



**Proposed City of Vista Grove
Public Works Task Force**

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I. Purpose

A number of new cities in metro Atlanta have demonstrated over the last fifteen years that government on a smaller scale, and closer to the people it represents, is well suited to provide a high level of service while keeping taxes low. In the area of Public Works, this committee is confident that the proposed City of Vista Grove can exceed the level of service currently provided and can generate sufficient funds to enhance the area's transportation infrastructure. This conclusion is based on an evaluation of the current conditions, firsthand experience in public works operations in other cities and interviews with other public works professionals. The purpose of this report is to:

1. Discuss suggested services to be provided
2. Provide recommendations for public works organization and contracting
3. Evaluate current and future levels of service
4. Provide in-depth funding and budget analysis
5. Consider startup and transition functions

II. Potential Public Works Service Areas

Though public works responsibilities can vary widely from city to city, basic functions typically consist of maintaining roads, traffic signals, signs, drainage systems and right of way. Other common responsibilities include managing capital projects, transportation engineering, facility maintenance and sanitation. Currently all of these services are provided to the Vista Grove area by DeKalb County. Historically these services have been distributed across several county divisions reporting to one administrator.

Recommended Vista Grove Public Works Services

The Public Works committee recommends at a minimum that the new city provide all of the functions related to roadways and the transportation system. The table below lists the functions that would be the city's responsibility:

Table 1. Proposed City Provided Public Works Services at Incorporation

- Pavement Maintenance and Repaving
- Right of Way Mowing and Maintenance
- Sidewalk Repair and Construction
- Traffic Signal Maintenance and Timing
- Traffic Sign Maintenance
- Transportation System Improvements

Other Services for Consideration

Stormwater Management

Traditionally the public drainage system that drains rainfall runoff from the right of way has been closely tied to road maintenance. This is the current situation in the county with road and drainage system maintenance housed within the county's Roads and Drainage Division. Increasing regulation of stormwater runoff under requirements of the federal Clean Water Act have led many local governments in recent years to create a stormwater utility separate from the general fund. The utility provides a dedicated funding source for drainage system maintenance and activities necessary to satisfy stormwater discharge permit requirements. Typical stormwater utility activities include cleaning, repairing and replacing storm drain structures and pipes, providing public education and information on water pollution prevention, monitoring the drainage system for pollutants and making improvements to enhance water quality or alleviate drainage problems.

Due to the typical age of the infrastructure in the proposed city and the increasing complexity involved in managing stormwater, the city will take on a significant responsibility by adding stormwater maintenance. Nevertheless, this committee anticipates that it will be in the city's best interest to add this service at some point after the initial startup. One of the goals in becoming a city is to elevate the level of service. Managing stormwater proactively rather than waiting for infrastructure to fail will provide that higher level of service. Having control of the stormwater system will also aid in maintaining the roads since many of the drainage pipes cross under roadways. Taking responsibility for both will facilitate the city's ability to coordinate road and stormwater maintenance activities.

Sanitation

Historically, DeKalb County has provided adequate sanitation services to its residents. This committee's recommendation is to keep sanitation service with the county initially. After startup the city council may choose to explore options for contracting with a qualified private hauler. Considerations in selecting a private hauler should include opportunities for competitive commercial hauling rates, revenue sharing with the city and a robust recycling program including glass recycling.

III. Organizational Structure

This section provides general recommendations for organization of the public works department. In a City Manager form of government, the operational and organizational decisions should ultimately be left to the discretion of the City Manager.

Privatized Services

The success of the privatized service model employed by recent startup cities in the metro Atlanta area has been well publicized. Privatization allows for rapid deployment of staff and resources without a large expenditure of capital during the initial startup phase. Over the long term, contracting for maintenance keeps the city from having to purchase and maintain expensive construction equipment and facilities.

With privatized services the greatest cost-benefit is realized from the scalability of personnel and resources. The notion that privatized services are more cost efficient does not necessarily apply to full time positions. The contractor's cost for labor plus overhead and profit is typically higher than what the city would have to expend for salary and benefits for that same labor. Where cost efficiency can be realized by outsourcing is through the city's access to specialized personnel and equipment on a part time or as needed basis. For example, with over 60 traffic signals the new city will certainly need personnel with signal timing expertise and a signal maintenance crew to make repairs. However, there may not be enough work generated to justify paying a signal technician for 40 hours per week. Whereas a traditional form of government may be forced to hire full time person, a privatized model allows for the city to contract for only the number of hours or number of full-time personnel necessary to achieve the required level of service. The city also often gains regular access to a wide variety of consultant technical expertise that it may not otherwise have at its disposal in a traditional form of government.

