – 11: Same question wording, different pairings

Assuming (for now) that taxes/fees and school assignments would not change, indicate which of these two hypothetical futures you would prefer (or "No preference" between these two).

Q6: Remain Unincorporated // New City // No preference

Q7: Remain Unincorporated // Existing DeKalb City // No preference

Q8: Existing DeKalb City // New City // No preference

Q9: New City // Atlanta // No preference // Not applicable (not near the Atlanta boundaries)

Q10: Atlanta // Remain Unincorporated // No preference // Not applicable (not near the Atlanta boundaries)

Q11: Atlanta // Existing DeKalb City // No preference // Not applicable (not near the Atlanta boundaries)

Part 4: No More Hypotheticals! Give Us Your Opinions

You're almost done! Just a few more questions.

First, here is your opportunity to express your opinions about the four possible entities whose visions intersect in our area. In these questions, please try to articulate specific issues that drive your interest and support (or lack thereof) for each of these four futures.

Now, for these questions, it is "fair game" to consider possible changes in tax structures and school systems. Those specifics are difficult to predict, and they might become central parts of any negotiations involved in any incorporations or annexations, but your hopes and concerns are encouraged here.

You may leave any of the lines blank, if you have no opinion for that question. If your neighborhood is not near the Atlanta boundaries, you can leave those hopes and fears blank, or enter "N/A."

Note for Questions 12-15: Same question wording for each entity:

- ***Hopes: Issues that drive my support toward this vision***
- ***Fears: Issues that drive my support away from this vision***

[free text box provided]

Q12. New City

Q13. Remain Unincorporated

Q14. Existing DeKalb City

Q15. Atlanta

[more part 4 questions on next page]

Part 4: No More Hypotheticals! Give Us Your Opinions

Q16. Now, considering everything you know and believe, please gather your opinions into a single forced ranking (1 = favorite; 4 = worst)

- New City
- Atlanta
- Existing DeKalb City
- Remain Unincorporated

Q17. Nearing the end! All that remain are questions about how your attitudes about the existing entities that might play a role in the future incorporation of this area.

In my opinion, how well run are each of the following entities? (Few people are likely to have clear opinions about all, so you have the ability to reply "no opinion" for as many as you like.

[No opinion // Poorly Run // Fair // Effective // Outstanding]

- Atlanta
- Brookhaven
- Chamblee
- Doraville
- Tucker
- Clarkston
- Decatur
- Avondale Estates
- Unincorporated DeKalb County

Q18 Suppose your neighborhood were going to be annexed into an existing city (never mind, for the moment, that some combinations would not be possible for geographic reasons). Rank order your preferences about which city you'd prefer to become a part of (1 = favorite, 8 = worst)

- Atlanta
- Brookhaven
- Chamblee
- Doraville
- Tucker
- Clarkston
- Decatur
- Avondale Estates

Q19. That's all we have to ask. Thank you for getting this far.

Now it's your turn: Please provide any additional comments to share with planners and decision makers.

[free text box provided]

Profile of survey responses

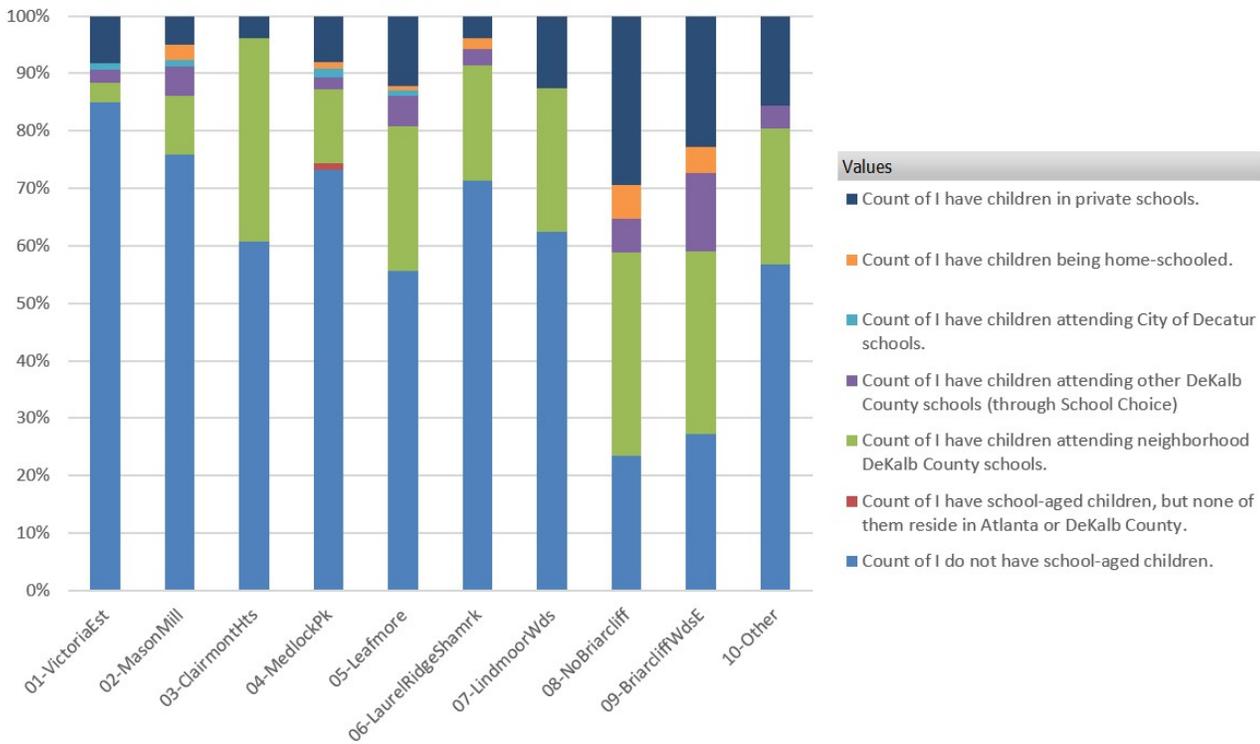
After removing duplicates and fully anonymous responses, we were left with almost 700 surveys. The largest six of the participating neighborhoods accounted for over 85% of those responses.

Row Labels	Count of Respondent ID
01-VictoriaEst	85
02-MasonMill	74
03-ClairmontHts	50
04-MedlockPk	180
05-Leafmore	108
06-LaurelRidgeShamrk	101
07-LindmoorWds	7
08-NoBriarcliff	16
09-BriarcliffWdsE	18
10-Other	48
Grand Total	687

The majority of respondents do *not* have school-aged children, although the family compositions range greatly across the neighborhoods.

