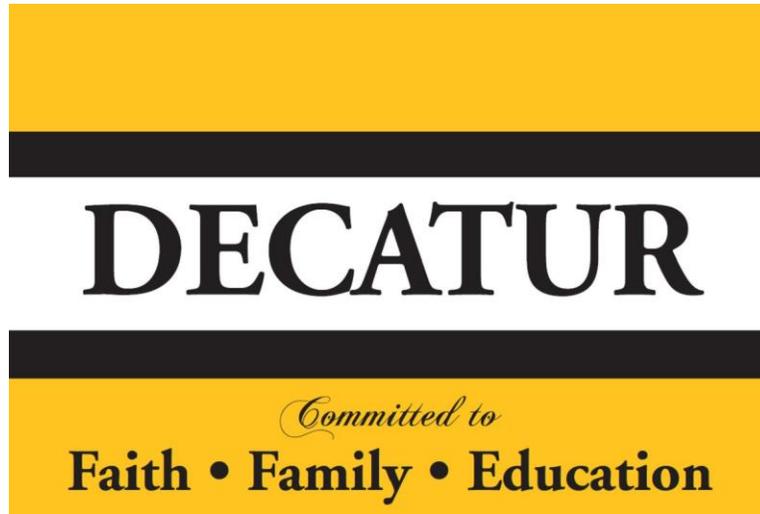


# 2011 Year Comprehensive Plan



## January 2011

Prepared by:



# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF MAPS .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>VISION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Purpose of the Plan .....	3
Elements of a Comprehensive Plan .....	3
Summary of the Decatur Plan .....	4
How to use this Plan.....	5
<b>CHAPTER ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND FORECASTS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Demographic Characteristics and Trends .....	7
Population .....	7
Age Structure .....	8
Housing Characteristics .....	9
Educational Attainment.....	12
Income and Poverty Level .....	13
Employment Base.....	14
Economic Conditions.....	18
Population and Housing Forecast .....	19
<b>CHAPTER TWO: GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Introduction.....	21
Land Use Goals.....	22
Transportation .....	23
Housing.....	25
Community Facilities and Services .....	26
Community Appearance and Spirit.....	29
Commercial and Industrial Development .....	30
Plan Implementation Goals .....	33
<b>CHAPTER THREE: EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS AND FUTURE LAND USE PLAN .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Existing Land Use.....	35
Residential .....	35
Commercial.....	35
Industrial .....	36
Public/Semi-Public.....	36
Institutional.....	36
Vacant/Agricultural.....	36
Streets and ROW / Easements.....	36
Future Land Use Plan.....	38
Introduction and Methodology .....	39

Environmental Constraints.....	39
Projected Land Use Needs.....	41
Agricultural.....	41
Low Density Residential.....	41
Medium Density Residential.....	42
High Density Residential.....	42
Manufactured Housing.....	42
Neighborhood Commercial.....	42
Downtown Commercial.....	42
Mixed Use / Heavy Commercial.....	43
Light Industrial.....	43
Heavy Industrial.....	43
Public/Semi-Public (PSP).....	43
Institutional.....	43
Flood Plain (FP).....	44
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSPORTATION.....</b>	<b>45</b>
Introduction.....	45
Transportation Improvements.....	47
Alley.....	47
Minor / Local Streets.....	48
Major / Collector Streets.....	48
Arterial Streets.....	49
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES.....</b>	<b>51</b>
General Government Operations.....	51
Police Department.....	51
Fire Department.....	52
Public Works Department.....	53
Water and Sewer Service.....	53
Code Enforcement / Building Inspection.....	56
Recreational Opportunities.....	57
Solid Waste / Sanitation Department.....	57
School Facilities.....	58
Community Service and Facility Needs.....	60
<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>61</b>

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

<u>Figure</u> .....	<u>Page</u>
1. Year Structure Built, Town of Decatur .....	11
2. Employment Statistics .....	15
3. Total Sales and Tax Diversion .....	19
4. Parcel Arrangement .....	37
5. Typical Section – Alley .....	47
6. Typical Section – Minor / Local Street.....	48
7. Typical Section – Major / Collector Street.....	49

## **LIST OF TABLES**

<u>Table</u> .....	<u>Page</u>
1. Change in population over time for select geographic areas .....	8
2. Population Estimates since the last U.S. Census .....	8
3. Change in population over time by age cohort .....	9
4. East Central Community College Enrollment .....	9
5. Distribution of Dwellings Units in Decatur, Mississippi .....	10
6. Housing tenure and vacancy rates .....	10
7. Housing Values in Decatur, Mississippi .....	12
8. Educational Attainment for Decatur, Newton County, and Mississippi .....	13
9. Median household income for 1990 and 2000 .....	13
10. Newton County, Mississippi Employment Statistics .....	14
11. Change in establishment based employment over time based on the SIC code system .....	15
12. Change in establishment based employment over time based on the NAICS code system .....	16
13. Where the Population Works .....	17
14. Commuter Patterns: Residence and Workplace .....	18
15. Newton County Population Changes .....	20
16. Town of Decatur Population and Housing Changes .....	20
17. Land Use Measures for Decatur, Mississippi .....	37

## **LIST OF MAPS**

<u>Map</u> .....	<u>Page</u>
1. Base Geography .....	5
2. Existing Land Use Map .....	38
3. Flood Hazard Areas .....	40
4. Future Land Use Plan .....	44
5. Street Classification Map.....	46
6. Areas in Decatur without Sanitary Sewer Service .....	54
7. Water Certificated Areas .....	55
8. Decatur School District .....	58

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## **VISION**

It is the goal and desire of the Town of Decatur to grow in a manner which emphasizes our strengths and encourages our citizens to have pride in their town, to maintain and strengthen our sense of community, and to persuade others to call Decatur home.

Our community has a multitude of strengths and opportunities including an abundance of education opportunities, our citizens have strong faith and family values, we are the county seat, we are conveniently located to larger cities, and we have a low crime rate.

We believe that focusing on the core strengths of Decatur (faith, family, and education) and the promotion of the Town as a quality bedroom community will attract new residents, increase the Town's population, and become more attractive to new businesses.

We envision this plan as guiding the Town in its future growth and providing guidance in the areas we want to improve as a Town. We believe our improvement as community should include: beautification, litter control, infrastructure improvement, and promotion of economic development.

~ Mayor and Board of Aldermen, Town of Decatur ~

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **Purpose of the Plan**

The primary purpose of this comprehensive plan is to serve as a policy guide for the orderly, physical, and economic development of Decatur. As such, this plan also serves as a basis for public decision making. The data gathered and included in this comprehensive plan encompasses social, economic and physical characteristics of the community and applies to both public and private lands. The plan brings together this information to enable the user to make more informed decisions regarding the future of the community. The future is considered to be a 20-year horizon.

A secondary purpose of this plan is to enable Decatur to apply zoning to territory recently annexed. According to state law, zoning must be based upon a comprehensive plan, and this plan is prepared to fulfill the requirements of law.

## **Elements of a Comprehensive Plan**

A comprehensive plan is a policy document with specific components required by law. The reason for the legal specificity is that the comprehensive plan is the basis upon which legally enforceable regulations are applied within a jurisdiction. Decatur has the authority to prepare a comprehensive plan and implement planning through the enabling legislation, codified beginning at §17-1-1 Mississippi Code Annotated, 1972.

The specific legal contents of a comprehensive plan are set out in §17-1-1 of the Mississippi Code. Through the eyes of the law, four components are required of a document to constitute a comprehensive plan:

1. **Goals and Objectives** for a period of twenty to twenty-five years address the long-range development of the municipality. Such goals and objectives must address (at a minimum) residential, commercial, and industrial development; parks, open space, and recreation; street or road improvements; public schools and community facilities.
2. The **Land Use Plan** designates, in map or policy form, the proposed distribution and extent of land use for residential, commercial, industrial, recreation and open space, and public/quasi-public facilities. There must be background information provided to identify the specific meaning of land use categories.
3. The **Transportation Plan** is presented in a map format, providing the functional classification of existing and proposed streets, roads and highways. Functional classifications include arterial, collector and local streets, and roads and highways, as defined by minimum rights-of-way and surface width requirements. The transportation plan also addresses

other transportation needs such as mass transportation or pedestrian access.

4. The **Community Facilities Plan** is used as a basis for making capital improvement decisions, and addresses the following: housing, schools, parks and recreation, public buildings and facilities, utilities, and drainage. The community facilities plan forms the basis for a capital improvements program.

While understanding the content of a comprehensive plan is important to its application, it is even more important to understand how the application of a comprehensive plan works.

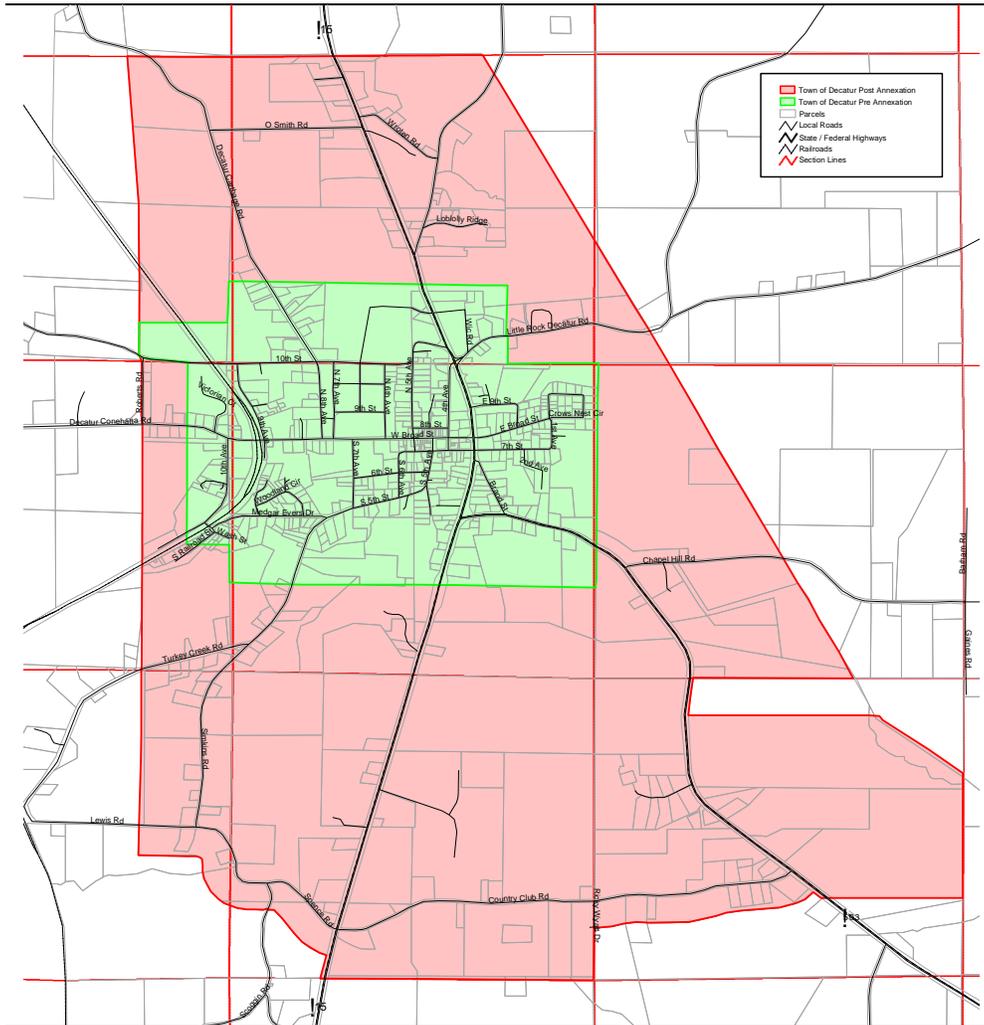
### **Summary of the Decatur Plan**

The town of Decatur recently annexed certain territory, which now requires the delivery of town services, including planning and zoning. This comprehensive plan is prepared as the minimum requirements necessary to meet the legal definition of a comprehensive plan in order to apply zoning to the annexed territory. Therefore, the primary thrust of this plan is that of land use planning. Map 1 (next page) sets out the previous municipal limits and the territory annexed.

A secondary thrust of this plan is that of quality of life issues. While employment, industrial development, and other related issues are deserving of detailed planning, maintaining a high quality of life is a fundamental necessity for any community.

The planning process is continuous and following the adoption of this plan, the town should continue to develop this comprehensive plan. Each element of this plan may be expanded, and new elements added to broaden the scope of this plan and town policy.

**Map 1: Base Geography for the Town of Decatur, Mississippi.** The area in green represents the Town Limits prior to the recent annexation. The area in red is the area that was annexed into the Town of Decatur.



Source: Newton County Tax Maps, Bridge & Watson, Inc.

## How to use this Plan

### Overview

This comprehensive plan is a tool to assist with public policy and decision making. The plan serves as a forum in which to express public policy. It is important to understand that this plan is only a policy statement and does not have the force of law. This point is important because oftentimes, the public or elected officials do not recognize the distinction, and therefore oppose the plan in fear of “regulations” being placed upon them. Because it is not law, the town of Decatur may deviate from the provisions of the plan without any certain penalty. Doing so without good reason is not advisable, however, from the standpoint of achieving consistent application of this plan.

Comprehensive planning does not attempt to replace market forces of supply, demand, and price but does attempt to shape and channel those forces by establishing certain rules for development and conservation. A comprehensive plan should contain policies that foster growth that enhances the community, rather than “no growth” policies. For example, haphazard growth is unsightly and wasteful of space and public facilities, which results in higher public costs and property tax increases.

The law states that comprehensive plans must precede land use regulations in preparation and adoption. Regulations that are consistent with, or conform to, a comprehensive plan must be consistent with a plan’s policies, goals and objectives, the land use plan map and the other plan elements. Even though there is generally not an exact identity between the land use plan map and the zoning map, the two should mirror each other as closely as possible.

The goals and objectives element provides written, consistent policies addressing how the community should develop. The plan enables the legislative body to make decisions on development matters that arise, using a unified set of general, long-range policies. The plan is intended to serve as a practical working guide to the governing body in making decisions.

The governing body uses the comprehensive plan to take action on two types of physical development matters: (1) measures that are specifically designed to implement the comprehensive plan (zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, capital improvements program and budget, the official map, and development plans), and (2) other measures which routinely require legislative approval (rezoning cases, special use permits/special exceptions/conditional use permits, variance applications, subdivision plats, site acquisitions, and public work projects). For both types, the plan should be consulted at least to see if the plan speaks specifically to the matter or provides any guidance as to how the matter should be handled. It should be remembered that the plan may not indicate what action to take, nor will it answer all the questions that come before the governing body. It is not supposed to; its purpose is to serve as a generalized guide.

### Implementation Devices

This plan will not benefit the community in any way if it is not implemented. There are three primary devices commonly used to implement comprehensive plans: a zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and a capital improvements program. Other devices include official maps and specific development plans. These devices, as well as any comprehensive plan, should be reviewed periodically to account for changes that may have occurred in the community.

# **CHAPTER ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND FORECASTS**

## **Demographic Characteristics and Trends**

The following data is compiled to establish the current profile of the town of Decatur with respect to a variety of issues including population, age, housing, education and employment. As a point of clarification, the data included in these tables reported for Decatur does not include the annexed territory.

### **Population**

Population data is recorded every ten years by the United States Bureau of the Census, as it has done since 1790. The latest census, Census 2000, provides the most recent and readily available resource for demographic information. The success or quality of a community is sometimes gauged by changes in population. The assumption is that increasing population indicates a favorable community because people are choosing to move into the community or choosing to stay in the community. The greater the growth rate in population, the more desirable and economically adept the community. These statistics are often compared by community leaders to “gauge” the community’s standing.

The population of Decatur has increased slightly over the past 30 years. The data reported by the Census Bureau indicates the following population figures:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1970	1,311
1980	1,148
1990	1,248
2000	1,426

In considering population changes, it is important to consider the factors which impact population. Population can be affected by three different components:

1. In migration or out migration (persons moving in or moving away)
2. Net affect of births and deaths, and
3. Change in geography (annexation or deannexation)

The Town of Decatur successfully annexed an area following the 2000 Census, which will be reflected in the 2010 Census.