With these considerations in mind, this committee provides the following recommendations related to privatized services:

1. All positions and functions of the public works department should be contracted initially. This allows for rapid rollout of services and gives the city time to focus on critical functions rather than identifying and hiring employees.
2. After the initial rollout or at the end of the term of the first contract for public works management, the city should make the Public Works Director a city position. This will provide for stability within the City Manager's leadership team. As the subject matter expert for public works, the director will also be able to advise the City Manager as to the department needs should the city continue to contract for all other positions in public works. Finally, it ensures that the director will be positioned to put the city's interest first and not be subject to the financial pressure and administration of an outside employer.
3. Over the long term, the city may want to consider converting other full-time management staff positions to city employees. As discussed above cost savings are not typically realized by contracting for full time positions. In fact, the opposite is often true.
4. Maintenance services should be contracted with the contractor providing all equipment.

Organization and Staffing

The public works department should be led by a director working under the supervision of the City Manager. The director would preferably have an engineering degree and be a registered professional

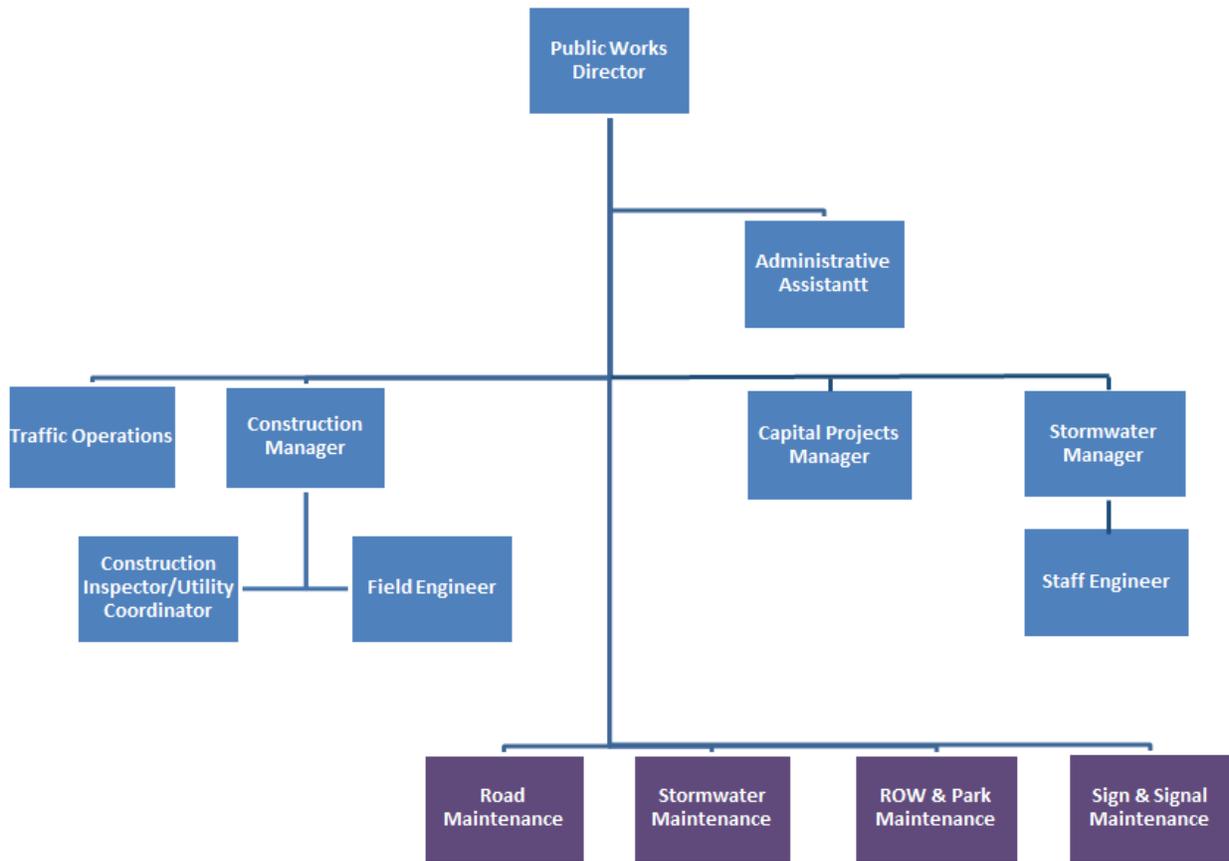
engineer. It is anticipated that the workload will initially require at least one additional engineer with transportation experience and a full-time administrator. With the addition of a stormwater utility, a stormwater manager position will be necessary as well as a junior engineer that can provide support to both stormwater and other public work functions.

