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To: Marc Wisniewski, Vice Chair, CSD Board of Education

Copy: Dr. Phyllis Edwards, Superintendent
Gene Ponder, Director of Facilities

From: Susan Simpson, Rosser Program Manager *SS*

Date: December 15, 2009

Subject: Suitability of Beacon Hill Site for 4-5 Academy

After several City of Decatur citizens suggested that the Beacon Hill site might be a better location for a 4-5 academy, the Board of Education asked CSD to provide a cursory review of the site and determine its suitability for this purpose. Gene Ponder and I have visited the site on several occasions and have had conversations with the City Planner, Amanda Thompson, Dan MaGee, Active Living Division and the Engineering Director, Julie Gyuricza. While the site is centrally located there are numerous problems associated with it that make it an undesirable location for a new school.

The property is located on a major thoroughfare into the City of Decatur especially for county government workers that want to park in the parking deck on Trinity or the surface lot directly across the street. Access to the site off of Electric Ave or Atlanta Ave would be difficult as the roads are fairly narrow. So the choices would be to queue the busses on Trinity (and there is not enough room for this) or spend a large amount of money reworking the site to get the necessary bus access.

A second problem is that the site is in close proximity to the Marta rail line. The trains are noisy and run every 15 minutes in both directions. This translates to two (both directions) trains every 15 minutes and more trains during heavy commuter times.

Another potential problem with the site is the on-going construction at the Decatur Housing Authority development across the street. The project has three phases and the demolition for phase one has just begun. At the current rate, the project could take anywhere from 3-8 years. This means an intermittent amount of heavy construction traffic in and around the site. Some of the activities on the construction site will create a dusty, noisy and distracting environment.

The City of Decatur's police department and communications tower are located on the Beacon Hill site and they have no plans to move the facility. This means the project would be delayed while the City determined if they wanted to move the police department. If they decided to move it, then the 4-5 academy project would be delayed

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further while they renovated an existing facility or built a new facility for the police. With no plans and no funds currently allocated for a new police station, it would take years for CSD to build on the site.

With regard to the size of the site, it is larger if you include the soccer field and pool area in the total calculation. It is extremely doubtful that the City of Decatur's Active Living Department would want to turn this space over to the City Schools of Decatur. Outdoor recreation space is very limited in Decatur and highly prized by our recreation department. It is also used by the Decatur Housing Authority and for City of Decatur sponsored cultural events. If we did not get the soccer field and pool area then the size of the site is smaller than the 5th Avenue site and CSD would be forced to develop the project at the lowest point on the property.

This brings up the biggest obstacle against developing the Beacon Hill site. The property is located at one of the lowest points in the City and floods frequently. The area of flooding is clearly identified on the City's most recently published Flood Plan map. In addition to flooding the water table in this area is extremely high. Last week a geotechnical firm was boring test holes on the Housing Authority site and hit water 6' below the surface. Our own testing work during the construction of the stadium and high school expansion project also revealed a high water table and we had to incorporate numerous and expensive construction methods to ensure a water tight building. Finally, the City has plans to install two large storm water pipes across the soccer field and Beacon Hill site. Should we procure this land from the City for our school, CSD will be forced to complete the City's proposed storm water plan as part of our project. This could add another \$500k to \$750k to the cost of our project.

There is no way for the City Schools of Decatur to procure and develop the Beacon Hill property in a timely manner. It would take years to work through the process of the planning, the necessary approvals and finally relocating City services. Should all of this actually be possible, with the storm water improvements that would be imposed by the City, CSD would have to pay more to develop a project on this site than they would at the proposed 5th Avenue site.

