

GO Bond Community Meeting Questions

Questions were generated from two informational sessions held on March 31, 2015

1. Does CSD have more flexibility building an ECLC vs. a regular K-12 in terms of space or land requirements?
Any K-5 building will have more requirements than an Early Childhood Center because it will fall under the responsibility of the Department of Education.
2. If College Heights became an elementary school and an ECLC no longer existed, how would preschool children with disabilities that required service starting at age 3 is served?
Federal law requires that public schools serve identified preschool children but the school system now serves them in an environment with other children of the same age.
3. Early intervention (before kindergarten) has been shown to save on education costs throughout K-12 years. Is this cost, as well as the positive impact on children and the community being weighed?
Certainly, these facts were heavily weighed when the Early Childhood Center was proposed as a cornerstone of the educational programs within City Schools of Decatur. Yes, the benefits have been discussed and will continue to be a topic of conversation.
4. My understanding of the presentations is that even if we immediately convert College Heights to a K-3 and don't annex anymore residential that still will not satisfy the basic space needs that we have. Is this correct?
Yes, the Low Growth without Annexation numbers would require more K-5 Instructional Units than the existing ECLC could provide.
5. Do any other school systems in the U.S. currently use a year round schedule? How is it working out?
In the 90's, several systems in Florida used the Year Round Approach for exactly the same reason, to avoid adding buildings. Most of them have gone off this schedule and returned to something more traditional.
6. How does the projected growth affect faculty and staff? **We are hiring additional faculty and staff to address the growth.** Are we at risk of losing good teachers due to class size and resource constraints? **Yes, as we increase the budget every year to hire additional faculty and staff to meet the growth we lose the availability of the additional funding to provide a raise for our staff. This puts us at a disadvantage when our salaries are compared to the surrounding school districts.**
7. Where can we see the "new" annexation map showing the areas not included anymore?
We found it on the City of Decatur's Website and it is attached.
8. Given the continuous increase of school enrollment, has there been a joint discussion between CSD and Commission on rapid infill housing?

There have been discussions between CSD and the City but not specific to this issue.

9. In the new annexation bill, is there a potential space for new school construction?

The new annexation bill covers the geographical area to be considered to be annexed into the City of Decatur. We are not aware of any language that would identify potential space for new schools. Depending on what areas get approved, it might provide more potential land to be considered for a new school.

10. Has there been any consideration to having families prove residency each year?

We currently have a School Admissions Policy JBC that includes residency procedures at matriculation levels and we routinely conduct residency checks each year through school level and central office residency processes.

11. What kind of cooperation is the school board receiving from the commission to find property for a new school and school facilities?

The School Board is responsible for securing additional sites. The City Manager and the Superintendent have met about this issue.

12. How would the bond issuance be structured? Length of term?

25 years

13. Does the city have a lobbyist in the legislature?

Not at this time.

14. Has there been a discussion with the Commission on an increase in sales tax on businesses?

Open for another to respond

15. What is the administration's thinking on the how QBE formula changes can impact CSD? There were no proposed changes to the QBE formula in the 2015 legislative session. The Governor's Task Force is expected to make recommendation in August of 2015. In the past twelve years, there have been no changes to the QBE which would further assist the Decatur system. Decatur-city is seen as a high wealth system.

16. Can you please confirm that your enrollment projections include any growth that could come from the many mixed-use multi-tenant buildings currently under construction with the city limits?

Yes, that has been included within the current enrollment projections

17. For 2015, property values were raised. Please explain why this increase in revenue doesn't help address the growth issues.

As we grow, we are hiring more teachers. The cost of the additional teachers as well as the annual increases mandated by the state to the Employer portion for Teachers' Retirement and Healthcare increase our annual budget. In addition, as we have more children entering into the school district the cost to provide the additional students with the same type of education will add to the budget. The school district was able to decrease the millage rate last year by .40 mills.

18. With the increase in enrollment, we should have more residents paying property taxes. Please explain why the growth in the tax base doesn't help address some of the financial issues.
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19. Has thought been given to the hardship that rising property taxes imposes on the working elderly or young couples that might want to move to Decatur?
Yes, the Board of Education is always mindful of how tax increases affect the citizens of Decatur. This is why when the tax digest increased significantly last year the Board reduced the millage rate.
20. Why doesn't SPLOST cover this?
The current SPLOST IV's revenues have been utilized to build additions to Oakhurst, FAVE, renovate space at Renfro Middle, bring Westchester back on line, and pay down existing debt service. All of its funds are accounted for in these measures.
The future SPLOST V would not be up for a vote until November 2016 and funds not available until summer of 2017. Even then, the most we can project to receive from this future SPLOST V is \$20+ Million. So, the timing pushes out too far to help us meet our immediate needs, and the amount is not adequate to fund the needs totally. There are not enough funds in the SPLOST, even if another one is approved, to cover the needs.
21. When looking for solutions to elementary needs and traffic impacts, will the 4/5 model be reevaluated?
Dr. Edwards answered this one at the meeting. We will continue to work with our School Principals, School Leadership Teams and the appropriate city personnel to address these concerns. The fact is that the schools are embedded in neighborhoods. Just like the common spaces within the small schools, the streets and intersections swell during start and ending times.
22. What consideration is given to residents that no longer receive the direct benefit of CSD growth?
The School Board and the Superintendent are always thinking of the residents. Even when the tax digest grew by almost 13%, the Board made the decision and the Superintendent recommended reducing the millage. The School System continues to try to plan appropriately so this burden does not gravely impact the taxpayers.
23. Is the commission aware of the burden that apartments represent for the school system?
We cannot respond to the Commission's awareness.
24. Who determines the final plan for the high school? How do we discuss concerns?

