



## FISCAL YEAR 2009-2010 BUDGET NARRATIVES

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### About Decatur

The City of Decatur, first chartered as a municipality by the State of Georgia in 1823, provides a full range of municipal services. These services include public safety (police and fire protection, inspections, housing codes enforcement, etc.), public works (streets and sidewalk construction and maintenance, storm drainage construction and maintenance, refuse collection, street sweeping, etc.), municipal court, parks and recreation, municipal cemetery, and community and economic development. In addition, the City owns a 280-space parking facility and a 25,000 square foot conference center.

The City of Decatur currently occupies a land area of approximately 4.25 square miles and serves an estimated population of 20,000. The City of Decatur is empowered to levy a property tax on both real and personal properties located within its boundaries.



The City of Decatur is the seat of DeKalb County, a large, urban county in the Atlanta metropolitan area. With its central location within the county and as the location of county offices and the court system, Decatur's economy is primarily a service economy. Legal, banking, medical, insurance, accounting, governmental and educational services are the mainstay of this economy. The essential nature of these services provides a solid basis for the City's economic well-being.

Downtown Decatur is surrounded by beautiful, historic neighborhoods reflecting a variety of architectural styles. New buildings, including a number of downtown residential developments, surround a vibrant retail center and a courthouse square that provides a link to the City's history. These new downtown residents have helped create a new neighborhood and contribute to the economic vitality of the downtown commercial district. Smaller neighborhood commercial centers also contribute to the sense of community and vibrancy of the neighborhoods by providing opportunities for residents to walk to a variety of shopping and dining prospects.

The tree-lined streets, strong sense of community and nationally recognized public school system continue to draw young families to the City. The City of Decatur has evolved into a vibrant small city that values its history and enjoys the sophistication and excitement of a college town along with all the benefits of living in a major metropolitan area.

## History

Decatur retains a strong connection to its history, while preparing for the future with managed growth and responsible development.

Decatur was incorporated December 10, 1823, and named after Stephen Decatur, a U.S. Naval hero. Decatur is the second oldest municipality in the Atlanta metropolitan area and the seat of DeKalb County. Decatur adjoins Atlanta's city limits six miles east of Atlanta's central business district.

The courthouse square in downtown Decatur is located on a rise of land where two Indian trails once crossed. Historically, the courthouse square served as the community gathering place. Today it continues to be the focus of festivals and special events, and serves as the heart of the community. The historic commercial district is a successful example of transit-oriented development that is surrounded by traditional historic single family neighborhoods.

## Government

The City of Decatur operates under the commission-manager form of government. There are five City Commissioners, elected in nonpartisan elections, for overlapping four-year terms. At



its organizational meeting in January of each year, the City Commission elects one of its members to be the Mayor/Chair of the City Commission. Bill Floyd has served as Mayor since 1999 and has been a member of the City Commission since 1992. At that same meeting the City Commission also elects a Mayor pro tem/Vice-Chair. Jim Baskett currently serves as Mayor pro tem. The other Commissioners are Fred Boykin, Kecia Cunningham and Mary Alice Kemp. It is the responsibility of the Mayor to preside at all meetings of the City Commission.

The Mayor has no veto power but retains the right to vote on all matters brought before the City Commission.

The City Commission appoints a professional administrator known as the City Manager who serves at its pleasure. The City Manager serves as the Chief Executive Officer & Chief Administrative Officer and is responsible for carrying out the policies and ordinances of the City Commission, for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the government and the appointment of all employees except that the appointment of department heads is subject to confirmation by the City Commission. The current City Manager, Peggy Merriss, has served as manager since May, 1993 and has been employed with the City since 1983.

## Vision

Successful organizations need to have a clear vision of where they are going and how they intend to achieve their mission.

In 2000, the City of Decatur engaged in a community-driven strategic planning process which resulted in the City of Decatur Strategic Plan 2000. The plan is a vision for the City from 2000 through 2010 that combines physical and economic planning with the social goals of the community. The plan continues to provide a framework for decision-making and guidance to the City Commission and community.