Table 1 (following page) depicts the population and population changes from 1980 to 2000 for the Town of Decatur and other geographic areas. The purpose of this comparison is not to indicate which community is “better” or “worse”, but to get an idea of where people choose to live. Recalling the purpose of this comprehensive plan is to “...serve as a basis for public decision making.”, accommodating and serving future residents will require many public decisions.

**Table 1: Change in population over time for select geographic areas.** Decatur, the third largest municipality in the county, has gained population over time, as has the county as a whole, while the largest municipality, Newton, has lost population.

Geographic Area	Total Population			Numerical Change			Percent Change		
	1980	1990	2000	80-90	90-00	80-00	80-90	90-00	80-00
Chunky	277	292	344	15	52	67	5.4%	17.8%	24.2%
Decatur	1,148	1,248	1,426	100	178	278	8.7%	14.3%	24.2%
Hickory	670	493	499	-177	6	-171	-26.4%	1.2%	-25.5%
Newton	3,708	3,701	3,699	-7	-2	-9	-0.2%	-0.1%	-0.2%
Union	1,931	1,875	2,021	-56	146	90	-2.9%	7.8%	4.7%
Co. Remainder	12,210	12,682	13,849	472	1,167	1,639	3.9%	9.2%	13.4%
Newton Co.	19,944	20,291	21,838	347	1,547	1,894	1.7%	7.6%	9.5%
Mississippi	2,520,638	2,573,216	2,844,658	52,578	271,442	324,020	2.1%	10.5%	12.9%

Source: US Census Bureau for years noted.

As can be seen in Table 1, Newton County experienced an increase in population of 1,894 persons over the twenty-year period from 1980 to 2000. In unincorporated areas of the county, population growth has occurred at a pace in line with, or greater than that of the state (see county remainder). Note that while countywide the population increased, Decatur, Chunky, and Union were the only municipalities that experienced a net population increase over the twenty-year period.

During the most recent census decade (1990-2000), Newton County experienced an increase in population of 1,547 persons. Decatur experienced an increase in population of 178 persons over the period.

Since the release of the Census 2000 data, with the exception of year-to-year fluctuations, the population has remained constant, as evidenced by census estimates. For the period spanning from 2000 to 2008, the Census Bureau estimates the population of Decatur and Newton County as found in Table 2:

**Table 2: Population Estimates since the last U.S. Census.**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Town of Decatur	1,904	1,907	1,890	1,893	1,884	1,875	1,908	1,943	1,943
Newton County	21,838	21,856	21,706	21,798	21,875	22,009	22,100	22,334	22,355

Source: US Census Bureau Annual Population Estimates, Tables 1 & 4 Mississippi Counties and Areas

## Age Structure

Changes within the population by age can reveal certain information about the future for Decatur. Table 3 (following page) provides the opportunity to see how age groups have changed over the decade between census periods. By comparing age strata over two census periods, the changes in specific age groups can be identified. Calculating the difference in these groups provides insight as to the makeup of Decatur.

**Table 3: Change in population over time by age cohort.** Decatur has experienced an overall growth in population.

Age	Town of Decatur		Change in Age Group
	1990	2000	
9 & under	134	143	9
10 to 19	390	457	67
20 to 29	218	298	80
30 to 39	121	115	-6
40 to 49	77	117	40
50 to 59	89	91	2
60 to 69	110	96	-14
70 to 89	84	72	-12
80 and over	25	37	12
<i>Total</i>	1,248	1,426	178

Source: 1990 Summary Tape File 1, U. S. Census Bureau; Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics, 2000, U. S. Census Bureau

When looking at the age groupings it is clear that the younger population (under 9 and 10 to 19) in Decatur has increased over the last ten (10) years. The age groups that have grown the most are the 10 to 19, 20 to 29 and the 40 to 49. The significance of this is that the people within these groups are the town's future and current labor force. This would indicate that the current labor force is being maintained, but it will present a unique opportunity as these groups near retirement age in the coming decades. This is a benefit in that those likely to invest in the community are maintaining residence in the community. Clearly, one aim of these planning efforts then is to at least retain the town's population. Growing enrollment at East Central Community College likely contributed to the large numbers (increase and total) of 10-19 year olds.

**Table 4: East Central Community College Enrollment**

Fall semester	Enrollment
2004	2,554
2003	2,501
2002	2,310
2001	2,291
2000	2,254

Source: Support Services Division of the Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges

## Housing Characteristics

There are 615 residential dwelling units within Decatur including the area annexed. Of this number, 411 units are single family and 71 units are mobile homes. Table 5 sets forth the mix of dwelling units types within the town.

**Table 5: Distribution of Dwelling Units in Decatur, Mississippi**

Type	Units <sup>1</sup>	Percent
Single Family	411	67%
Multi-Family	133	22%
Mobile Home	71	12%
Total	615	

Source:

1. Land use field survey May 2006 by Bridge & Watson, Inc. Represents the enlarged town.

The housing characteristics for the town of Decatur and Newton County are presented in Table 6. As can be seen, the number of housing units in the town of Decatur increased from 1980 to 1990, as well as from 1990 to 2000. The number of housing units in Decatur grew by 9.5% from 1990 to 2000. Over the twenty year period from 1980 to 2000, the number of housing units in Decatur increased by 24.5%, while the population for the same time period increased by 24.2%.

**Table 6: Housing tenure and vacancy rates.** Over the twenty-year period, Decatur shows growth in housing units reflective of the population gains.

Housing Units	1980				1990				2000			
	Decatur		Newton County		Decatur		Newton County		Decatur		Newton County	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Occupied	342	91.9%	6,936	89.3%	366	86.5%	7,358	90.9%	407	87.9%	8,221	88.8%
Vacant	30	8.1%	828	10.7%	57	13.5%	737	9.1%	56	12.1%	1,038	11.2%
Total	372		7,764		423		8,095		463		9,259	
Occupied												
Owner	252	73.7%	5,736	82.7%	229	62.6%	5,998	81.5%	249	61.2%	6,732	81.9%
Renter	90	26.3%	1,200	17.3%	137	37.4%	1,360	18.5%	158	38.8%	1,489	18.1%
Total	342		6,936		366		7,358		407		8,221	
Population	1,148		19,944		1,248		20,291		1,426		21,838	
Persons / Household	2.06		2.40		2.42		2.68		2.30		2.57	

Source: US Census Bureau for years noted.

The statistic “Persons per Household” is reported near the bottom of Table 6, and over the twenty year period shown, Decatur has increased in household size. On average, the size of households throughout the state, and nation, is decreasing. Newton County also gained in household size over the twenty year period.

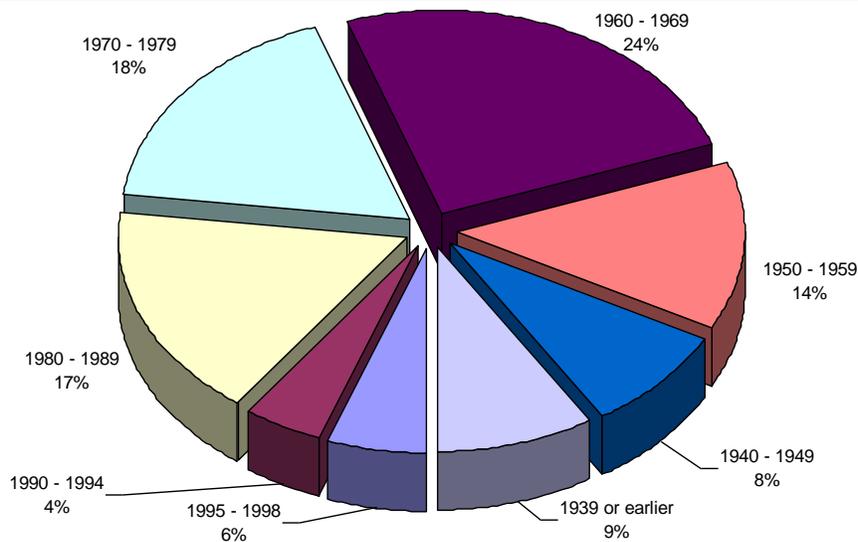
The data in Table 6 also indicates trends in housing tenure and occupancy. The vacancy rate in Decatur has increased from 8.1% in 1980 to 13.5 % in 1990 and then decreased to 12.1% in 2000. At the same time, Newton County has also experienced a similar overall increase in vacancy. As a benchmark, the vacancy rate statewide for 2000 was 9.9%. In 2000, both Decatur and Newton County exceeded this statewide average.

The housing ownership mix in Decatur changed considerably from 1980 to 2000. In 1980, owner occupied homes made up 73.7% of all housing in the town. By 2000, that percentage had dropped to 61.2%. Countywide, however, the mix has remained quite stable during the same twenty year period. Statewide, the housing ownership mix is 72.3% owner occupied, and 27.7% renter occupied. The home ownership rate in Decatur is significantly below the state average, likely due to the necessity for rental property to accommodate the student population.

Housing quality is a factor that has an impact on the community in terms of community appearance, property values, and overall quality of life. Presently, the housing stock in Decatur is in good condition overall. An indicator as to the future quality of housing is the age of housing.

Older housing usually requires a higher level of maintenance to keep it in good condition. The Census Bureau reports the “year structure built” in its decennial reports. The importance of this data is that it will demonstrate not only the age of housing but also the distribution by time period.

**Figure 1: Year Structure Built, Town of Decatur.** Distribution of housing units in Decatur based upon year structure built. Percentages represent total of all housing units.



Source: US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3)

Figure 1 is a pie chart indicating the age distribution of housing reported by the Census Bureau. It indicates an uneven distribution of housing units among the time periods. A substantial majority (73%), of the housing units in Decatur were constructed prior to 1980. Also, statistics show that newer homes are becoming fewer and fewer, which translates into a growing number of older homes that will likely require more maintenance. Given this fact, at some point in time, a more aggressive housing ordinance may need to be enacted and enforced.

The housing values in Decatur do not span a very wide margin. Housing value in Decatur is as diverse as the age of the structures. Table 7 (below) illustrates the value of housing in Decatur as of 2000.

**Table 7: Housing Values in Decatur, Mississippi**

Value	2000	<sup>1</sup>
Less than \$50,000	62	<sup>2</sup>
\$50,000 to \$99,999	89	<sup>2</sup>
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16	<sup>2</sup>
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3	<sup>2</sup>
\$200,000 to \$299,999	0	
\$300,000 to \$499,999	0	
\$500,000 to \$999,999	0	
\$1,000,000 or more	0	
Median (dollars)	63,800	

Source:

1. Table DP-4 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristic: 2000
2. There are 463 housing units in Decatur, the 170 units listed here are a sample of the housing stock

The proportion of houses less than \$50,000 in value, coupled with the proportion of rental units in town, indicates that Decatur does not have a shortage of affordable housing.

### **Educational Attainment**

Information on educational attainment is presented in Table 8 (following page) for the town of Decatur, Newton County and the State of Mississippi. In reading Table 8 it is important to understand the data rows. The row labeled “High School Graduates” includes the population that has achieved only a high school education (college educated persons also have a high school education).

As can be seen in Table 8, the percentage of those with only a high school education in the town of Decatur decreased slightly over the decade while the county saw a sizeable increase. This is positive for the town, meaning that people are choosing not to stop their education after high school. The percentage of college graduates in the town decreased while those in the county increased. The education level of the area’s population will have an impact on the types of employers that seek to draw upon the local labor pool. Likewise, income levels will be commensurate with education levels.

One important note to the reader is that Table 8 is not a reflection of the quality of education or schools in Decatur. Rather, it is simply a measure of the level of education that the Town residents have accomplished for themselves.

**Table 8: Educational Attainment for Decatur, Newton County, and Mississippi.**

1990	High School Graduates <sup>1</sup>		College Graduates <sup>2</sup>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Town of Decatur	125	10.0%	189	15.1%
Newton County	3,333	16.4%	1,917	9.4%
State of Mississippi	423,624	16.5%	306,211	11.9%
2000	No.	%	No.	%
Town of Decatur	119	9.5%	200	14.0%
Newton County	4,559	22.5%	2,596	11.9%
State of Mississippi	516,091	20.1%	397,652	14.0%

Note: The percentage calculations represent the percent of people over the age of 25.

1. Persons with High School Diploma only. Does not include those with High School and College.
2. Persons with Associates Degree or higher.

Source: US Census Bureau 1990 and 2000 Summary Tape File 3.

## Income and Poverty Level

Income and poverty levels are important indicators of a community's economic ability. Conceptually, a community with high levels of poverty and low levels of income among its population may require focused strategies to accommodate community needs.

Table 9 indicates the level of (median) income as well as the number of families below the poverty level for Decatur, Newton County and the State of Mississippi. In Decatur, the median household income level has grown over time, but is still less than that of the county or state.

As a result of the growth in median household income for Decatur, the number of families below the poverty level decreased from 1990 to 2000. Even with this decrease, Decatur continues to have a smaller share of families below the poverty level than does the county or state.

**Table 9: Median household income for 1990 and 2000.** When comparing constant dollars, Decatur has experienced an increase in household income along with the county and state.

1990	Median Household Income		Families	Families below poverty	
			No.	No.	%
Town of Decatur	\$ 18,804		264	48	18.2%
Newton County	\$ 19,302		5,621	983	17.5%
State of Mississippi	\$ 20,136		679,191	137,025	20.2%
2000			No.	No.	%
Town of Decatur	\$ 28,333	(\$21,673)	270	40	14.8%
Newton County	\$ 28,735	(\$21,981)	6,022	990	16.4%
State of Mississippi	\$ 31,330	(\$23,966)	752,234	120,039	16.0%

1990 constant dollars:

Source: US Census Bureau 1990 and 2000 Summary Tape File 3.

## Employment Base

Economic analysis is more difficult for smaller levels of geography such as cities and towns. Data is compiled by various agencies at larger levels of geography such as counties, metropolitan areas and states.

Newton County is a victim of the current economic recession. Labor force data set forth in Table 10 indicates a higher unemployment rate and fewer people working than in the last 18 years.

**Table 10: Newton County, Mississippi Employment Statistics.** Newton County has seen a decrease over the years with respect to employment, and the 2009 unemployment rate has risen to 8.9%.

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2009</u>
Civilian Labor Force	9,410	10,190	9,530
Unemployment Rate	6.4%	5.7%	8.9%
Employed	8,810	9,610	8,680

Sources:

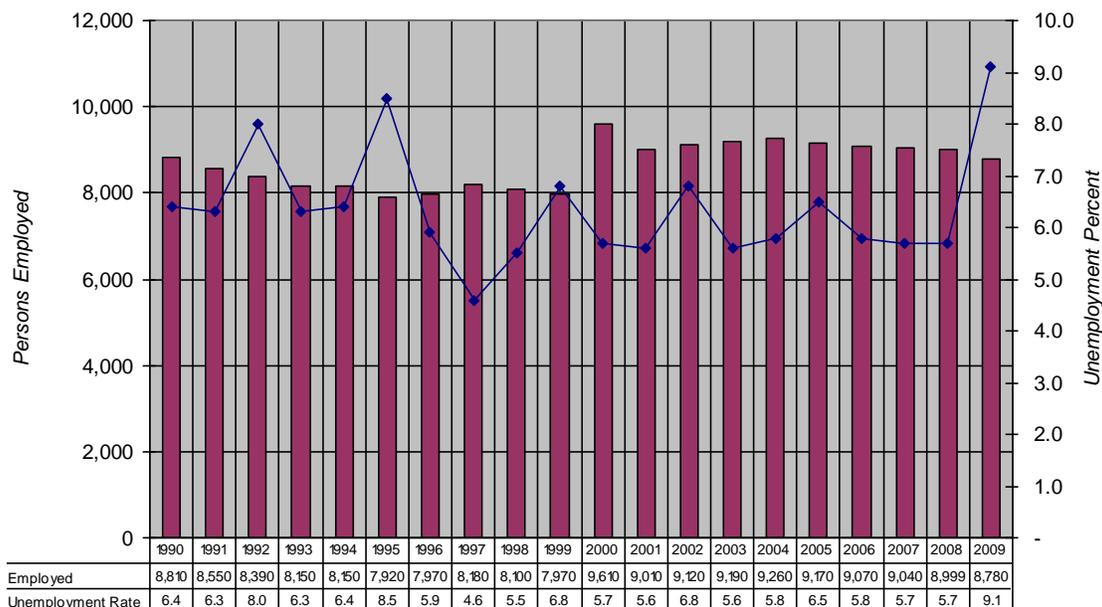
Data taken from Mississippi Employment Security Commission

Annual Averages reports and December 2009 Labor Force Estimates.

