

Woodland Hills Neighborhood Options: Comparison of Unincorporated DeKalb County, Briarcliff / Lakeside & Atlanta

DeKalb http://www.co.dekalb.ga.us/	Briarcliff / Lakeside http://lakesideyes.nationbuilder.com/	Atlanta http://www.atlantaga.gov/
SERVICES PROVIDED		
GA law mandates that a city take on at least three of the following: law enforcement, fire protection and fire safety, road construction or maintenance, solid waste management, storm-water collection and disposal, electric or gas utility services, code enforcement, planning and zoning, parks and recreation, water and sanitation.		
DeKalb County continues services. There is a potential for a diminishment in services or a tax increase from loss of tax base from new city.	City of Lakeside: Law enforcement, code enforcement, public works, planning and zoning, parks and recreation City of Briarcliff: The above plus storm water collection and disposal.	Law enforcement, fire protection and fire safety, road construction or maintenance, solid waste management, storm-water collection and disposal, electric or gas utility services, code enforcement, planning and zoning, parks and recreation.
WATER & SEWER		
DeKalb County's water system is currently under a federal consent decree to make needed improvements.	Even if included in Briarcliff / Lakeside, residents would continue to pay DeKalb County for water / sewer. Therefore, DeKalb County's water issues will continue to be an issue for our residents.	Even if annexed into Atlanta, residents would continue to pay DeKalb County for water / sewer. Therefore, DeKalb County's water issues will continue to be an issue for our residents.
ZONING / DEVELOPMENT		
DeKalb County has not historically received high marks from residents related to this issue.	Briarcliff / Lakeside: More local decisions making; people who live and play in this area as your decision-makers.	The City of Atlanta has a defined system, the Neighborhood Planning Units ("NPUs,") through which residents express opinions on a variety of local issues. With respect to zoning and development, developers must start their development discussions at the NPU level prior to moving to the City Zoning stage of the process. While NPUs do not have final say on development and zoning issues, often, many issues are resolved at the NPU level in a manner that is approved by the neighborhoods. Annexation into the City of Atlanta gives our residents a voice into the development of Cheshire Bridge Road. In the past five years, the average time to secure a permit has reduced from thirty days to six days.
POLICE		
DeKalb County Police force of approximately 1,100 police service approximately 700,000 people in a 271 square mile radius. County provides specialized services, e.g. SWAT.	The Lakeside Feasibility Study determined that Lakeside could support 83 police officers. The Briarcliff Feasibility Study estimated a need for 136 police officers to have service comparable to Dunwoody or Smyrna. A DeKalb city would contract with the County for such services as SWAT	Atlanta has approximately 2,000 police and a population of approximately 440,000. (Over 800 police hired since 2010.) In 2013, The United States Department of State honored the outstanding contributions of Atlanta Police Department in advancing U.S. strategic and diplomatic interests through extensive police training and curriculum development assistance.

REPRESENTATION

There are seven DeKalb County commissioners, each representing approximately 130,000 people & 54 sq. miles.

A city of approximately 60,000 - 90,000 residents would potentially have 5-6 commissioners, who live in the community and represent about 15,000 citizens.

The City of Atlanta, with a population of approximately 440,000, has 12 districts each with its own city council member and three members at large. This equates to representation of approximately 30,000 per council member. District Six, represented by Alex Wan, is closest to Woodland Hills, Druid Hills, LaVista Park and the other neighborhoods currently investigating cityhood in either Atlanta or Briarcliff / Lakeside.

TAXES

DeKalb can raise its millage rate simply through approval by the County Commission.

Uncertain future of HOST credit (Homestead Option Sales Tax.) This is a 1% county sales tax. 80 % of the revenue from the sales tax must currently be used to reduce homeowner real property county taxes. 20% is used for County and city capital improvements.

DeKalb County may need to revise the HOST program because the funds provided to the County via the HOST sales tax have not proven sufficient to cover County capital improvements. Further, as new cities are formed, HOST funds available to the County are diverted to cities.

While the financial studies conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of the University of Georgia (“The CVI”) analyzed the prior City of Lakeside and City of Briarcliff plans separately, there is general agreement that a combined city will also be financially viable without a need for an increase in property taxes IF there are no significant revenue losses related to the HOST credit. The CVI has a track record of reliable, conservative predictions for the studies it has performed for other cities.

