



Laurel Ridge Shamrock

Civic Association

Newsletter

Winter, 2015

KEEPING YOU INFORMED

After only four months in existence, Laurel Ridge Shamrock Civic Association has held five meetings on topics relevant to all of us.

Oct. 14, 2014: Cityhood

Herman Lorenz, representing what was then City of Briarcliff Initiative (COBI), and Josh Kan, representing what was then Lakeside Yes!, updated our group about the possible incorporation of our area into a new city. Since this meeting, the two entities have combined to form LaVista Hills, which continues to include LRSCA on its map.

Nov. 19, 2015: Annexation

Atlanta City Councilman Alex Wan and Atlanta Public School Board member Matt Westmoreland spoke to a group about ramifications of the Fernbank and Briar Vista school attendance zones being annexed into City of Atlanta, and along with them, the loss of Druid Hills High School.

Nov. 20, 2014: Blueprint to Redefine DeKalb

Volunteers Brenda Pace, Robert Glover and Ted Daniel have been working all year to implement proposals contained in the Blueprint. They spoke to our group about concerns with county government and the Blueprint's solutions, and solicited our support.

Dec. 8, 2014: Goodwill

Public relations representative Elaine Armstrong spoke to a group about the development of Goodwill Store and Career Center in N. DeKalb Sq. shopping center.

Jan. 20, 2015: Planning and Zoning

Marian Eisenberg, DeKalb County zoning administrator, provided information on the processes within county government that take place when planning and zoning decisions are made.

Coming up Feb. 10, 2015: Interim CEO Lee May

Is there a topic you want to see presented? Please contact a member of the LRSCA Board.



Time Out. Let's Think!

No doubt you have been noticing yard signs in the neighborhood with this message.

In December a group of DeKalb residents came together to create DeKalb Strong to advocate for a moratorium on decisions that affect our county governance. They have created a web site that contains updates on governance issues, notices of future meetings around the county, and a section for public comment.

DeKalb Strong encourages everyone who wants to slow down the process of radically changing the way we govern our county, especially decisions that affect our schools, to sign the **petition**.

To sign the petition, and to request a sign for your yard, please go to <http://dekalbstrong.com/>.

Superintendent Search Begins

The DeKalb County Board of Education will be holding stakeholder engagement meetings regarding the upcoming search for a new Superintendent.

This is your opportunity to attend a meeting to share your thoughts about the characteristics and experience that should qualify candidates for this important job. Feedback from the community is a critical component of developing a profile that will drive recruiting. Please come and participate.

Community Engagement Public Forum Meetings:

Tues, Feb 3, 7:00-8:30pm Dunwoody HS Region 1

Wed, Feb 4, 7:00-8:30 PM Lakeside HS Region 2

Thurs, Feb 5, 7:00-8:30PM Stephenson HS Region 3

Tues, Feb 10, 7:00-8:30PM Miller Grove HS Region 4

Wed, Feb 11, 7:00-8:30PM Towers HS Region 5

Countywide Public Forum:

Thurs, Feb 12 7:00-8:30PM BOE Board Room

Survey Reveals Strong Preference to Remain Unincorporated

In mid-November 2014, surveys were distributed by volunteers to the 805 households that make up the Laurel Ridge Shamrock Civic Association. Five options were offered to return surveys, including electronically, in person, or by mail. If respondents wanted someone to pick up their surveys, that service was provided. A valid sample was obtained, with a return of 217 surveys.

The survey was conducted in response to legislators urging our neighborhood to let our opinions be known on the subject of future governance. Many proposals have been reported or rumored that could affect everything from our taxes to our schools to our property values. In order to know how to proceed, the legislators desired our input.

At the time of the survey, there were three feasible options: 1) Be a part of a proposed new city that includes much of the unincorporated areas lying between Atlanta, Decatur, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Doraville and Tucker. This new city would assume responsibility for police, planning, parks, and roads. At the time of the survey, this area did not have a name. It has now become known as LaVista Hills. 2) Be annexed into the City of Atlanta, which could happen only if our adjoining neighborhoods of Clairmont Heights and Medlock annexed also, in order to avoid unincorporated "islands." 3) Remain unincorporated.

Clearly, these options conflict with one another. The issue became more complicated with possible annexation of Druid Hills into Atlanta, and with it the loss of Fernbank and Briar Vista elementary schools, along with Druid Hills High School and other DeKalb school assets. Major commercial areas would be lost also. Those responding to the survey acted in good faith with the available information, which they knew might change at any time.

What emerged from the surveys was a very strong (71%) preference to remain unincorporated. The other, even stronger preference (83%) was to slow it all down with a one-year moratorium on any decisions regarding cityhood or annexation. A strong majority (64%) feel strongly that the Druid Hills school cluster (consisting of Fernbank, Laurel Ridge, Briar Vista, McLendon and Avondale elementary schools, Druid Hills Middle and Druid Hills High) should remain united.

The open comments sections received overwhelming responses that were comprehensive and shed further light on how residents feel about the many ramifications of changing our municipal governance.

