

Decatur Focus Group Interview

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

1. In your view, what two or three features differentiate Decatur from other nearby communities today?

- For the size of City, the hospital and Conference Center.
- Lots of retail centers.
- Health care and medical facilities that are in the City.
- Stable city government and the City is financially sound.
- A western feel and vibe.
- The courthouse/county seat.
- The shops and events at the square that bring the community together. It feels safe and secure. People can talk to each other.

2. What assets does Decatur have now that are “hidden treasures” – things that people and businesses outside the city or region are unaware of or don’t fully appreciate?

- Decatur is a gateway to the LBJ National Grasslands.
- North of Decatur there are large lakes that draw people. There are also horse trails, recreation, and hunting.
- There are good schools. A good asset back in the days was the oil and gas.
- The daytime population is 50,000 to 70,000 people with 6,000 residents in the City. Daytime population is something people don’t know about.
- The culture is good. Decatur is a faith-based community that cares.
- There are vibrant families that are making a huge difference.
- Churches are involved. Like to see neighbors taking care of each other.
- Whistle Stop Café and Texaco station. You have bookmarks/gems and you must take advantage off.
- The square has no chains, it is all locally-owned small businesses. We are becoming something that entices people to come back.

3. If someone told you there’s a chest of gold buried in the heart of Decatur, where would you start digging?

4. What word or phrase would you use to describe the most desirable future for Decatur in the next 30 years or so?

- Continue to be financially sound as Government and Community.
- Stick to community roots, small town with mom and pop shops. It should be a Big Small town. Small town feel and big town infrastructure.
- Sustained growth but not Frisco growth.
- Be careful not to outgrow infrastructure and to stay ahead of growth. Sustained growth and core values.
- Developing the square.
- Vibrant: economic location, healthy economy, quality community. Decatur does not have to be Southlake, but it should be a city that looks to the future.
- Community; how community is connected through events.
- More opportunities for people and more places to hang out.

- More recreational activities, new parks, city pool. Small town atmosphere/vibe.
- Safety and infrastructure.
- Currently not a lot of activities for seniors and elderly. There is a lack of awareness about the Housing Authority.

5. What are the biggest obstacles to reaching that future?

- The financial ability to meet the growth requirement especially with state laws regarding annexation. Worried how the limiting taxes will affect the growth. Also, infrastructure and the geographic footprint is too small and not sure how it's going to increase with Tier 2.
- Traffic management, dangerous intersections, the thoroughfare plan is important.
- Since QT opened the trucks have been bad. Getting on and off 287 is dangerous and needs to be better controlled. The traffic happens around new development on 51 and there are only two main access points. TxDOT has done a bad job on 51 South with only two lights and it needs at least one more crossing.
- Fire protection is expected outside the City and the County is not doing its part. Majority of the calls come from outside of the City and that puts residents in the City in danger if EM is to occur downtown.
- Maybe a partnership with developers and TxDOT. Not healthy for all the growth to be in the County and not in the City.
- Keeping the small town feel while growing - it's hard not to become a Southlake or Frisco.

6. What could Decatur do to strengthen its identity in the future?

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

7. If the City of Decatur could invest in just one or two capital improvements next year, which ones would provide the greatest impact in attracting desirable development?

8. What is the biggest transportation issue in Decatur?

- The growth along the 51 corridor. There are three schools that let out on 51 and a lot of retail on 51. Need a thoroughfare from 51 South to 287 around Bennet Rd. The hospital is in the area as well.
- Need a thoroughfare parallel to 51 and connect Business 380 to open more commercial area. More access to the Hill and to the west. Connection between 730 and 51.
- Where the Fires Station sits, they must make a bigger loop to get to hospital and to the west. There are a lot of kids on 287 which is dangerous for them.
- There is a ton of potential at the airport. Room for growth and potential to generate revenue for City. The airport is at 4200 and need to get to 5000.
- The railroad is like a giant wall because it limits growth to the east due to access.
- There are no service roads and without service roads development is limited.

9. How important is it that people have travel choices in addition to driving a car?

- Minimally, but as Decatur grows it may be important in the future. There needs to be sidewalks around the square. There need to be sidewalks on main thoroughfares that lead to schools.
- Walkability is an issue. The sidewalks are a mess in the downtown area; Decatur needs pathways in historical areas.

- The events at square keep growing so we need to have streetlights that work. One on Miller (*by follushies*) does not work. ONCOR is responsible for fixing street lights and Citizens can report.
- As part of thoroughfare we need to look at parking downtown. There is no room for pickup trucks to park and seems like police enforcement takes up most parking. Some streets are so narrow that it becomes a concern for fire truck access. Consider potentially making these streets one way and maybe parking on one side only. A more current plan is needed, like a 5-year plan.
- Millennials will demand these needs, like bike paths. Riding a bike now is dangerous because no one expects bikers on the roads.
- Always thought about a loop trail connecting all parks as one of the best choices. This could also be used for the cross-country team. This should be a priority project.
- City needs to hold developers to high quality development standards - not only holding city but have partnerships

10. Which areas in Decatur are inviting for people on foot? How easy is it to walk to these places from most neighborhoods?

11. What major destinations in Decatur can be reached easily and safely by bicycle?

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

13. Which areas or developments in Decatur (neighborhoods, commercial areas, natural or open spaces, etc.) bring you the most pride? Why?

