**Executive Summary**

The 1955 Georgia Urban Redevelopment Act empowers local governments to combat blight and chronic underdevelopment in areas within their jurisdiction.

DeKalb County designated an Urban Redevelopment Agency in 2010 that will undertake redevelopment in the defined Urban Redevelopment Area (URA). The Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) serves as a diagnostic and operational framework to address the following objectives:

- Rehabilitate contaminated or blighted properties
- Guide land bank activities
- Stabilize neighborhood communities and local housing markets
- Leverage relevant benefits within the URA for economic growth and stability
- Identify site opportunities that will draw jobs and businesses
- Coordinate administration of loans, funds, incentives, and other financial resources
- Grow the County’s resources, services, and facilities
- Build and strengthen partnerships among community organizations and businesses
- Provide a more connected and integrated physical environment that links home, work, entertainment and recreation destinations
- Foster collaboration within and among local governmental agencies.

The Urban Redevelopment Area delineates the geographic extent of the County experiencing acute blight and underdevelopment, as seen below.
The URA includes much of DeKalb County from its western border shared with Fulton County in the Bouldercrest area to Rockdale County at the eastern end of DeKalb County; north to Stone Mountain, and inclusive of the I-85 corridor. It does not include any of the incorporated places in DeKalb County or any of the more stable and developing neighborhoods. The negative conditions documented in the Urban Redevelopment Area include elevated unemployment rates, chronically vacant properties, concentrated poverty, under-maintained properties, and sluggish growth indicators.

DeKalb County plans to use a wide array of fiscal and administrative tools to guide implementation of the Urban Redevelopment Plan, including land banking, property remediation and rehabilitation, federal grants, and tax incentive programs.
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Introduction

Background
The Georgia Urban Redevelopment Act, (O.C.G.A. § 36-61-1 et seq.) was passed in 1955 to enable local governments to tackle blighted areas and issues arising from blight. The powers granted in the legislation allow for cities and counties to rehabilitate, conserve, or develop identified slum areas under their jurisdiction.

DeKalb County has seen the need to develop a comprehensive strategy for directing revitalization in underserved areas of the County. In 2010, DeKalb County designated an Urban Redevelopment Agency authorized to exercise its Urban Redevelopment powers, as empowered by the Urban Redevelopment Act, O.C.G.A. § 36-61-18. The Urban Redevelopment Agency will undertake the responsibilities associated with urban redevelopment as laid out in this Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) and coordinate with other entities as needed.

Purpose
The URP sets out a framework for DeKalb County to strategically direct resources and investments within a designated Urban Redevelopment Area (URA). The following objectives of the URP have been identified to promote redevelopment and advance a sustainable quality of life for the County’s residents.

- Rehabilitate contaminated or blighted properties
- Guide land bank activities
- Stabilize neighborhood communities and local housing markets
- Leverage relevant benefits within the URA for economic growth and stability
- Identify site opportunities that will draw jobs and businesses
- Coordinate administration of loans, funds, incentives, and other financial resources
- Grow the County’s resources, services, and facilities
- Build and strengthen partnerships among community organizations and businesses
- Provide a more connected and integrated physical environment that links home, work, entertainment and recreation destinations
- Foster collaboration within and among local governmental agencies.

Planning Consistency

Statement of Conformity
The Urban Redevelopment Plan is consistent with the future growth and development goals of DeKalb County and conforms with the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan. The following are key themes identified through the Comprehensive Plan’s Community Assessment and Community Participation Program:

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Parks and Open Space
- Community Facilities
- Community Character and Identity
- Housing
- Natural Resources
• Economic Development.

These focus areas have been incorporated into the URP and remain broad goals for development in the URA as well as for the entire county.

The URP is further consistent with the visions and goals of supplemental plans and studies undertaken in DeKalb County. The following plans, ranging from small-area Livable Center Initiative (LCI) studies to topic specific comprehensive plans, have identified salient issues and planning goals for the County.