GA State has recently made recommendations to a DeKalb County Operations Task Force to reform the HOST credit. Some reform options include reducing HOST payments to the cities. If this were to occur, the cities would need to find other funding sources. See http://www.co.dekalb.ga.us/OperationsTaskForce2014/pdf/2014_09_04_gsureport.pdf and <http://www.reporternewspapers.net /2014/01/09/forming-new-cities-decrease-host/>

Under City of Lakeside’s initial SB 270 (no longer under consideration), raising the city millage rate would require not only a vote of the city council, but also ratification by a majority of voting city residents. While it is anticipated that this provision will be included in the new legislative bill for a combined city, there is no such guarantee.

The DeKalb County Tax Commissioner has reviewed the below figures comparing the tax liability of a resident currently in unincorporated DeKalb to that of Atlanta: [See also http://druidhills.org/cityhood-annexation-options/city-of-atlanta-annexation-initiative/](http://druidhills.org/cityhood-annexation-options/city-of-atlanta-annexation-initiative/)

Fair Market House Appraisal	(Reduction In) or Increase in Tax by Annexation Into Atlanta
\$200,000	(\$179)
\$300,000	\$53
\$400,000	\$286
\$500,000	\$518
\$600,000	\$750
\$800,000	\$1,215
\$1,000,000	\$1,680

Assumptions built into calculations. 2014 millage rates apply. Includes HOST tax credit and basic homestead exemption only. Assumes Atlanta Public Schools taxes will apply for annexed areas. Senior exemptions not considered.

Atlanta does not have DeKalb’s fees for street lights (\$25), speed humps (\$25), and storm water (\$48.) Sanitation Fees in Atlanta are \$586 a year vs \$265 a year in DeKalb.

Note that some of the increase in tax as compared to Atlanta will drop off after 2015 when certain bonds secured by DeKalb County are paid off.

CITY PRIORITIES

- Government closer to the people resulting in more local control over city services.
- A police force that can respond more quickly.
- Enforcement of existing ordinances / commitment to respond to code violations.
- Greater control over zoning decisions so that development occurs in a thoughtful manner.
- Well-developed & well-maintained public spaces / parks.
- Better and more efficient services provided in a more financially sound manner.
- Improved roads and sidewalks.

- Priorities include continued improvement in financial governance while focusing on parks, roads, bridges, sidewalks, fire stations, police stations, transit and sewage.
- As noted below the city is planning to secure additional bonds to fund its priorities vs raising taxes. While neighborhoods currently considering annexation would not be included in the initial project list as annexation would not yet have occurred, the \$50 million of additional annual funding is being planned for infrastructure maintenance. New neighborhoods would be included in ongoing projects. The City plans to find savings in other areas, including pension changes, operational changes and competitive sourcing of contract bids to repay the debt.

ADDITIONAL PROS & CONS

<p><u>Pros specific to Unincorporated DeKalb</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be happy with status quo <p><u>Cons specific to Unincorporated DeKalb</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of becoming an unincorporated island, difficult to service efficiently by DeKalb. • Uncertainty related to how the cities being created in DeKalb County and the loss of their tax base will affect those who remain unincorporated. • Potential loss of input into future city boundaries that may incorporate us. 	<p><u>Pros specific to Briarcliff / Lakeside</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean slate with ability to elect new officials. • Without infrastructure, city would hire 3rd party, as Sandy Springs did, to take over services. This could be a good factor if services are provided efficiently. • Being part of a new city / having the ability to get involved and have direct input into the development of city plans. • The promise of a more responsive government that concentrates on our area. <p><u>Cons specific to Briarcliff / Lakeside</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New city would have no experience providing services. Therefore there is risk that the services may not be provided more efficiently or better. • Unknown government entity and officials. • Budget and Revenue estimates are projected, not tested • More difficulty analyzing the impact of a change as there is no history on which to judge the new city. 	<p><u>Pros specific to Atlanta</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vast improvements since 2009 reflected by an increase in services, a growth of cash reserves to \$130 million and a slight decrease in property taxes. • FY 2014 operating budget of \$540M is \$105M less than FY 2008, while increasing services without tax increases. • Both Moody's and Standard & Poor's recently gave the City a 3 Level upgrade to credit worthiness. • Current plans to secure bonds of \$250 - \$300M upfront and another \$50M annually for infrastructure improvements. • History of successful procurement of federal funding. • Diverse tax base; corporate, commercial, & residential. • Last year, Atlanta had \$1.5 billion in development, including mixed use properties, in town housing, business, commercial and retail. This investment approaches pre-2008 levels. It is predicted that by next year, more than \$2.1 billion additional investment will occur. • Being part of an internationally recognized city with global economic impact. <p><u>Cons Specific to Atlanta</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past issues with corruption • Past issues with inefficient spending / financial governance. In 2009, the City of Atlanta was in a weak financial position. Cash reserves had dropped to \$7 million.
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LIKLIHOOD OF INCLUSION