- The Community, over the months of August through November, 2014 provided input and ultimately recommended the current Master Plan to be approved by the Board. The CSD Board has approved the current Master Plan for DHS and RMS that will accommodate the worst case of projected growth. However, each phase of the Master Plan will be re-evaluated to ensure it meets the most current projected needs, and revenues available.
25. How long will the portables be in place? What about security?
Based upon the current projections and potential revenue sources, we do not see a time where portables will not be in place. As for the security, CSD has had portables in place for a very long time. Our staff has developed good operational security measures to protect the students. We will deploy similar measures moving forward including addition of cameras and other security devices.
26. How many students can be added to classes and still be manageable?
Maximum class sizes for City Schools of Decatur are K-3: 25; 4/5 Academy: 28; 6-12: 30. It is important to try to keep our class size to these manageable sizes.
27. What are the differences between the types of funding for capital- Bond, COPs, SPLOST, etc. - and what do they mean to taxpayers?
This was addressed at the public informational sessions. A General Obligation Bond is the least expensive in terms of interest rates. It must be voted on by the taxpayers. COPS or Certificates of Participation are more costly and rely on the equity that exists in buildings.
28. What is the recommended fund balance as % of expenditures?
It is recommended that a strong fund balance equals two months worth of expenditures. That is approximately 12% of the budget at this time.
29. The city is already struggling with maintaining diversity- income, age, and race. Are there options for applying increased taxes that would consider this concern such as exemptions?
This is an issue that the city leaders and the board must address.
30. What percentage of the Decatur population has students in the school system? Per person? Per household?

We have been studying only the student population itself.

The US census estimates the 2013 population of the City of Decatur to be 20,086. In 2013, The CSD enrollment in September was 3649, for a percentage of 18.16%. The US Census claims an estimate of 22.6% for all children under the age of 18 year old.

The US census estimates the 8523 households in of the City of Decatur in 2013. We have not done the analysis to determine how many households had children in 2013. Based on these numbers there would be fewer than 42% of the households with children in the CSD school system.

31. Where does this growth come from? Annexation does not explain it. Family size doesn't explain it. Apartment/condo growth does not explain it. Decatur population growth will not explain it. So why does one expect this unprecedented growth?

The largest single area of growth comes from the roll-over in the single-family detached residential properties. While the growth in the overall number of housing units of any type, either through annexation or construction, increases the number of children in the system, the majority of the growth is coming from the sale and rental by people with few children to families with a greater number of children. Recent zoning changes within the residential category will help the segment of the population commonly called "empty nesters" to stay in a small section of their house while renting the larger part of it. This both allows them to stay and allows them to rent to families with children.

This growth is not unprecedented; it is an extension of the growth rates experienced in the last few years. In three of the last five years the growth rate was over 10% and every year's growth was over 7%.

32. There has been discussion of delaying enrollment of children in the annexation areas. Is this possible from a legal perspective?
Annexation is not set to happen for the upcoming year. The city has indicated that if it does happen, the school children do not enter for a period of approximately 18 months.
33. What impact if any could annexation have on mil increase on taxes with or without bond?
This is a city question.
34. Planning at Glennwood was incorrect. Planning at FAVE was incorrect. Why should we trust the school board now?
Planning was not in error. The Board can only plan within the amounts of funding that are available. If the Board were to try to meet all the needs, there would be criticism that the school system is not taking into account possible enrollment changes that could occur. We can also only build within the space or land that is available. All of our sites are extremely small.
35. What % of city of Decatur residents does not partake in the city schools? No school age children and private school.

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36. When will the BOE put a bond request to the city commission and when will the commission decide to put it on the ballot?

The Superintendent has asked that the bond request be voted on by the end of this school year.

37. If the bond is passed what will be % increase in the taxes we pay now? How long will it last?

The bond will be for 25 years but is callable in 10 years.

38. Are there fundraising opportunities available to parents through PTA or other non-profits that CSD could count on to support the schools?

Dr. Edwards responded to this at the meeting in a very well-crafted manner

39. Where will the new schools be built?

As you all know, available property in Decatur is hard to find. Especially with the number of acres necessary to support an Elementary School. CSD is currently looking and evaluating any option that might exist but are not at liberty to say at this moment.

40. What is the facilities cost for each new student? Does the state pay any of this?

CSD does participate with the state in seeking reimbursement for the building costs. This requires a step by step procedure for our staff in terms of submission and is reliant on the state's approval of the bond budget and how it is appropriated year to year. The state reimbursements are helpful but do not come close to covering costs. Facility costs per student depend on each facility and the number of students who will be in that facility.

41. Projected growth from annexation is projected for 5 years. What happens after 2020? Has that growth been studied?

Beyond 2020 the trends cannot be accurately projected because there are too many external factors which could change the demographics of the Decatur and the City of Decatur School system. Anything which might change the perceived desirability of the school system relative to the other educational alternatives available would change the trend. For instance, if the Georgia Legislature passed a voucher system which took money away from the public schools and allowed private schools to be partially funded with public funds, the public schools would not be able to provide the level of educational programs they now offer and the private schools would become more affordable. Or, perhaps developers of apartments might start building three bedroom apartments in lieu of the one bedroom apartments now being built. Many other legislative or policy changes could change the demographics beyond 2020.

42. If we only plan for low growth without annexation, how costly is it to add more space in 5 years?

It is hard for CSD to know at this time. But even if we were to know exact needs we would be limited by the current revenue sources available today. We have also been consistently charged with developing phased plans so that we do not overbuild.

43. What land is available?

See Item Number 39 above