



# COVE

citizens of victoria estates  
victoriaestates.info

## Annual Report July 2014-June 2015

**C**itizens of Victoria Estates (COVE) had a very busy year once again. Annexation, new city movements, county reform and transparency, and quality of life issues once again required on-going engagement to assure that our neighborhood's concerns and issues were included in deliberations by local and state government, nearby institutions, and other civic associations and neighborhoods.

### Official structure

**D**uring last year's annual meeting, the COVE board was expanded from seven to nine members. The inaugural board was reappointed by unanimous vote, and two additional members joined at that time. (See page 4.)

Following the meeting, the newly constituted board deliberated on the officer succession plan. The board decided to follow a traditional succession plan, and, as a result, COVE's vice president will ascend to the president's position the following year. This will allow for smooth transitions and assure that multi-year initiatives will continue. Following the annual meeting in July 2015, Pat Killingworth will begin her term as COVE's president.

Consistent with our by-laws, COVE's board has met an average of twice per month for the past year, alternating conference calls with in-person meetings. The board determined four strategic priorities for the year: (1) Cityhood and annexation; (2) County reform and transparency; (3) Zoning; and (4) Coordination with neighboring institutions/organizations and neighborhoods.

### Membership & finance

**A**s of June 30, 2015, COVE had 63 households in its membership, which is an increase of about 60 percent from last's year's membership of 39 households. We continue to reach out to neighbors to encourage higher levels of participation, both in COVE and in the important conversations that affect our neighborhood's quality of life.

Many of the initial start-up costs were one-time expenses last year, which were not incurred again this year. However, the cost of the website and other like items are annual expenses. COVE continued to publish COVE Report this year to keep neighbors informed on important events. COVE also continued to promote use of the neighborhood's secure website on Nextdoor.com, which COVE set up last year.

The board has confidence that COVE's strong record of accomplishments provides a healthy platform for on-going growth.

### Progress toward goals

**Goal one: *Continue to represent the neighborhood in the renewed cityhood initiatives, including presence at the state legislative session in 2015.***

Cityhood initiatives, which include both new cities and annexations, once again required hands-on involvement from many neighbors. Fall of 2014, leading up to the 2015 legislative session, was especially busy with more than two dozen town hall



meetings by state legislators, cityhood proponents, annexation proponents, unincorporated proponents, county commissioners and others neighborhood associations. To cover these meetings, numerous COVE members stepped up and monitored the proceedings in each one.

- COVE joined with the Mason Mill Civic Association in November to issue a survey to our neighborhoods regarding cityhood and annexation. The results:
- 75 residents of Victoria Estates completed the survey.;
- 58% of the total survey respondents ranked remaining unincorporated as their top choice, over annexation by Atlanta or becoming part of a new DeKalb city;
- remaining unincorporated was favored by more than 2 to 1 over each of the cityhood options when considered separately.

COVE shared the survey results with:

- the DeKalb legislative delegation,
- county commissioners
- the interim CEO,
- organizers of cityhood, annexation, and unincorporated groups,
- neighboring institutions
- other civic associations,
- the media.

COVE representatives followed up the distribution with numerous individual meetings and conversations to assure that the neighborhood's wishes were shared.

In December, the Georgia House of Representatives convened a subcommittee to take testimony from the Lakeside and Tucker cityhood proponents to resolve the boundary dispute in the two cityhood proposals. COVE was again on hand for these hear-

ings to track the boundaries, which literally stop at the entrance to Victoria Estates. While this subcommittee resolved temporarily the east/west boundary specifically between these two cities, the southern boundaries of both cities remained unresolved—the boundary that abuts Victoria Estates. The rapid ramp-up of Together in Atlanta to pursue annexation by the City of Atlanta put our boundaries further in dispute.

To address this ever-changing boundary issue and assure that Victoria Estates residents had a full voice in the decisions, COVE convened three neighborhood conversations with:

1. Alex Wan to discuss city of Atlanta;
2. Georgia House Delegation Chair Howard Mosby to address legislation and process;
3. Interim CEO Lee May to review county efforts to address citizen concerns and the impact of cities and incorporations on the county's fiscal health.

During the 40-day legislative session, COVE representatives attended more than 50 meetings that included:

1. weekly meetings of the DeKalb legislative delegation;
2. meetings of the newly formed Atlanta delegation (comprised of all representatives with parts of the city of Atlanta in their districts);
3. numerous house and senate committee meetings;
4. individual meetings with senators and representatives.

COVE members paid particular attention to the new city of LaVista Hills legislation, especially during the last-minute boundary redrawing. The city of LaVista Hills will move forward on the November ballot—a considerable process improvement over past elections on cityhood formation, which were held in off-cycle special elections.