During the community input and data gathering process, the City's vision statement was developed:

***The City of Decatur will assure a high quality of life for its residents, businesses and visitors both today and in the future.***

Principles, goals and projects that support the vision were developed through a collaboration of residents, government, business and institutional leaders.

The City Commission holds a working retreat annually to reflect on past achievements, identify future goals, discuss challenges to those goals and determine the City Commission's vision for the City in the context of the overarching strategic plan.



In 2007, the City Commission's vision was articulated by the following statement:

***Decatur - a vibrant city that is clean, green, active & attractive.***

Goals in support of the statement include:

- Identify new forms of revenue to help relieve the property tax burden
- Expand streetscapes plan citywide and promote 'campus style' development throughout the City including integrated development and open spaces
- Incorporate Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) principles in new construction
- Develop a plan to maintain the City's aesthetics and overall cleanliness
- Encourage affordability in housing and retail markets
- Support existing and future arts and cultural facilities

- Consider the aging population in future planning efforts
- Create opportunities for active and healthy living

The City Commission envisions the City of Decatur of the future as a regional destination with design-oriented development within a community that is attractive, clean and environmentally sound and fiscally responsible. Cultural opportunities including public art will abound and be enjoyed by a diverse population. Citizens will be able to travel throughout the City using a variety of transportation modes including public and private motorized and non-motorized wheeled vehicles and by foot. Travel paths, including roads and sidewalks, will be maintained for safety and cleanliness. All persons in the community will experience a feeling of safety.



## Sustainability

Sustainability is often defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In an effort to ensure the long-term vitality of the community, the City Commission and staff strive to incorporate the principles of sustainability as they develop and implement public policy. The department overviews provide specific examples of how departments are taking steps to support sustainability in the areas of the environment, economy, civic organization and social equity.

The Athenian Oath was recited by the citizens of Athens, Greece over 2,000 years ago. It continues to represent the ideals embraced by elected officials and City of Decatur employees who share the goal of making the City a better place for current and future citizens.

### *The Athenian Oath*

***We will never bring disgrace on this our City by an act of dishonesty or cowardice. We will fight for the ideals and Sacred Things of the City both alone and with many. We will revere and obey the City's laws, and will do our best to incite a like reverence and respect in those above us who are prone to annul them or set them at naught. We will strive increasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty. Thus in all these ways we will transmit this City, not only not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.***

## Performance Measures

In addition to developing and following a vision, a successful organization needs to know how well it is doing towards achieving the vision. As a result, the City has developed quantifiable measures for determining how efficiently and effectively the City is meeting its goals. Over the next fiscal year, the City will continue its participation in the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) Comparative Performance Measurement Program which provides performance measures in 15 service areas for the City to use to evaluate existing services, to benchmark results with other communities and exchange best practices within a consortium of participating jurisdictions, including a consortium of Metro Atlanta communities. Additional information on the quality of services provided by the City is gauged through a biennial citizen survey.

The City conducted a citizen survey in March and April 2008 to gauge citizens' satisfaction with the community and local government services. This was the City's second citizen survey. The full report can be found on the city's website at [www.decaturga.com](http://www.decaturga.com). A third citizen survey will be administered in FY 2009-2010.

## Budget

The annual budget serves as the foundation for the City's financial planning and control. All agencies of the City are required to submit departmental budget requests by the first week of March. These requests are the starting point for developing the proposed budget. Once the requests are submitted, the department heads meet to review the requests collectively.



The proposed budget is presented to the City Commission on the third Monday in May. The operating budget includes the proposed expenditures and the means for

financing them. The City publishes a summary of the proposed budget in the official legal organ, makes copies available to the residents of the City and posts the proposed budget on the City's website. Public hearings on the proposed budget are held during the month of June. The budget is then legally enacted through passage of a resolution by the City Commission normally on the third Monday in June but no later than June 30<sup>th</sup>, the close of the fiscal year.

The budget document is a written plan that provides the basis for implementing the organizations' vision and related goals. It represents the departments' best efforts at achieving the vision within an environment of competing goals and limited resources.