In the maintenance area, one full time dedicated three-person crew will be needed for road maintenance in the startup phase. A separate crew will be needed for right of way maintenance. When stormwater is added at least one, three-person crew dedicated to stormwater maintenance should be added. A sign and signal maintenance contractor should be utilized on an as-needed basis initially until the sign and signal maintenance needs are fully understood.

The public works committee provides the following recommendations for the initial contracting:

1. Selection of a firm to provide public works management services should be primarily qualifications based. After a firm is selected based on qualifications, a competitive fee can be negotiated using comparable contracts from other cities or by applying a fixed, audited overhead and profit multiplier to actual labor costs.
2. Contracts should require minimum staff consisting of the director, administrator and at least one full-time engineer. Staffing beyond those positions should be at the discretion of the city and the consultant as needed to meet the specified level of service requirements.
3. Stormwater staffing and costs should be identified in the initial proposals for public works management. This will give the city the flexibility to add this service at a later date.
4. Initially the city should look to “piggyback” on another local government contract for maintenance. In other words, the city can utilize a maintenance contractor at daily or monthly rates already negotiated through a competitive process by another local government. This will allow the city to provide basic services early on and give the public works management staff time to get through the initial startup and initiate a request for proposals for maintenance on behalf of the city.
5. The city should explore opportunities for cost savings by combining services, such as park grounds maintenance, geographic information system services (GIS) and city engineer, that overlap with other departments.
6. The city should look for opportunities for shared services with other nearby cities for services where the city may not need full time service such as right of way or signal maintenance.
7. As a capital improvement program is developed and implemented, the city will likely need to add staffing on at least a part time basis to manage that program. Rather than including this position in the base management contract, the city could consider contracting for the number of hours needed based on the volume of capital projects in progress each year. These costs are often negotiated as a percentage of the capital project construction cost and can be budgeted into each capital project.

Once the public works department reaches full maturity with all services added, the city should expect to fund a professional staff of 7 to 10 people including the director. The organization chart for the department would be similar to the one below.



IV. Current Level of Service (County)

In many cases county maintenance records are difficult to obtain. The information contained in this section is based on publicly available information, observations and experience from other cities. It is well documented that the county has experienced financial challenges. Additionally, the county has seen an exodus of experienced, long-time county employees as it has downsized through attrition and early retirement incentives. The combination of financial constraints and loss of institutional knowledge and stability have been major factors in a decline in infrastructure investment.

The roadway and drainage system are multi-million dollar assets that have a finite service life before they must be rehabilitated or replaced. Consistent investment in maintaining these assets is essential to avoid developing a backlog of deferred maintenance. Several years ago the county released an Organizational Effectiveness Study that stated "...the Roads and Drainage Division has not fully documented the locations, ages, repair histories and service levels of the infrastructure for which it has responsibility. Without a comprehensive database of its infrastructure, nor a set of defined service levels for its maintenance, it cannot effectively manage its assets or determine the resources needed for its maintenance." As deferred maintenance builds the risk of hazardous conditions or disruption of

service to the public grows, maintenance crews are forced to address more frequent potholes and temporary repairs and when the road is resurfaced the rehabilitation is more extensive and costly.

Pavement Maintenance

In 2014 DeKalb adopted a comprehensive transportation plan. The plan included an Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment Report that recommended that the County should be resurfacing about 300 miles of roadway per year but has only been able to fund 10 to 20 percent of that amount in recent years. That means that every year over 200 miles of roadway are being added to a backlog of roads that need to be repaved. The recent Organizational Effectiveness Study reinforces this when it states that, “Given that over 20% of the roadway network qualifies for resurfacing, this indicates that the County has significantly underfunded the resurfacing of roads in the past, and this has contributed to both a deteriorating quality of roads, and a declining ability of Roads and Drainage crews to complete service orders...”.

