



## 2023 'LEAFLET' FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE LEAFMORE-CREEK PARK HILLS CIVIC ASSOCIATION, INC.

### TO ASSOCIATION MEMBERS AND RESIDENTS OF THE LEAFMORE-CREEK PARK HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD

My name is Ted Daniel, and I have had the honor of serving as the President of the Leafmore-Creek Park Hills Civic Association, Inc. ("LCPHCA") I stepped back into this role after the untimely death of Sherrod 'Pete' Patterson in August of 2021 due to COVID. This report is to provide a summary of the successes (and failures) of the work of the LCPHCA over the past few years as we worked to meet our goal of protecting and improving the quality of life of the residents in our great neighborhood and keep it the desirable place it is to live, work, raise our children, and age in place. This report will be distributed to everyone on the Association email list and the Leafmore Google Group as many of our newer residents are perhaps not aware of all the work that has (and continues) to go on 'behind the scenes' over the past several decades in furthering this mission. **This report is to inform you that the LCPHCA is your local neighborhood organization dedicated to improving your community quality of life and is deserving of your membership! The LCPHCA needs your financial support and we request that you renew your membership- or consider joining for the first time- as there is strength in numbers! You can easily sign up on the LCPHCA website at [www.leafmore-creekpark.org](http://www.leafmore-creekpark.org).**

We close with an introduction from our President-Elect Mr. Rob Holley who takes the gavel in May, 2023.

### LCPHCA MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Leafmore-Creek Park Hills Civic Association ("LCPHCA") is to research the issues that will impact our community, and participate in those actions and activities that will preserve, protect and improve the livability of the neighborhood and quality of life of all Leafmore Creek Park Hills residents.

To accomplish this mission the LCPHCA officers and representatives research community concerns and political and other issues, coordinate with other area civic and neighborhood associations when appropriate, attend meetings with county, city, state and federal officials, and use due diligence to determine if proposed governmental policies, development projects, and land use and zoning applications will positively or negatively impact the neighborhood. The LCPHCA Board of Directors will hold regular, announced meetings with the members to inform the members of current issues and proposals that could impact their quality of life and property values. The LCPHCA will make decisions and take action with the consent from, and on behalf of, the members that are consistent with this mission.

Long time resident Reid Mallard summed it up best; "The members and officers of our Civic Association spend many, many hours, month after month, working in the interest of our neighborhood and the surrounding area on issues that simply don't make it to the public forum: challenging zoning changes that might affect the residential quality of our neighborhood; challenging limits of surrounding development and infill within the neighborhood; working in cooperation with other neighborhoods and civic associations to advocate for improvement of the surrounding area; supporting the beautification and distinction of the neighborhood particularly around the entrances; attending county meetings and meeting with officials to petition for the interests of the neighborhood... A healthy and large Civic Association not only supports the current functioning and future possibilities of the neighborhood, but it shows county officials the strong investment and commitment we neighbors have in our neighborhood".

## IN THE BEGINNING

For thousands of years tribes of indigenous Indians inhabited what became the colony of Georgia, and they left behind archeological evidence throughout the state. The area that became DeKalb County was ceded to the State of Georgia by the Lower Creek Nation of Indians in 1821, and DeKalb was officially created in 1822 and Decatur was designated as the county seat.

With three railroads and the resulting growth the Georgia Legislature decided to make what became known as Atlanta as the county seat, so it created Fulton County from the western portion of DeKalb County. For many years Moreland Avenue was known as County Line Road.

The availability of water from the creek now known as Burnt Fork Creek from its confluence with the South Prong (later Fork) of Peachtree Creek north to the creek's source just below present day Tucker (earlier known as Browning Court House) made the area ideal for settlement, and the rich soils on both sides of the creek were particularly well suited for farming. A portion of the road later known as LaVista Road linked many of these farms located along the west bank of the Burnt Fork Creek corridor. Oak Grove Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1836 and was one of the first churches established in the area that still informally bears its name. Area landowners in 1860 included the Kitteridge, Cash, Chewning, Jolley, Dobbs, and Mason families.