The following pages highlight each department's mission, functions, accomplishments and goals for the future. The department budgets include strategic linkages which identify how the

department budgets are aligned with the strategic plan. More information on the budget and the budget process can be found in the Budget Guide under Appendix B.

## **City Organization Mission**

Our mission is to work with the citizens of Decatur to meet the needs of the community while serving all with respect and integrity. We strive to do so with **Competence, Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Excellence. We Care!**

To CARE is to value:

- Honesty and integrity
- Competence and skill
- Dependability
- Respect for other people
- Commitment
- Teamwork and cooperation



# General Government Department- City Commission and City Manager's Office

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## Department Overview and Mission

Decatur has operated under a commission-manager form of government since 1920. The Charter of the City of Decatur establishes the City Commission as the governing and legislative authority of the City government.



In the commission-manager form, the elected officials are the community leaders and policy makers who establish a vision for their city, town, or county, and who hire the City Manager to carry out adopted policies and ensure that services are being equitably provided. The City Manager coordinates the work of department heads and other employees, who help ensure the smooth and efficient delivery of services.

The City Manager serves at the pleasure of the Commission and has responsibility for preparing the budget, directing day-to-day operations, hiring and firing personnel, and serving as the Commission's chief policy advisor.

The City Commission's budget includes resources that support developing goals and policy objectives as well as supporting all other volunteer boards and commissions. The City Commission budget also provides limited funding to the DeKalb History Center and the DeKalb Library System.

In addition to general management services, the City Manager's budget includes expenses related to organizational emergency management services, capital construction and legal services. Emergency management oversees the coordination of all available city resources and skills to mitigate and plan for likely catastrophic events, to reduce the probability and impact of extreme circumstances and to bring about quick restoration of city services after a disaster. A comprehensive emergency management plan has been created as a general framework to plan for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the likely hazards that face the City of Decatur. Emergency management includes coordinating our efforts with other community partners including the school system, public and private institutions, DeKalb County, the State of Georgia and the United States government.





The Deputy City Manager serves as the project manager for all capital construction projects, which are primarily funded through proceeds from the general bond issue approved by voters in 2006. Activities are described in more detail on Narrative pages 44-50.

The City Attorney reviews contracts and agreements, provides legal opinions, defends the City's interests in legal proceedings and serves as a resource for all City legal matters.

## **Accomplishments**

Accomplishments are made possible by the support of the entire City organization.

### **City Commission**

- Supported a tax equity study of the funding and cost of services provided by DeKalb County under the municipal special tax district legislation.
- Engaged the services of a third party independent community facilitator who led two community work sessions regarding development of property at 315 West Ponce de Leon Avenue.
- Provided grant funding match that allowed the City to hold a very successful "This Old House Fair" which provided educational and technical resources to owners of historic homes.
- Funded a city-wide historic resources survey.
- Established the Active Living Board and the Environmental Sustainability Board.

### **City Manager's Office**

- Named one of Georgia Trend Magazine's "2009 Best Places to Work."
- Received GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for FY 2008-2009.
- Secured grant funding to install severe weather sirens throughout the City.
- Installed and maintained AED Units in City facilities.
- Offered CPR & First Aid certification for all staff.
- Initiation of formal performance measurement metrics through the Center for Performance Measurement.
- Initiated the "Open City Hall" public engagement project on the City's website.
- Numerous capital improvement projects, including:
  - Fire Station Number 2
  - Rebuilding of Glenlake Park Pool Bathhouse
  - Sidewalks
  - Demolition of four flood-prone houses and restoration of the area as floodplain.



## Budget Summary and Priorities FY 09-10

The City Commission budget includes funding for a facilitated strategic visioning session for the City Commission and members of all volunteer Boards and Commissions.

The City Manager's Office budget includes priority funding for a third citizen satisfaction survey and for participation in the Center for Performance Measurement. The Deputy City Manager will continue to oversee the development and construction of projects included in the capital bond program. Upcoming activities also include the incorporation of electronic media strategies to increase the opportunities for information and communication exchange between the City of Decatur and its residents, business owners and visitors.