Clearly this model of asset management is unsustainable. Figures for two recent years of paving are provided below along with the City of Dunwoody’s paving totals for comparison. A map of the current pavement conditions in the county is also provided. (See Figures 5-17 and 5-18)

Table 2. Paving Mileage Comparison

	DeKalb County	Dunwoody
Total Roadway Centerline Miles	2005 miles	143 miles
2012 Paving	38 miles	5 miles
2013 Paving	37 miles, \$6.5 mill.	11 miles
2014 Paving	\$5.3 million*	2 miles
2015 Paving	\$7.5 million*	8 miles
2016 Paving	\$7.2 million *	13 miles
2017 Paving	\$8.0 million (~27 miles)	10 miles
Estimated 6 Yr % of Total Miles	11%	34%

**At the time of writing the miles paved were not known. Based on published budget amounts an annual paving mileage of 35 miles was assumed for these years for the purposes of comparison.*

The target service life for asphalt pavement is usually 7 to 10 years for arterial roads and 20 years for neighborhood streets. As can be seen from Table 2, the City of Dunwoody is on target to resurface all of its streets every 20 years whereas a given county road will be resurfaced every 50 years at the current rate.

The new city should develop a priority for road paving based on a complete pavement inventory of all city streets with the highest priority streets being paved first. This provides a need based approach, minimizes politics in the process and insures that roads that need paving the most get the highest priority in funding.

Other Service Areas

County spending on other infrastructure has not been obtained but based on the financial conditions of the last several years, the observed condition of visible infrastructure such as sidewalks and the age of the stormwater system observed in other parts of north DeKalb, it is reasonable to conclude that the level of deferred pavement maintenance is representative of other types of infrastructure. According to the county's Organizational Effectiveness Study, about 20% of annual drainage repair requests are not being completed.

V. PROPOSED CITY LEVEL OF SERVICE

This committee is confident that the proposed city will exceed the level of service currently provided by the county in all service areas proposed to be offered by the city and will provide services at comparable rates to other new cities in the metro Atlanta area. The following proposed levels of service are recommended based on the city's expected revenue, industry best practices and experience with other cities:

1. Paving- The city should develop a pavement management program based on an independent pavement condition assessment of all of the roads within the city. An annual resurfacing budget should be funded at a level that can remain relatively constant from year to year based on the recommendations of the plan. Ideally the funding level would result in a resurfacing cycle of 7 to 10 years for arterial roads and a 20-year cycle for neighborhood streets.
2. Maintenance- The city should develop a plan to maintain all traffic signs, signals, roads, sidewalks, storm clean-up and right-of-way mowing.
3. Sidewalks- The city should conduct a complete inventory of existing sidewalks to determine where gaps exist, where repairs are needed and where curb ramps are needed to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. A plan to address these issues should be developed.
4. Right of Way Maintenance- Wherever possible mowing of the right of way should be left to the adjacent property owner. Where mowing does fall to the city these areas should be scheduled for mowing at regular intervals of no less than once per month between March and October.
5. Stormwater- The city should conduct a complete inventory of the stormwater system. A replacement program should be developed to address the expected backlog of deferred maintenance.
6. Traffic Safety- The city should inventory all crash locations within the city limits to prioritize and process to improve traffic safety in the city.
7. Performance Measures- Requests for service should be prioritized and target response times should be established based on the priority of the request.

VI. Budget Estimates

The following budget estimates are based on the Carl Vinson Institute study and experience with similar cities.

Paving

In order to meet the recommended level of service for road maintenance, the city would need to budget \$3.75M to \$5M per year for road resurfacing based on the 177 miles reported in the CVI study. The city can expect to offset some of this cost through the state's Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG). This program, administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation is funded through the state gas tax and is apportioned to local governments from a formula based on road mileage and population. Using recent appropriation levels, the city could expect to receive \$400,000 to \$500,000 from LMIG.

Management

Based on the staffing plan recommended above, the city should expect to spend approximately \$800,000 annually for an experienced management staff. This figure does not include the labor cost for stormwater which would be funded out of the utility.

Maintenance

The anticipated annual cost for street maintenance including pothole filling, pavement patching, sign replacement and sidewalk maintenance is \$750,000. This figure was estimated based on the number of road miles within the proposed city. Signal maintenance is expected to cost \$300,000 based on the maintenance of 60 signals. Right of way maintenance is expected to be around \$225,000 per year based on the city's total road mileage. Storm cleanup and other miscellaneous costs are expected to be \$60,000 and \$150,000 per year respectively based on the total area and population of the city. The estimated maintenance and management costs are based on a level of service comparable to other recently formed DeKalb County cities. Costs may vary up or down depending on the new city's desired level of service in a particular area.

Streetlights

Streetlight costs are estimated to be approximately \$600,000 based on the road miles within the city boundary. Residential street light fee revenue typically offsets approximately 70% of the total streetlight costs.

