

## **BROOKHAVEN ANNEXATION**

### **Larry Hoskins**

So, talking with Meg, she asked me to address a couple things, one, was why we decided to do annexation. What were the methods that we chose? And, what were the options that we explored, and what does this processing look like in terms of trying to pursue annexation.

So, let's start with the why. It really boils down to two things. One was frustration over the level of services that we were getting from DeKalb County. Some examples. For police, we had several situations where folks called the police in the middle of the night because they had a prowler in the back yard, and no one showed up. That would be really concerning to a lot of folks.

Second, we've had problems with the typical pot holes. But we also had three large sink holes that developed. And I do want to make a shout out to Jeff Rader's office because they stepped up and did a lot to try and help us get some of these services solved. But the challenge was we have to go to him every time to try to get something solved. It just didn't feel very responsive. People would make inquiries and what we would get back was no answer. And, so, it just got really frustrating after a while. Parks were the problem. When they came out to do some work after harassing them for several months, they actually tore the park up and created more problems.

And lastly Code Enforcement. We had several situations where the trees fell onto two rental properties. The homeowner didn't choose to do anything about those. We complained. We had problems with homeless and rodents in the houses and Code Enforcement took 18 months to finally resolve it, after a lot of harassment, a lot of intervention from Jeff Rader's office.

And probably the biggest thing, and this is somewhat unique to us, is the issue associated with Children's Healthcare development on the north side of North Druid Hills, and the Emory Development in Executive Park. Those are some issues that are somewhat unique to our neighborhood because they are just north of us, but a \$2.5 billion dollar investment between those two is going to create a lot of traffic and issues for our neighborhood, as people love to cut through to try to get into parts of Midtown.

So, those were two things that we were concerned about, and then, on top of it, CHOA and Emory went and annexed into Brookhaven. And, so, we lost our seat at the table that we would have had being in unincorporated DeKalb, because you have to be a resident of the City to be included in the whole zoning process. We can file a request, but they don't have to listen to us because we're not part of the City. And that's going to happen in any City that you will be part of.

So, what were the methods that we looked at? First, was the 100 percent method. This is probably the easiest to do. It's what a lot of commercial property owners do, and the benefit of

that is the speed at which you can do it. Since we had 675 properties, we knew we weren't going to be able to get 100 percent, so that wasn't going to work.

Second was, we looked at, and several politicians encouraged us, to try and pursue getting some legislation through the Georgia legislature, and let us take it to a vote. The challenge with that is, (a) they weren't real good lobbyists. We'd never done that before. And (b), there were a lot of people to influence, if you think of the size of the State legislature, and those bills change dramatically as they go through the process. So, we didn't have a guarantee that if we said we wanted to be in Vista Grove, or be in Brookhaven that the bill wouldn't get changed and we wouldn't be voting on whether we want to be in Atlanta. So, there's lots of stuff that happens. So, a lack of control in that method didn't feel real comfortable.

So, we decided to pursue the third method. And we Marjorie alluded to it a little bit. It's called the 60 percent method. The 60 percent is 60 percent of two groups—two distinct groups. One is voters, all active voters in a jurisdiction that you're trying to annex. And separately, 60 percent of the homeowners or property owners in that jurisdiction. So, you have two distinct groups. Property owners, believe it or not, probably are the easiest to get. The voters tend to be a little harder, particularly when you bring in apartment complexes, into the picture. But, the benefit of it is that you do have control over the process. You're the one driving it. Nobody else is make any changes to what you \*\*\*\*.

So, what were the options that we explored? We had three different cities that we could have been a part of. One was Atlanta. One was Brookhaven, as a result of the annexation by Emory, and third was Vista Grove. We weren't in the Vista Grove map, but we had conversations with them. They were very welcoming if we wanted to join.

So we looked through those options based on several different factors. One was, what's going to happen to the property taxes. What's going to happen to our senior exemption? What happens to our schools? What happens to Code Enforcement, roads, parks, police, and so on? Those were a lot of the factors that were challenges for us and concerns for the people in the neighborhood.

So, what was the process that we went through? Well, we looked at it. We did a survey as you guys are talking about doing. We wanted to be sure that we understood where people were starting from—what were the issues concerning some that they had. Second, we did research on all these topics that we, I listed just before. We had 18 town halls where we presented this information and encouraged people to have open dialogue about what it was they wanted after they had heard the information.

Then we reached a consensus that we wanted to go forward with Brookhaven. And we reached that consensus because of the unique factor of the zoning input because of Executive Park and CHOA. Because the folks over in Vista Grove could have given us some of the same benefits that we were looking for with Brookhaven, but they couldn't give us a seat at the table for the zoning changes that were happening in the City of Brookhaven.

So, then, we gathered lists of the voters. We gathered lists of the owners. We developed a petition. We went out, over a 9-month process, and gathered the signatures that we had to get. And then we wrote and submitted the annexation petition. And that then started about a 6week process to go through and get it approved by the Planning Commission and the city council. In total, it took 15 months, and it took probably 10 people working, my guess, is, about 4 or 5 hours a day.