Number of responses for category, "I have children attending..."
 [multiple responses permitted; City of Atlanta response offered, but got 0 responses]

Row Labels	n/a (no school-aged children)	n/a none reside in ATL or DeKalb	Nbrhood DeKalb schools	Other DeKalb (via School Choice)	Decatur schools	Home-schooled	Private schools
01-VictoriaEst	73		3	2	1		7
02-MasonMill	60		8	4	1	2	4
03-ClairmontHts	31		18				2
04-MedlockPk	137	2	24	4	3	2	15
05-Leafmore	64		29	6	1	1	14
06-LaurelRidgeShamrk	75		21	3		2	4
07-LindmoorWds	5		2				1
08-NoBriarcliff	4		6	1		1	5
09-BriarcliffWdsE	6		7	3		1	5
10-Other	29		12	2			8
Grand Total	484	2	130	25	6	9	65

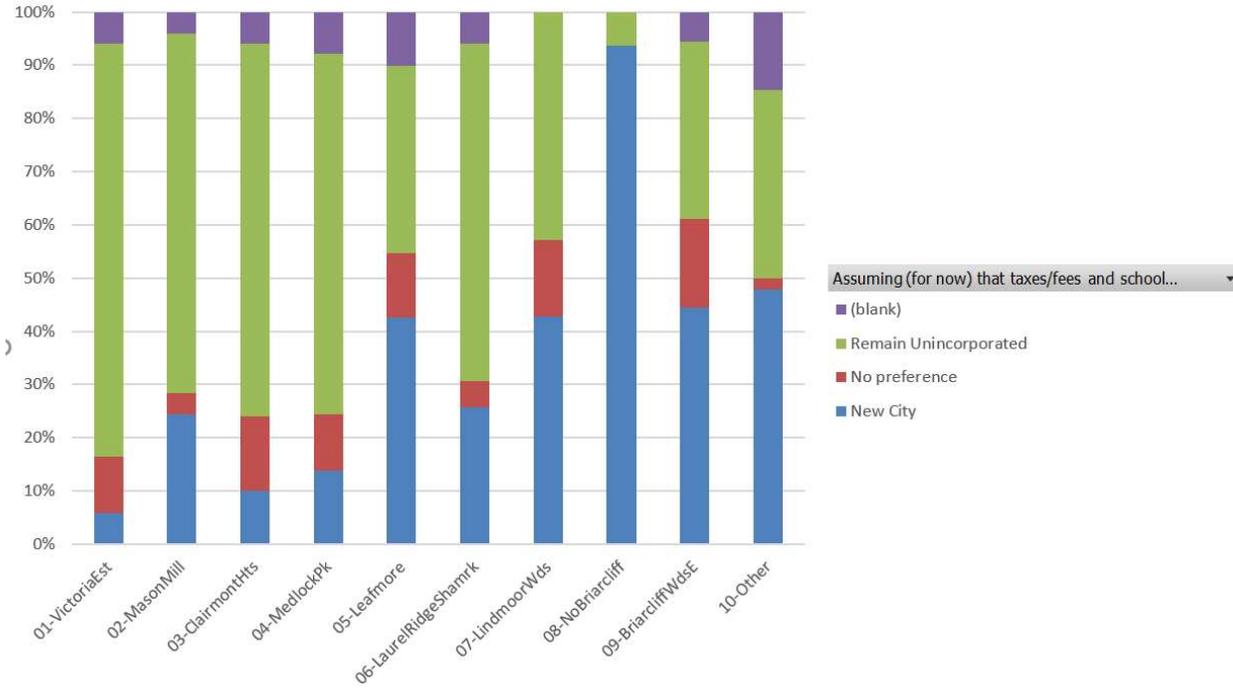


Preferences for Futures

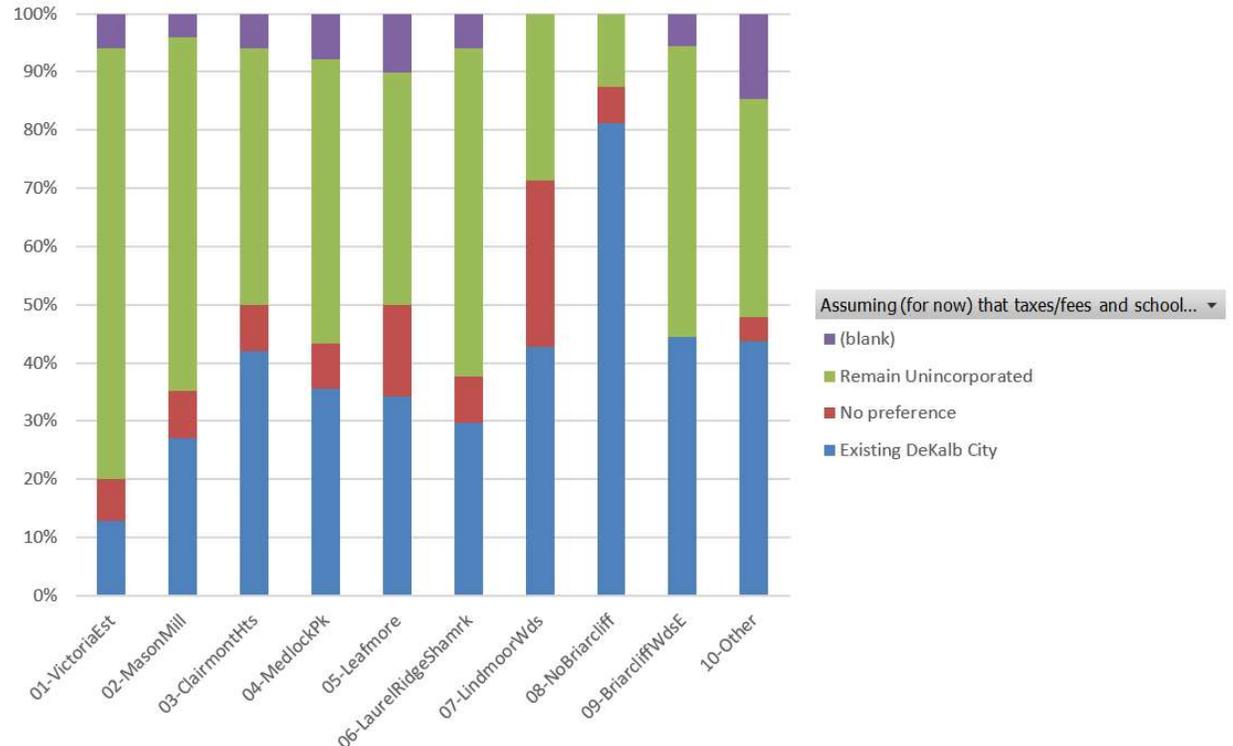
In the first set of questions directly related to cityhood and other futures, respondents were given opportunities to compare all the various futures **pairwise** (with the instruction to set aside, for the moment, their assumptions that taxation and schools would change).

Although the results vary significantly by location, in the participating neighborhoods that comprise most of the responses, the unincorporated status quo *tended* to be preferred over existing DeKalb cities over City of Atlanta over New City. (Note: strong geographic split on the ordering of the last two items.)

