



COVE

citizens of victoria estates
victoriaestates.info

Annual Report July 2015-June 2016

The formation of new cities . . . county reform/transparency . . . quality of life issues. These all required that Victoria Estates stay engaged to assure the neighborhood's inclusion in deliberations by local and state government, nearby institutions and other civic associations and neighborhoods. COVE has had plenty of work to do.

Official structure

Following last year's annual meeting, Pat Kilingsworth began her term as COVE's president, two board members—Erika Birg and Peter Sederberg—stepped down, and Bobby Baker joined COVE as a new board member. See officers on page 4.

Consistent with our by-laws, COVE's board has met regularly 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) Decaying infrastructure; and (4) Coordination with neighboring institutions/organizations and neighborhoods.

Membership & finance

As of June 30, 2016, COVE had 73 households in its membership. 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.

While many of the initial start-up costs were one-time expenses, the cost of the website and other like items are ongoing. To keep neighbors informed on important events, we continued to publish COVE Report and promote use of Nextdoor.com. In addition, David Woolf and Carl Lange were integrally involved with Victoria Estates Civic Association in helping produce the neighborhood directory.

The board recognizes that the existence of two neighborhood groups is unusual for a neighborhood the size of Victoria Estates. One group plans social gatherings, handles the entrance islands and creates the directory; the other represents the neighborhood in on-going civic and quality of life conversations that involve organizations and institutions beyond the neighborhood's borders.

The board feels strongly that for an organization to represent a neighborhood it must be officially registered with the Secretary of State for that purpose—a process COVE completed in 2014 upon its founding. This allows COVE to become a member of state and county community organizations, such as the Civic Association Network (CAN), many of which may provide information and assistance to us regarding issues of importance to Victoria Estates and our surrounding neighborhoods.

According to the IRS, COVE's 501(c)(4) status is appropriate for civic organizations. As a 501(c)(4), COVE may engage in advocacy on behalf of the neighborhood, but refrains from taking a specific position on any individual or issue. *COVE's mission is to assure that the neighborhood is included in conversations that affect it, not to advocate for one position over another.*



Progress toward goals

GOAL ONE: Represent the neighborhood in the renewed cityhood initiatives, including monitoring the LaVista Hills election and have a presence at the state legislative session in 2016.

The new City of LaVista Hills was on the ballot in November 2015, and was defeated narrowly. Victoria Estates was not included in the new city. This was a result of several COVE surveys over the past two years determining our neighborhood's interest in being part of a new city or annexation effort **AND** COVE's efforts to make sure LaVista Hills leaders were aware of these survey results. Every survey showed overwhelmingly that neighbors preferred to remain unincorporated at this time.

Leading up to the 2016 legislative session, COVE hosted several meetings with legislators to discuss what could be expected in the upcoming session. In contrast to previous years when new city and annexation questions dominated the conversation, questions covered a wider variety of topics: a special purpose local option sales tax for transportation, changes to the existing HOST tax, possible changes to DeKalb County's form of government, and the "Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act."

COVE members attended state senate and house subcommittee meetings regarding the process for creating new cities, the related impacts and advocated for more transparency in the process, including:

- Requiring that a proposed city have a defined map prior to going to the legislature;
- Compelling new city proponents to host public forums (with adequate public notice) to engage citizens before initiating a new city proposal at the legislature;
- Requiring that new cities have impact studies—available to the public—to show the effect on surrounding areas and the rest of a county.

Throughout this process, COVE's organizational position was to advocate for a better process that requires substantial citizen engagement.

GOAL TWO: Remain engaged in monitoring county affairs, including: 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 over the past two years. The county's new ethics board and audit oversight committee experienced some challenges. A sitting county commissioner filed a lawsuit challenging the legitimacy of the ethics board. There was also an attempt to remove duly appointed members of the audit oversight committee without following the process outlined in the legislation.

COVE representatives attended town hall meetings and met with county officials to assure that funding for the internal auditor oversight committee and the internal auditor would be included in the county budget. (First drafts of the budget did not include these legislatively mandated costs!)

COVE also worked behind the scenes when the internal audit oversight committee did not follow its own procedures for removal of one its members. The result: State Senator Elena Parent requested an opinion from the Attorney General on the removal, ultimately causing in the reinstatement of the member.