- Wesley Chapel LCI
- Candler Road / Flat Shoals Parkway LCI
- Tucker Commercial District LCI
- Northlake LCI
- Brookhaven Peachtree Activity Center LCI
- Kensington LCI
- Perimeter Focus LCI
- Kensington Station/Memorial Drive Redevelopment Plan & Tax Allocation District
- Avondale/Columbia Drive Plan & Tax Allocation District
- Moreland-Bouldercrest-Cedar Grove Plan
- Clifton Corridor Transit Feasibility and Connectivity Study
- Memorial Drive Strategic Action Plan
- Buford Highway Corridor Study
- Tucker Strategic Neighborhood Plan
- Emory Village Revitalization Plan
- La Vista Blueprints Program
- Scottsdale Revitalization Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Transportation Comprehensive plan

Land Use Planning & Objectives
The URP does not entail any deviations from the land use planning and zoning regulations developed for DeKalb County. Although land use and zoning changes are permitted in urban redevelopment plans to further particular land use objectives, there is no need in this case to do so. Rather, the URP aims to promote development in a manner consistent with the County’s land use plan developed for the most recent adopted Comprehensive Plan.

DeKalb County Urban Redevelopment Area
The Urban Redevelopment Area, as mandated by O.C.G.A. § 36-61-7, delineates blighted or threatened areas within the County. The boundaries of the DeKalb County Urban Redevelopment Area are seen in Figure 1. The URA includes most of unincorporated DeKalb County, but omits several more economically stable areas, including some of southern DeKalb County bordering Henry and Clayton Counties, parts of northern DeKalb County along Lavista Road, and the municipal cities and towns within the County.
Figure 1. Urban Redevelopment Area Boundaries

Source: DeKalb County Office of Economic Development
Conditions Necessitating Redevelopment

There are no state-mandated criteria for defining an Urban Redevelopment Area. However, the Urban Redevelopment Act indicates that geographies within the government’s jurisdiction that constitute ‘slum areas’ are to be designated an urban redevelopment area. The Act (O.C.G.A. §36-61-2(18)) characterizes a slum area as any or multiple of the following conditions:

- Dilapidation, deterioration, age, or obsolescence;
- Inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, or open spaces;
- High density of population and overcrowding;
- Existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes;
- Any combination of such factors as is conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, or crime and is detrimental to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare;
- The presence of a substantial number of slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures;
- Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout;
- Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;
- Unsanitary or unsafe conditions;
- Deterioration of site or other improvements;
- Tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land;
- The existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes;
- Having development impaired by airport or transportation noise or by other environmental hazards;
- Or any combination of such factors substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality or county, retards the provisions of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare in its present condition and use.

The DeKalb County URA was therefore determined based on several indicators that indicate depressed or deteriorated conditions. The indicators that have been chosen are commonly employed criteria for designating blighted areas in Georgia State programs, such as the State Enterprise Zones and the Opportunity Zones programs: pervasive poverty and crime; home foreclosures, vacancies, and code enforcement; building construction and commercial activity; and buildings and infrastructure quality.

Poverty

The percent of residents below the poverty level in the URA is 18.7%, more than 2.5 percentage points higher than the County’s average of 16.1% living in poverty.

Table 1. Poverty rates for Comparison Areas, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>URA</th>
<th>DeKalb County</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010 poverty rate</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 5 in Appendix A shows that poverty is most concentrated in the central part of the County in areas adjacent to Avondale Estates, Clarkston, and Stone Mountain. Poverty rates in the URA exceed 60% in some areas, whereas neighborhoods outside the URA or at the boundaries edges are consistently below 15%.
Unemployment
Census tract data from the American Community Survey 2010 5-year estimates shows the unemployment rate in the Urban Redevelopment Area to be 12.9%, as compared to the Countywide rate of 11.4%. Unemployment rates are even lower for the Atlanta region and the state, at 9.6% and 9.8% respectively. In addition, 5-year trends for unemployment rates, seen in Figure 2, corroborate the fact that high unemployment is consistently higher than local, regional and national statistics.