In July 1864, the availability of water from Burnt Fork Creek, South Prong of Peachtree Creek, and other nearby creeks for soldiers and animals alike caused both the Confederate and Federal armies to march through or pause or bivouac in the area between Browning Court House (Tucker) on the north and present day North Decatur Road on the south. Part of the Federal Army of the Tennessee commanded by General McPherson (forming the left wing of General Sherman's army) passed through, and camped in, the Oak Grove area on its march to Decatur via present day LaVista Road, Montreal Road, and Lawrenceville Highway (nee Road) to cut and destroy the Georgia Railroad line in and east of Decatur to Stone Mountain to eliminate a crucial Confederate supply line from Augusta and thereby isolate Atlanta from the east. To do this, General McPherson had to outflank Confederate entrenchments initially manned by General Wheeler's dismounted cavalry attached to General Hood's Confederate Army of Tennessee at Decatur and East Atlanta. There, the decisive engagements of the Battle of Atlanta occurred (and General McPherson was killed). The grading of the right of way for the East Expressway (later designated Interstate 20) in East Atlanta and DeKalb County in the mid-1950s uncovered numerous Confederate and Federal relics from these battles.

In 1870, five years after the end of the War Between the States, the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church was established on what is now LaVista Road by freed slaves, including members of the Nelms and Stokes families, who farmed land in the area they obtained from their former owners.

Some decedents of the Nelms and Stokes families still own property and reside in the Mount Zion community. Area residents used a wagon trail (later called Cash Road and still later LaVista Drive) that ran by the present-day Leafmore Club and along the northern edge of the River Oak extension development to cross Burnt Fork Creek [and, after 1892, under a trestle of the Georgia Carolina & Northern Railway ("GC&N")] at a shallow ford to travel by horse and wagon to and from the former Georgia Railroad Augusta-Atlanta mainline at present day Scottdale.

Railroads were the main driver of economic growth, and the GC&N (the predecessor of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and the "S" in today's CSX system) purchased the right of way to build the railroad that runs beside our neighborhood. In recognition of Seaboard's crucial role in the development of northeast DeKalb County, we have adopted a modified version of its famous "Through the Heart of the South" medallion logo as one of our civic association symbols, and it appears above this letter.

After the Civil War, DeKalb grew to become a major agricultural and dairy county to the point that at one time DeKalb was thought to be the largest dairy producing county east of the Mississippi River! With the growth of Atlanta this began to change. As former resident Bob Berry described it, "In 1950 there were 100,000 cows in DeKalb and 10,000 residents. By 1960 those numbers had switched". Leafmore was a reflection of that as dairy farms gave way to subdivision development starting in the 1950s.

Burnt Fork Creek became the site of the first water treatment facility in DeKalb, and the remains of that plant are a local attraction within Mason Mill Park with the remaining structures decorated with 'urban art' graffiti.

For those interested in more details on local history, please visit the Leafmore website and read the extensive History of Leafmore as written by former LCPHCA President 'Pete' Patterson.

### **HISTORY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE LCPHCA**

The precursor to the LCPHCA was the group of Leafmore residents that organized, designed and arranged funding for the swim and tennis club on Altamont Drive in 1961-1962. Within a few years it was determined that the club also needed a group that was more involved in local and county politics, land use and zoning, traffic and safety issues, and environmental concerns. It became apparent that two distinctly different organizations were operating under the club's auspices: the club was an organization with social events and facilities promoting health and fitness through physical activities. The sub-group that became the Civic Association was more focused on political and developmental concerns, and the two groups separated into the two organizations we have today.

The LCPHCA has led the way on a number of issues that would threaten our quality of life and property values.

**STONE MOUNTAIN FREEWAY-** The first major battle was opposing the route for the Stone Mountain Freeway in 1967. As a circa 1967 map delineates, the design and routing of the SMF would have taken the limited-access road just south of and parallel to North Druid Hills Road and ominously just a stone's throw from our Spring Creek Road entrance before it turned southwest paralleling the Seaboard Air Line Railroad through the old Decatur Water Works and Reservoir before crossing Clairmont Road at the current railroad bridge. Without question, the proposed highway and its ancillary interchanges, had they been built as originally proposed and designed, and then widened in the 1980's, would have irreparably harmed our neighborhood and the surrounding areas.

Concerned about the adverse effect that the extended SMF would have had on our neighborhood, your Civic Association -- joined and supported by a number of other in-town neighborhood groups and campaigns -- opposed this routing, and luckily, it never got past the planning stage (as it did in the Poncey-Highlands, Inman Park, and Candler Park neighborhoods, where the Highway Department tore down homes, businesses, and churches and remained a center of controversy and litigation for almost 30 years).

