

DEKALB CROSS-NEIGHBORHOODS COUNCIL
and the North DeKalb Mall Redevelopment, February 2022

Who we are: The DeKalb Cross-Neighborhoods Council (DCNC) is a coalition of community volunteers representing neighborhood interests with developers concerning commercial and residential development in and around our central DeKalb neighborhoods. The DCNC alliance aims to ensure that the outcome of local economic development will bring measurable improvements that benefit nearby residents and reflect good policy practices.

DCNC participants come from a variety of local neighborhood and community organizations and are appointed as representatives to DCNC by the boards of those groups. Representation on the DCNC is fluid, based primarily on proximity to the development, organizational structure, and outreach capability. The current DCNC team working with EDENS on the North DeKalb Mall proposal includes:

- Clairmont Heights Civic Association (Jim Smith, Michael Dowling);
- Clyde Shepherd Nature Preserve (Chris Beck);
- Good Growth DeKalb (Mary Shellman);
- Greater Valley Brook Civic Association (Elizabeth Roberts, Kenna Simmons, Josh Shuster);
- Laurel Ridge Shamrock Civic Association (Marylee Putnam, Susan McWethy);
- Medlock Area Neighborhood Association (Theresa Same), which includes Tuxworth Springs Condo Association (Jean Logan, Adam Manchester); and
- North Druid Valley Home Association (Gail Richman, Dawn Lanier)

MANA's Zoning Chair Theresa Same serves as the DCNC Chair, working to identify project specific impacted communities; sharing her zoning expertise; and bringing her negotiation experience to community-developer communications. Jim Smith has served as the Zoning Chair for Clairmont Heights since 1995 and currently serves on the Community Council. Elizabeth Roberts is an attorney experienced in zoning and real estate issues. Theresa Same and Jim Smith have worked together representing their neighborhoods in zoning issues since 2008. Coming from varied backgrounds, the other DCNC members each bring unique skills and a willingness to work hard for their communities. In an ongoing fashion, DCNC members report back and provide community updates through their member organizations.

What we seek: Most important of all, the DCNC strives to give the community a voice in the development process. In DeKalb County, developers wield formidable sway and financial resources. Coupled with the limited opportunities for advocacy, communities are often left feeling powerless to impact meaningful change. DCNC brings neighborhoods together, creating a more powerful and influential voice.

While each development is unique, DCNC generally promotes the inclusion of desired amenities such as quality restaurants and locally owned businesses, employment centers, and service and retail establishments which satisfy the needs of the community; and the use of quality construction materials and desirable architectural styles which are compatible with the existing neighborhoods. We support the inclusion of a percentage of affordable, workforce and senior housing in residential developments.

We advocate for developments that adhere to smart growth principles by defining traffic patterns and impact on existing neighborhoods and implementing traffic mitigation strategies. We push for enhanced pedestrian and bicycle pathways throughout and surrounding the developments. The most difficult piece to negotiate has been our goal to limit environmental impact by striving to retain, replace and enhance greenspace within development.

Thus far on the North DeKalb Mall Redevelopment: For some of us on DCNC, this is the fourth go around with redevelopment of the mall. EDENS reached out to the DCNC in May 2021 shortly after purchasing North DeKalb Mall. We had an introductory meeting which gave us an opportunity to

DEKALB CROSS-NEIGHBORHOODS COUNCIL
and the North DeKalb Mall Redevelopment, February 2022

familiarize ourselves with EDENS and their development portfolio while sharing some of the desires and priorities of our communities.

A development of this size (77 acres) in north-central DeKalb is a unique and important opportunity. Recognizing the stakes, Commissioners Rader and Terry dedicated County time and resources to more fully understand the possibilities of the site and to “workshop” with the developer. In support of this process, the Commissioners asked DCNC to outline the concerns, priorities and requests we had previously received from our communities. We provided a 4-page document informed by the community feedback we received during the most recent development proposal for this property by Sterling Enterprises in 2018.

In late January 2022, EDENS invited DCNC to meet for a second time to present a preliminary site plan in preparation for their community meeting on February 22, 2022. (This was the plan recently reported in Decaturish and the AJC.) We had many questions and concerns – many of the same ones we see neighbors asking on various social media platforms. (Note: The plan EDENS will present at their community meeting on February 22, 2022 may vary from these preliminary materials.)

While we still have some important concerns, we have been encouraged by the fact that EDENS has shown its willingness to listen and adjust, and we look forward to further dialogue as the plans evolve. Following their formal presentation to the community, we will listen to your concerns and actively collect community feedback before coming back to the table with EDENS and our Commissioners.

What happens next: After their pre-submittal community meeting on February 22nd, EDENS will file its rezoning application and begin the public review process. The plans will be reviewed by the DeKalb District 2 Community Council, the DeKalb Planning Commission, and the staff of the DeKalb County Planning & Sustainability Department. Each of these bodies will make a recommendation. Ultimately the Board of Commissioners will vote on whether to grant the rezoning. Developments of this size often take many months to work through this process. We will keep you informed of the meeting dates once we have them.

Projects of this size require a Development of Regional Impact study (DRI). The DRI process looks at impacts created by the development beyond its immediate boundaries. This study produces an advisory report for informational use by the host local government as it moves through its local process. EDENS has already begun this process and study results should be available in the spring.

The County has also contracted the PATH Foundation to do a preliminary study of alternative transportation options available in the area that surrounds North DeKalb Mall. PATH will hold a series of public meetings, tentatively beginning in March. We will let you know the dates. This is the first building block needed for the community to understand what options we have in our area.

Every development is different and as such the DCNC will assess how we can best assist the community with the redevelopment at North DeKalb Mall as it unfolds. In the past we have addressed a range of community issues by negotiating contracts to ensure that a developer’s promises regarding community benefits are legally enforceable.

As always we are restricted by the dictates of the county zoning code. The amount of leverage we are able to exert during negotiations is directly proportional to the property’s current zoning designation and the type and number of zoning changes and special permits requested by the developer. We are fortunate to have County Commissioners who have encouraged us and often complement our conditions with their own. Their planning expertise and support has been essential to our efforts.

Community involvement: DCNC members are here to support the voices of our communities. Each DCNC member organization represents many residents of DeKalb and our strength during negotiations comes from those numbers. Your participation and input are crucial. We are here to solicit, organize

DEKALB CROSS-NEIGHBORHOODS COUNCIL
and the North DeKalb Mall Redevelopment, February 2022

and share neighborhood feedback with EDENS and the Commissioners. We will work to keep you informed of upcoming meetings and developments. We encourage you to stay informed and if you do not understand something, ask us. At any time during the process you can send us your input by reaching out to your neighborhood association or by emailing the DCNC directly at crossneighborhoodscommittee@gmail.com, and we strongly encourage you to do so.