Figure 2 (following page) illustrates data similar as that in Table 10 but for more point in time between 1990 and 2009. Sharp changes have occurred in the unemployment rate over this time period, with the most dramatic increase in unemployment occurring between 2008 and 2009.

Within Decatur, the community college is a large employer and as an institution of the state, one would expect it to provide a stable employment base. While in theory this is true, job cuts are occurring not only in private sector businesses but also in government sectors. No one is exempt from the impact of the economic recession.

**Figure 2: Employment Statistics.** Newton County has historically maintained an unemployment rate between 6% and 7%. 2009 indicates a significant increase in unemployment.



Source: Data taken from Mississippi Employment Security Commission, Annual and Monthly Averages reports: Sept 2005, April 2009

While the trends seem to be worsening with respect to number of employees and labor force data, similar trends are taking place with respect to employment establishments. Tables 11 and 12 provide a summary of change over time by establishment.

**Table 11: Change in establishment based employment over time based on the SIC code system.** A decrease in the number of jobs has taken place overall (1990-2000: 5.3% decrease). A dramatic swing in type of employment, moving from manufacturing to non-manufacturing has occurred during the same time period.

**Newton County, Mississippi  
Employment by Establishment**

	1990	2000	Change	
			'90-'00	Percent
Establishment Based Employment	7,270	6,886	-384	-5%
Manufacturing (Total)	3,120	2,050	-1,070	-34%
Nonmanufacturing (Total)	4,150	4,810	660	16%
Mining	0	0	0	0%
Construction	60	190	130	217%
Transportation & Public Utilities	120	130	10	8%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	1,070	1,240	170	16%
Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate	170	160	-10	-6%
Service & Miscellaneous	1,160	1,160	0	0%
Government	1,580	1,930	350	22%
Public Education	670	900	230	34%

Totals may not add due to rounding.

Source: Data taken from Mississippi Employment Security Commission, Annual Averages for 1990 - 2000

**Table 12: Change in establishment based employment over time based on the NAICS code system.**

Newton County, Mississippi		Change			
Employment by Establishment		2001	March 2009	'01-'09	Percent
Manufacturing (total)	1,740	1,200	-540	-31%	
Nonmanufacturing (total)	4,950	5,290	340	7%	
Agri., Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting	220	360	140	64%	
Mining	0	0	0	0%	
Utilities	50	50	0	0%	
Construction	160	220	60	38%	
Wholesale Trade	20	20	0	0%	
Retail Trade	820	730	-90	-11%	
Transportation & Warehousing	60	90	30	50%	
Information	30	50	20	67%	
Finance & Insurance	120	120	0	0%	
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	20	20	0	0%	
Prof., Scientific, & Technical Ser	50	50	0	0%	
Management of Companies & Enter	70	50	-20	-29%	
Admin Support & Waste Management	140	90	-50	-36%	
Educational Services	40	30	-10	-25%	
Health Care & Social Asst	730	760	30	4%	
Arts, Entertain & Recreation	20	20	0	0%	
Accommodation & Food Service	330	400	70	21%	
Other Service (except Public Admin)	170	190	20	12%	
Government	1,900	2,040	140	7%	
Education	870	900	30	3%	
Total Nonagricultural Employment	6,690	6,490	-200	-3%	

Totals may not add due to rounding.

Source: Data taken from Mississippi Employment Security Commission, Annual Averages for 2001 Forward dated April 2009 and Annual Labor Force Monthly publication December 2009

The most significant decrease in employment occurred in the manufacturing sector, losing 540 positions from 2001 to 2009, after having lost 1,070 jobs from 1990 to 2000. Non-manufacturing jobs experienced a net gain from 660 jobs from 1990 to 2000 and another increase of 340 jobs between 2001 and 2009. Government positions saw the largest increase growing by 140 jobs from 2000 to 2009.

A matter of interest in planning for the future is to consider, to the extent possible, where people work. For example, consider the fact that the Mississippi Employment Security Commission data indicates that 9,610 persons within Newton County were employed in 2000. Then also consider that the same data source indicates that for 2000 there were only 6,886 jobs within Newton County. The difference is that of 2,724 persons employed outside the county. Clearly there is room within the county for additional jobs.

In an effort to understand where people work, the Census Bureau provides selected data to that effect. For the town of Decatur's population, the data is summarized in Table 13.

**Table 13: Where the Population Works.** More than 73% of the town's working population finds employment beyond the town's limits.

<b>Town of Decatur</b>		
	Number	% total
Total Population 16 yrs.+	503	100%
Work within Decatur	135	27%
Work outside of Decatur	368	73%
<b>Newton County</b>		
Total Population 16 yrs.+	8,778	100%
Work within Newton County	5,541	63%
Work outside of Newton County	3,072	35%
Work outside of Mississippi	165	2%

Source: U. S. Census Bureau; Summary File 4 for Census 2000.

On a countywide basis, the Census Bureau provides data to identify commuter patterns, or where people travel to work. This data summarizes the flow of workers from a resident county to work county and vice versa. Table 14 (next page) indicates the commuter patterns in to and out of Newton County.

Part I of the table indicates that 3,072 workers that reside in Newton County travel to work outside the county, with Lauderdale County receiving approximately 42% of those workers. Part II of the table indicates that 2,009 workers from outside Newton County seek employment within the county. The indications from this data are that Newton County has a need for more employment opportunities.

**Table 14: Commuter Patterns: Residence and Workplace.**

**Part I. – People living in Newton County, but working in some other place.**

Residence County	Workplace County	Count <sup>1</sup>	% Working	
			% Total Working	% Working Out Of County
Newton County	Newton Co. MS	5,541	64.3%	
	Clarke Co. MS	59	0.7%	1.9%
	Hinds Co. MS	98	1.1%	3.2%
	Lauderdale Co. MS	1,292	15.0%	42.1%
	Leake Co. MS	44	0.5%	1.4%
	Neshoba Co. MS	527	6.1%	17.2%
	Rankin Co. MS	120	1.4%	3.9%
	Scott Co. MS	767	8.9%	25.0%
	Other Area (20 Counties)	165		
Total Newton County Residents Working:		8,613		
Workers Commuting to Outside Newton County:		3,072		

**Part II. – People working in Newton County, but living in some other place.**

Workplace County	Residence County	Count <sup>1</sup>	% Workers	
			% Total Working	% Workers From Other County
Newton County	Newton Co. MS	5,541	73.4%	
	Clarke Co. MS	21	0.3%	1.0%
	Jasper Co. MS	283	3.7%	14.1%
	Lauderdale Co. MS	203	2.7%	10.1%
	Leake Co. MS	73	1.0%	3.6%
	Neshoba Co. MS	859	11.4%	42.8%
	Rankin Co. MS	21	0.3%	1.0%
	Scott Co. MS	366	4.8%	18.2%
	Smith Co. MS	76	1.0%	3.8%
	Other Area (20 Counties)	107		
Total Working in Newton County:		7,550		
Workers Commuting from Outside Newton County:		2,009		

Notes:

1. Number of Workers 16 years old and over in the commuter flow

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Internet Release date: July 25, 2003

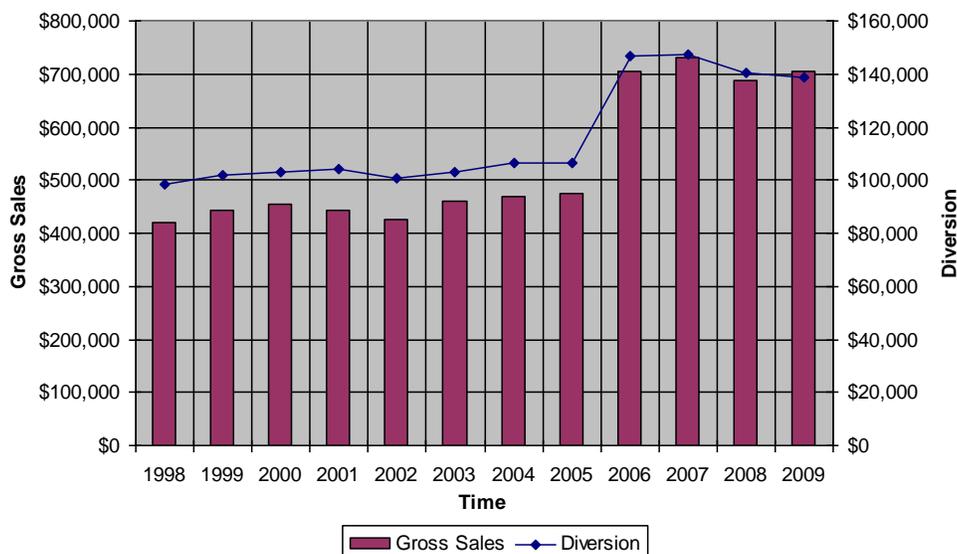
**Economic Conditions**

As evidenced in Figure 2 (page 13), unemployment is on the rise in Newton County. The affect of this is a diminished cycle of money flowing through the community. As families earn less (and spend less), government sales tax revenues decrease, business owners' profit is less which thereby decreases the margin of disposable income within the community. The ability of government to function and provide services is then reduced, and the desire of people to invest in the community is diminished. This

economic cycle in Decatur and Newton County needs to be strengthened. This is only worsened by the recent national economic downturn.

Figure 3 indicates the gross retail sales and sale tax diversions to the town. Sales had been trending slightly upward until a spike in 2006 caused by annexation. The increased continued through 2007. Recently the Town has experienced fluctuations in sales in due to the state of the economy.

**Figure 3: Total Sales and Tax Diversion.** Decatur's yearly sales and tax diversion have increased until a recent decline.



Source: Mississippi State Tax Commission Annual Report for the year noted.

### Population and Housing Forecast

Having looked into the demographic history of Decatur and the economic standing, a picture of the future must now be created. Calculating the expected population and housing needs are particularly important components of the comprehensive plan. Comprehensive planning is in large part based on the physical environment. A community's population and its needs form a majority of the physical requirements of the natural and built environment.

The population and housing forecasts are difficult to compute with any degree of certainty due to recent events affecting the state of the economy. With the exception of a few well located sites, the economy is not supporting any significant level of construction and development at this time. The duration of the economic slump is unknown.

### Population – Newton County

Forecasts for Newton County are calculated based on historical data reaching back to 1980. The following forecasts shown in Table 15 are based upon linear trends of historical data, including most recent census estimates for population.

**Table 15: Newton County Population Changes**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Population Increase</u>
1980	19,944	
1990	20,291	347
2000	21,838	1,547
2010	22,585	747
2020	23,532	947
2030	24,479	947

Table 16 shows the forecast of Decatur’s population and housing units under the continuation of current trends. The information reflects the assumption that Decatur will maintain its current share of the County’s population for the 2010 to 2030 time period. Decatur represents approximately 8.6% of the countywide population after annexation.

**Table 16: Town of Decatur Population and Housing Changes**

<u>Population</u>	<u>Population Increase</u>	<u>Housing</u>	<u>Housing Increase</u>	
1980	1,148		372	
1990	1,248	100	423	51
2000	1,879 <sup>1</sup>	631 <sup>1</sup>	652 <sup>1</sup>	229 <sup>1</sup>
2010	1,943	64	680	28
2020	2,025	81	715	35
2030	2,106	81	751	35

1. Figure is adjusted to reflect annexed area.

While the above forecasts are based on past trends, the implementation of this comprehensive plan could have a positive influence on the trends, i.e. increase population. The recommendations of this plan, if successfully carried out, should spawn development in Decatur and thereby cause population to increase greater than expected. The unknown element is to what degree this plan will be successful and to what degree the population trend may change. Because of these unknowns, a comprehensive plan should be reviewed periodically (every 5 years or so) to adjust for any unexpected changes or new data availability.

Along with the increase in population, Decatur should seek to increase employment opportunities as well. Utilizing data from the 2000 Census, the employed persons in Decatur represents approximately one third of the Town’s population. Applying this same percentage to the expected population increase, there will need to be an additional 228 jobs available to Town residents by 2030. It is important to note that the employed labor force includes persons sixteen years of age and older.

## **CHAPTER TWO: GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES**

### **Introduction**

As required by state law, the goals, objectives and policies of this comprehensive plan form the foundation upon which this plan is built. The logical process is that of first forming goals, which leads to creation of objectives, and finally the development of policy.

Goals are statements of the community's desires, vision, or aspirations for the community. As such, goals are not necessarily ever achieved and brought to an end. As broad statements, goals are to identify the purpose of an effort, and are not easily measured.

Objectives are statements that serve the purpose of narrowing broadly stated goals into something more specific and measurable. Objectives are formulated to move toward achievement of goals, and are more precise in terms of directing energies toward an action.

Policy statements then follow objectives. The stated policies serve as the basis for decision-making. Policies are very specific and are directed toward carrying out the objectives, which in turn are designed to achieve certain goals. In some cases, comments are provided following the policy statements to explain the planning principle and basis for the policy statement.

To aid in the formulation of goals, objectives and policies, the community was surveyed to gauge their perception of the community. Although only 26 surveys were returned, some distinct patterns emerge from the responses. A complete tabulation of the responses is included at Appendix A.

The survey data indicates the community is most dissatisfied with community sidewalks and the parks, but was most satisfied with schools, fire, police and ambulance services. The desire for additional shopping opportunities was revealed, particularly for grocery stores and additional restaurants. A strong sense of community exists among the citizens of Decatur, a characteristic that is difficult to create if it doesn't already exist.

In addition to these items identified by the community, it is necessary for Decatur to consider other goals, objectives and policies. Typically, communities undertake comprehensive planning efforts in conjunction with rapid growth, i.e. Memphis metro area, Jackson metro area, and gulf coast communities. Decatur is in a unique position in that there is calculated to be a modest increase in population and housing units over the next 20 years. With that being the case, the approach for the future of Decatur is that of community maintenance and fostering economic growth.

## Land Use Goals

### **Goal 1: Continue to provide for the orderly and logical spatial arrangement of development in Decatur.**

Objective 1.1: Avoid the creation of incompatible land uses as Decatur develops or redevelops, and to remedy over time the existing incompatible land uses that have occurred.

Objective 1.2: Ensure the protection and betterment of the public health, safety and general welfare, including the provision for adequate light, air and circulation, separation and open space between land uses, prevent overcrowding, protection of the value of property and the protection of the integrity of the various neighborhoods within Decatur.

Objective 1.3: Provide for the protection of property values by the creation of a level of certainty regarding the use and reuse of lands within the town.

Policy 1.3.1: The Town of Decatur should review the existing zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations in order to determine what, if any, revision or modification are necessary to accomplish the goals and objectives of this comprehensive plan.

Policy 1.3.2: The Town of Decatur will, at the appropriate time, prepare and adopt additional land use control ordinances necessary to implement the recommendations of this plan.

Policy 1.3.3: The Town of Decatur will fully implement and enforce its land use control ordinances.

### **Goal 2: Guide and direct development in a manner which is sensitive and responsible with respect to the natural environment and natural resources and promotes historic preservation.**

Objective 2.1: Encourage developers and land owners to preserve environmentally sensitive areas or to employ development techniques which result in the conservation of natural resources or otherwise benefit the natural environment.

Policy 2.1.1: The Town of Decatur considers the natural environment for which concern is given to be areas of delineated wetlands, areas designated within Special Flood Hazard Areas according to FEMA, and areas of historical significance.

Policy 2.1.2: At the appropriate time, the Town of Decatur should consider developing a historic preservation program.

**Goal 3: Guide and direct development to locations that allow for the most efficient utilization of existing investment in public infrastructure and public facilities.**

Objective 3.1: Minimize the public investment necessary to provide municipal services to future developments within the Town.

Policy 3.1.1: The Town of Decatur will encourage development to first locate in areas that are served with adequate municipal utilities and require no further costly utility extensions or improvements.

Policy 3.1.2: The Town of Decatur will assess the intensity of development and encourage its location with respect to available service facilities and capabilities. Developments will be guided to areas to best accommodate the service demands including, but not limited to, water supply, wastewater demands, fire protection requirements, traffic generation and transportation access needs.