In the coming fiscal year, emergency management services will be enhanced through implementation of a severe weather warning system including CodeRed Weather Warning and the installation of four severe weather sirens, additional training and development for all response team staff and management team members through scenario planning and drills.

## Commitment to Sustainability

**Economic.** The City Manager's Office continues to engage in fiscally responsible budgeting practices.

**Community.** The City Commission participated in the third annual Georgia Rides to the Capitol bicycle awareness campaign and provided significant financial support for the preservation and protection of The Woodlands. The City Manager's Office became an inaugural member of the Decatur Agriculture Alliance.

**Environmental.** The City Commission supported an application to Atlanta Regional Commission's "Green Communities" designation, as well as provided reusable water bottles to all volunteers at the MLK, Jr. Day Service Project. The City Manager's Office served as project manager for the construction on Fire Station No. 2 as a LEED-certified building and design of Fire Station No. 1 as a LEED-certified Silver building. It also initiated an "Anti-Idling" policy for all city vehicles, and participated in the Georgia Organics Conference at Agnes Scott College.

**Organizational/Institutional.** The City Manager's Office coordinated presentations on economic, community, environmental and institutional/organizational sustainability.

# Community and Economic Development Department

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## Department Mission

To assure a high quality of life within the City of Decatur by promoting balanced growth, viable commercial districts, a strong sense of community, active citizen participation and accurate and accessible citizen communication options.

## Department Overview

The Community and Economic Development department has two distinct areas of focus. Community Development is responsible for programs related to maintaining a strong sense of community, providing accurate and accessible communication tools and providing opportunities for community interaction. Economic Development programs focus on the implementation the City's long-range plans for the redevelopment of the city's commercial districts and the recruitment and retention of retail, restaurant and service businesses. The department also includes the Active Living Division, Children and Youth Services and the Planning, Zoning and Inspections Division. Their activities are covered separately in this budget document.

**Community Development:** Quality of life programs are often cited by residents as their reason for moving to and remaining in the City of Decatur. References to the importance of these programs are included in the Strategic Plan and received high marks in the last citizen satisfaction survey. In fact, the benchmark numbers included in the citizen satisfaction survey clearly show that the City of Decatur is well ahead of its peers in citizen rankings for quality of life and sense of community. During the past year as the economic crisis grew, some might assume that fear and uncertainty would cause individuals to stay home and isolate themselves from community. Instead, we found that attendance at community events went up and the number of volunteers for community events increased. As we learned after September 11<sup>th</sup>, people find comfort in community during times of stress making our investment in quality of life programs more important than ever.



The Volunteer!Decatur program benefitted from this need to feel connected during the Spirit of Giving Season when, in spite of an increase in the number of children and senior citizens needing assistance during the holiday season and a dramatic downturn in the economy that many feared would reduce the number of citizens able to provide assistance, the program

ended up adopting out all who needed assistance two weeks earlier than in previous years. The same support was felt during the popular MLK, Jr. Weekend Service event. In 2008, a record number of 800 volunteers participated over the three-day weekend but in 2009, over 1,000 volunteers participated. Repair work was completed on the homes of 13 senior citizens and the extra volunteers enabled program organizers to complete needed yard work at an additional 17 homes.

Decatur continues to offer a full calendar of festivals and special events that help bring the community together. Many of these events are offered in partnership with the Decatur Business Association or with other local non-profit organizations like the Decatur Arts Alliance and the Community Center of South Decatur. Corporate sponsorships have become increasingly difficult to secure but event organizers are finding creative ways to raise funds, trim budgets and keep these important activities on the schedule. Holiday activities earlier this year reported record numbers of participants.

A commitment to developing an educated and connected citizenry has made the Decatur 101 program and the Decatur Focus popular and effective tools for communicating with residents and businesses in the City of Decatur. The 2009 Decatur 101 class was the largest in the program's 10 year history and we continue to have a waiting list for the class. Residents report a high satisfaction level with the Decatur Focus newsletter and value it as a communication tool.