- Financially proud of retail development and growth. Need to grow sales tax.
- Infill houses in City. Took an oil lot and built 1200 sf to 1500 sf infill houses downtown that filled fast. Currently there is a lot of buying up older homes and fixing up homes. The infill housing on Miller Street is nice. Homes sell fast in Decatur.
- One constraint is regulation and current regulations limit infill housing; these limitations are a big issue. There can be infill housing regulations. There is pride in updating homes and investing in the City.
- The medical district is one. We would not want to change the square. The Trinity Roaster and candy shop have taken off there.

14. Which areas or developments cause you the most concern? What should be done with those areas?

- Business 287 South and 287 North could use some reinvestment.
- There are some nice buildings by football stadium. It is a "crappy" street.
- The area behind the football field needs attention; the current area has old, rundown buildings. That area does not have much significance; it could potentially become a restaurant row in the area.
- Decatur needs to improve on partnerships to get things done.

15. What additional steps (if any) should the City of Decatur take to enhance its downtown area?

- Additional parking as it continues to grow. 20 years ago, you couldn't get anyone to invest in downtown but in the last 5 to 10 years it has flourished.
- The lack of good internet is a major issue since. The City is losing businesses because there are no capabilities for internet. Decatur needs fiber optic cable, so business will consider Decatur. Century Link is the main company and they are not putting in infrastructure for more internet. Right now, companies don't even consider Decatur since the internet is not good. JD Clark did a national study for communities that are limited to internet access - when Vibe or Century Link is down businesses do not function. Tom can provide more information on internet access or expansion.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT/OPEN SPACE

16. What are the most notable natural areas or open spaces in Decatur? How many times a year do you spend time there?

17. Are there any natural areas or open spaces that have been overlooked in the past that could become important community assets?

- The hill by the old college. The land needs to be enhanced and it would be a great location for a community pool. It could be easily connected to the downtown.
- Grassland. It would be cool to add trails in the grasslands. Jones Park and the country club are side-by-side; that connection could provide opportunities for that.

ECONOMICS AND THE MARKETPLACE

18. Should the City place an emphasis on attracting businesses to Decatur? What changes would make it likely that a new business would decide to invest in Decatur in the next 10 years?

19. How important is tourism to the future of Decatur? What attracts visitors to Decatur? Are there other features or attractions that might bring more tourism?

- The grasslands are a draw.
- The square draws events.
- The Conference Center also draws a lot of people to the community. Hosts many surrounding communities.
- NRS brings people here and there are 30 to 40 Rodeo World Titles in Decatur. JW Hart bull riding brings a lot of people here for weekends. The car and tractor show is also a draw.
- The fairgrounds are taken over by the County and they are well maintained and managed. Scottish Festival in fairgrounds is a draw.
- The Wise County Old Settlers Reunion happens one week a year and there are cabins that can be rented.
- One of the world's biggest washer tossing contests.
- Each year in February is the swap meet.
- Northwest OHV Park in Bridgeport and retail shopping center for 100,000 people.
- Huge bariatric center in Decatur. 1700 people are employed in Decatur by the hospital. The junior college has a nursing program.
- It is filling in between Decatur and Fort Worth and all residential development is happening outside of city limits. Others are not paying their fair share for fire department; last year report was 29-30% of calls were outside of city.
- A group of international students stopped to eat at Sweetie Pies. Prison break was filmed here, and these aspects need to be embraced. Most people want to know about the Waggoner Mansion. It would be great if the area could be controlled to enhance the history.
- The younger generation does not think of them so there needs to be more focus on it. There could be a museum in Decatur, so kids can learn about Decatur.

20. Are there other types of industries that need to be promoted to ensure a strong Decatur economy?

- More retail. Distribution/commercial – Decatur is well setup for distribution. Industrial Diesel is coming to Decatur.

PEOPLE

21. Do people who grow up in Decatur commonly choose to come back and live here after they go off to college or a first job? What would draw them back?

- Careers are what keep people out of town. A lot of people are coming back due to hospitals, and close proximity to Dallas. There is a public transportation system.
- The place is family and the proximity to Dallas. There are a lot of people that commute to the DFW area. Would like more job opportunities.
- Unique feeling of community. There is a lot of pride in community but would need more recreational activities.
- People come to Decatur for events, Wise County Reunion (week-long event), Market Decatur (as a place and destination). Decatur should be branded as a destination.
- Park Board could approach the grassland to partner and get things done

22. Can a long-time resident of Decatur continue to live here if he/she can no longer drive or maintain a home and yard?

- Would like to rent but there are not many rental opportunities in Decatur.
- Housing Authority on social security and now the people can't go out in Decatur and rent a low-income house. Average waiting list is 1-4 years to get in. Professionals in the service industry can't find affordable housing in Decatur.
- There are nursing homes and assisted living by the airport, but it is very high end.
- Two-acre requirement outside the city for single family residential.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

24. What role does Decatur Municipal Airport play in the community today? Could/Should the City and the Airport try to partner more successfully in the future? How?

25. What other institutions/organizations are important to the successful future of Decatur?

- Good financial institutions/ banks.
- There is a church in every block.
- A youth center for kids to get tutoring, or get mentoring, free haircuts or dental. Kids need somewhere to go after school like a rec center or YMCA.
- The County needs to be involved.
- Hospital district
- The railroad company controls additional spurs and there is an industrial park but there is not a lot of businesses going in there.

OPEN DISCUSSION

26. Is there any other advice or information you can share with Decatur as it plans for its next 30 years or so?

- There need to be things to do in the community for people of all ages. Activities for the elderly people are forgotten. It feels like the elderly are not valued in the community.