Objective 3.2: Maximize the public investment in existing municipal service facilities and capabilities.

Policy 3.2.1: The Town of Decatur will encourage infill development to occur, particularly in those areas which are already served with municipal utilities.

Policy 3.2.2: The Town recognizes the impossibility of achieving full build out within the municipal limits and therefore acknowledges that the availability of vacant developable land is not the sole factor to consider when guiding and directing development.

## **Transportation**

**Goal 4: Provide a safe means for vehicular and pedestrian circulation.**

Objective 4.1: Provide adequate signage and striping along the streets to regulate and direct traffic as needed.

Policy 4.1.1: The Town should review the street signage within the town and develop a plan for replacing those signs which have become an eyesore (faded, dented, defaced, etc.), or to reinstall missing signage. Street striping should be evaluated as well, particularly pedestrian crossings.

Objective 4.2: Increase the opportunity for pedestrian mobility throughout the town.

Policy 4.2.1: The existence and condition of sidewalks should be evaluated and sidewalks should be improved where needed. Particular attention should be given to the level of handicap accessibility for existing sidewalks.

Policy 4.2.2: Sidewalk repairs or installations should be directed first toward areas which are used to move students between ECCC and Downtown.

Objective 4.3: Improve the safety and attractiveness of access to private properties.

Policy 4.3.1: Decatur should consider establishing and enforcing a curb cut policy to limit the access points along commercial corridors and to improve the appearance of transportation corridors.

Policy 4.3.2: Developments should incorporate shared internal circulation and limit curb cuts to arterial streets.

**Curb Cut**  
*An opening along the street curb providing vehicular ingress and egress to adjacent properties and to abutting public streets.*

Objective 4.4: Ensure the reservation of right-of-way for future transportation routes.

Policy 4.4.1: As development occurs along the path of any planned transportation routes, Decatur should require, as a condition of development approval, the reservation of an appropriate right-of-way corridor.

Policy 4.4.2: Decatur should require, through appropriate development regulations, newly constructed streets be laid out so as to facilitate future extensions or connections.

Policy 4.4.3: Decatur should develop a minimum standard for construction of new street and for resurfacing existing streets.

Objective 4.5: Identify necessary improvements to the existing street network.

Policy 4.5.1: The Town should review the streets within the town and develop a plan for addressing maintenance needs, including but not limited to, broken curb and gutter, broken sidewalks, patching or repaving damaged streets, and cleaning ditches.

Policy 4.5.2: Decatur's Public Works Director, in conjunction with Mayor and Board of Alderman, should coordinate and develop a schedule of the required improvements and repairs.

Policy 4.5.3: Decatur's Public Works Director, in conjunction with the Mayor and Board of Alderman, should develop a financial strategy to pave the gravel roads within the Town.

Objective 4.6: The Town of Decatur should develop and adopt Subdivision Regulations and Specifications to ensure new infrastructure development and expansion meet acceptable engineering and construction specification standards.

Policy 4.6.1: The Town of Decatur should develop and adopt a standard street cross section and pavement design to allow support of heavier vehicles (school buses and garbage collections trucks) that service the residential and commercial areas of the Town.

Policy 4.6.2: The Town of Decatur should reserve adequate right-of-way for the location of sanitary sewer, water service, and other underground utilities that may be required in new developments.

## **Housing**

### **Goal 5: Improve the quality of the housing stock in the community.**

Objective 5.1: Eliminate, to the extent possible, all dilapidated and abandoned housing in Decatur.

Objective 5.2: Require homeowners to maintain houses to a certain standard of safety and durability.

Objective 5.3: Ensure that new housing is built to current standards for safety, durability and functionality.

Policy 5.3.1: The Town of Decatur should adopt and enforce the most current and up to date suite of building codes, and continually update its codes as new code suites become available.

Policy 5.3.2: The Town of Decatur should adopt and enforce property maintenance codes and unsafe building abatement codes, requiring that dilapidated homes and buildings be removed and damaged buildings be repaired or removed.

Policy 5.3.3: The Town of Decatur will maintain its publicly owned property to the same level as that required of its citizens.

## Goal 6: Promote infill housing development in Decatur.

Objective 6.1: Attract new housing developments to locate upon underutilized properties within the town.

Policy 6.1.1: The Town of Decatur will seek to fill vacant lots within the town. Entities such as Habitat for Humanity are organizations in the business of providing housing on a lot by lot basis. While the town is not in the development business, local leaders can aid in the facilitation of such developments.

Objective 6.2: Provide a wider field of housing opportunities within Decatur in the form of housing types and housing costs.

Policy 6.2.1: Decatur should promote the concept of mixed use development, particularly with regard to housing types and limited commercial development (commercial on the first floor, housing on the second floor).

Policy 6.2.2: Decatur will maintain a diverse supply of housing available to people of all income levels, but will limit the proportion of stand alone multifamily housing to 30% of the town's housing stock. Dormitories will not be considered as multifamily housing for the purpose of this measurement.

### **Multiple Family Dwellings**

*For the purpose of this calculation, multiple family dwellings are individual buildings designed to house two (2) or more families or contain two (2) or more separate living units, regardless of the ownership of each living unit. Common examples of multiple family dwellings include apartment buildings, duplexes, triplexes, or otherwise attached living units.*

Objective 6.3: To transition the town's built environment into one employing Traditional Neighborhood Development principles.

Policy 6.3.1: Diversity of housing should be promoted by the inclusion of a wide range of choices in size, design, and cost.

## Community Facilities and Services

### Goal 7: Provide excellent services throughout the town in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Objective 7.1: Ensure that space is available for the expansion and extension of public services.

Policy 7.1.1: Decatur should require, as development occurs, the reservation or dedication of space for public use such as additional street right-of-way, park space, or space for public buildings or utilities.

Objective 7.2: Ensure there is a logical and compatible relationship between service facilities / capabilities and land uses.

Policy 7.2.1: Decatur will evaluate development proposals with regard to the intensity of service demands (police, fire, water, sewer, etc.) and compare the same to the capability and impact of providing the needed services.

Policy 7.2.2: Decatur will discourage development proposals with such an intensity of service demands (police, fire, water, sewer, etc.) that, if approved, could have a negative impact upon the level of services for existing town residents; unless, however, there is an adequate plan to provide the necessary services.

Policy 7.2.3: Decatur will provide the services and make the improvements to which it committed when annexing additional territory. Such services include paving existing nonpaved streets, providing street lights, and installing fire hydrants with adequate water supply and sanitary sewer system where economically feasible.

Objective 7.3: Enhance public services available to the citizens of the town.

Policy 7.3.1: Decatur should evaluate the type of recreational facilities most beneficial to town residents, and develop a plan to fulfill those desires.

Policy 7.3.2: Decatur should work with the Mississippi State Rating Bureau to continually enhance fire protection services within the town. The town should seek further improvement in its fire classification rating from the present class 8.

Policy 7.3.3: Decatur will develop a system whereby streets which are in need of major repair are identified and prioritized, so that a plan can be developed to address the maintenance needs.

Objective 7.4: Minimize the burden of infrastructure costs to the existing tax base.

Policy 7.4.1: The Town of Decatur should not make speculative infrastructure extensions. Infrastructure should only be extended where development is certain.

Policy 7.4.2: Decatur will develop a system by which developers bear a proportion of the expense to extend and improve the infrastructure as necessary. This policy, however, shall not be construed in conflict with the policy of first locating development in areas presently served by adequate infrastructure.

Objective 7.5: The Town of Decatur shall assess the need for expanding Public Works facilities to house equipment and materials necessary for the proper functioning of the department.

**Goal 8: Enhance the environmental quality of the Town through the provision of a public sanitary sewer system.**

Objective 8.1: In areas where the sanitary sewer service is provided, connect all new construction within the city limits to the Town's sanitary sewer system.

Objective 8.2: All privately owned sanitary sewer systems (septic tanks and sewer plants) will be approved and regulated by the Newton County Health Department and/or Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality.

**Goal 9: Enhance the environmental quality of the Town through the provision of an improved public stormwater drainage system.**

Objective 9.1: To eliminate the potential for flooding during high volume rainfall events.

Policy 9.1.1: The Town of Decatur should assess the condition of primary and secondary drainage systems and ensure that all are maintained in a manner that allows for the removal of debris that would inhibit the flow of storm water.

Policy 9.1.2: The Town of Decatur should develop a design standard for all secondary drainage ditches that includes gentle slopes to encourage property owners to mow the ditches.

**Goal 10: Enhance, to the extent possible, services delivered to the residents of Decatur from other governmental or quasi-governmental entities.**

Objective 10.1: To work in a mutually cooperative fashion with public and quasi-public agencies for the discharge of their duties within the Town of Decatur. (i.e. Chamber of Commerce, Civic Clubs, County Supervisors, Adjacent towns, State of Mississippi, etc.)

Policy 10.1.1: The Town will make its resources available for the purpose of furthering this goal and objective; provided, however, that the town shall not place any burden upon the taxpayers of the town in doing so unless there is an offsetting benefit to the town.

## **Community Appearance and Spirit**

### **Goal 11: The Town of Decatur should clearly and effectively communicate the rules and regulations under which the Town operates.**

Objective 11.1: The Town of Decatur should review the existing Ordinances and Regulations of the Town to ensure that they are current, meaningful and not out dated.

Objective 11.2: The Town of Decatur should maintain the Ordinances and Regulations of the Town in a well organized up-to-date document that is readily available to all Town officials in printed and electronic format.

Objective 11.3: The Town of Decatur should post the Ordinances, Regulations, and associated application in electronic format on the Town's web site.

### **Goal 12: Improve and Enhance the Overall Appearance of the Community and Generate a Sense of Community Pride.**

Objective 12.1: Eliminate, to the extent possible, all dilapidated and abandoned structures in the town.

Objective 12.2: Maintain public and private properties in the town so as to project a positive image of Decatur.

Policy 12.2.1: Decatur should adopt and/or enforce the necessary ordinances to empower it to compel property owners to clean their property by removing unused or discarded items, mowing tall grass, removing dilapidated buildings and otherwise keeping property in a safe and presentable form.

Policy 121.2.2: Decatur will maintain public property to the same standards required for private property owners.

Objective 12.3: Improve the visual appearance of the community.

Policy 12.3.1: Decatur should evaluate the effectiveness of its sign regulations to ensure that signage does not cast a cluttered and confused impression for commercial, business or industrial areas of the town.

Policy 12.3.2: Decatur should assess the appearance of the entrances to the town and take measures to improve the visual impact.

Policy 12.3.3: Decatur should assess parking lots and streets to determine where added landscaping would enhance the appearance. A program

could be implemented whereby citizens “adopt-a-spot” to maintain the landscaping, or “adopt-a-street” to pick up litter.

Policy 12.3.4: Decatur should assess the need for a strong litter ordinance.

Policy 12.3.5: Decatur should assess the need for residential parking, particularly where rental housing units have more tenants than available parking spaces.

Policy 12.3.6: The town will address, to the extent necessary, negative conditions arising from inadequate property maintenance, including but not limited to the conditions of: inadequate parking space, trash, litter, clutter and similar indicators of generally unkempt property.

**Goal 13: Promote, Strengthen, and Advance the Core Values of the Town of Decatur: Faith, Family, and Education.**

Objective 13.1: Identify needs and/or opportunities within the community to advance this goal.

Policy 13.1.1: Town leaders will periodically meet with educators, members of the clergy, and other local leader to evaluate the needs and conditions within the community.

**Commercial and Industrial Development**

**Goal 14: Promote Downtown Decatur as the Center of Retail Activity.**

Objective 14.1: Establish a sense of continuing activity in the downtown area.

Policy 14.1.1: The Town of Decatur recognizes that ongoing pedestrian activity and on going business activities creates a valuable synergy within an area, and it is desirable to create an atmosphere which fosters this synergy. This is particularly important for the areas between ECCC and Downtown.

Policy 14.1.2: Decatur should explore the possibility of offering an incentive package to encourage the reuse of vacant commercial spaces within the downtown area as opposed to constructing new commercial spaces outside the downtown area.

Objective 14.2: Encourage pedestrian activity in downtown Decatur.

Policy 14.2.1: Decatur should assure that pedestrian features, such as benches and garbage cans, are located in the downtown commercial area for public convenience.

Policy 14.2.2: Decatur desires to have a sufficiently diverse land use makeup in the downtown so as to provide a wide variety of goods, services and facilities for people of all ages.

Policy 14.2.3: Downtown development and redevelopment should consistently achieve safety, functionality and promote the aesthetic quality of the area.

Objective 14.3: To promote the economic viability of downtown Decatur.

Policy 14.3.1: Decatur will configure its land use control regulations in a fashion so as to recognize land uses which are suitable and appropriate in the downtown area versus those which may be suitable elsewhere.

Policy 14.3.2: Decatur will configure its land use control regulations in a fashion so as to direct larger scale automobile oriented commercial uses to highway corridor or higher traffic areas.

### **Goal 15: To Generate Additional Employment Opportunities within Decatur.**

Objective 15.1: Strengthen and increase the employment opportunities within the town.

Policy 15.1.1: Decatur will seek to attract diverse employment opportunities including manufacturing, public sector, research, retail, service industries and other potential employment sectors.

Policy 15.1.2: Decatur will evaluate the volume of land zoned for industrial use and determine the likelihood of industrial potential for these lands. Those lands not likely to support industrial use should be zoned for some other productive use.

Objective 15.2: Provide incentives which serve to enhance the creation of jobs and reuse of vacant buildings.

Policy 15.2.1: Decatur will encourage the reuse, or an adaptive use, for existing vacant buildings and properties.

Policy 15.2.2: Decatur will investigate the potential to provide financial incentives for economic development and the creation of jobs.

## Goal 16: Stimulate and Promote Economic Development within the Community.

Objective 16.1: Provide a sense of welcome for new development or redevelopment.

Policy 16.1.1: The town's development regulations and policies resulting from this comprehensive plan are not to be construed as restrictive, but are intended to be supportive of development.

Policy 16.1.2: The development regulations and policies resulting from this comprehensive plan are to be interpreted in a consistent and fair manner. Decatur recognizes the importance of a "level playing field" with regard to the competitive nature of real estate development.

Objective 16.2: Make the public aware of the town's commitment to attracting economic development.

Policy 16.2.1: Form alliances with local Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Authorities, or other such agencies within the county designed to locate and attract economic development.

Policy 16.2.2: Decatur should take an active role in ensuring information available to the public is accurate and up to date. This includes publishing pertinent data to the Town's web site. This also includes providing data to other web sites, such as the chamber of commerce, for their publication.

Objective 16.3: Reduce the financial risk typically associated with development under standard Euclidean zoning measures (zoning by use).

Policy 16.3.1: Decatur will support the land use concept of mixed-use development.

Objective 16.4: Capitalize on the economic development opportunities afforded by the presence of East Central Community College, Newton County School System, and Newton County Academy.

Policy 16.4.1: Decatur will pursue the development of knowledge based industry and economic development drawing upon the presence of

### **Reducing Financial Risk**

*Mixed-Use allows the developer to lower his financial risk by taking advantage of multiple market opportunities at a single location. Through standard (Euclidian) zoning, uses are to be separate. Therefore, a residential development would have to occur at one location while a retail development occurred at another, requiring an investment in duplicate infrastructure, more parking, land costs, and other financial considerations. The mixed use concept allows for development of both residential and retail, for instance, at a single site and with reduced infrastructure costs.*

resources of East Central Community College, Newton County School System, and Newton County Academy.

## **Plan Implementation Goals**

### **Goal 17: Continually interpret this plan and evaluate its effectiveness and impact on the community.**

Objective 17.1: Create a forum in which the town receives comment and feedback regarding the implications of this plan.

Policy 17.1.1: Following the adoption of this plan, the town will establish a means by which the effectiveness and implementation of this plan is measured. This task may be accomplished by the planning commission or some other established committee.

Policy 17.1.2: The Town of Decatur will utilize this plan as a guide when making land use and development decisions.

Objective 17.2: Facilitate future revisions and updates to this comprehensive plan as needed and increase the comprehensiveness of this plan, as activity in Decatur increases.

Policy 17.2.1: Decatur should implement a permitting system to enable the tracking and quantifying of development activity. This system should not only be for the purpose of determining compliance with regulations, but also to gather statistical information regarding development activity.

