

DEKALB STRONG

Marjorie Hall

So, hi everybody. Thank you so much for hosting this discussion. I think this is a wonderful thing for neighborhood associations to do to give people an opportunity to just hear all, hear the different perspectives and ask your questions.

Just as a very brief introduction so you know who I am, my name is Marjorie Hall, until last week it was Marjorie Hall Snook, so if you've seen my name before I'm the same person with a slightly less silly name now, and I grew up in this area. I went to DeKalb County schools. I have lived in what is now the Vista Grove footprint. I lived over off Fraiser Road for the past fifteen years. I'm a PTA mom in DeKalb County schools, so I'm not paid. I am not officially with the County. I am not paid with the County or contracted with the County. I am a small business owner here in Atlanta, and I just got involved in this issue several years ago because I'm very passionate about the communities of DeKalb County since it's been my home for my entire life and I want it to be the best that it can be.

DeKalb Strong formed largely in opposition to the Vista Hills movement. Anybody who doesn't know, people come with a huge range of knowledge about the history of all this I'm sure, but there was a referendum to form a city in this area back in 2015, and it was voted down, and we were a part of that campaign. So just to get the basics, I could talk about our perspective and why we oppose this for an hour which I'm not going to do. Although you're welcome to reach out to me, my email is marjoriehall@gmail.com, you can also get us through our Facebook page DeKalb Strong. Also, info@dekalbstrong is our email, so if you have any specific questions about our positions.

But to state our case very clearly what it really comes down to is you don't get something for nothing and having another layer of government is expensive, it's very expensive. It costs millions of dollars a year to have more communications people, lawyers, other facilities, clerks; there's an infrastructure even before you provide the first service, before you fill the first potholes or blow leaves in the park. There's an infrastructure for having government. It goes far beyond just what you're paying a city council and another government just for the city to exist and it ends up sucking up a huge amount of the budget in any city. It's just the cost of having an entity like that.

And just to really explain what cityhood it is, it's not a replacement for DeKalb County in that even in what are called full-service cities, all of the cities are still getting most of their municipal services from the county, so the animal shelter, the library, the health department, the sheriffs and the jail, all of that stuff is going to come from the county no matter what. It's a minority of services that come from the city, so you're paying kind of a premium in order to have a full extra level of government and seven extra politicians to administer a small number of services and our perspective is that is wasteful.

One thing that has really been – and I know that are frustrations with DeKalb County government sometimes, and I'm not going to go out there and say “no, you don't need to do anything different because our government is clearly perfect” because that has never been our perspective, all governments need a lot of maintenance whether it's a city or it's a county. The problem often when we form another level of government is you still have the issues that you have in the county (because it doesn't actually address those) and now you have them on the city level as well. And it is true that a lot of the new cities have gone on to very quickly have a lot of the same corruption problems that you have in the county and sometimes it can be a little bit harder to really police them because they fly under the radar. You don't have... There are investigative reports that are all over everything that happens in DeKalb County, and that doesn't happen quite so much when you're talking about a Clarkston or a Tucker and so sometimes it can make it a little bit harder to know what's going on with these smaller governments.

And another part of our perspective is it is very important to me as someone who loves this community, it is important for all of us that our entire community is healthy. Drawing an arbitrary boundary and saying we just should be concerned with this area and what happens outside of this boundary does not matter to us. I don't think it's the healthiest way to look at how we get our government. For one thing, some of the services, just on a practical level - Mason Mill Park, which is one of my favorite parks that I go to when I ride bikes with my kids and enjoy that beautiful trail, that is not in this footprint. So my tax dollars that go to pay for parks will no longer be able to support that park. or Arabia Mountain which is another place that I love to go.

My world encompasses... I like to say, every morning when I drop my kids to school and then go into work, I drive through four different jurisdictions. And it is important to all of us that all of them are healthy. I think that most of our problems that we have in the metro area are regional. We are looking at things like public safety and transportation and these are things best dealt with in a coordinated way and not in a piecemeal way. We have more than 70, now, separate police jurisdictions in metro Atlanta. We have multiple different 911s. So say, since Brookhaven has a private contractor who does their 911, instead of regular Dekalb, if your cell hits a tower that's in Brookhaven you get the wrong 911 and you have to go through a whole extra process of transferring back to the right 911 before they can dispatch the right person. I think that these kinds of problems are better for us to deal with in a coordinated way and not in a piecemeal way because you're broadly affected by the health of our entire community.

Two more points, the Carl Vinson Institute, which is the same institute that does studies to see whether cities are going to be feasible, whether it's even possible to support another layer of government without raising taxes. They recently did a study that said the net impact of Vista Grove was, I think it comes up to, they said \$16 million that was the net impact that it was going to take from the other services that DeKalb County provides that are outside of the scope of city services. So that will be money that would come from, from the libraries, from the animal shelter, from the other services that still we're still going to get. The county would feel the impact when you take money away from the county and you use it to fund creating another layer of government. And that number, to be fair, was overstated because they were assuming that the City of Vista Grove would take police as one of their services which is part of the original

proposal. That is not the proposal at this point in time. So it could've been that the CVI study overstated. The impact is closer to \$5-1/2, 6 million that is the net loss to county services, when you use that money to instead fund a city layer of government.

And again, I think that it is we are not only concerned with what happened just in the streets in front of our houses. We live in a much broader community and we leave the confines of the relatively arbitrary boundary everyday. So I think taking actions that have a negative impact on the county government is bad for everybody who lives in the county. Whether they're in a city or whether they're unincorporated. And just to finish, I don't want to belabor the annexation point too much, especially if we have somebody from Vista Park here who can talk to that. I just wanted to make it clear that everybody understood.

I've heard a lot of people, and I talk to people on this issue, I hear a lot of anxiety of people saying "well people are just going to come grab us, we're going to get annexed by a city whether we like it or not." And I just think that it's important that you understand that isn't the way it works. You cannot be unilaterally annexed by a city. As the Vista Park people will tell you, it takes quite a lot of effort. You have to get homeowners to sign petitioners affirmatively. It's actually a lot higher bar than the votes that are often used to create new cities than to annex into another city. You have to get 60 percent of homeowners to say that they in fact want to. There's a few different methods with a few different numbers but they're all signed, so you don't have to worry about somebody grabbing you against your will.

Annexing is something, if there's a strong sense in the neighborhood that you want to annex into a city, then start a petition drive. That's something that is a possibility, but it's unlikely to happen unless there's overwhelming support within a neighborhood. There's one neighborhood that has desperately wanted to be in Tucker ever since Tucker got created. They're in the Tucker High School District and they got left off with all these last minute map changes, and they want to be in Tucker but haven't been able to do it. Because just finding enough of the homeowners to talk to to sign a petition has proven to be a little bit more difficult than they could do. So it's a lot of work to get annexed into a city and it's not something that's going to happen unless there's a pretty strong insistence in the neighborhood.

So I'm going to go ahead and conclude right now so y'all can hear other people, but, I don't know if we're going to do a question and answer, but whether we do or not I will be around if anybody wants to talk to me directly, I'm happy to talk to people.