**At all meetings, COVE's organizational position was to share our survey results and support efforts**



to create a better process that requires substantial citizen engagement.

**Goal two: Remain engaged in monitoring county affairs, including important areas of creating an independent internal audit capacity and a functioning board of ethics, encouraging greater transparency in county operations, and advocating for solutions to our crumbling infrastructure.**

COVE's role in county reform efforts has been significant. Members of COVE:

- Led development of position papers and draft legislation calling for an independent internal audit capability, ethics board reform and the establishment of a purchasing code
- Worked hands-on with the legislative delegation to pass the legislation calling for these reforms, including HB 597, HB598, and HB599, which were passed unanimously by the House and with a single dissent on the floor of the Senate.
- Attended all meetings of the DeKalb Operations Task Force convened by Interim CEO Lee May, and worked extensively on the Task Force's final recommendations.
- Represented Victoria Estates at more than three dozen meetings dedicated to county reform, including several large county forums.

The next step in county reform is to monitor the county's progress in putting in place the required reforms. For example, at a recent town hall meeting regarding the budget, the funding for the independent internal auditor was not yet included in the budget. Thus, reform implementation will be a COVE focus for the coming months.

COVE also researched the issues behind the lack of funding for sidewalk, pothole and aging water/sewer system repairs. All of the county's funding for capital repair is tied to part of the HOST sales tax—funds which are rapidly dwindling. While several legislators have developed potential options that residents will vote on in November 2015, the lack of

funding remains. This situation will continue to be a COVE focus area in the coming year.

**Goal three: Provide input on the zoning code re-write and support good development along Houston Mill Road and other nearby areas.**

The zoning code re-write has been of great concern to many civic associations; their considerable activity in this area focuses primarily on the administrative aspects of the code. COVE has monitored this process and participated in the Civic Association Network (CAN) reviews. The latest version is in the review/adoption process.

With the improvement in the economy, activity along Houston Mill Road has renewed. At present, new development has involved single-family, high-end homes, rather than multi-family, which avoids adding too much additional stress on the already over-burdened roads.

COVE also worked with the county's Global Information Systems department to have Victoria Estates officially identified as a neighborhood on the county's map.

**Goal four: Expand dialogue with neighboring institutions and organizations on issues that affect our quality of life.**

Victoria Estates is situated in a high-impact area of DeKalb County, and the number of organizations that affect us grows every year. Each of these organizations, either through planning, maintenance, policy or influence, affects the community:

- Emory University
- The Centers for Disease Control
- Veterans Administration
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Atlanta Regional Commission
- Cities of Atlanta, Brookhaven, Decatur, Avondale Estates



- MARTA
- Council for Quality Growth
- Georgia Chamber of Commerce
- Southfork Conservancy

Over the past year, COVE members have participated in meetings and/or met with each of these organizations, often more than once.

In Spring 2015, for example, a COVE representative, along with a representative of the Mason Mill Civic Association, met with the Georgia Department of Transportation to discuss the negative impact of changes to the traffic flow at Houston Mill and LaVista. LaVista is a state road, thus the Georgia Department of Transportation must address any changes or alterations. Short term changes (better striping, signage, clearing trees for visibility) have helped somewhat, but long-term changes will require more extensive partnership with the institutions on LaVista Road.

The Centers for Disease Control has also added a new position for community transportation services, which has opened the door to conversation with the CDC about traffic along the Clifton Corridor. Our goal is to work creatively with the CDC and other groups to develop alternatives to getting into and out of the Clifton Corridor.

## COVE strategic direction for 2015-2016

Many of the focus areas that COVE addressed during this past year are multi-year commitments. For the coming year, COVE will focus on these four primary areas:

1. Cityhood/Annexation: LaVista Hills is on the ballot for November. The current city boundary splits WD Thompson Park in half. The proponents of annexation by the city of Atlanta plan to renew their advocacy—Victoria Estates is included in the boundaries of the annexation areas so our voice must be heard.
2. County Affairs: county reform and transparency affect our property taxes and our quality of life.
3. Neighboring Institutions/Organizations: issues that affect our quality of life must be addressed in conversation with the institutions and organizations that surround us.
4. Decaying Infrastructure: working with elected and appointed officials and other groups to find ways to fund and repair/replace our crumbling infrastructure.

### COVE's board of directors and officers

Martha Pacini, president  
Susan Bell, treasurer  
Carl Lange secretary  
Pat Killingsworth, vice president  
Erika Birg

Tim Buchman  
Emily Koumans  
Ron McCauley  
Peter Sederberg  
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