We are always looking for ways to use new technology to improve communication tools. During 2008-2009 the City launched a test of the "Open City Hall" program providing another way to engage citizen discussion and gather opinions around a wide variety of topics. Several other

cities across the country participated in this trial program but Decatur's participation level exceeded that of the other cities. We made improvements to the City's website making it easier to navigate and completed a needed independent audit of the website that identified specific problems that will be corrected as part of a continued website update next year. We also expanded our e-newsletter capabilities and introduced a Facebook page, blog and Twitter account.

**Economic Development:** Our economic development program continued to respond to specific elements of Decatur's Strategic Plan and focused on the implementation of Decatur's various planning documents. The City's development strategy is based upon a commitment to higher density mid-rise development within clearly defined commercial districts centered on transit stations and an adherence to the tenets of Smart Growth within these districts and throughout the community:

- Higher Density Development is limited within clearly defined central business districts and districts oriented around transit .
- Mix of Uses within these commercial districts to encourage pedestrian activity and alternative transportation.
- Mix of housing types throughout the community to encourage diversity and respond to life cycle housing needs.
- Connected street networks.
- Range of transportation options.
- Protected greenspace by focusing higher density development within existing commercial districts and underutilized surface parking lots and out of single family neighborhoods.

In spite of recent controversy related to proposed redevelopment projects in the downtown commercial district, the City continues to be used as one of the few examples in metro-Atlanta for true Smart Growth. A review of important factors indicates that the City's long-term commitment to Smart Growth strategies is producing the desired results. The number of downtown residential units has increased, traffic counts on major corridors have decreased, foot traffic counts are up and the values of new developments added to the tax base and allowed the City to see a moderate increase in its tax digest when other local governments are experiencing downturns in property values.

While two additional mixed-use projects were approved for the downtown district, we anticipate that the tightening financial market will make it unlikely that we will see any construction starts in calendar year 2009. This slow-down allows us time to absorb the few remaining condominiums and focus on business retention efforts targeting existing retail and restaurant businesses. In addition, we will implement several marketing strategies targeting office tenants using the information we gathered during the Brand Articulation Study that identified Decatur's perceived strengths and weaknesses as a business center.



Our staff members continue to look for ways to improve community outreach, strengthen program offerings and actively interact with citizens as cost effectively as possible. Our staff continues to be our best asset.

## Accomplishments

- Recruited over 1,000 volunteers to participate in the MLK, Jr. Service Day project in January 2009.
- Successfully launched the Open City Hall project.

- Completed the Brand Articulation Study and the Website Audit gathering important data needed to focus marketing strategies and website updates.
- Completed Communication Plan that identifies goals for the city's communication efforts, articulates existing programs as they relate to these goals, and identifies new projects and programs needed to accomplish these goals.
- Completed first phase of website revision.
- Registered the highest number of participants for Decatur 101 for the program's 10<sup>th</sup> year.
- Completed year-long negotiations for a residential development on the 315 W. Ponce project and successfully adopted a set of interim standards to address the transitional design standards in the downtown commercial district.
- Had a net gain of one retail/restaurant business in spite of the down economy including the opening of five new restaurants in the downtown district.
- Successful relocation of the Art Institute of Atlanta and DeVry Institute into the W. Court Square building absorbing the vacancies in this downtown commercial building.
- Raised \$75,000 to fund a Cultural Arts Master Plan.
- Completed the Green Festival Brochure including a strategy to make all of our festivals and special events more environmentally sustainable.

## **Budget Summary FY 09-10**

The creation of a Tourism Bureau to access the City's hotel/motel tax provides funding for programs specifically targeted at bringing visitors to the City through this funding mechanism and reduce expenditures from the City's general fund. We have worked to find opportunities to leverage matching funds through the City's Downtown Development Authority to support specific downtown improvement projects including landscaping that will also make the area more attractive to tourists.