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## **CHAPTER THREE: EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS AND FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**

The purpose of this chapter is to identify existing land use patterns by preparing an inventory of existing land uses in map form, which in turn aids in developing goals and objectives for future land use patterns. By predefining future land use patterns, town officials and the community will have a guide over which to focus and direct future development. The future land use plan serves as a guide that literally maps out the general location and relationship of land uses.

### **Existing Land Use**

A land use survey for the town of Decatur and the study area was conducted in 2006. This “windshield” survey allowed data to be recorded on tax maps with underlying aerial photography. A digital parcel map was created using a Geographic Information System (GIS), and each parcel coded for its particular land use.

The existing land uses are divided into the following described categories:

### **Residential**

Residential uses are those having a principle purpose of providing for permanent shelter and dwelling to persons or families. Residential uses are further classified in the following categories:

 Single Family Residential – A single residential living unit of conventional (on-site) construction, designed to house only one family.

 Multifamily Residential – A structure designed with more than one separate living unit, such as a duplex or apartment complex.

 Mobile Home Residential – A single residential living unit designed to house only one family and constructed or assembled off-site and transported to the site for placement. This category includes both Mobile Homes and Manufactured Homes.

### **Commercial**

 Commercial establishments are considered to be those that are operated privately, for profit, and provide merchandise or services for retail trade. Examples include banks, grocery stores, barber shops, etc.

#### ***What is the difference between Mobile Homes and Manufactured Homes?***

*A Mobile Home is a structure manufactured prior to the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act. In essence, mobile homes are not constructed to any particular code.*

*A Manufactured Home is a structure which is constructed in accordance with the National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act.*

## **Industrial**

 Industrial establishments are considered to be those that are operated privately, for profit, and engage in manufacturing, reduction, warehousing, storage, or distribution of products or goods. Also included in this category are uses that may generate excessive noise, odor, light, traffic or other nuisances associated with industrial uses.

## **Public/Semi-Public**

 Uses that are operated primarily for the purpose of providing a public service or delivering a public utility, such as a fire station, post office or electric power sub station. This also includes non-profit organizations such as churches and cemeteries.

## **Institutional**

 This category relates to uses that are operated by a public or non-profit body that involve the frequent assembly or housing of persons, such as a school, hospital or prison.

## **Vacant/Agricultural**

 This category relates to the use of property, as opposed to the use of structures. Property that is in an undeveloped state, or is being used for agricultural purposes, falls into this category.

## **Streets and ROW / Easements**

 This category is set aside to account for those corridors necessary for transportation routes or utility lines. Although in some instances there may be nothing visible on an easement, the property is set aside for a specific use. The map of existing land uses within the town does not provide a color shading to identify the rights of way, but the corridors are clearly visible along streets, highways and railroads.

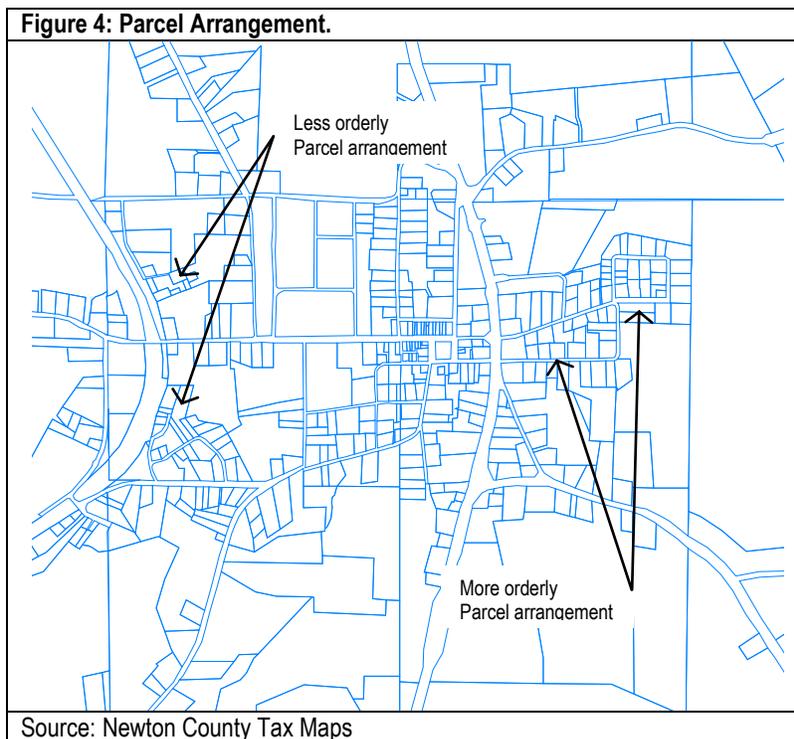
Table 17 (next page) shows the amount of land in use by category in the Town of Decatur. Land use measurements for the specific categories are expressed in acres, and represent the town in its enlarged, or post annexation, condition.

**Table 17: Land Use Measures for Decatur, Mississippi.**

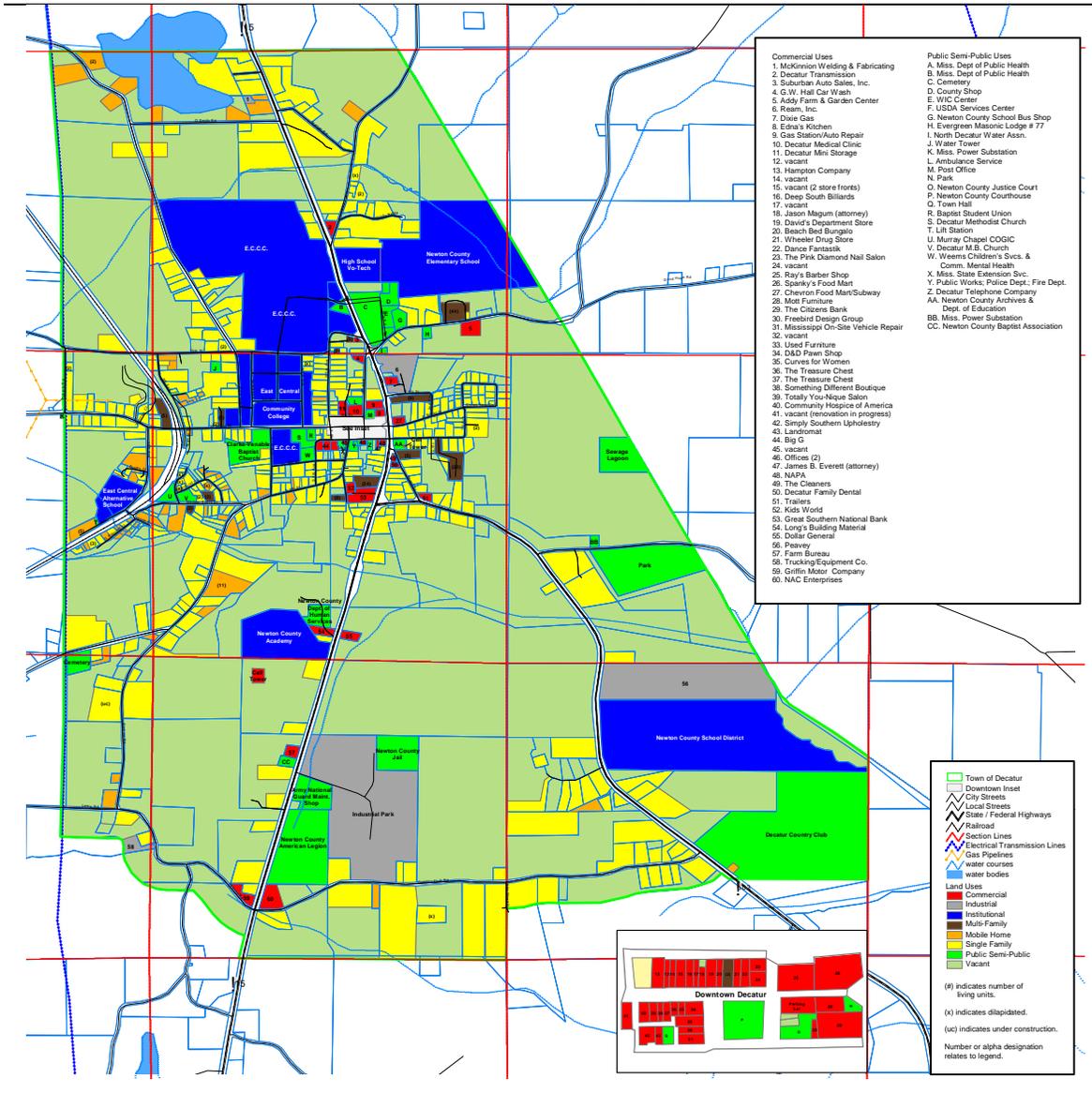
Land Use Category	Acres	% Total
Total Area	3,084.7	100.0%
Residential		
<i>Single Family</i>	502.6	16.3%
<i>Multi-Family</i>	16.3	0.5%
<i>Mobile Home</i>	50.1	1.6%
Subtotal for Residential	569.0	18.4%
Commercial	25.9	0.8%
Institutional	334.1	10.8%
Industrial	116.7	3.8%
Public/Semi-Public	194.3	6.3%
Streets and ROW / Easements	143.5	4.7%
Total Developed Land	1,383.6	44.9%
Vacant/Agricultural	1,701.2	55.1%

Source: Bridge & Watson, Inc. field survey May 2006.

The spatial arrangement of the existing land uses for the Town of Decatur is shown on Map 2. Observing existing land use provides some insight toward the development of the future land use plan and policies regarding land use management. The arrangement and relationship of property lines is also an indicator of past development trends, and future land use control needs. Figure 4 illustrates a portion of the parcel arrangement for Decatur.



**Map 2: Existing Land Use Map for the Town of Decatur, Mississippi.**



Source: Newton County Tax Maps, Bridge & Watson field survey May 2006

The land use survey indicates a growth pattern primarily focused on the transportation routes once beyond the original town limits. This pattern is typical of rural fashioned slower growing communities, where market forces are not strong enough to support the construction of new transportation corridors.

While the existing land use pattern is typical, it is not efficient. If the same number of houses were accumulated within a single subdivision or two, there would be far fewer street miles, street lights and water and sewer lines to maintain and deliver services. A more compact form of development has its advantages.

**Future Land Use Plan**

## **Introduction and Methodology**

In order to comply with Mississippi enabling legislation, the future land use plan must designate in map or policy form the proposed general distribution and extent of the proposed land uses. Additionally, the proposed land uses must be generally described in regard to expected land uses and intensity of development.

The future land use plan serves two purposes. First, it provides for the general physical location of expected future development. The second purpose is to create order among the existing land uses. Decatur consists of a variety of land uses and a variety of lot sizes. Planning for these built areas will create order, although it will occur over a long period of time.

In preparing a Future Land Use Plan, a necessary and responsible step is that of considering environmentally sensitive areas. These areas are not only worthy of some degree of preservation, but also pose a constraint to development.

## **Environmental Constraints**

Responsible planning dictates that the natural environment be planned just as the man-made environment is planned. The following discussion outlines the importance of certain environmental elements.

### Septic Tank Suitability

Decatur and Newton County are made up of numerous types of soil. Each soil is unique in terms of its physical and chemical characteristics. Because of these differing characteristics, some soils may not be very well suited to properly disposing of sewage through on-site methods.

Although Decatur operates a central sewer collection and treatment system, some areas recently annexed utilize on-site methods of sewage disposal. The improper disposal of sewage poses a threat to both ground water supplies and surface waters. Soils that allow wastewater to permeate through too quickly fail to filter out pollutants. Eventually, these pollutants make their way into the ground water supplies. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some soils do not allow wastewater to permeate through quickly enough. When wastewater is generated faster than the soil can absorb it, the excess then is forced to the surface. Ultimately, the pollutants are washed away and become part of a body of surface water. If humans come into contact with improperly treated sewage, diseases such as hepatitis could be contracted.

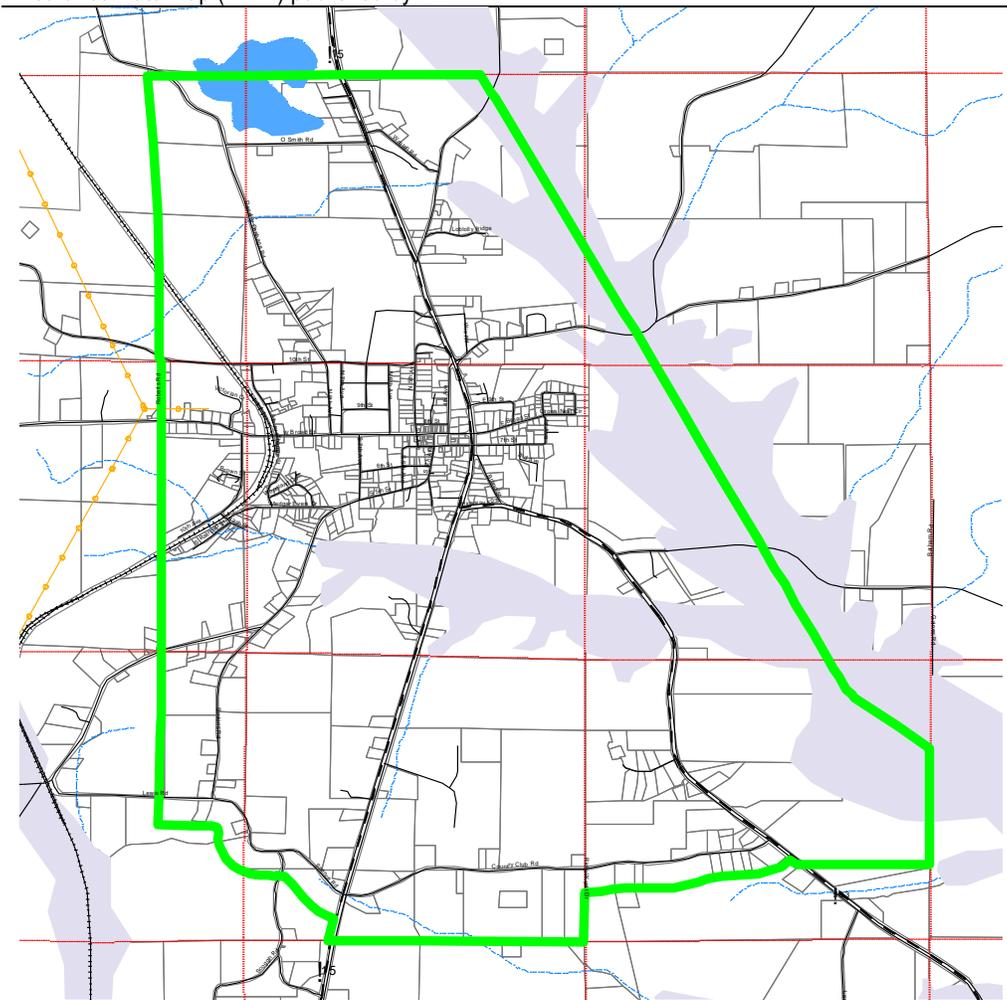
Portions of the town are severely unsuitable for on-site sewage disposal systems. This determination is made from reviewing the Newton County Soil Survey. To overcome this constraint to accommodate development, municipal sewer service should be utilized, or, innovative design techniques coupled with significantly larger lots must be

implemented. In other words, the areas which are least likely to receive town sewer service are classified into the lowest density land use categories.

### Flood Potential Areas

The intertwining of floodwaters and development is a problem that costs Americans millions of dollars and numerous lives each year. The federal government has adopted strong policies on this issue in the form of the National Flood Insurance Program. Decatur participates in the Flood Program, and should direct development away from flood hazard areas. Map 3 (next page) sets out the general limits of flood hazard areas as reported by the federal government. For the purpose of determining flood hazard limits, one should consult the appropriate Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for the town.

**Map 3: Flood Hazard Area for the Town of Decatur, Mississippi.** The flood hazard area show is an approximation base on FEMA maps. For determination of the exact flood hazard limits, see Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) published by FEMA.



Source: Newton County Tax Maps, FEMA FIRM

## **Projected Land Use Needs**

From the population and dwelling unit forecast in Table 16 (page 18), the Town of Decatur is expected to increase in the number of dwelling units and total population by the year 2030. These demographic additions to the town must have a place predetermined in order to avoid haphazard development.