Figure 2. Comparison of Unemployment Rates, 5-Year Trend

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Vacancy
Vacancy rates in the County have increased by 4.4% overall in the past 5 years. Figure 3 shows that each of the retail, industrial, and office markets, has experienced a sizable increase in vacant stock. Although the rising vacancy rates began to level off in 2011, they still remain high enough to be detrimental to redevelopment efforts. Industrial vacancy rates in particular have a large impact because of its build out, with over 6 million square feet of industrial space standing vacant in 2011.
Figure 3. Market Vacancy Rates, 5-Year Trend

Source: CoStar

Code Compliance Cases
Over 6,000 code compliance cases occurred in the URA in 2011. The predominant number of cases are located in central unincorporated DeKalb County, sweeping from south of Atlanta all the way to Stone Mountain (Figure 7). This prevalence of code compliance issues reflects the chronic issues of physical and aesthetic blight throughout the URA.

Home Foreclosures
DeKalb County maintains a mandatory foreclosure registry as a means of monitoring housing conditions and avoiding blight. In 2010, 87% of over the 840 foreclosed homes in the County were within the URA. Figure 8 illustrates the geographic distribution of foreclosures, with a strong presence in central and south DeKalb. Foreclosures in DeKalb County mimic the pattern seen of code compliance cases, indicating areas that may have destabilized local housing markets.

Building Permit Activity
Building permits for recent years were mapped to gauge physical development in terms of new construct or renovations (Figure 9). The northwestern area of the County experienced the most robust growth in terms of new construction and building renovations, occurring along major corridors with close proximity to municipalities. The southern and eastern areas of the County experienced the most sluggish permit activity. It is worth noting that areas with high levels of building permit activity are also areas where there fewer code compliance cases and foreclosed homes. In areas where housing issues are more abundant, new building permits are more dispersed.

Business License Applications
Applications for business licenses have dropped off in the past five years, in part due to a sluggish national economy. Figure 4 shows that the number of business license applications maintained around...
3000 for the past two years, only 75% of the amount applied for in 2007. Figure 10 in the Appendix further illustrates the geographic distribution of business licenses in the County, occurring mostly in the northern part of DeKalb and on the outskirts of municipalities.

Figure 4. Business License Applications, 5-Year Trend

![Business License Applications](image)

Source: DeKalb County Office of Finance

**Property Disrepair**

The URA is host to abundant building deterioration. There is a strong presence of graffiti, as well as unkempt exteriors, rust, peeling paint, and some structural dilapidation. Additionally, sites are commonly under-maintained, with the presence of broken fences, overgrown brush, poorly paved parking lots and the presence of litter or debris. Examples of such distressed properties are seen in the photos in Appendix.

**Implementation Strategies**

The implementation framework of the URP provides workable organizational, policy, and financial strategies. The URP leverages public and private resources available to DeKalb County to spur redevelopment. This is accomplished through vehicles, programs and policies that serve to clean and rehabilitate blighted properties, coordinate human and business support services, and stimulate investment.

**Land & Community Development**

DeKalb County land development strategies focus on blight removal, redeveloping brownfields and underutilized properties, reducing crime rates and code enforcement actions, and building internal capacity to effectively stabilize and improve our neighborhoods.
DeKalb Regional Land Bank
Land bank authorities (LBAs) are a highly effective vehicle for land revitalization and strategic planning, with powers that can help overcome barriers to property redevelopment such as unclear titles, unpaid taxes, high holding costs, or drawn-out foreclosure processes. The recent establishment of the DeKalb Regional Land Bank (DRLB) in August of 2011 will play a critical part in redeveloping vacant and distressed properties in the URA. The DRLB has the powers to receive, hold, and transfer properties as well as facilitate development opportunities.

Brownfields Program
The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) manages a Brownfields Program to encourage the remediation of properties contaminated by hazardous substances or pollutants. Grants are disbursed to communities to facilitating remediation through assessments, cleanups, loans, and environmental training programs. Promoting reuse of brownfields helps conserve greenfields, provides in-fill opportunities, and can improve environmental integrity and community health. EPA awarded DeKalb County $900,000 in 2012 to establish a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). The RLF will help finance brownfield cleanup of hazardous waste and petroleum throughout the County.

Neighborhood Stabilization Program
The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) is managed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and provides funding to local governments for community stabilization purposes. NSP funds have a wide range of applications, including financing, purchasing, demolishing, or redeveloping vacant, foreclosed or otherwise blighted residential properties. The DRLB was borne out of NSP funding and will be a vital aid to housing and community development efforts.