Public Works Operation and Maintenance Cost Summary

Table 3. Estimated Public Works Cost not including stormwater

Area	Estimated Cost
Public Works Management	\$800,000
Road Maintenance	\$750,000
Signal Maintenance	\$300,000
Right of Way Maintenance	\$225,000
Storm Cleanup	\$75,000
Other Costs	\$250,000
Streetlights	\$600,000
Total Public Works Operating	\$3,000,000
Paving	\$4,000,000 (\$3.5 million local, \$0.5 mill. State)

The management cost assumes that the stormwater manager and a support position would be paid out of the stormwater utility. Only the cost that would be paid from the general fund for public works is shown here.

Stormwater

Stormwater should be funded through a utility separate from the general fund. As a utility, the fee is set based on the cost to provide a specified level of service. The county’s current fee for a single family residence is \$48 per year, though there has been some consideration to raising the rate. The current fee would provide enough revenue to staff the utility and provide for routine maintenance. However, based on other cities’ experience the fee will likely need to be increased by \$20 to \$30 per resident per year to provide adequate funding to replace the numerous pipes that are likely beyond their service life. Once a complete inventory of the stormwater system is obtained the City should conduct a rate study. The study should consider the age of the infrastructure, the schedule and cost for replacement and the recommended fee to offset those costs.

VII. Transition Plan

Startup Considerations

There are numerous processes and organizational details that have to be worked out during startup. In order to be operational on day one, the city will need to have the management contractor in place and arrange for maintenance to be provided utilizing rates established through another local government’s procurement process.

It will be important for the public to see city services in action right away. Initially the city maintenance crews can focus on small, inexpensive tasks such as filling potholes, sign repair and replacement, and cutting overgrowth on the right of way. The management team should begin immediately establishing a relationship with county staff and gathering as much information about the infrastructure and assets within the city. Public Works staff will need to begin making its own inventory to supplement or fill in gaps in the information available from the county. It is anticipated that information on the road network, traffic signal equipment, streetlights and stormwater infrastructure will be available from the county. Field inventories will likely need to be conducted by the city for road signs and sidewalk conditions.

In addition to the county, the city should establish contact with the Atlanta Regional Commission, MARTA, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and adjacent cities. Besides establishing communications, these meetings will help the city gather information about ongoing and planned transportation projects.

First 6 Months

After the initial startup, Public Works should go through a competitive procurement process to put maintenance contracts into place for road, sidewalk, right of way, traffic signal and sign maintenance. Consideration should be given to combining right of way maintenance with park maintenance if the city has taken over maintenance of the parks at this time. Economies have been realized in other cities by combining these services into one contract.

Ordinances will need to be enacted regarding streetlight districts and the stormwater utility during this time in order to provide the necessary information to the County Tax Assessor in time for the City to collect these revenues within the first year. Typically, the tax assessor's office requests this information by April 15th each year.

First Year

Within the first year the city should complete the following:

1. Conduct an independent pavement condition assessment of all of the city-maintained streets. This will provide the basis for budgeting and selecting streets for paving in year two and subsequent years. Having an objective assessment can take the politics out of paving and allow the city to develop a well thought out pavement management plan.
2. Establish an objective plan for prioritizing new sidewalk construction and be prepared to recommend projects for year two as budget allows.
3. Establish policies for traffic calming districts.
4. Plan for receipt of LMIG funds for paving in year 2.
5. Migrate any ongoing grant or federally funded projects from the County to the City.
6. Obtain Local Administered Project certification from the Georgia DOT so that the city will be eligible to manage its own federally funded transportation projects.

VIII. Potential Capital Projects

In addition to paving, which has been addressed above, the city will be expected to plan, fund and implement capital projects to improve the transportation system. Examples of these types of projects include: new sidewalk construction, intersection improvements to address safety or relieve congestion, bicycle facilities, and new roadway connections. Because much of the area within the new city consists of established residential neighborhoods, improvements will likely not include major road widening or new roadways. Instead much of the focus will likely be on improving the level of service of existing infrastructure and adding components such as sidewalks that improve access and add to quality of life.

Concurrently with or soon after the city adopts its Comprehensive Land Use Plan, it should develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan that will identify the community's goals and vision for the transportation system and guide long term investment. The improvements recommended in the transportation plan should align with the city's long-term land use guidelines and the economic growth goals of the city. With several state routes and MARTA bus routes located within the city, the city should work closely with the Georgia Department of Transportation and MARTA on improvements to state routes, MARTA bus service and bus stops. Opportunities to leverage additional funding from these agencies should be considered.

