

*dekalb***STRONG**

CITYHOOD IS NOT THE SOLUTION

In November, voters in this area will have the chance to vote on whether or not to create a new layer of government to administer a handful of municipal services.

The vast majority of the services that residents use will continue to be provided by DeKalb County, including, but not limited to: schools, sanitation, water and sewer, fire/EMS, libraries, elections, courts, jails, the animal shelter, family and children's services, and senior affairs.

The cost of having a new layer of government is considerable. According to the projections of the Carl Vinson Institute Feasibility Study, the additional administrative costs would be nearly \$6.5 million dollars annually, siphoning off 18% of the tax dollars we pay for these services for new overhead.

And these expenses tend to grow. The tax bills in cities have gone up considerably; in Brookhaven, city taxes have gone up 26% in the two short years since the city was formed. When adding in other revenue, including new fees and fines, the budget of Brookhaven for 2015 is almost double what the original study for the city predicted.

There is very little data that these additional expenses result in better services. City police forces lack many resources, such as helicopters, bomb squads, domestic violence specialists, and K-9 units. A 2012 study in Dunwoody found that the small police force there was 'often overwhelmed', and that 25% of calls were not getting timely responses. Dunwoody police statistics, available online, show that property crimes are up 30% since the first full year of their department in 2010. In 2014, only 10% of burglaries and 14% of motor vehicle thefts were solved.

Parks could also suffer. Many of the parks heavily used by residents of this area, such as Mason Mill and Medlock, were left out of the city boundaries and would no longer be supported by our tax dollars. Friends of the Parks groups would lose the support of Park Pride. And perhaps most importantly, the feasibility study has so little room in its budget that there would not be the resources to acquire new parks--the addition of the 21-acre Briarlake Forest alone reduces the 'surplus' of the city by 15%.

A big issue for many citizens, considering the consistent bad news about corruption in DeKalb County, is concerns about corruption in government. Unfortunately, the experiences of other cities have shown that city politicians are not immune from the problems that have plagued the county government. Adding more government positions increases the opportunities for cronyism and corruption. The charter of LaVista Hills has no provisions for an independent ethics board to oversee city politicians.

The proposed city of Lavista Hills was introduced through a broken and dysfunctional process, and would add an additional layer of government which would inevitably cost its citizens more in tax dollars to implement without offering them better services.

Although DeKalb County government has its share of problems, we are beginning to make real progress in addressing them. The removal and resignation of corrupt government officials, in addition to the revised purchasing policies and independent internal audit office put in place by the reform legislation that was passed by the legislature this year, will have a significant impact. These changes are in progress, but it does take time. We should continue to work to improve how DeKalb County functions rather than simply implement an additional layer of government, with the cost and risk that entails.

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