The future land use plan is designed to indicate the general location of anticipated future land uses. These uses have been allocated with significant surpluses above and beyond that necessary to accommodate the calculated increase in dwellings. While future land use planning typically involves specific calculations as to land use needs, the magnitude of the calculated changes are such that it is only necessary to suggest future land use patterns, as opposed to more specific land use planning. However, as previously mentioned, this plan will need to be updated with consideration given to more detailed planning as development activities occur.

For the purpose of this plan, discussion will concentrate on gross density, which is the total number of residential units divided by the number of acres of a project site. The net density is the number of residential units divided by the acreage of the lots upon which the units are located.

Contained within the future land use plan are various categories of land use described below.

### **Agricultural**

This land use classification is intended to describe those areas that are rural in character and sparsely developed. These areas are expected to remain in virtually an undeveloped state with the exception of limited agricultural uses and related structures, and no concentrations of any residential, commercial, industrial or other type of land uses are anticipated. Residential development may occur at a low density of approximately one dwelling unit per two (2) acres. Many of these agricultural areas are not expected to be served with sanitary sewage collection for the duration of this plan; however, there are some instances that may arise which would prompt service, such as a public health hazard or the economic feasibility of extending services.

### **Low Density Residential**

This land use category is intended to preserve existing concentrations of low density development in areas of contiguous residential development. These areas are concentrated to the extent that their form establishes the character of the neighborhood, and their character should be preserved. This category also allows for additional residential development at densities of approximately two (2) to three (3) dwellings per acre. Future development in this area will be single family residential in nature with limited agricultural uses.

## **Medium Density Residential**

This classification will allow residential development at densities of four (4) to five (5) dwellings per acre, and is intended to allow for a variety of single family housing types such as patio homes, zero lot line homes and townhomes. These areas are located conveniently (smaller travel time and distance) to the every day needs of the residents of these areas. Strict oversight should be administered to project development. Future development in this area should be compatible with the existing developments in the surrounding area or should be separated by the appropriate zoning classification for the desired use.

## **High Density Residential**

This land use classification is intended to accommodate single family and multifamily housing at a maximum density for single family of five and one-half (5.5) dwellings per acre, or multifamily housing at densities of up to eighteen (18) dwellings per acre. Because of the concentration of population in high density areas, these areas are located more conveniently (smaller travel time and distance) to the every day needs of the residents of these areas.

## **Manufactured Housing**

The manufactured housing district is created to provide an area to accommodate manufactured and/or modular type home construction. Because of the distinct architectural appearance of the manufactured houses, they do not blend well with conventionally constructed homes. This use is located near areas where manufactured housing has already accumulated. The density of projects developed in this land classification will have a density of up to eight (8) dwelling units per acre.

## **Neighborhood Commercial**

The neighborhood commercial land use category is primarily to serve the needs of those individuals living in close proximity, and would accommodate such uses to provide convenience retail goods to the residents. Examples include branch banks, a deli, or a personal service such as a beauty shop or tanning salon.

## **Downtown Commercial**

This is a land use classification created to accommodate a variety of commercial and professional land uses in the downtown area of Decatur. It includes uses to cater to the



**Sidewalk seating at a restaurant along Barracks Row in Washington, D.C.**

Image captured at [www.princeofpetworth.com](http://www.princeofpetworth.com).

needs of the nearby residents and is not dependent upon traffic flows for its sustainability. Uses within this district would be conducted indoors with the exception of sidewalk or patio activities, such as is the case with many restaurants. A horizontal mix of uses is encouraged to include retail, public/semi public uses, or community facilities. A vertical mix of uses is encouraged as well to provide second floor uses of offices or residential spaces.

### **Mixed Use / Heavy Commercial**

The highway commercial land use category is designed to accommodate commercial uses conducted either indoors or outdoors. As the name suggests, this land use category is located in areas where business proprietors require high visibility or are dependent upon traffic volume as a portion of its market base.

### **Light Industrial**

The light industrial land use classification is designed to provide for areas suitable for industrial activities that are conducted primarily indoors. Such activity will include manufacturing, storage or assembly of goods or products. Light industrial uses should not create excessive amounts of noise, odor, light or other nuisances beyond the limits of its property line.

### **Heavy Industrial**

This land use classification designates areas which are suitable for industrial activities which are conducted primarily outdoors. These activities will include those listed under the light industrial category, plus the production, alteration, or reduction of goods. Heavy industrial uses generally include those facilities that rely on large volumes of truck traffic or the operation of heavy machinery in carrying out its function.

### **Public/Semi-Public (PSP)**

This classification is intended to reflect the location of existing and/or proposed uses such as churches and cemeteries, municipal buildings and facilities, etc. The future land use plan does not designate each and every public/semi-public use whereas many such uses occur as an incidental development to other uses, such as a small park within a new residential area. Therefore, this land use designation is not intended to become a separate zoning classification.

### **Institutional**

This classification represents uses that are operated by a public or non profit body that involve the frequent assembly or housing of persons, such as a school, hospital or prison. It is expected that the existing institutional designations will remain as such use. With mild population increases expected for Decatur and Newton County, expansions of

these types of facilities are likely not necessary, notwithstanding any need for renovation.

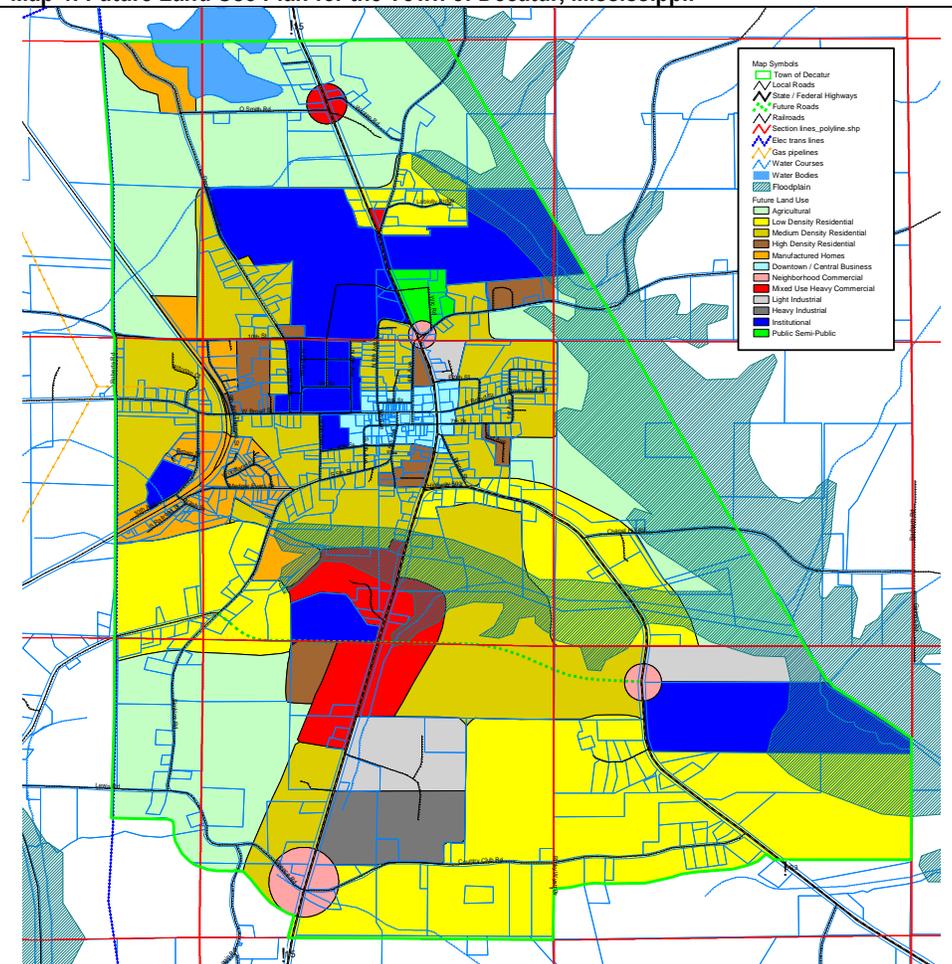
 **Flood Plain (FP)**

The flood plain district is an overlay district outlining the low lying areas within the community which are subject to flooding in the event of a 100-yr. storm event (1% chance of flooding). Development should not be encouraged within this district; however, any development proposed within this district should be very carefully reviewed.

Since Decatur recently annexed additional territory into its town limits, the town has sufficient land resources to accommodate the calculated increase in population, housing and other related land uses. However, this conclusion does not preclude the town from having a need at some point in the future to expand its limits.

With regard to future land use patterns, Map 4 sets out in general form the spatial arrangement of future land uses for the Town of Decatur.

**Map 4: Future Land Use Plan for the Town of Decatur, Mississippi.**



Source: Newton County Tax Maps, Bridge & Watson, Inc.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSPORTATION**

### **Introduction**

The transportation network is the key element that ties a community to the remainder of the world. Four primary modes of transportation exist which are in the form of 1) roads, 2) rail, 3) aircraft and 4) watercraft.

Roads are typically divided into functional categories. Map 5 (next page) sets out the classification of existing roadways in Decatur as follows:

1. Minor/Local Streets – Serves the primary purpose of accessing property and leads to collector streets. Alleys are considered within this classification.
2. Major Streets – Serves the purpose of providing internal circulation within densely developed areas such as downtown Decatur.
3. Collector Streets – Streets that convey traffic between the minor/locals and arterial streets, or serve the purpose of linking local streets to arterial streets.
4. Arterial Streets – Roads that carry traffic into and away from the community.

Decatur is served by two (2) arterial routes, which are Highway 15 running north and south bisecting the town and Highway 503 running northwest and southeast. The two highways intersect a few blocks south of the downtown area. Highways 15 and 503 are state highways and are maintained by the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

Most traffic enters and leaves Decatur via Highway 15. Once inside the town, the local streets adequately move traffic to its destination. The streets in Decatur do not appear to be overburdened by current daily traffic volumes.

From a broader perspective, Decatur lies at the center of a transportation hub. Many of the transportation corridors have a radial relationship to the town, including both automobile routes and rail lines.

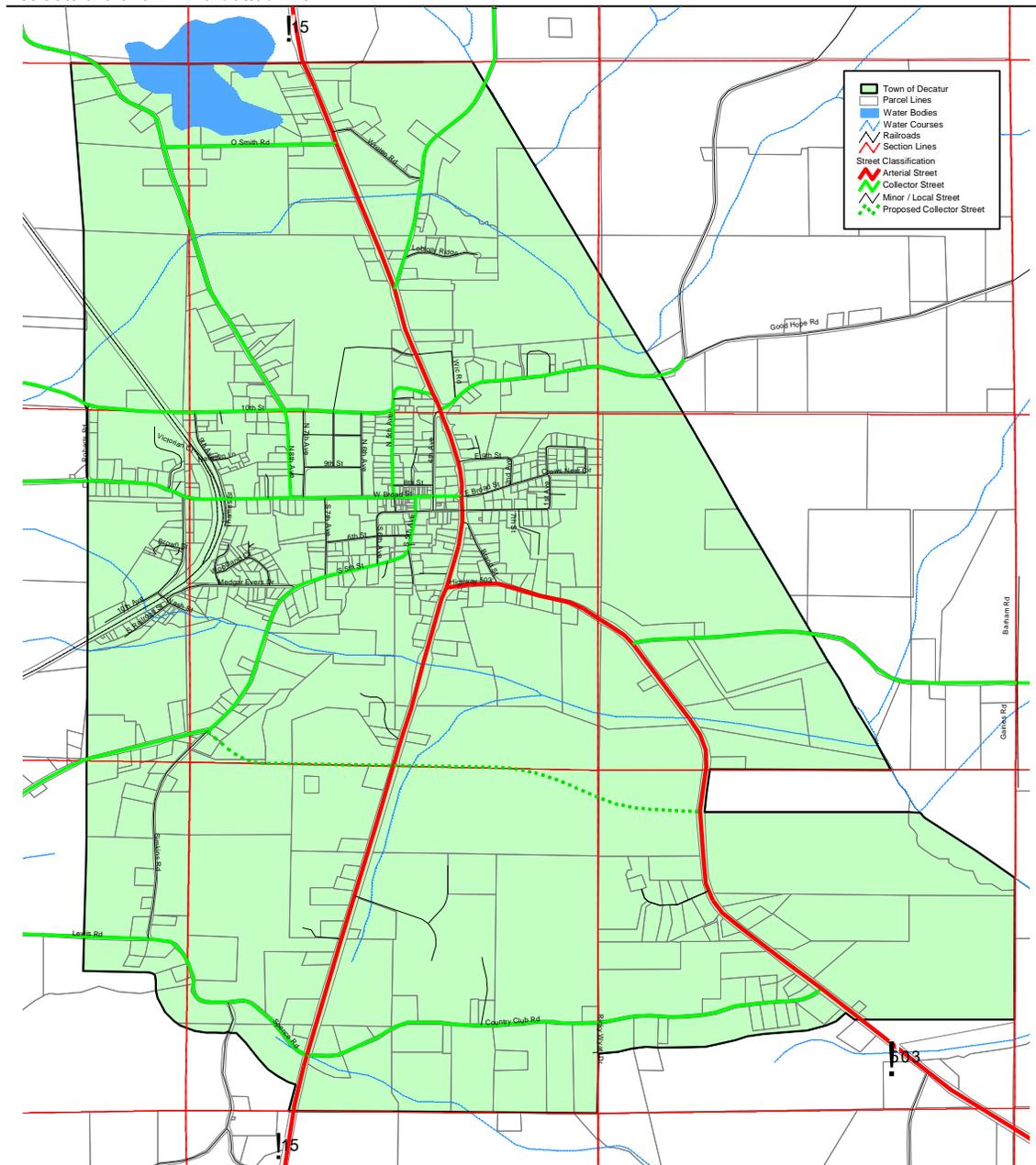
The streets in Decatur are in reasonably good condition given the current level of service. Within the town there are approximately 19.6 miles of roadways to maintain, most of which are paved. Maintenance of these roadways is the responsibility of the Town of Decatur public works department and the Mississippi Department of Transportation (state / federal roads only).

Sidewalks are an important part of the transportation system, providing the means for pedestrians to move about the town. Decatur should evaluate the condition and functionality of its sidewalk system. A point of emphasis in Decatur would be the sidewalk systems that connect the downtown area to ECCC. As with many cities, it is

likely necessary to prepare a plan for the systematic improvement of the sidewalk system.

In terms of mobilizing the pedestrians, the absence of sidewalks in certain residential neighborhoods should not cause an impediment. Along streets where there is minimal traffic flow at low speeds (short dead-end streets, cul-de-sacs), automobiles and pedestrians should be able to safely share the same roads.

**Map 5: Roadway Classification for the Town of Decatur, Mississippi.** Arterial streets are shown as heavy red lines, collector streets are shown as heavy green lines, and local streets are shown as black lines. Proposed streets are shown in a dotted line.



Source: Newton County Tax Maps, Bridge & Watson, Inc.

## Transportation Improvements

Given the level of development that is expected to occur over the next 20 years, no significant road construction or widening is necessary to accommodate traffic. As development takes place, there may be a need to construct and/or extend existing local streets. The determining factor will be the extent to which existing vacant parcels, which front existing streets, are developed.

As a matter of convenience and efficiency, a new connector road is proposed in the plan reaching from the Newton County school site on Highway 503 to the intersection of Turkey Creek and Simkins Rd. In addition to this improvement, the Town of Decatur should seek to pave all unpaved public streets within the town.

As development occurs streets must be constructed or improved to accommodate traffic. This will include the width of the right-of-way, travel surface, drainage method, sidewalk, and other technical specifications necessary to make the street safe, functional, and durable.