Please access the entire survey results and comments at our web site <http://laurelridgeshamrock.weebly.com/>

Pitfalls of Cityhood

On January 25, 2015, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* ran an article detailing problems occurring in new cities around the area, including Brookhaven and Dunwoody.

Elected officials are accused of steering city business to relatives and campaign donors, of accepting illicit gifts and favors, and of spending too much on salaries and development deals not endorsed by constituents.

This is the beginning of an *AJC* series to highlight the "challenges, pitfalls and successes" of the cityhood wave sweeping across metro Atlanta.

LRSCA is grateful to University Heights Methodist Church for their continued generosity in providing a venue for many of our functions.



Another Civic Association?

Those who follow civic news on the LaurelRidgeDeKalbGA listserv have been barraged over the months with correspondence from a person or persons who have used a series of different identities to discredit LRSCA. They have remained in the shadows, so it has been unclear who was behind the identities.

Emerging information makes it appear that this is a very small group of residents (possibly only a couple) who have been acting as representatives of the neighborhood, misstating or ignoring our preferences derived from LRSCA survey data. They are not authorized to speak for us.

From the very beginning, LRSCA has made every effort to alert and educate our community about issues that could severely impact us all by being transparent, inclusive and informative. We have used open forums and public meetings to raise issues, bring public officials to speak to us, and foster informative dialogue. We encourage all of our neighbors to use wisdom and caution when considering the messages of anyone who is not transparent, inclusive or informative.

Important Web Sites

LRSCA: <http://laurelridgeshamrock.weebly.com/>

Nextdoor Laurel Ridge: https://laurelridge.nextdoor.com/news_feed/

DeKalb Strong: to <http://dekalbstrong.com/>

This newsletter is available on the LRSCA web site.

It's Time to Take Action about Cityhood and Annexation

The 2015 GA Legislative session has begun. The Laurel Ridge Shamrock community is on the final LaVista Hills map, in spite of survey results indicating our preference not to be included. The future of our school cluster is compromised if we are incorporated into an area that is outside of our specific school attendance zone.

It is imperative that we email legislators about our feelings on the annexation and cityhood proposals. The House Intragovernmental Coordination Committee will deal with annexations; the House Governmental Affairs Committee will deal with the cityhood issue. It is possible but unlikely that a bill will first be introduced in the Senate. The DeKalb Delegation should be included on any emails that you write. Rep. Rahn Mayo and Sen. Elena Parent also represent us.

House Intragovernmental Coordination Committee

Chair: Jan Tankersley jan.tankersley@house.ga.gov
Vice Chair: John Carson john.carson@house.ga.gov
Kevin Tanner kevin.tanner@house.ga.gov
Kimberly Alexander kimberly.alexander@house.ga.gov
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Ed Rynders erynders@bellsouth.net
Pam Stephenson pam.stephenson@house.ga.gov *
Brian Strickland brian.strickland@house.ga.gov

House Governmental Affairs Committee:

Chair: Ed Rynders erynders@bellsouth.net
Vice Chair: Buzz Brockway buzz.brockway@house.ga.gov
Tyrone Brooks tyrone.brooks@house.ga.gov
Barry Fleming barry.fleming@house.ga.gov
Hugh Floyd hughfloyd@mindspring.com
Mark Hamilton mark.hamilton@house.ga.gov
Dustin Hightower dustin.hightower@house.ga.gov
Kidd Culver ("Rusty") rusty.kidd@house.ga.gov
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John Meadows john.meadows@house.ga.gov
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Jay Powell jay.powell@house.ga.gov
Tom Taylor tom.taylor@house.ga.gov *
Bruce Williamson bruce.williamson@house.ga.gov

* DeKalb Delegation

Georgia House of Representatives

Name	Dis	City	email
Stacy Abrams	84	Atlanta	stacey.abrams@house.ga.gov
Karen Bennett	94	(elect)	karen.bennett@house.ga.gov
Dee Hawkins-Haigler	93	Lithonia	dee.dawkins-haigler@house.ga.gov
Karla Drenner	86	Avondale	karla.drenner@house.ga.gov
Michele Henson	87	St. Mtn.	michele.henson@house.ga.gov
Scott Holcomb	82	Atlanta	Scott.holcomb@house.ga.gov
Mike Jacobs	80	Atlanta	Mike.jacobs@house.ga.gov
Dar'shun Kendrick	94	Lithonia	Darshun.kendrick@house.ga.gov
Rahn Mayo	91	Decatur	Rahn.mayo@house.ga.gov
Billy Mitchell	88	St. Mtn.	Billy.mitchell@house.ga.gov
Howard Mosby	90	Atlanta	Howard.mosby@house.ga.gov
Mary Margaret Oliver	83	Decatur	Mary.oliver@house.ga.gov
Tonya Peterson-Anderson	92	(elect)	Mspete16@yahoo.com
Pam Stephenson	92	Atlanta	Pamela.stephenson@house.ga.gov
Tom Taylor	79	Dunwoody	Tom.taylor@house.ga.gov
Ernest Williams	89	Avondale Est.	Ernest.williams@house.ga.gov