A strong civic association was vital in 1967 to -- and did -- protect, sustain, and improve the livability of our neighborhood and in 55 years this has not changed. Indeed, our civic association remains just as vital and necessary today as it was in 1967 to address the challenges posed and presented by future highway construction, road widening, infill, zoning and other county ordinance changes, and renewed development, as well as funding among other things; maintenance, landscaping, and improvements to our neighborhood entrances and other "common" areas.

**STOPPED MAJOR CUT-THROUGH-** The LCPHCA was involved in preventing Vista Leaf from becoming a major cut through.

**SPEED HUMPS-** The CA led the way to get the speed bumps installed in 2000 to slow the number of cut-through cars and improve pedestrian safety.

**SIDE WALK-** Worked with residents and former DeKalb Commissioner Gale Waldorf that resulted in the Oak Grove sidewalk to improve pedestrian safety, especially for school kids. The LCPHCA continues to support the construction of more sidewalks in our neighborhood and communicates with the DeKalb Board of Commissioners on the need for same.

**CONDO COMPLEXES ON LAVISTA-** In 2003, and again in 2012, developers were assembling single family properties along Lavista Road in the Nalley Circle area. They planned to rezone the property and build 4-5 story condominium buildings that would back up to the Leafmore homes on Knollwood Terrace. The LCPHCA coordinated with other area civic associations and neighborhood groups, and organized large turnouts by area homeowners who were united in opposing this project. This led to a vote for denial of the 2003 rezoning application at the Community Council, Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners (BOC) meetings. After the BOC rejected the developer's rezoning application, the developers took the BOC to court where the BOC's decision was upheld in 2005. A later attempt to rezone these lots for condos in 2012 was also successfully opposed by a large coalition of neighborhood groups. Finally in 2016 a developer was willing to redevelop these properties with homes that were more compatible with Leafmore. The civic association negotiated with the builder on many site conditions, and eventually these properties were redeveloped at much lower density and height by building 12 single family detached homes. This proposed rezoning application was supported by the LCPHCA and received BOC approval in 2017.

**DRIVING RANGE-** There were four separate attempts in the last 30 years to turn the driving range on North Druid Hills Road into a large apartment complex or a football stadium. This site had many inherent problems related to slag deposits from the defunct steel foundry that was located by the railroad, improperly packed fill dirt, the high water table and flooding on the site, and the difficulties of protecting the stream. The Association held countless meetings with county officials over the years regarding development on this site. Despite our best efforts, a redevelopment proposal was ultimately approved. However, the number of units was substantially reduced, a permanent green space of the 4+ acres on the north side of Burnt Fork Creek was preserved in perpetuity, and stream bank protection for Burnt Fork Creek was also included in the site design.

TEARDOWN AND INFILL was the hot development topic during the real estate boom years of the past 20 years. This occurs when a developer purchases a residence- usually an original older home- demolishes it and builds a much larger home(s) in its place. In Leafmore and surrounding communities this involved tearing down a one story house and replacing it with a 3-4 story home on a larger footprint with a drive-in basement and a raised first floor elevation. The problem at the time was that the county regulations regarding infill homes specified that they could not be higher than 35' from the mean grade to the mid-point of the attic. Builders routinely worked around this limitation by bringing in fill dirt to raise the grade by several feet (frequently causing storm water run-off problems for the pre-existing homeowners next door) and they would increase the overall height with the steep sloped roofs you see on these houses. The effect was to build a new house with a larger footprint that was 40 or more feet high as measured from the ground floor 'basement' to the top of the new steeply pitched roof. Such huge houses not only caused problems by increasing storm water run-off, they also block sunlight and the movement of air. Original homeowners living adjacent to one of these mansions were faced with being next door to a major construction site during the building of the new house, and a decline in their homes property value since the new houses were not compatible in size, style, age or price with the original homes.

The first instance of teardown and infill in Leafmore occurred on Montevallo Circle in 2004. Your Civic Association researched the problem and came up with a solution: draft an ordinance amendment to the county code for the county Board of Commissioners ("BOC") to approve a Leafmore Overlay District. This ordinance would only apply to houses within Leafmore-Creek Park Hills, and would require new construction (and major renovations of homes) in Leafmore be limited to a height of 28 feet as measured from the front door threshold of the original house to the roofline on top of the new house. Another way to express this is '2 stories are fine, 3+ stories are too much' in an area of one and two story homes. (New mini-mansions under construction or already built were grandfathered.) The LCPHCA held a series of meetings in the Fall of 2004 with residents to explain this height limitation proposal, and then distributed ballots to every home and asked for each household to vote on whether they approved or disapproved of this proposal. The LCPHCA board required that a 2/3 super majority was necessary before we could present our ordinance for a Residential Overlay District (RIOD) to the BOC. The vote came back with over 72% of the voting households in favor of the Leafmore Overlay District. After going through the process of presenting our ordinance to the Community Council, Planning Commission, and the BOC, the Leafmore Overlay District was approved by the BOC in the Fall of 2005. This effort resulted in a sense of predictability for current and future residents, and the concern that a buyer purchasing a Leafmore home will never have to worry about a mini-mansion being constructed next door. Since the approval of the Leafmore RIOD by the BOC, there have been several houses built or renovated within the guidelines of the Leafmore Overlay District that fit in beautifully with the pre-existing homes. Anecdotal comments from many real estate professionals have been positive about this as a good selling point for prospective buyers.