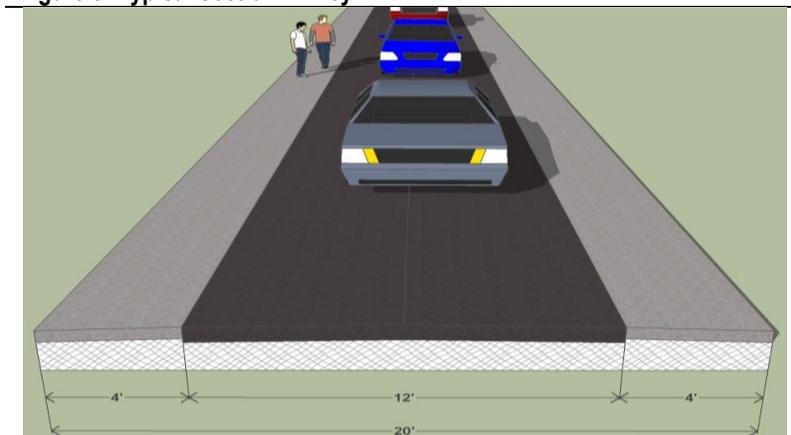
As a guide for this review process, refer to the following illustrations and comments:

### Alley

Alleys are a form of access to property that are not commonly utilized in typical modern day developments. Alleys could be a tremendous design asset in improving the visual impact and pedestrian-friendliness of residential developments. Decatur should not discourage the use of alleys as a secondary means of access to property.

Alleys are purposefully designed to be narrow, and no parking on the alley is expected. As a less formal element of the town's transportation network, alleys are not expected to have sidewalks or curb and gutter. To minimize drainage maintenance, alleys should not utilize drainage swales.

Figure 5: Typical Section – Alley



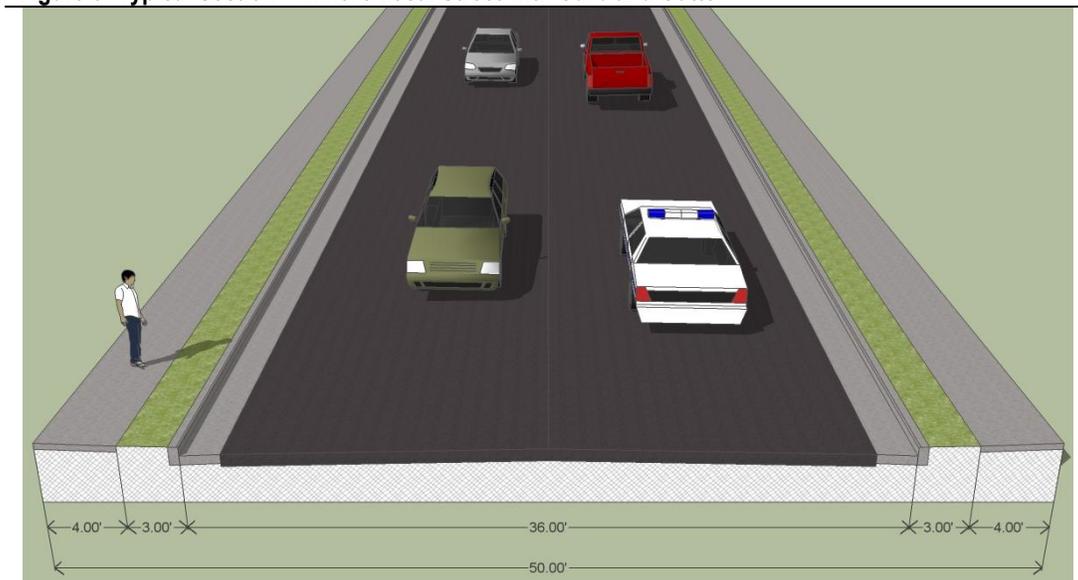
Bridge & Watson, Inc. 2009

## Minor / Local Streets

Minor streets, also referred to as local streets, serve the purpose of accessing property and typically do not carry through traffic. Minor streets are intended to have lower speed limits and therefore may be narrower in travel surface and right-of-way.

An important design element along streets where pedestrians will be mixed with automobiles is to provide some separation between the two. This is achieved by placing the sidewalk at the edge of the right-of-way and creating a space between the sidewalk and the curb. From a psychological point of view, pedestrians are more comfortable using the sidewalks when there is some barrier between them and passing traffic. This is achieved by requiring street tree plantings, or on street parking along the sidewalk side of the street.

Figure 6: Typical Section – Minor / Local Street with Curb and Gutter



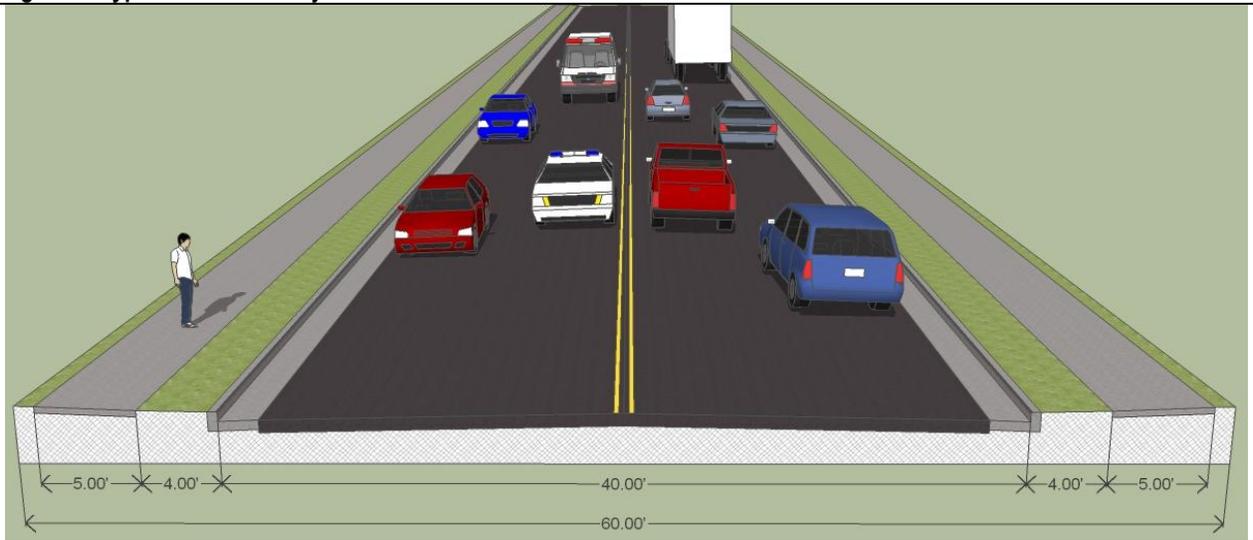
Bridge & Watson, Inc. 2009

## Major / Collector Streets

Major or collector streets serve as means to move traffic into busy commercial areas or onto arterial highways. Because of higher traffic volumes and higher speed limits, these roadways are typically wider to allow for more separation between pedestrians and automobiles. Where on street parking is desired, additional pavement width is necessary.

Sidewalks are needed on both sides of the street due to expected traffic volumes. As with minor streets, providing a visual and physical separation between pedestrians and passing automobiles will create a more user friendly atmosphere.

**Figure 7: Typical Section – Major / Collector Street with Curb and Gutter**



Bridge & Watson, Inc. 2009

### **Arterial Streets**

Arterial streets in Decatur consist of Highway 15 and Highway 503. Over the horizon of this plan, it is not anticipated that an arterial street will be constructed by Decatur, Newton County or in conjunction with a private development. Ultimately the design of the roadway and required right-of-way will be determined by state and federal highway construction guidelines.

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# **CHAPTER FIVE: COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

## **General Government Operations**

The Town of Decatur is served by six (6) elected officials. Those officials are the mayor and five board members. Handling the day-to-day business of the town is the responsibility of the town clerk's office. The clerk's office is also responsible for financial duties, record keeping, elections, and a variety of other tasks that serve the citizens of the town.

As presented/discussed in "Chapter One: Demographic Profile and Forecasts", a large increase in population is not expected over the life of this plan; therefore, the need for significant additions in personnel, equipment or capital facilities in order to operate the Town of Decatur is not anticipated. Town officials should, however, continually monitor the function and efficiency of its departments to plan for any additions or improvements that may be necessary. The town should assess its needs for office space as time progresses, particularly for storage purposes.

## **Police Department**

The Town of Decatur Police Department consists of the following employees:

<u>Personnel</u>	
Chief	1
Officers	9
Full-time	4
Part-time	5

The standard for measuring police protection is to calculate the ratio of the number of officers per unit of population. Staffing within the Decatur Police Department equates to a ratio of 2.5 sworn officers per 1,000 persons (counting only the full time employees).

As population increases, the Town of Decatur may require additional officers. While population is not the only influence on the demand for police officers, Decatur should continually assess the crime rate within the town and adjust police protection methods accordingly.

## **Long Term Police Service Needs**

The Decatur police department should continually strive to increase its capabilities to provide law enforcement services and to fight crime in the community. These increased capabilities include the upgrading and addition of law enforcement equipment, maintaining a high level of training and certification for the officers, and expanding the police force as needed. The population increase expected over the horizon of this plan is not sufficient enough to require additional police officers unless crime rates increase. However, as previously mentioned, change in population is not the sole factor indicating

a need for additional officers. The town will have to monitor criminal activity and traffic loads within the town and adjust as necessary. In addition to providing high quality police services, Decatur should strive to maintain a positive public perception with regard to the safety of the community.

In this regard, the Town should begin exploring financial opportunities to construct a multipurpose facility that could house the Police Department and City Hall. Present day City Hall is limited on space as is the Police Department. To put together financing (grants, loans, or otherwise) and assemble a project of this nature takes a long time; therefore, the Town should start sooner rather than later.

## **Fire Department**

The Town of Decatur operates a volunteer fire department out of one fire station. The Mississippi State Rating Bureau graded the Town of Decatur a Class 8 in 1983, and the grading has held constant since that time. The inspection system is based on a point schedule with credit given in several categories related to fire fighting and protecting property from fire damage. These categories include the age of fire fighting equipment, the quantity of water available to fight fires, the number of firefighters responding as an average per call, and the distance the fire fighting equipment must travel in order to reach a fire (run distance).

From a scoring standpoint, the Mississippi State Rating Bureau (MSRB) requires the station to be within 1½ miles of developed commercial areas, two (2) miles of densely developed residential areas and four (4) miles of scattered residential development. The present location of Decatur's fire station is such that all currently developed areas of the town are within an acceptable run distance from the existing fire station.

As development in Decatur occurs, a compact spatial pattern located in relation to the existing fire station could prevent the need for an additional station. This is true as it relates to commercial or industrial development, as any residential areas would lie within the acceptable run distance from the station.

### **Long Term Fire Department Needs**

One of the most demanding future challenges facing the Town is that of replacing fire equipment. Fire trucks have a predetermined "ratable" life, which means the MSRB will only recognize their duration of reliability for rating purposes for only this time period, which is 15 or 20 years depending on the type of truck. The Town should assess the age of its fire protection trucks and anticipate the timing of replacing them. Given the high cost of fire trucks, the town should anticipate this expense and plan for it accordingly.

Additionally, the town should also seek to improve its fire rating from class 8 to class 7 or better. The tasks necessary to improve the rating are itemized by the MSRB and are available to the town. Improving the rating typically involves expensive items such as

additional equipment or manpower, but it could also include items such as annual hydrant inspections and a building permitting system. The town should consider a simple cost-benefit analysis of improving its fire grading. Although funding the improvements may require additional taxes, lowering the fire rating would result in insurance savings, potentially offsetting the increased taxes. Also, the improved fire rating is a positive indicator for new business and industry seeking to locate in the town. To improve the fire rating, the town should develop a specific plan based upon the deficiencies cited by the MSRB, and then consult with the rating bureau before implementing the plan.

### **Public Works Department**

The Decatur public works department is responsible for maintenance of the town's streets, water system, and sewer system. The department also maintains rights-of-way and recreation facilities. The public works department utilizes a variety of personnel and equipment as it performs its responsibilities.

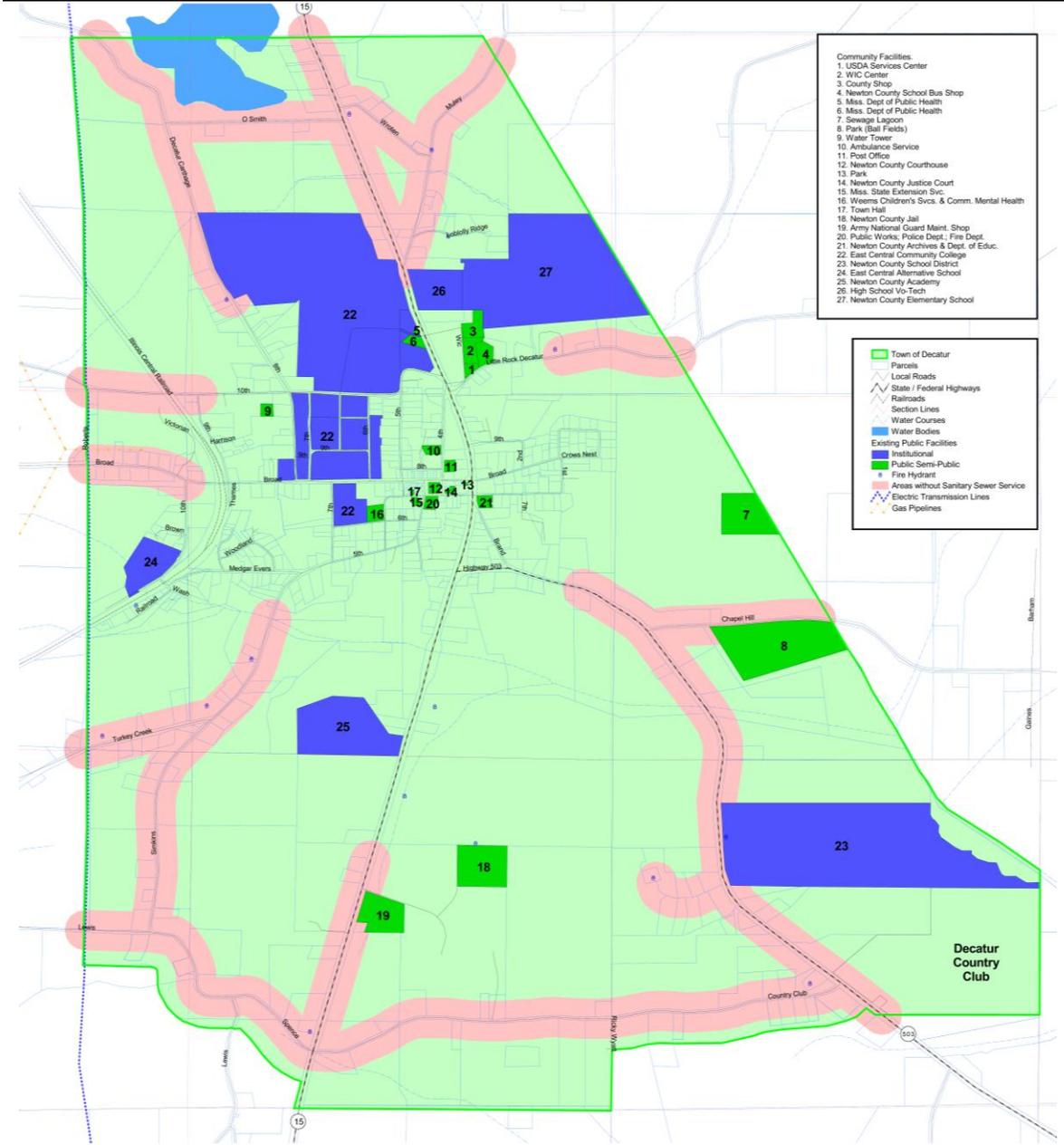
As additional development occurs, it may become necessary for Decatur to acquire additional personnel and equipment to perform public works functions. At a minimum, town officials should schedule out the age of existing equipment and prepare to replace it at the end of its useful life. The type of equipment utilized for public works functions is expensive and would constitute a capital expenditure for the town. Avoiding financial surprises is important to the delivery of essential services to a community. This same concept also applies to resurfacing streets.

### **Water and Sewer Service**

The Town of Decatur provides central water and sewer services to most of the residents in the town. A recent annexation brought territory into the town that was not served with central sewer, and has water service provided by North Decatur Water Association. As part of the Town's desire provide high levels of services, utility extensions and improvements are needed. Map 6 (next page) indicates the areas which are without central sewer service. From a public health standpoint it would be beneficial to extend central sewer into each of these unserved areas. However, economics often stands in the way of such accomplishments. The town should extend sewer services based upon the criteria of economic feasibility and the degree of need.

