

DOWNTOWN DECATUR NEIGHBORS
GENERAL MEETING
JANUARY 8, 2025

President Kathie Gannon called the Annual Meeting to order at 7:00.

The Meeting was held for the first time at the Decatur Library.

We had a lively Happy Hour while waiting for everyone to arrive.

These notes were recorded then transcribed by AI. The format is new but the notes are much more complete than being taken by hand.

Welcome by President Gannon:

- The organization is celebrating its 10th anniversary.
- Attendance is lower than expected, possibly due to cold weather.
- Appreciation expressed for board members and attendees.
- Tonight's agenda includes elections and an annual report from the library.
- DeKalb County Library System is recognized as the best in the Southeast.
- Feedback requested on the meeting space for future gatherings.

Secretary's Report

Jo, the Secretary, posted last meeting's minutes on Facebook.

- Motion to approve minutes was made and seconded; minutes approved.

Jo presented the following:

Facebook Statistics:

- Membership increased from 1,200 to 1,500.
 - Followers include individuals from Decatur, Peachtree City, Thailand, Italy, and Nigeria.
- 75% of followers are women, with the largest age group being 45 to 55.

Treasurer's Report

- Ingrid, the Treasurer, reported a \$50 donation.
- Current balance is \$1,694.39, with a required minimum balance of \$500.

Board Elections, Nominating Committee Report

Past President Pete Pfeiffer led the Elections for 2025 Board Officers

- Nominations for positions:
 - President: Kathy Gannon
 - Secretary: Jo Giraudo
 - Treasurer: Ingrid Reinhard
 - Communications Chair: Kerry O'Gorman
 - Parks and Green Spaces: Stephen Busch
 - Senior: Lila Miller
 - Planning Chair: Mary Karwoski
 - Public Safety Chair: Nancy Hall
 - Past President: Pete Pfeiffer
- Nominations were opened and closed without additional nominations.
- Election results declared by acclamation.

President Gannon gave her Annual Report:

Committee Involvement

- Emphasis on getting more people involved in committees for leadership development.
- Public Safety Committee highlighted for strong participation and successes.
 - Nancy Hall was recognized for her work on the sidewalk on Candler Road.
 - City has approved a budget for the sidewalk project.

Achievements and Programs

- Successful initiatives include the installation of a bus stop across from Oliver House.
- Crosswalk improvements discussed.
 - Initial attempts to paint crosswalks were unsuccessful due to weather.
 - City followed up with multiple visits to complete the crosswalk in front of the Renaissance.

Community Engagement

- Programs during the year included:
 - February's Black History Month program featured a speaker on Decatur's history.
 - May's outdoor meeting included games and snacks, with participation from candidates.
- Survey feedback led to ideas for future activities, including field trips.

Communication Improvements

- Increased consistency in communication methods.
 - Facebook followers increased from 1,275 to 1,545.
 - Mailchimp email list grew from 290 to 320 subscribers.
- Challenges with the website noted; seeking assistance for updates.

Website and Communication (19:59 - 29:57)

- Our current website is static; plans to transition followers into active participants by 2025.
- Many organizations, including nonprofits and churches, struggle with meeting attendance.
 - Zoom meetings are still popular; organization opted out for in-person connectivity.
 - Possibility to revert to Zoom meetings if necessary.

Challenges with Apartment Outreach

- Difficulty in reaching apartment residents due to restrictions on outside communication.
 - Only one apartment allows outside mail quarterly.
 - Need for a resident liaison, but turnover is high among managers.
- Increasing number of apartments in Decatur complicates outreach efforts.

Board Participation and Goals

- Board members aim to participate more in Decatur initiatives.
 - Plans to join the Lifelong Advisory Committee, Sustainability Committee, and Decatur Safe Streets Action Plan Community Committee.
- Goal to speak at four city commission meetings on relevant topics.

Fundraising and Meeting Attendance

- Initial fundraising efforts were strong but faltered; plans to restart fundraising efforts.
 - Aim to host a membership event to engage community members.
- Attendance at meetings has dwindled; seeking a consistent meeting location.

Park Development Issues

- Long-term goal of establishing a downtown park in Decatur.
 - Previous administration was cooperative; new administration is resistant to park development.

- Concerns over new early learning center plans that prioritize parking over green space.
 - School board representative expressed that the school board is not in the park business.