The Leafmore Overlay District was so attractive to other neighborhoods that were also having problems with teardown and infill; that over the next two years 25(!) other area neighborhoods applied for and received BOC approval of their own Overlay Districts based on the Leafmore height rules. The BOC ended up spending so much time having to vet and approve the new overlay districts, that in 2007 the BOC amended their own countywide height rules so that all infill homes could not be higher than 32' as measured by the Leafmore standards. Today, the Leafmore 28' rule remains in effect for our neighborhood and those neighborhoods that had their own RIODs approved.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE- LCPHCA has been invited to participate in large geographical area studies that have focused on defining guidelines for long term planning to ensure compatible future growth.

This included a 6 month study in 2009-2010 of the North Druid Hills corridor from Buford Hwy. to the driving range. Within this corridor are sites where developers were applying to get approval for higher rising office buildings and higher density apartments and condos. In some locations such height and density are appropriate, but not in others. For example: in 2008 the owner of the Williamsburg complex applied for a zoning change that would allow tearing down their older apartment complex (that averaged 11 units per acre), and rebuilding with up to 60(!) units per acre. This rezoning was administratively approved a year later by the county Planning and Development Department -- over our written and stated objections -- and 60 units per acre became the allowed density on the property. Fortunately, in 2009 DeKalb Commissioner Jeff Rader was able to fund a study of the NDH corridor and we were at the table. We convinced the other participants to support lowering the allowable density in Williamsburg (and nearby Toco Hills) to 24 units per acre. These density limits continue to be challenged by builders. In Williamsburg the rebuilding of apartments mixed with single family homes is underway.

#### INSTITUTIONAL SIGN ORDINANCE

In 2009, a neighborhood church decided to replace their old manually lettered sign with a digital sign that could be remotely programmed from the inside office, and would have the capacity to display multiple announcements. To accomplish this under the county code at the time, the church had to apply to have the property rezoned from residential to commercial. This would create a potential problem if and when the church ever decided to close its doors or relocate elsewhere. The church would leave behind a 5 acre commercially zoned tract that is contiguous to a number of Leafmore homes. This property could then be redeveloped as a shopping area or any other commercially allowed development. Any commercial development would not be compatible with the existing homes, and would have caused a decline in property values and quality of life for those residents.

The LCPHCA appeared before the BOC and pointed out the problems this rezoning could create if the church ever moved. We recommended that the BOC consider a change to the county's sign ordinance so that other churches across DeKalb County could replace their old manual signs with digital signs without requiring that their properties be rezoned as commercial. This recommendation resonated with the BOC as several of the commission members had churches in their districts that were contemplating sign improvements and they were hearing concerns from neighborhood residents who lived adjacent to the churches. The BOC deferred the local church rezoning application while they worked on finding a solution. The BOC ultimately adopted a new sign ordinance amendment so that church and school properties would not have to be rezoned to commercial use just to have a digital sign.

#### SPRING CREEK PATH ACCESS

We attended many county meetings to determine the route and funding for the PATH extension on the Mason Mill Park Master Plan that takes you from the Spring Creek entrance into Mason Mill Park where it ties into the existing path network. Today the boardwalk section through the wetland is one of the most expensive such walkways that has been built for public use in DeKalb, and is a popular amenity that allows easy access for pedestrians and cyclists to trail access without having to travel around on North Druid Hills Rd to the parking lot by the tennis center/playground area. Needless to say this PATH spur is used by hundreds of people every day! We continue to support the county buying the small parcel on the other side of Burnt Fork Creek on NDH for additional parking, but so far without success.

## OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ACTIVITIES AND HOW WE SPEND MEMBERSHIP DUES

The LCPHCA hosts regular meetings of the Board of Directors and the members. (COVID has limited public gatherings but we are getting back on track.) In our members meetings regular updates by Leafmore real estate professionals on home values and prices in Leafmore are always of great interest to homeowners. We also invite elected officials to attend association members meetings and already have commitments from our newly elected District 2 Commissioner Michele Long Spears to appear later this year, as well as from State Senator Elena Parent and the new precinct commander for the DeKalb PD. We will invite other speakers who have stories and information that would be relevant to our owners.

The LCPHCA is involved in coordinating and staffing candidate's fairs, and your dues allow LCPHCA to contribute to the campaigns of candidates who support protecting established neighborhoods.

The LCPHCA has supported efforts to add to the county's green space and parks in our area of DeKalb County. Frazier-Rowe Park is a wonderful example that gives Leafmore residents on the north side of the neighborhood a destination where they can enjoy nature. This park has grown from 6 to over 10 acres as other adjacent properties became available and were acquired with DeKalb bond funds. The park now has a trail network over a mile in length, a kids playground area, and a pavilion that residents can reserve and use for birthdays and other events.

LCPHCA has worked with other neighborhoods to provide volunteers and funding for the maintenance of the Carey Hansard Park privately owned property on the corner of Lavista and Clairmont Roads. This 2+ acre parcel provides an effective buffer between Leafmore homes and the traffic congestion at this intersection. This is a unique park that was purchased by private donations and loans in the 1990s. If they had not done so, old records indicate that a commercial redevelopment for a large 24 hour gas station was in the works!

Your dues allow the LCPHCA to pay for the ongoing landscape maintenance at the entrances to the neighborhood, Santa's annual visit, social gatherings with members and elected officials, and having a 'war chest' fund for hiring land use attorneys, engineers, hydrologists and other experts from time to time as needed- fortunately this is not often. In the past your dues have paid for the sign toppers on all the stop signs in Leafmore to better define and identify our neighborhood, supported the Oak Groove Festival (until COVID ended large public gatherings), and the Embrace Our Green Space Race to support local parks. The monthly 'cash burn' runs to almost \$500/month, so your financial support is essential to the ongoing work of the Association!

## PLEASE JOIN THE CIVIC ASSOCIATION!

This is a brief summary of the LCPHCA story. The Association has served, and continues to serve, in an important role by being the neighborhood's officially recognized representative that is solely dedicated to preserving, protecting and improving the quality of life and livability that makes Leafmore such a great place to live! You can join online at [www.leafmore-creelpark.org](http://www.leafmore-creelpark.org). Thank you for your support!

Lastly, we close this newsletter with a note from **LCPHCA President-Elect Mr. Rob Holley** who is well known throughout the neighborhood and is well-connected with many DeKalb County officials. Here's Rob's introduction in his own words:

As the incoming president of the Leafmore Civic Association, I would like to introduce myself.

My name is Rob Holley. I have lived nearly my whole life in Leafmore. My parents built our family home in 1958 on Spring Creek Road. My wife, Allison, and I bought the home from my parents in 1999. It remains our residence and where we raised our children.

W.D. Thomson, my elementary school, was where LA Fitness is today across from Toco Hills. My three sisters and I were on the Leafmore Dolphins Swim Team in the 1960s and 1970s. We all attended Briarcliff High School.

My parents started Holley Realty Company in 1948. My wife, Allison, and my sister, Jane and I and our associates continue to own and work as Holley Realty Team nearly 75 years later.

My involvement in the Leafmore Civic Association started in 2000 when Gib Guerin decided that I needed to take his place on the Board as traffic chairman. I am a past president of the Leafmore Creek Park Swim Club.

Our neighborhood of more than 70 years has been through some classic iterations like Garden Clubs and Bridge Clubs, Welcome Wagon, Yard of the Month, and group activities to decorate our entrances for the holidays. All of these things built the foundation of this wonderful neighborhood even though at the time we were divided between Lakeside High School and Briarcliff High School. The Civic Association, the Leafmore Swim Team and their activities were the unifying influences in those days and still are today.

My hope is that we can continue to stay connected as a community as we carry on the legacy of acceptance, fun, laughter, shared responsibility and collective achievement as a wonderful place to live and raise our families.

Thanks,

Rob Holley

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With Best Personal Regards to All Leafmore residents and LCPHCA members, and with confidence and optimism for the wonderful future of our neighborhood, I remain;

Very Truly Yours,

Troy Emory 'Ted' Daniel- President LCPHCA (Retired)

404-295-0465