As a starting point, this committee references the findings of the County's 2014 Transportation Plan: Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment Report. Several maps including in that plan are included in the Appendix of this report. (Refer to Figures 2-27, 5-16, 12-1 and 15-1)

Sidewalks

As a starting point, this committee references the findings of the County's 2014 Transportation Plan: Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment Report. Several maps including in that plan are included in the Appendix of this report. (Refer to Figures 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 8-2, 8-5, 8-7, 8-8, 8-10 and 8-11)

The city's long-range goal should be to provide sidewalks on both sides of all major roads and within school walking zones. The orange hatching labeled hazardous on Figures 2-3, 2-4 and 2-5 represent areas within 1 mile of schools that do not have adequate sidewalk or crossing facilities to allow students to safely walk to school. These areas should be considered for future pedestrian improvements to increase safety and help relieve congestion around schools. Potential projects are too numerous to identify individually but an example is the lack of sidewalk on the west side of Oak Grove Road that results in hazardous walking conditions for students in the immediate vicinity of Lakeside High School (Figure 2-5).

Figure 8-2 provides the location of existing sidewalk along the major roads throughout the county. Within the Vista Grove area, sidewalks are woefully lacking on major roads such as Briarcliff Road, Clairmont Road, North Druid Hills Road and LaVista Road. On these higher traffic volume roads, it is difficult for pedestrians to find a safe gap in traffic to cross (see Figure 8-10) and thus a complete transportation system should include sidewalks on both sides of the street. As can be seen not only do many of these roads not have sidewalks on both sides but in many places less than 50% of the corridor has any sidewalk at all. In addition to the main roads indicated on the map, this committee has identified other secondary roads such as Crestline Drive that should have a sidewalk on at least one side.

Figures 8-7 and 8-8 further help to identify the needs. Figure 8-7 indicates that the current level of service for pedestrians is inadequate in many of the commercial areas including the Chamblee Tucker Road corridor, the Northlake area, Clairmont at I-85, the North Druid Hills corridor and the Oak Grove commercial node. These same areas also have a poor level of services for bicycles as shown in Figure 7-6. Additionally, Figure 8-8 identifies significant pedestrian safety concerns on the Lawrenceville Highway corridor.

Safe sidewalk and crosswalk access to transit facilities are also important. Pedestrian access to many MARTA bus stops in the area needs improvement.

Intersection and Roadway Capacity Improvements

Intersection improvements usually consist of the addition of turn lanes or minor realignment to improve safety or relieve congestion. Figure 5-23 indicates that most major intersections within the city boundary operate at a low level of service which is not unusual for the metro Atlanta area. As part of the transportation plan process, the City should gather feedback from residents and identify intersections and roadways that would benefit from capacity improvements during the development of its transportation plan. Extension or improvement of the signal fiber network (Figure 5-9) should also be explored.

Paths, Trails and Bikeways

As part of the comprehensive transportation plan the city should develop a network of multi-use paths that link the existing and future parks in the city. (See Figures 7-1 and 7-6)

Other Capital Projects

The City should review existing North Druid Hills and Northlake Livable Communities Initiative area plans for potential capital projects in those areas.

IX. Conclusions

The new city will be able to provide an annual budget of over \$40 million dollars while having a zero (0.00) millage rate increase. Public Works services will likely amount to a little over 13% of the overall budget and public works should thrive under a new city council and mayor.

Appendix

Figure 2-3	Walking Contours, Dekalb County Elementary Schools
Figure 2-4	Walking Contours, Dekalb County Middle Schools
Figure 2-5	Walking Contours, Dekalb County High Schools
Figure 2-27	Livable Center Initiative Areas
Figure 5-9	Traffic Signal and Fiber Optics
Figure 5-16	2013 Pavement Condition
Figure 5-17	Pavement Degradation Rates
Figure 5-18	National Bridge Inventory (NBI)
Figure 5-23	Intersections with High V/C Ratios:2040 PM Peak
Figure 7-1	Existing Bicycle Infrastructure
Figure 7-6	Bicycle Level of Service Gaps
Figure 8-2	Existing Pedestrian Infrastructure
Figure 8-5	Pedestrian Level of Service
Figure 8-7	Pedestrian Level of Service Gaps
Figure 8-8	Pedestrian Crashes, 2009-2011
Figure 8-10	Crossing Level of Service
Figure 8-11	Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Potential Future Demand
Figure 12-1	Plan 2040 Programmed Projects
Figure 15-1	Streams and Wetlands