GOAL THREE: Advocate for repair of decaying infrastructure in the area immediately surrounding Victoria Estates.

A primary goal of COVE is to assure that the neighborhood has a voice that is recognized and respected by our state and county elected officials. The county's decaying infrastructure is evident in the state of Mason Mill Road, Houston Mill Road and all of the roads in Victoria Estates. We are making progress on this.



First, after all traditional avenues for assistance had been pursued unsuccessfully, COVE contacted the Office of the CEO directly about repairing the extremely large potholes at the entrance to the neighborhood and along Rainier Falls. The county sent patch crews to address the potholes the following week. COVE also joined with Mason Mill Civic Association to address the rapidly decaying state of Mason Mill Road up to Clairmont Road. Mason Mill Road was repaved this spring.

Second, COVE members attended the Georgia Department of Transportation meetings regarding installing a left-turn lane on LaVista Road at Biltmore. COVE shared its concern about viewing this intersection in isolation from three other intersections that are greatly affected by traffic going into and out of the Clifton Corridor (Houston Mill and LaVista Road; Houston Mill and Clifton Road; Biltmore and Clifton Road), and advocated for a comprehensive plan that would address all four intersections.

Third, COVE members also met with state and county officials, the Mason Mill Civic Association, the CDC community transportation representative and members of Intown Community Church to determine options for correcting the issues with the Houston Mill Road/LaVista Road intersection. The county has identified potential state funding sources and is currently creating designs for possible solutions.

Fourth, beyond the state of roads, COVE members spoke with county officials concerning proposed changes to the county's land use map. This guides future zoning for the area including development density. COVE, along with the Mason Mill Civic Association, attended a meeting where the planning commission was to vote on updating the land use map to downgrade Toco Hill from its current 8-story limit on buildings to 4 stories. Without notice, planning staff went against previous community and planning department recommendations and requested maintaining the 8-story limit. COVE and others requested more neighborhood input including addressing traffic impacts. After additional community meetings, county staff deferred recom-

mendations until year end as a part of the new 2035 Comprehensive Plan.

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
- Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
- 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
- DeKalb County School System
- Nearby neighborhood organizations

Several issues arose regarding surrounding institutions that required immediate action this past year. First, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta received approval from the Brookhaven City Council to construct a nearly 400,000-square-foot outpatient surgery center at I-85 and North Druid Hills. CHOA and Brookhaven had cleverly avoided a review by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). But the broad impact of this change affects neighborhoods, like Victoria Estates, that are several miles away.



Joining with other neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the project, COVE requested the involvement of (ARC). As with all other issues, COVE's position is to advocate for transparency and adherence with established processes.

The DeKalb County School System also developed plans this past year that could have dramatically affected traffic in the area. In order to relieve overcrowding in the Cross Keys High School cluster, the school district proposed moving all or nearly all students from Briar Vista Elementary to Fernbank Elementary. The district would then bus children from several elementary schools in the Cross Keys High School cluster to Briar Vista.

COVE members attended public meetings with the school district to point out the obvious: Adding 400 more cars or buses to the Clifton Corridor every morning and afternoon was impractical given the already congested nature of the roads in the area, and even more so given the CDC's plans to add a parking deck allowing for a net increase of 1400 cars on its campus. COVE advised the school district to consult with the ARC and major institutions in the area, such as Emory, CDC and Children's Healthcare, prior to making such plans. The result: a revised approach that reflects the traffic realities of the area.

COVE strategic direction for 2016-2017

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:** Individual neighborhoods are increasingly annexing into Atlanta. Once a neighborhood shares some boundary with the city, residents can petition the city to be annexed. As this neighborhood-by-neighborhood annexation continues, Victoria Estates could find itself facing this question in the mid-term future. COVE will monitor how these annexations proceed and their relative effect on residents.
2. **County Affairs:** County reform and transparency affect our property taxes and our quality of life. COVE will continue to monitor county implementation of reform efforts, as well as the Charter Commission that is being proposed to recommend changing the form of government.
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:** We will continue 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

Pat Killingsworth, president	Susan Bell, treasurer	Emily Koumans
David Woolf, vice president	Bobby Baker	Ron McCauley
Carl Lange, secretary	Tim Buchman	Martha Pacini