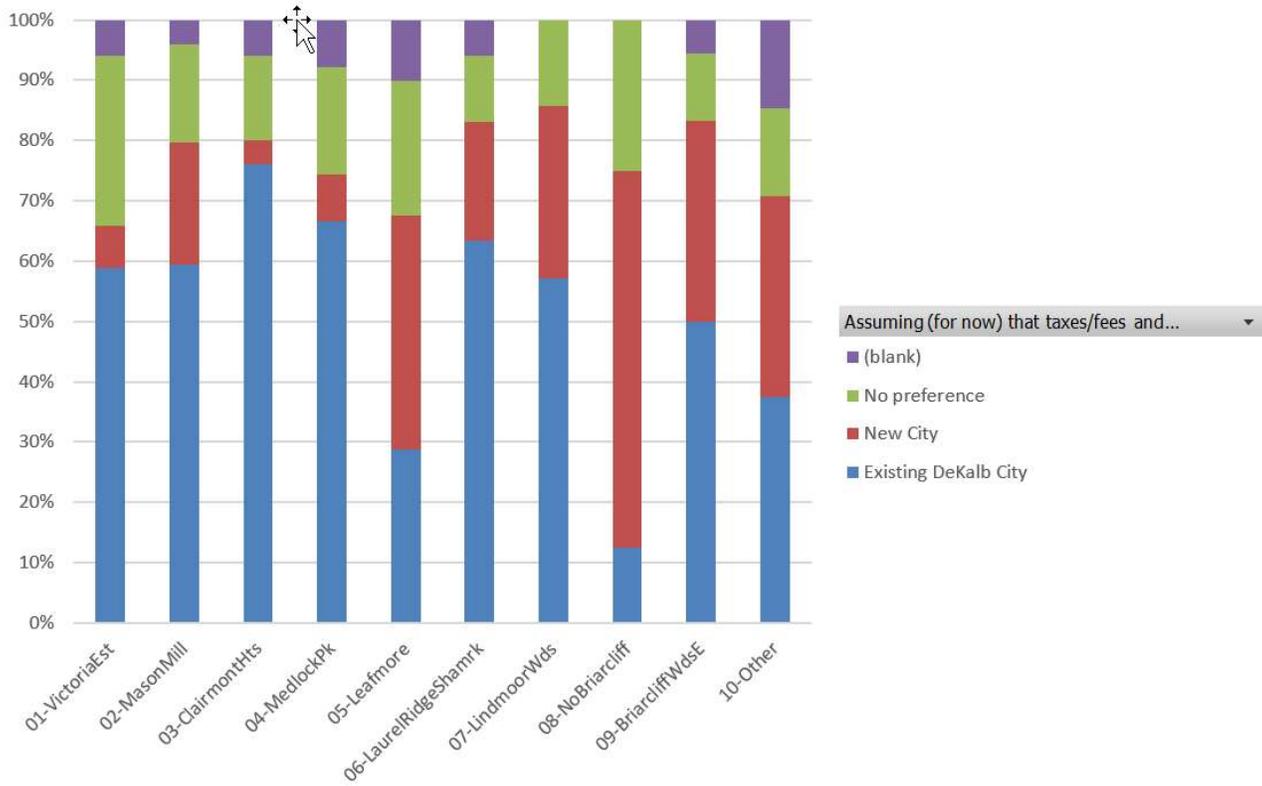
Unincorporated vs New City:



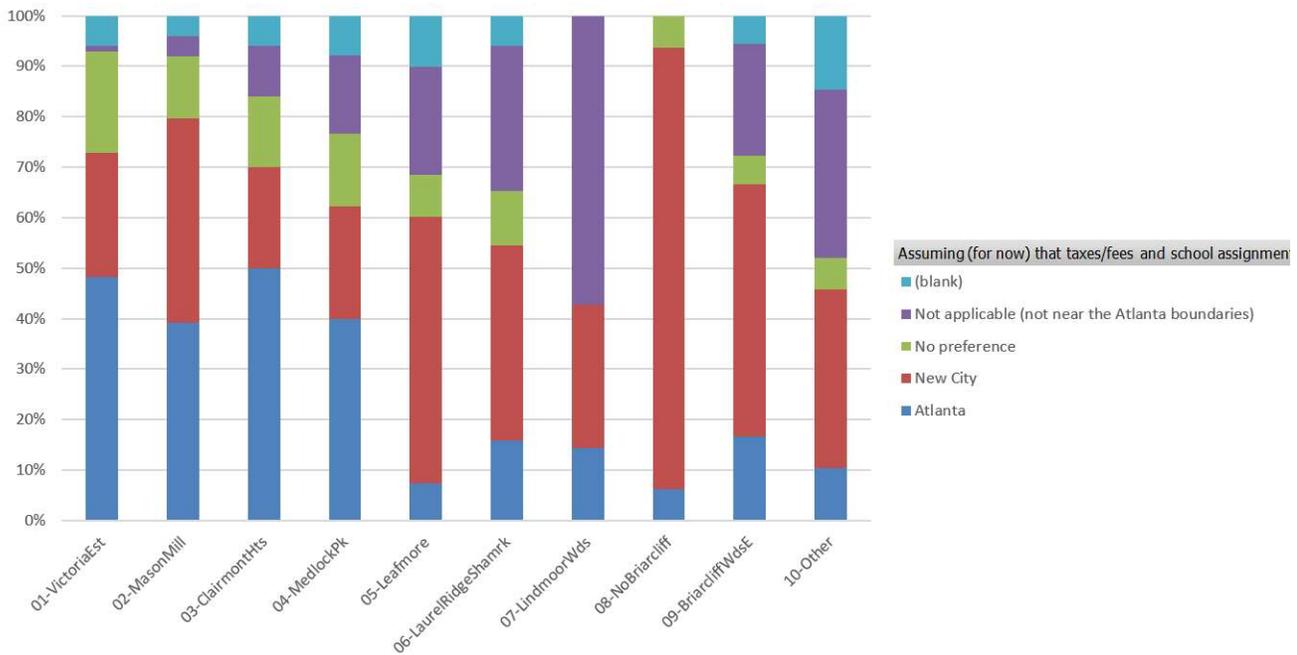
Unincorporated vs Existing Dekalb City:



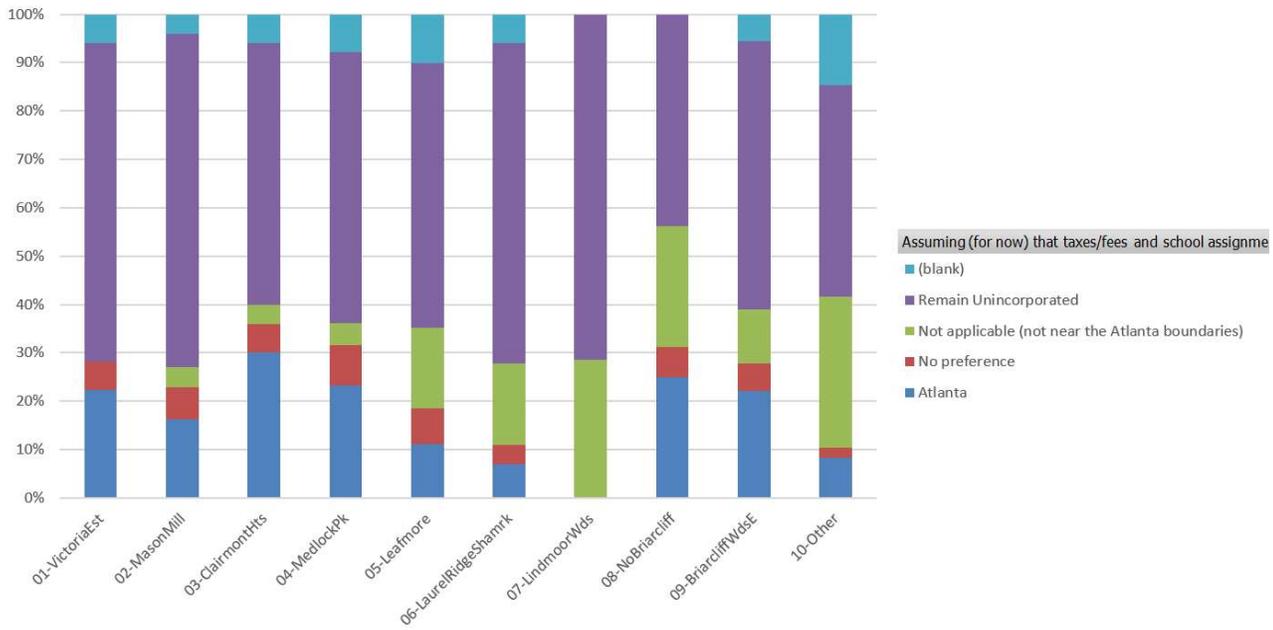
New City vs Existing Dekalb City:



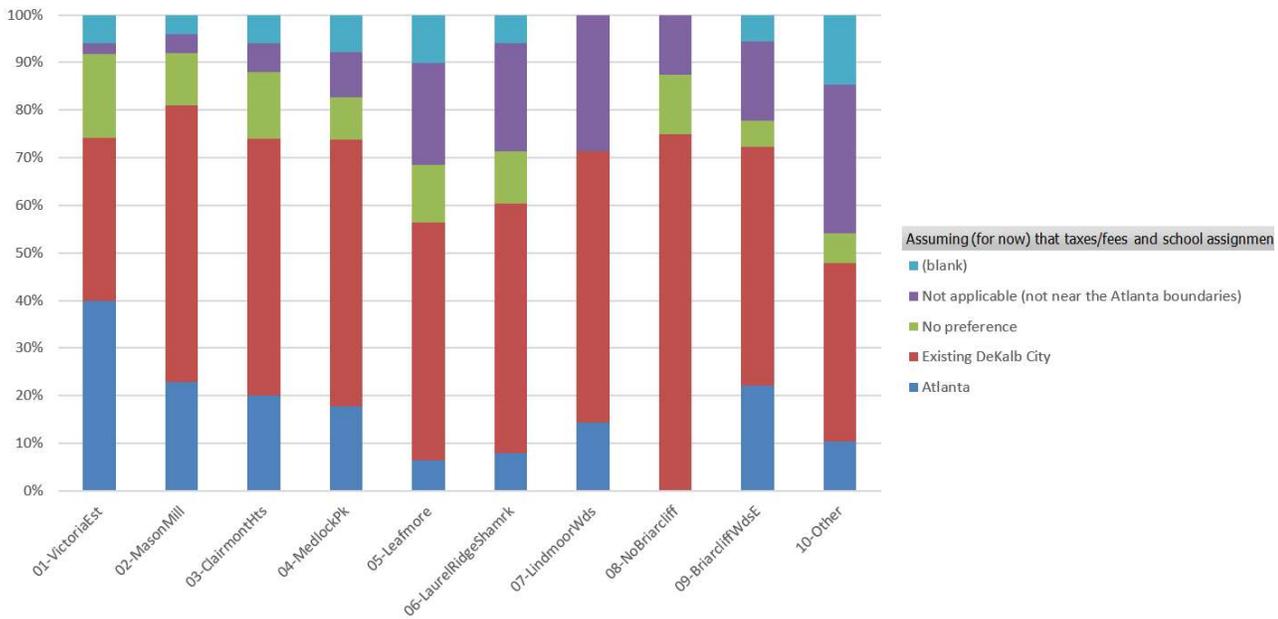
New City vs City of Atlanta



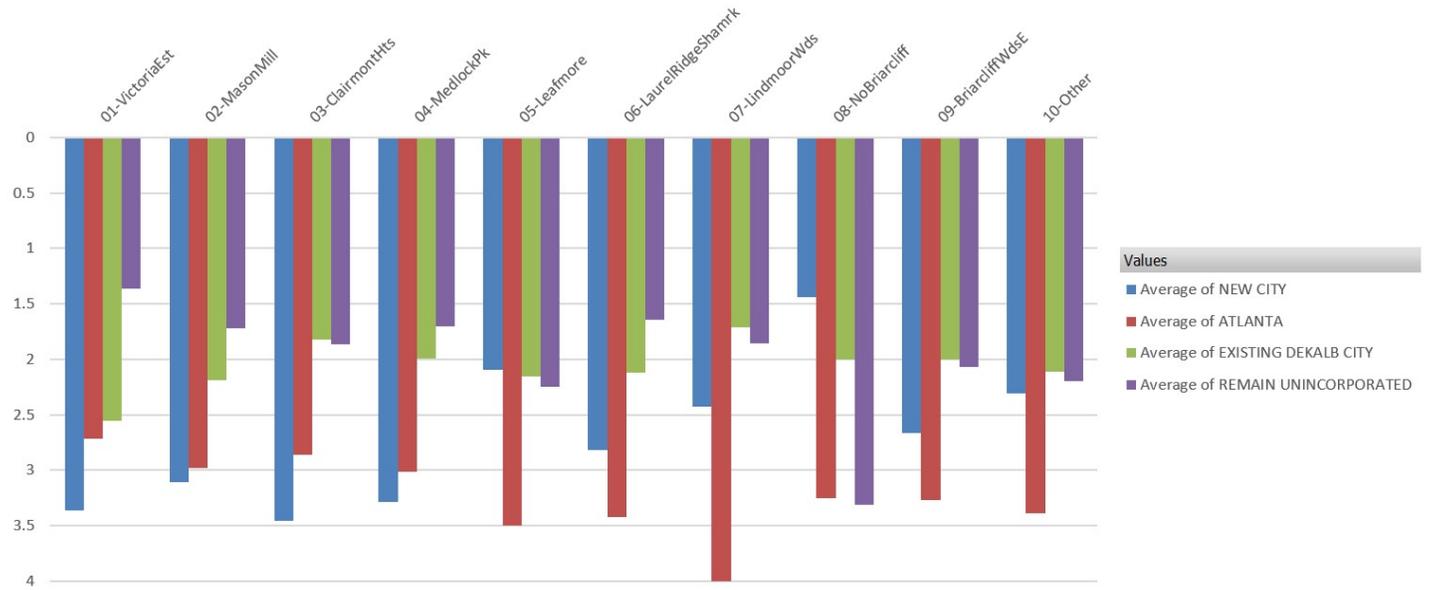
Unincorporated vs City of Atlanta



Existing Dekalb City vs City of Atlanta



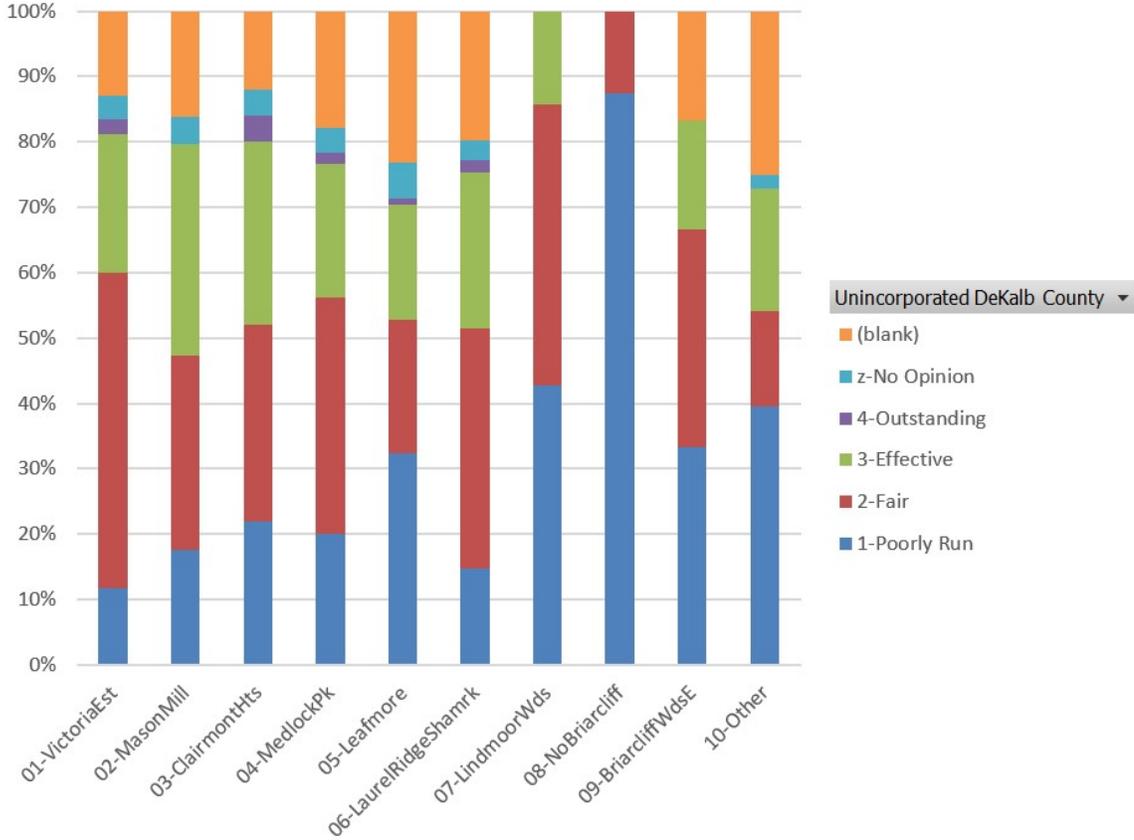
In the next set of questions, respondents were asked to *rank-order* four futures, with 1 = most favorable and 4 = least favorable). The results were consistent with the pairwise comparisons.



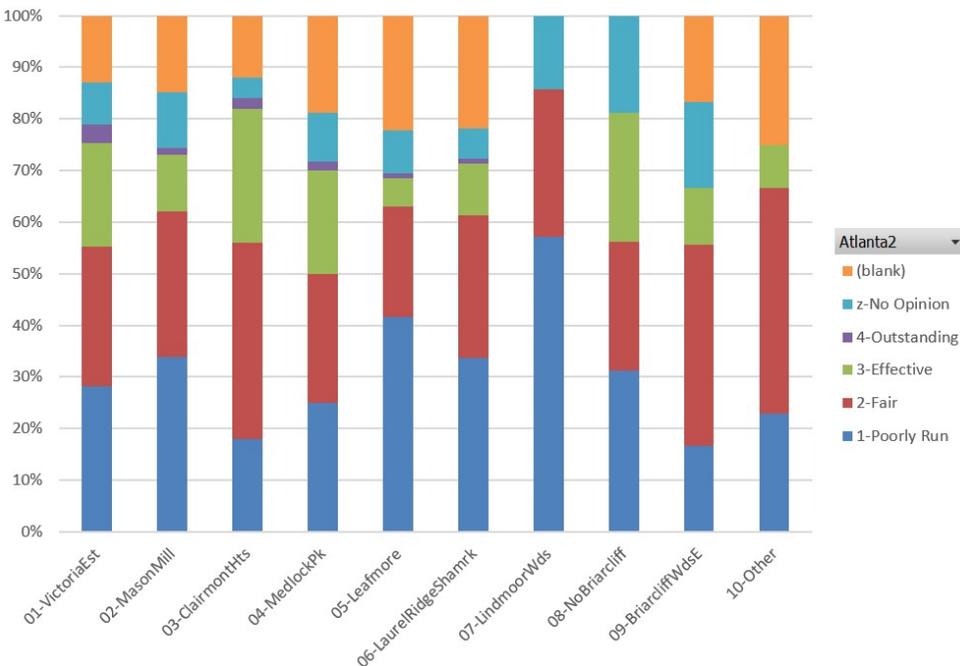
Opinions of Existing Entities

Respondents were asked their opinion of the quality of government (“how well run”) for each of the existing entities in the vicinity. The first set of questions asked for qualitative opinions one entity at a time. Although there were geographic differences, Dekalb and Atlanta were generally judged harshly, Decatur and Brookhaven (and in some cases Tucker) more favorably, and the others were largely unknown.