Community Development Block Grants
Community Development Block Grants (CDGB) are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through each state. CDGBs serve as a vital funding source for revitalizing communities through housing, community and economic development activities. CDGB programs aim principally to benefit low to moderate income populations.

In terms of the redevelopment strategies in the URA, no resident relocation plans are needed since none of the implementation strategies will cause dislocation of any residents. The redevelopment focus will be on vacant or non-residential properties and will not affect occupied residential housing.

Economic & Workforce Development

Economic and workforce development strategies intend to support job creation, promote industrial attraction, expansion and retention, and strengthen the alignment between workforce development and industry needs.

Enterprise Zones
The Georgia Enterprise Zone Employment Act was enacted in 1997 to revitalize areas suffering from disinvestment and cultivate business development through economic incentives. In 2002, DeKalb County passed legislation authorizing the Enterprise Zones (EZ) program, which permits EZs to be established in economically depressed areas in the County based on state-mandated criteria. Eligible businesses located in economic zones receive 10 years of property tax exemptions and may also receive
a reduction or abatement of up to $10,000 per category in building permit, business license, and water/sewer tap-on fees.

**Opportunity Zones**
The Opportunity Zone Job Tax Credit Program is established through 2004 state legislation permitting the designation of Opportunity Zones (OZ) in areas characterized by pervasive poverty, underdevelopment, general distress, and slum or blight. Areas must also be fully located within either an Enterprise Zone or an Urban Redevelopment Area to qualify for OZ designation. The program entices businesses to locate and grow within OZs with the highly advantageous incentive that, given a minimum of two jobs created, provides a $3,500 tax credit per job claimable up to five years as long as jobs are maintained. Several proposed OZs have been applied for, the locations of which are shown in Figure 15.

**Tax Allocation Districts**
The 1985 Georgia Redevelopment Powers Law (O.C.G.A. § 36-44-8) empowers local governments to establish Tax Allocation Districts (TAD) for the purpose of financing redevelopment efforts. A TAD derives its funding from the increase in an area’s ad valorem taxes levied by the County and the school system. The revenues are placed in a special redevelopment fund for the area and are used to directly pay for the redevelopment costs or to issue bonds to pay for the redevelopment costs. Successful TADs strengthen the tax base, create new jobs, attract businesses and developers, facilitate economic self-sufficiency, and have a multiplier impact on surrounding areas. The benefit of TADs is that they can be used for a wide range of redevelopment projects, from mixed-use developments to infrastructure improvements.

**Community Improvement Districts**
A Community Improvement District (CID) is a self-taxing organization enacted by a vote among business leaders in the community. Once a CID is established, each business member pays dues into a pool that is used for improvements to the community in a wide range of areas including infrastructure, streetscaping, maintenance services, security, public safety, marketing, and economic development. DeKalb County has two active CIDs and plans are in the works for several more.

**Workforce Development Programs**
DeKalb County's Workforce Development department works to match businesses and potential employees. Matches are facilitated through skills training, education, and supportive services. These programs are critical to ensuring there is a compatible local employee base. A goal of the URP is to capitalize on this human resource development and target services to businesses, residents, and workers in the URA.
Appendix A: Urban Redevelopment Plan Maps & Photos

Figure 5. Future Land Uses for the Urban Redevelopment Area

Source: DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability
Figure 6. Poverty Rates, 2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 estimates
Figure 7. Code Compliance Cases, 2011

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>6,897</td>
<td>6,011</td>
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Source: DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability, Code Compliance Division
Figure 8. Housing Foreclosures, 2010

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<td>2010 Housing Foreclosures</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>733</td>
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Source: DeKalb County Foreclosure Registry Program, Geographic Information Systems
Figure 9. Building Permits, 2011

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<td>2011 Building Permits Issued</td>
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Source: DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability
Figure 10. Business License Applications, 2011

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<td>2011 Business License Applications</td>
<td>2,924</td>
<td>2,441</td>
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Source: DeKalb County Office of Finance
Figure 11. Enterprise Zones in DeKalb County

Source: DeKalb County Geographic Information Systems
Figure 12. Proposed Opportunity Zones

Source: DeKalb County Office of Economic Development
Figures 13-16. Photographic Documentation of Blighted Properties in the URA

Source: DeKalb County Office of Economic Development