<p>We can remain a part of unincorporated DeKalb as long as unincorporated DeKalb exists.</p> <p>It is important to emphasize that it is becoming more and more unlikely that remaining unincorporated will remain an option.</p>	<p>City of Briarcliff / Lakeside representatives have been helpful and responsive throughout our process of gathering information. They will welcome Woodland Hills with open arms if we show that our preference is to be included in this new city.</p> <p>The City of Briarcliff and the city of Lakeside have incentive to agree upon city boundaries. DeKalb cityhood proponents have until November 15th to come up with mutual agreement on city boundary lines or Committee Chairwoman Amy Carter will appoint a panel of five state House members to do so.</p>	<p>Alex Wan, District 6 Atlanta City Council Member indicated that the City of Atlanta would welcome annexing neighborhoods in our area; however, they are not pushing areas to annex. The City would be gaining property tax revenue and incurring additional expense by adding to its boundaries. The financial implications are not significant nor a driving factor to the City of Atlanta. Rather, Atlanta is interested in growing in general to continue to have influence in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area.</p>
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SCHOOLS: NAVIGATING THE AMBIGUITY

REMAINING DEKALB COUNTY:

- If our area remains part of unincorporated DeKalb County OR becomes part of a new city, the central administration, governance and management structures, and attendance zones for our public schools will not change. Becoming part of a new city such as Briarcliff / Lakeside will have no impact on the schools; they remain part of DeKalb County Schools.
- The DeKalb County School District will soon apply to the state to become a charter system. The district proposes school governance and cluster advisory councils. The latter would have advisory status but not autonomy regarding budget and personnel. This may be a preemptive strike so that the County does not lose control / funds if independent Charter Systems were approved. You may view the proposal here: <http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us>.
- State law currently prohibits new cities from creating new school districts. This is unlikely to change.
- On October 15, Druid Hills Charter Cluster chair Matt Lewis wrote to the members of the DeKalb County Board of Education that his organization had withdrawn its petition. To read the entire letter, please visit <http://www.druidhillschartercluster.org/>.

CITY OF ATLANTA ANNEXATION:

- Under Georgia law, if an unincorporated area is annexed into a city with an independent school system, the students and schools within the annexed area become part of that system. Therefore, the schools in the annexed neighborhoods would move into Atlanta Public Schools (APS). DeKalb County would need to place students not in the annexed neighborhoods into other DeKalb County Schools.
 - If Druid Hills neighborhood annexes to Atlanta, Fernbank Elementary (Fernbank) and Druid Hills High School (DHHS) follow.
 - If Woodland Hills annexes into Atlanta, BVE follows.
 - The annexation area probably lacks a middle school. If Fernbank or BVE are within an annexation area, one outcome is for the students to remain in those schools through the middle school years and then move to DHHS.
- Should our area opt for Atlanta annexation, it is reasonable to expect that parents and community members who were supportive of the Druid Hills Charter Cluster will seek similar autonomous governance and management structure for our public schools. You should note that APS has approved the first charter cluster in the state and the first true autonomously governed conversion charter at Centennial Place Elementary (now a K-8 school).
- Annexation could increase per pupil funding and teachers' salaries in our schools. Per pupil expenditures by APS in previous years have been approximately \$15,000 per student. DeKalb spends approximately \$10,000 per student. (See National Center for Education Statistics, "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts, Fiscal Year 2011.")

NEIGHBORHOOD INTERDEPENDENCIES:

- If WH is included in Briarcliff / Lakeside, but Druid Hills annexes into Atlanta, the students in our neighborhood will no longer attend Druid Hills High School. Instead, they would move to another DeKalb County high school.
- The continuity of Briar Vista Elementary (BVE) with respect to its population would be tied to the breadth of any annexation. Those in the annexed area would be part of APS. Those outside the annexed area would be in DeKalb County Schools. The Briar Vista Community has indicated their desire to keep the current school population intact.