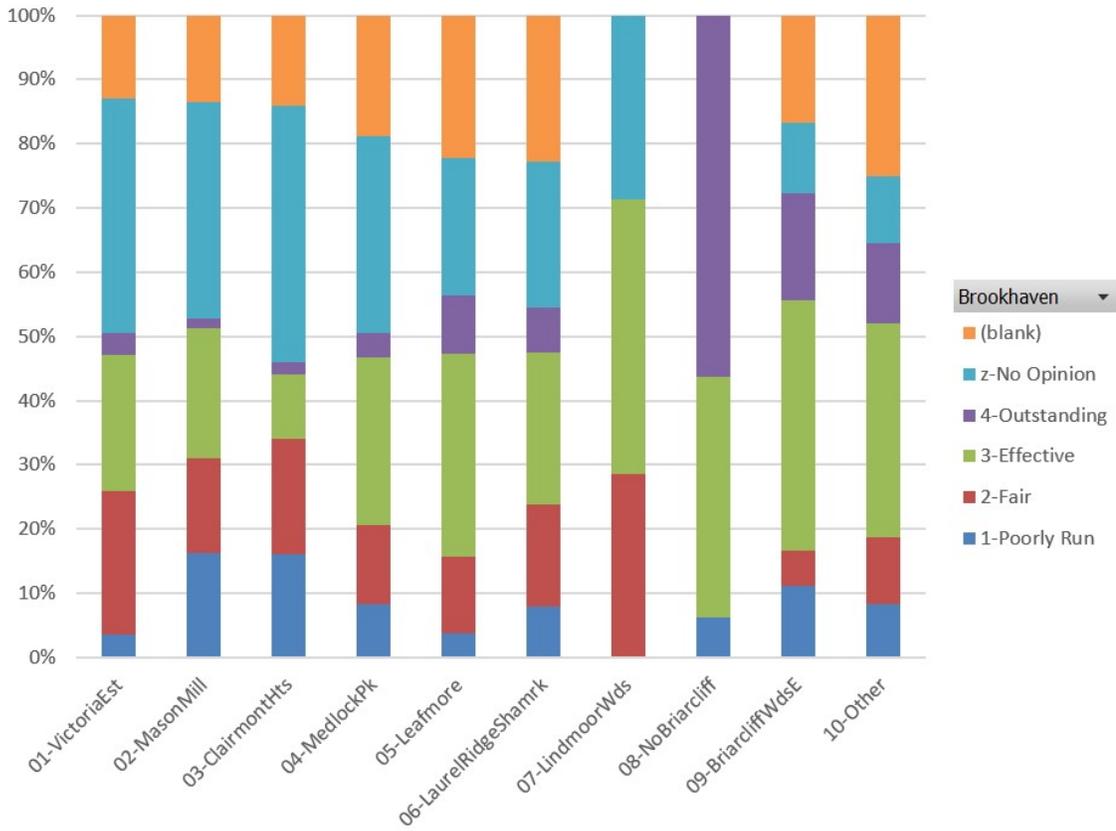
Unincorporated DeKalb County



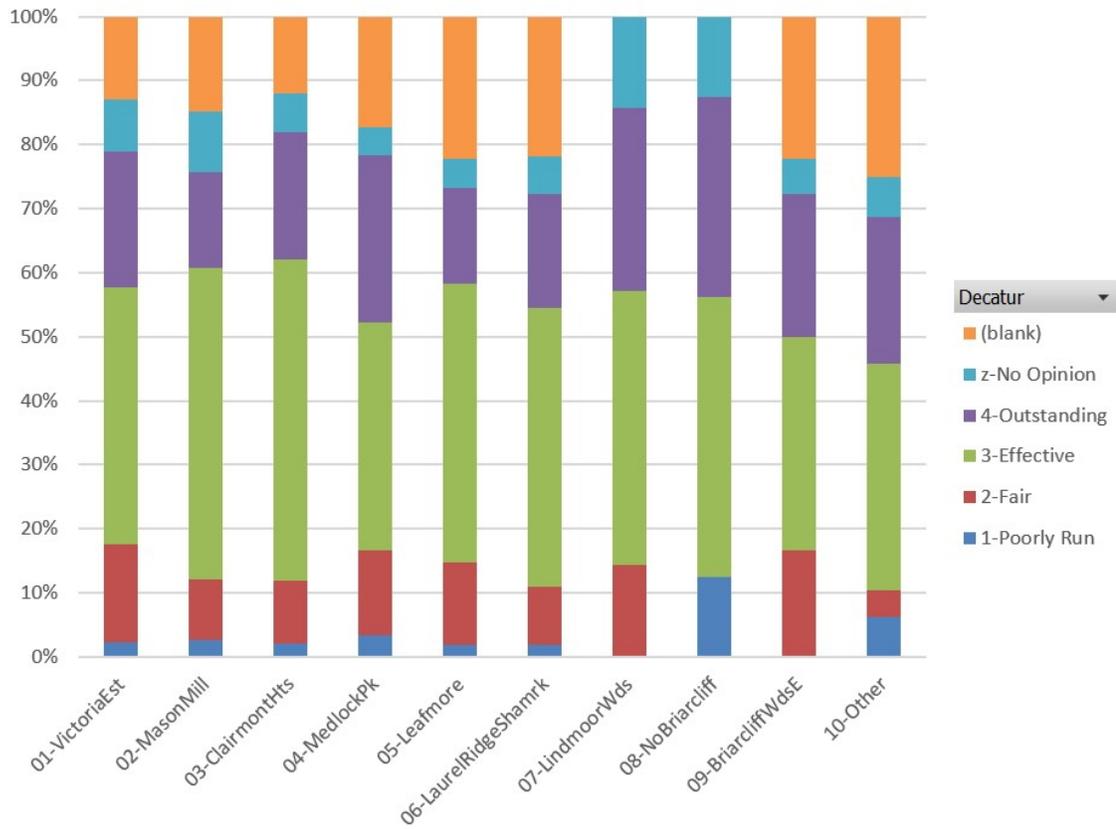
City of Atlanta



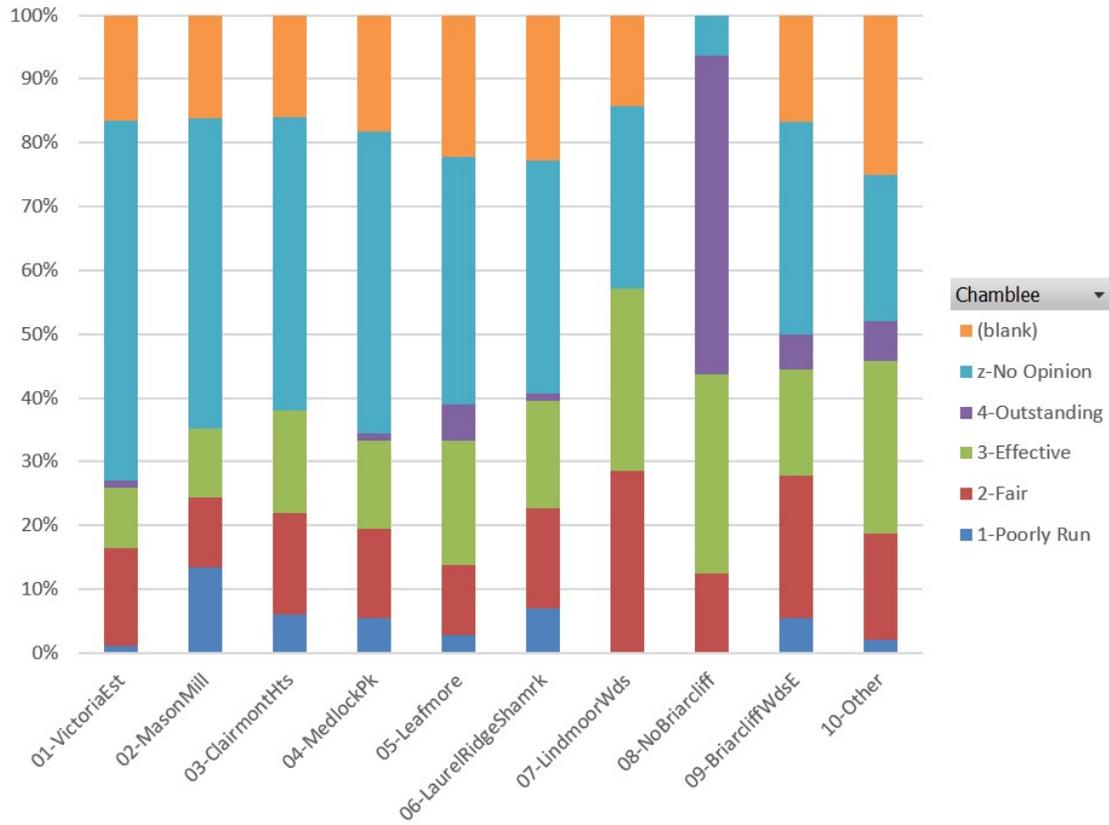
City of Brookhaven



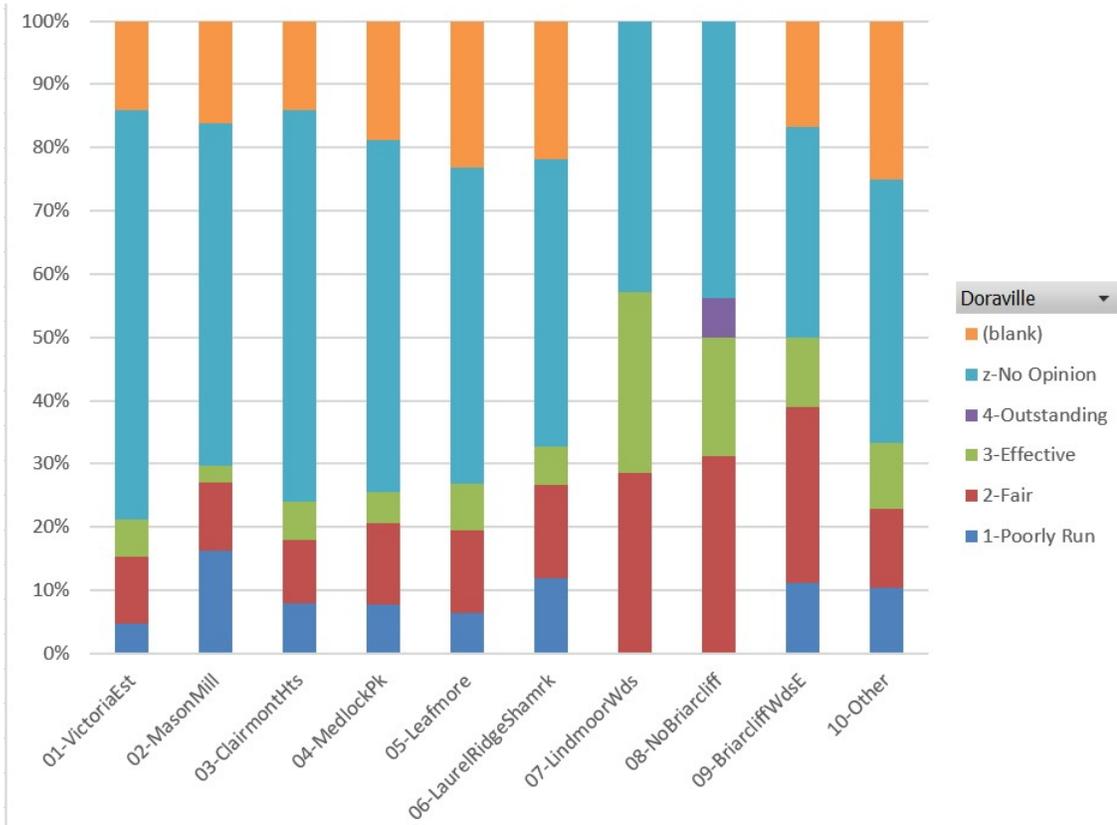
City of Decatur



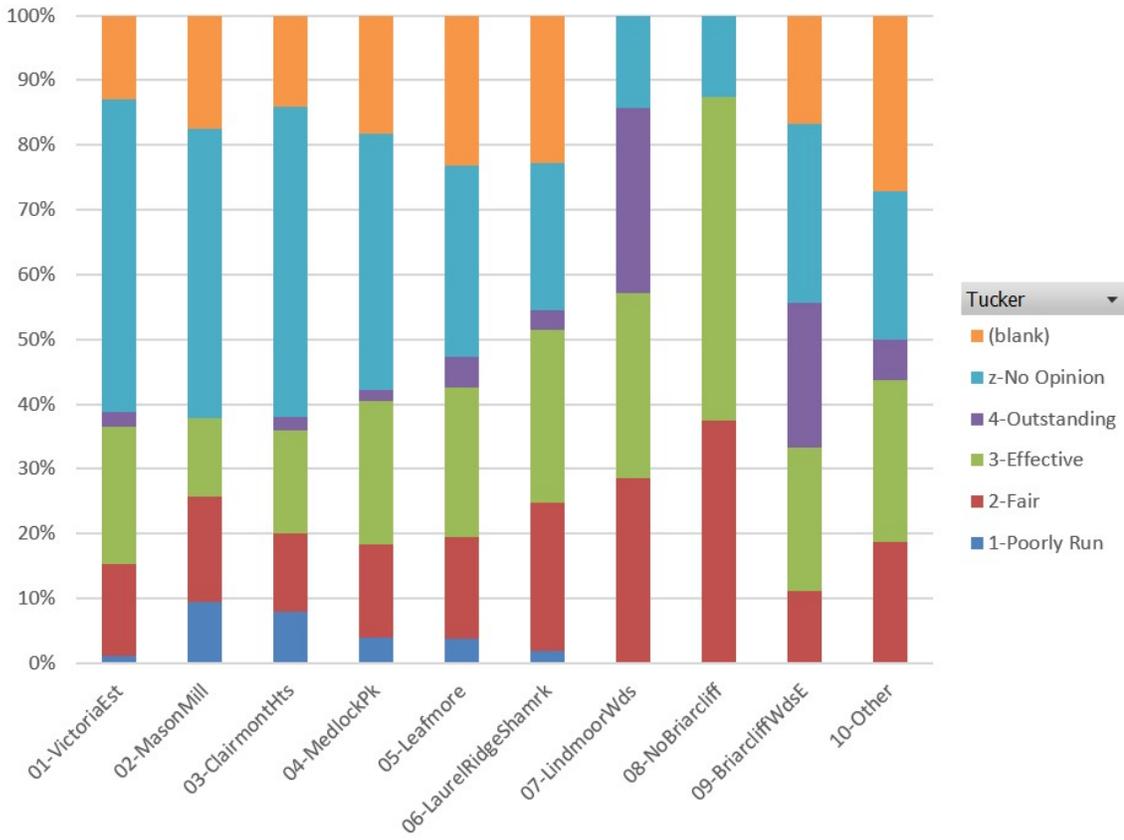
City of Chamblee