Georgia Senate

Name	Dist.	City	email
Gloria Butler	55	St. Mtn.	gloria.butler@senate.ga.gov
Elena Parent	42	Decatur	elena.parent@senate.ga.gov
Gail Davenport	44	Jonesboro	gail.davenport@senate.ga.gov
Steve Henson	41	Tucker	stevenson@mindspring.com
Emanuel Jones	10	Decatur	emanj@mindspring.com
Fran Millar	40	Atlanta	fran.millar@senate.ga.gov
Ronald Ramsey, Sr.	43	Decatur	ronald.ramsey@senate.ga.gov

Communicating with Legislators: Talking Points

- People in central DeKalb have expressed reluctance to incorporate or annex, based on survey data.
- Taxes tend to rise over time in new cities, or new fees are levied as revenue sources.
- Another layer of government might complicate complex problems--doesn't promise to solve them.
- Corruption is already in evidence in new cities.
- Privatization of services removes accountability.
- Incorporating into LaVista Hills sacrifices any possibility of negotiating to keep the Druid Hills school cluster intact if Atlanta annexation occurs.
- If annexation takes place, DeKalb County Schools will come up short on tax revenue.
- Most of our services will continue to be provided by DeKalb County. Duplication of services provided by new cities will not necessarily reduce costs to the county.
- Incorporating into a city brings government closer to home, with greater local control.
- Police service could improve with cityhood.
- We need to incorporate so we are not left behind.

DeKalb Neighborhoods on the Same Page

Our neighborhood is uniquely positioned to be most affected if we incorporate into LaVista Hills because of the threat to the school cluster. That might explain the preference of 71% of LRSCA survey respondents to remain unincorporated; however, a look at results of surveys across the southern spread of the LaVista Hills map and elsewhere shows us to be in good company.

A continuous block of civic associations stretching five miles east from the City of Atlanta to North DeKalb Mall conducted independent surveys and all reached similar conclusions. (See below.) The residents of LaVista Park, North Druid Hills, North Amanda Circle, Leafmore Creek Hills, Mason Mill, Victoria Estates, and Laurel Ridge Shamrock clearly indicate a desire to be left out of the proposed LaVista Hills map or the City of Atlanta.

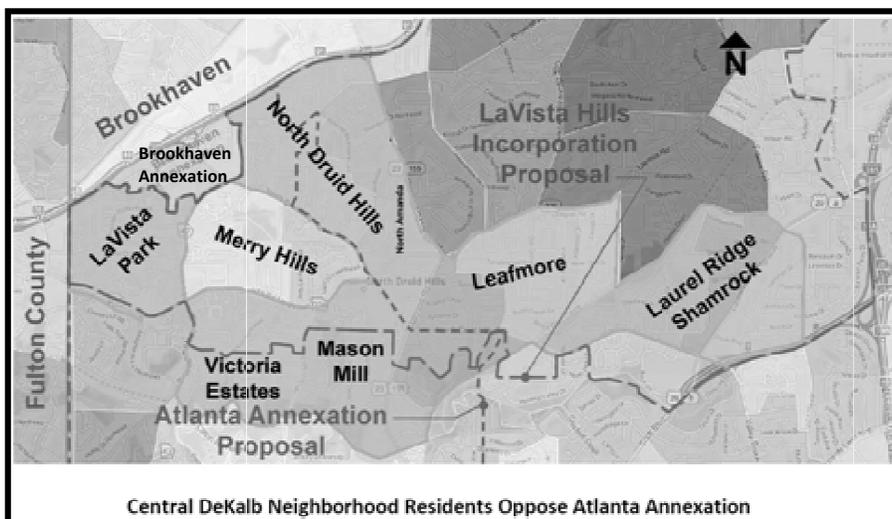
Recently the DeKalb County Commission de-annexed parts of Doraville because residents and business owners there chose to rejoin unincorporated DeKalb County.

Crucial information needed to make decisions about future governance has not been provided: proposals are not final; questions about a variety of financial matters have not been resolved; boundaries still overlap; the future of DeKalb County schools is completely uncertain. The issues and unresolved questions remain deeply complex and confusing to many residents.

With a tradition as a stable community enjoying decades of high achieving public schools, strong home values, good county services and proximity to jobs and commercial centers, there is a lot to lose if decisions are rushed or wrong.

Neighborhood	Survey Date	Survey Results
Victoria Estates	Oct. 30, 2014*	58% For Remaining Unincorporated
Mason Mill	Oct. 30, 2014*	58% For Remaining Unincorporated
Laurel Ridge Shamrock	Dec. 1, 2014	71% For Remaining Unincorporated
North Amanda Circle	Dec. 12, 2014	92% Against Atlanta Annexation
LaVista Park	Dec. 18, 2014	70% Against Atlanta Annexation
North Druid Hills	Dec. 19, 2014	83% For Remaining Unincorporated
Leafmore	Jan. 23, 2015	54% For Remaining Unincorporated

*Victoria Estates and Mason Mill neighborhood associations conducted their survey together.



Take time NOW to email or call the appropriate elected officials about your desire to be in or out of the LaVista Hills map, or about cityhood and annexation in general.