The economic feasibility of proposed projects will change over time, and will be influenced by a multitude of factors, including but not limited to developer participation, potential customer base (user fees), interest rates, the receipt of outside funding sources (grants), and of course the cost of labor and materials. The town is expected to see growth occur primarily in its southern portion and therefore will most likely need utility services in this area to support economic development. As expressed in the goals and objectives of this plan, the town should seek mechanisms to fund utility extensions without placing a burden on its existing customer base.

**Map 6: Areas in Decatur without Sanitary Sewer Service.** The Town of Decatur municipal limits are represented by the green outline. The areas without sanitary sewer service are in pink.



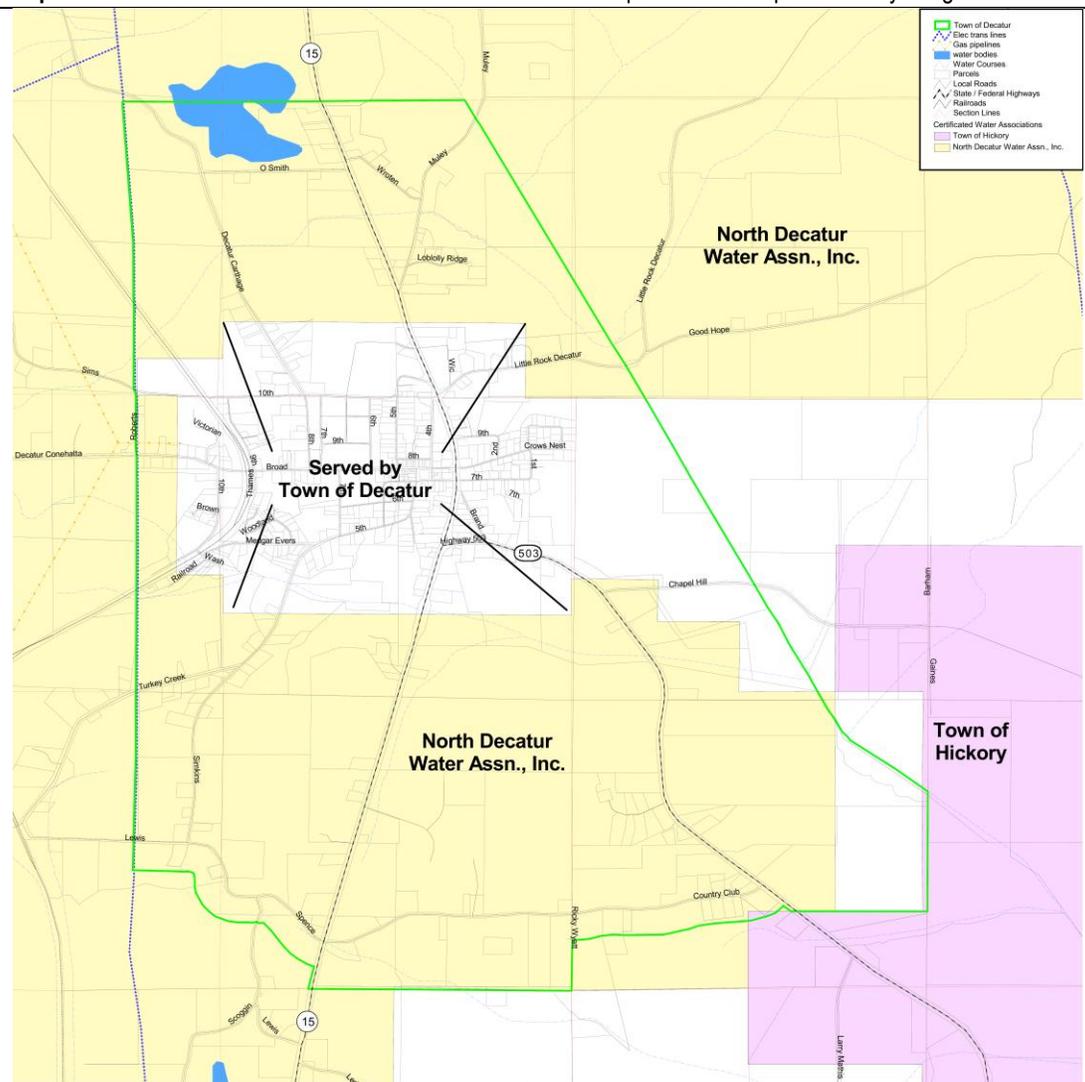
Source: Newton County Tax Maps; Bridge & Watson, Inc.; 2005 Annexation Plans

Water service within the annexed area is provided by North Decatur Water Association and is designed primarily for household purposes, as opposed to fire protection purposes. The map in Map 7 (next page) indicates the service limits of the North Decatur Water Association. Over time the town will need to enhance the water services to accommodate development. Adequate fire protection is an important element to businesses and industry considering locating in the town, and as development occurs, the town can assess the availability of fire hydrants on a case by case basis.

Presently the Town of Decatur does not have any authority to make any needed improvement to the North Decatur Water Association infrastructure to improve fire protection. Because improvements may be needed overtime, the Town of Decatur should seek the means to see that needed system improvements occur when needed. This could be accomplished by any one of several ways:

- Town of Decatur could purchase the portion of the North Decatur Water Association certificated area lying within the city limits and tie that portion into the Town’s existing water system;
- Enter into a cooperative agreement whereby the Town of Decatur participates in the upgrade of the North Decatur Water Association infrastructure financially with in kind services or both; or
- Encourage North Decatur Water Association, on their own initiative, to make improvements to their water system and potentially expand their customer base.

**Map 7: Water Certificated Areas.** The Town of Decatur municipal limits are represented by the green outline.



Source: Miss. Public Service Commission

## Code Enforcement / Building Inspection

The Town of Decatur provides no inspection and code enforcement services to the citizens of the town. These services are especially important to ensure the safety and durability of construction and to maintain a positive image in the town. The absence of an effective code enforcement program can be problematic in that code violations create a negative impression upon those visiting or living in the town. The following series of photographs were not taken in Decatur, but do provide a demonstration of the type of problems that arise if not kept in check.

Although beauty is in the eye of the beholder, each of the conditions in the photographs below can be remedied or avoided through the application and enforcement of proper codes. These conditions do nothing to better their neighborhoods, increase property values or provide a high quality of life. Decatur should enforce proper codes to avoid the blighting impacts of inadequate property maintenance.



Top Left: An over utilized dumpster in a commercial area. The collection frequency is not what it should be.  
Top Right: A dilapidated home is falling in. Not only is it unsafe and accessible to the public, it is an eyesore.  
Bottom Left: A makeshift auto repair garage has sprung up in this residential neighborhood.  
Bottom Right: This home has an overgrown and cluttered appearance.

Key to successful implementation of an inspection program is that of creating some type of mechanism for town officials to have knowledge of a construction project before it begins. Typically, the implementation of a permitting system serves this purpose. By mandating a permitting process through ordinances, a town is able to legally enforce the requirement for a permit. By requiring permits before a project begins, the town can

ensure the project will comply with local zoning, building and other codes. Correcting an error after the fact is extremely difficult and politically unpopular.

The town engages in planning and zoning, but it does not require permits be issued at the front end of a project. The town must develop a permitting process and implement the process if it is to effectively administer zoning or other regulations, or fully implement this plan.

### **Recreational Opportunities**

The Town of Decatur maintains one (1) park, with the facility being the ball park on Chapel Hill Road. In addition to town owned facilities, the Town is fortunate to have within its limits three public schools, one private school, and East Central Community College. Each of these facilities has recreational space available for use, although proper arrangements may be necessary, such as interlocal agreements. If these facilities are not available for public use, it is more logical for Decatur to seek some level of intergovernmental cooperation to share facilities as opposed to constructing new facilities and duplicating services.

As discussed earlier in this plan, a large increase in population is not expected over the life of this plan; therefore, the need for significant additions in personnel, equipment or capital facilities for recreational purposes is not anticipated. However, as recommended in the Goals, Objectives and Policies, town officials should seek to determine the type of recreational and cultural opportunities that best serve the community and adjust programs accordingly. Doing so may require additional facilities, or conversion of existing facilities.

### **Solid Waste / Sanitation Department**

Garbage and trash are terms that are often interchanged, but the two are very different. Garbage refers to typical household garbage, and trash refers to items such as yard waste, appliances, discarded furniture, and things of that sort. The Town of Decatur provides garbage collection once each week through a private contractor. Trash is collected once each week by the town.



Left: Illegal dumping along an isolated stretch of public street. This not only creates a health concern, but also is an eyesore for the community. This photo was not taken in Decatur.

The garbage and trash services within a community can have a significant impact on quality of life issues and community appearance. The Town should continuously monitor the effectiveness of its

garbage and trash program with respect to collection frequency and costs. The goal is to ensure the citizens are utilizing the program as opposed to engaging in illegal dumping or allowing waste to collect elsewhere.

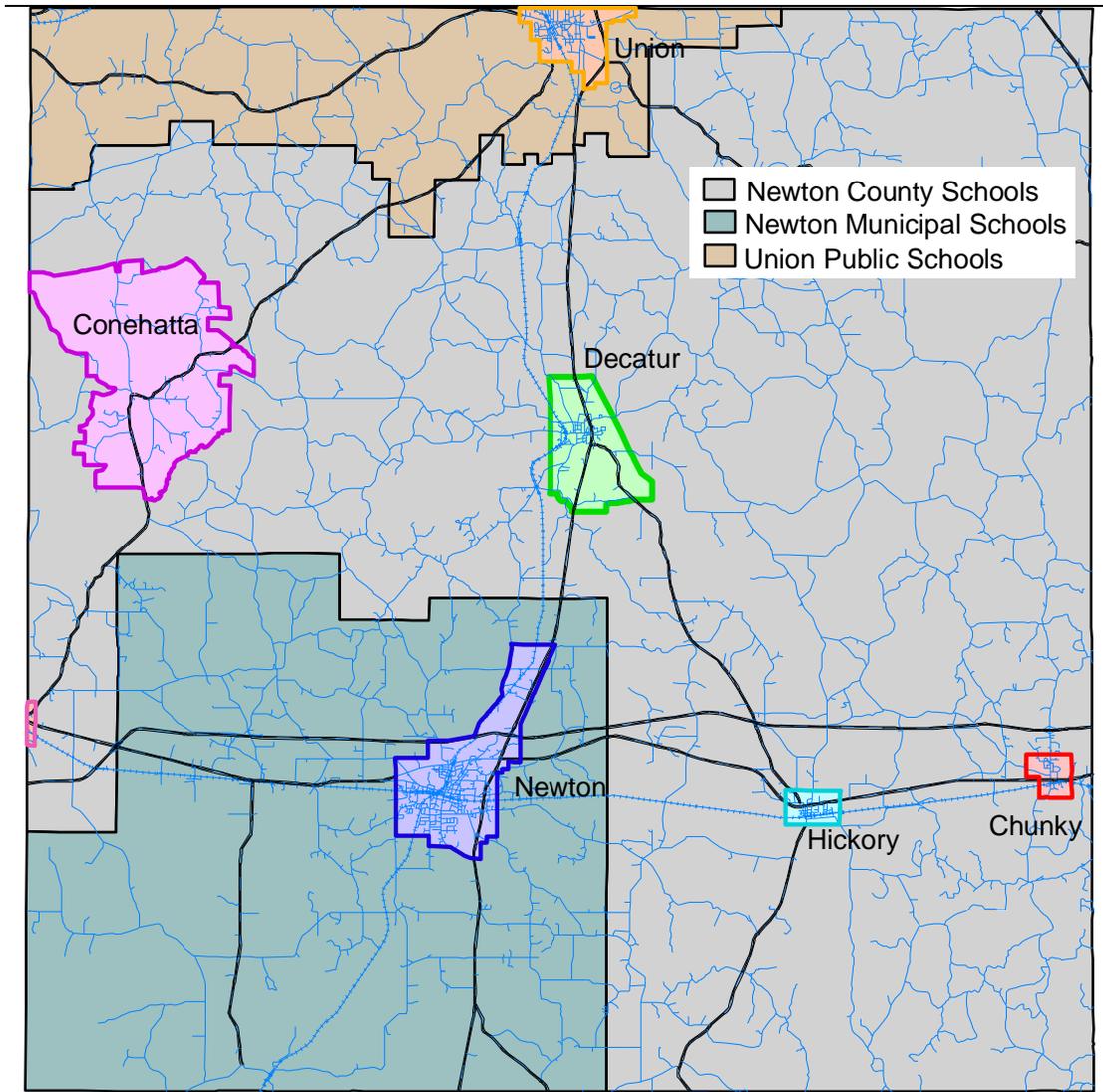
As with the public works department, the lifespan of the town's trash collection equipment should be evaluated and its replacement anticipated. Trash trucks and equipment is very expensive and such capital expenditures should occur on a planned schedule as opposed to becoming a surprise expenditure.

### **School Facilities**

The population of Decatur is served by the Newton County School District, and Decatur is home to the school facilities serving kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Map 8 (next page) illustrates the geographic limits of the Newton County School District.

**Map 8: Decatur School District.** The limits of the Newton County School District are represented by the black outline. The Decatur town limits are in green.

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER Data Files

The Newton County School District has in place a plan for the future of the district. For the purposes of comprehensive planning, the Town of Decatur is encouraged to continually communicate with the school district regarding growth and development. To the extent possible, Decatur should monitor the spatial needs of the school district and work to meet those needs through the town’s development approval process. The same communication and cooperative efforts should be extended to ECCC and Newton County Academy regarding their future development needs.

Over time, the schools will need improvements such as expansions, technological upgrades, or full replacement depending upon the age of the structures. It is important that as school building programs are implemented, school facilities remain within the town limits or within close proximity to the town limits to allow the town to deliver services to the schools.

## **Community Service and Facility Needs**

Although the Town of Decatur provides a high level of service to its citizens, the town should never become complacent. As with any city, there is always room for improvement or additional service due to changing conditions. Although the text of this chapter identifies some needs, the following is a more comprehensive outline, including those items previously mentioned:

- Over time, provide additional police personnel to serve in multiple capacities – crime prevention, school crossing, etc.
- Begin the process of planning for a new City Hall / Police / Multipurpose building.
- Assess the requirements of achieving a lower fire protection rating, which could save residents and business owners significant insurance premiums
- Prepare a schedule of timing and priority for repaving town streets. If scheduled far enough into the future, it may become apparent that the rate of repaving can be reduced and money diverted for other uses. Another consideration is the need to repair utility lines. Consider abbreviating the repaving in order to make utility repairs under the street.
- Identify the areas where water line improvements are needed most. This should be coordinated with the effort to improve the fire rating, as the rating is based in part on water supply.
- Identify the areas where sewer lines are in need of repair, and assign a priority and schedule for achieving the repair.
- Continue improving the town's park. Strive to expand the recreational facilities and opportunities.
- For all town departments and services, assess the efficiency of the function of the department. While virtually every task requires funding, the needed funding is not always available. There is no room for waste. One example of examining this efficiency may be that of street repairs. If the same repair is made to the same pothole over and over, an alternate repair technique may be needed. In an effort to gauge efficiency, the town may want to establish certain performance standards to follow.

## **SUMMARY**

Comprehensive plans, by their very nature, are voluminous documents that could easily overwhelm the user. The goals, objectives and policies chapter contain many “to do’s”, some of which may seem to be out of reach financially. It is important to remember that this plan is a 20 year plan, and elements of the plan can be achieved over that time period. Although sooner is better, the perceived magnitude and difficulty of some tasks should not be discouraging.

Decatur is rich with community assets. The presence of the Community College is a substantial asset for Decatur. Another community asset is the Newton County School District and associated facilities. The full range of grade level, teaching facilities and athletic programs serve as an attraction for people to live in Decatur. The town and school district should work in a collaborative fashion for the betterment of the community.

Decatur, although a well-established community, is at the beginning of the planning process. This comprehensive plan is broad in that it covers a wide scope of community aspects, but at the same time is narrowly focused on certain task items, serving as a framework within which to plan. As activity increases, community leaders are encouraged to refine this plan to more closely focus on various elements of the community.

The most important element of planning for the community to be aware of is the fact that planning must be continuous. Continuous planning means that past events must be monitored and future outcomes must be anticipated. Failure to do this could render this entire comprehensive planning process useless.