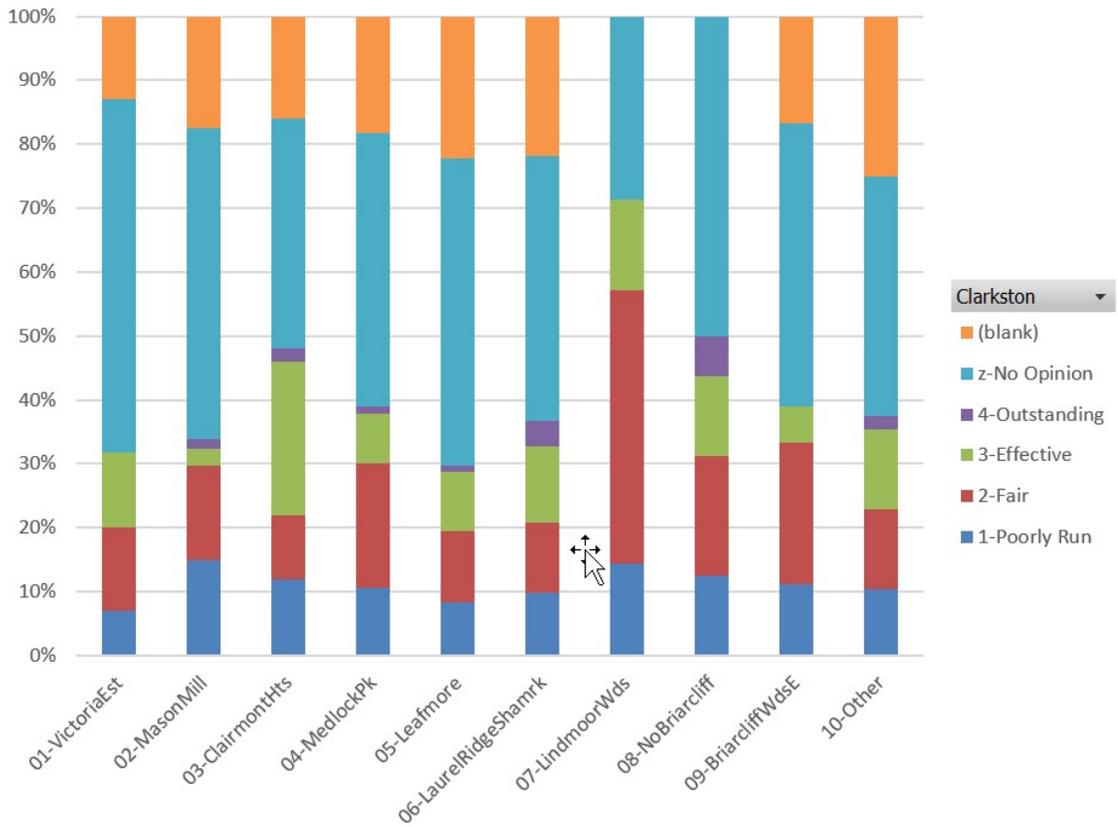
City of Doraville



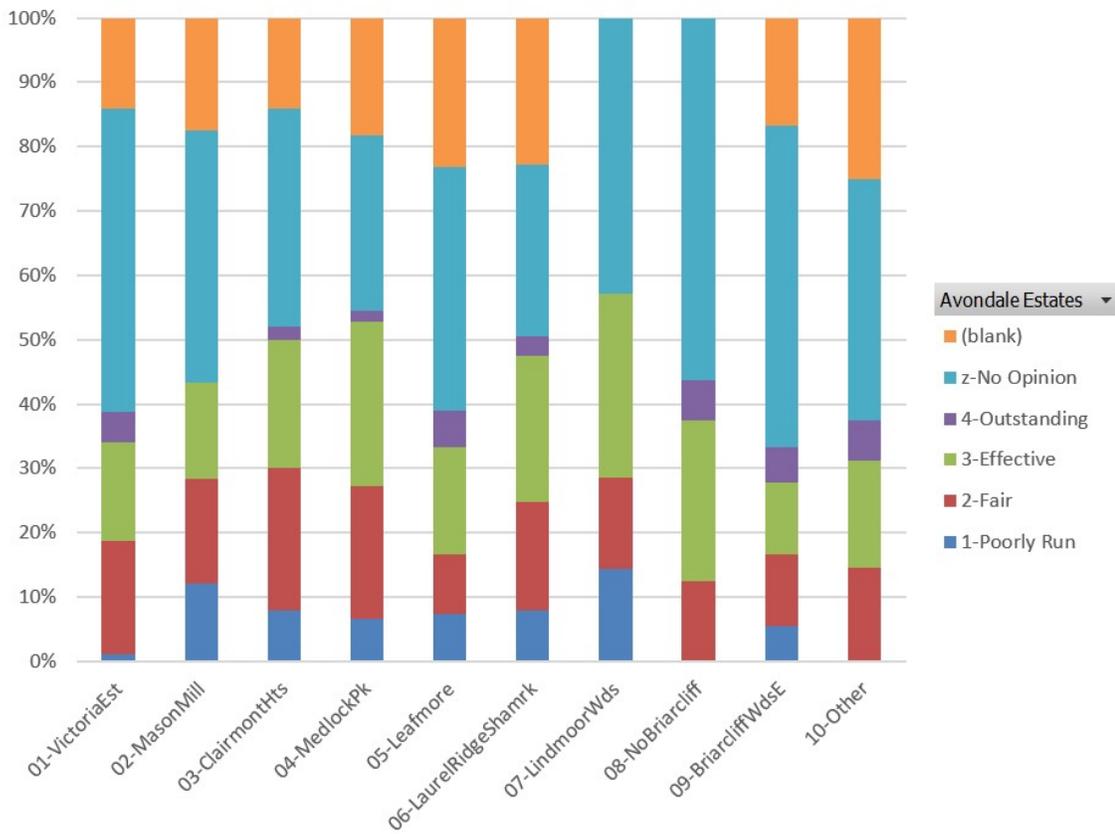
City of Tucker



City of Clarkston



City of Avondale Estates



Finally, respondents were asked to imagine that their neighborhood was going to be annexed into an existing entity (regardless of geography), and then to rank-order which entity they'd prefer to be part of (1 = favorite, 8 = worst). The City of Decatur was broadly considered a desirable option in this hypothetical scenario. [for clarity, the chart below removes several neighborhoods with consistently low rank averages: Doraville, Clarkston, Avondale Estates)