Legacy Park and Community Input

- Legacy Park has strong parent school backing.
- There was a proposal for an early childhood development center on the property.
 - Concerns raised about the need for a sprawling building versus a smaller footprint.
 - Stephen Bush provided a plan for accommodating the program in a smaller space.

School Board and Local Government Relations

- There is a perceived lack of collaboration between the school board and local government.
 - Meetings occur but are not seen as productive.
 - The school board is viewed as the dominant entity due to their funding.

Cemetery Development Concerns

- Development is planned next to the cemetery, which needs protection.
 - The cemetery is considered a sacred space, not a park.
- Discussion about the behavior of residents with dogs in the cemetery.
 - Importance of treating the cemetery respectfully.

Community Engagement Initiatives

- Proposal for "Thirsty Thursdays" to foster community connections.
- Plans for lunch and learns with city leadership to engage residents.
- Senior committee aims to reach out to local seniors and apartment residents.

Newsletter Initiatives

- Monthly one-question survey
 - Aim to gather more input from the community
- Opportunity for attendees to suggest questions before leaving

Meeting Format Suggestions

- Proposal to incorporate Zoom into meetings
 - Advertise on Facebook to reach those who cannot attend in person

- Engage younger populations who may have childcare responsibilities

Secretary Jo Introduced our Speaker:

- Introduction of Joe Apple Davich
 - Executive Director of the Georgia Center for the Book
 - Joined in 2006, became Executive Director in 2013
- Overview of the Georgia Center for the Book
 - Established by the Library of Congress in 1977
 - Designated DeKalb County Public Library as host in 1997

Joe's slide presentation about Georgia Center for the Book

Library of Congress Programs

- National Ambassador for Young People's Literature
 - Previous ambassadors include Jason Reynolds and Meg Medina
 - New ambassador to be named on February 6th
- Literary awards and grants
 - Support for innovative literary programs, including pop-up libraries

Resources and Collections

- Teaching with Primary Sources
 - Online resources for classroom use
- Library of Congress collections
 - Virtual tours and access to various departments, including Folk Music and Folk Life Centers

Author Events

- Monthly author events can be found under the Author Events tab.
 - Some events require tickets, while others are free.
- Upcoming events include:
 - Derek Thompson event in January.
 - Lost Southern Voices program in March, focusing on marginalized authors.
 - Decatur Fine Arts Exhibition in May.

○ Ongoing Programs

- Book is Art exhibition on the fourth floor.

- Features linotype, handmade, and modified books.
- Conversations at First Baptist Church.
 - Ongoing author programs have led to a ministry around them.
- River of Words program.
 - Visual Art and Poetry program coordinated with Georgia Project WET.

Community Engagement

- Georgia Humanities is piloting a program to place poems in parks statewide.
- Johnson Jackson Summer Reading series to keep the community engaged during the pandemic.
- Decatur's Short Docs Film Festival highlights local filmmakers.

Reading Programs

- The Big Read in partnership with Seven Stages.
 - Current book: "Interior Chinatown."
 - Next year's theme will focus on nature and environmentalism.
- Books All Georgians Should Read list.
 - Annually updated list highlighting significant books by or about Georgians.
- Lillian Smith Book Award honors civil rights icon Lillian Smith.

Civil Rights and Social Change

- Books illuminate civil rights struggles, injustice, and the search for greater social change.
- Events are hosted every year in September as an introduction to the Book Festival.

Townsend Prize for Fiction

- The Townsend Prize is the only surviving Georgia award currently sponsored.
- Named after Jim Townsend, creator of Atlanta Magazine.
 - Famous for calling everyone "Dear Heart."
 - Raised up Georgia talents like Ann River Siddons and Terry Kay.

Route 1 Reads Program

- A program conducted before the adult selection of great reads from great places.
- Involved reading programs from Maine to Florida.
 - The last theme was Mystery.

Staff and Communication

- Currently a staff of one until January 26.

- Allie, the programming and communication specialist, is on maternity leave.
 - She recently had her first child, Lila Vivian.
- Information can be found on the Library of Congress's website.

President Gannon thanked Joe, the Library for Hosting us, and the residents who came this evening.

She adjourned the meeting at 7:59pm

Minutes Respectfully Submitted by Jo Giraudo, Secretary and Al