We propose to follow up on recommendations gathered through studies completed during the current fiscal year to upgrade the City's website which is based on five year-old architecture making it cumbersome and difficult to navigate. The goal will be to make the website more intuitive, easier to navigate and more relevant to our primary user groups. Marketing and advertising efforts have been carefully delineated to allow programs specifically designed to attract visitors to be funded through the Tourism Bureau. Special focus will be given to developing marketing and advertising projects targeted at retaining existing retail and restaurant businesses and will be jointly funded in partnership with the Decatur Downtown Development Authority.

We anticipate that 2009 will continue to be a difficult year for our existing retail and restaurant businesses and plan to give our attention to finding opportunities to support the businesses currently located here. As a cost saving measure, we eliminated plans in the current fiscal year

to complete an updated retail market analysis and will use web-based data services and internal assessments to provide our businesses with updated information on the market. Again, our primary focus this year will be to support existing businesses and help them find creative, cost effective ways to attract customers and survive the current economic downturn.

We have been testing new technology on 54 parking meters in the downtown district that allows us to better monitor how parking spaces are used, manage enforcement and collections and provide alternative payment options through the cell phone payment program. Further study is required to determine the feasibility of expanding the smart meter program.



## Budget Priorities

**Priority One: Complete the Update of the City's Website.** We completed phase one of the website update making changes in drop down menus to provide easier access to frequently used information. Phase two utilizes an independent audit of the existing site to replace outdated structure, develop a more intuitive navigation of the site and fix problems with the existing search engine.

**Priority Two: Partner with the Tourism Bureau and the Decatur Downtown Development Authority to target advertising and marketing to attract visitors, support programs to retain existing retail and restaurant businesses and maintain clean, attractive and inviting commercial districts.** The new Tourism Bureau allows us to share advertising, marketing, landscaping and decorating costs between the CED Department, the Tourism Bureau and the Decatur Downtown Development Authority and reduce the amount of funding from the City's general fund to support these activities.

**Priority Three: Develop A Community Arts Master Plan.** In recent years, a number of organizations, institutions and individuals have raised the issue of the need for expanded arts facilities within the City of Decatur. With the completion of the new performing arts facility at Decatur High School, the proposed redevelopment of the Decatur Recreation Center, the possibility of the redevelopment of the Beacon Hill complex and plans by Agnes Scott College to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the arts facilities, this is an appropriate time to undertake a comprehensive plan to coordinate all of these activities. A comprehensive arts master plan would catalog existing facilities, determine current needs for additional arts facilities and identify the appropriate partners to file those needs. This effort would be similar to the Community Athletic Facilities Master Plan that was completed five years ago. This effort



would bring together a partnership including the Agnes Scott College, the Decatur Arts Alliance, the City Schools of Decatur and local arts groups. We have received pledges of financial support for this effort as follows: Agnes Scott College \$25,000; Decatur Downtown Development Authority \$15,000, Decatur Business Association \$5,000; Decatur Beer Festival \$5,000; Decatur Arts Alliance \$5,000. We are requesting \$20,000 from the City of Decatur to allow us to issue a Request for Proposals and get this project underway. Agnes Scott received grant funding to complete a campus master plan in preparation for expanding and improving their campus arts facilities. They want to make certain that this campus effort is coordinated with a community-wide assessment to assure that their plans incorporate community arts needs and identify possible opportunities for developing joint-use facilities off of their campus.

***Priority Four: Purchase new vehicle for Parking Enforcement.*** Over the past ten years, we have relied on recycled vehicles from the City's inventory to provide equipment for parking meter coin collection, meter maintenance and to move supplies for the various festivals and special events between the warehouse and the event location. Recently we were notified that our old truck is beyond repair and no suitable vehicles exist in the remaining inventory. We are currently using an older city-owned sedan but it is not reliable and does not provide the secure storage for equipment and coins. We included a lease purchase option for a small pickup truck in our last budget but found that the availability of an all-electric vehicle option to meet our needs now exists. Therefore, we postponed our purchase to allow us to gather additional information and asked this item be moved to the next fiscal year. We propose to purchase a small, electric truck with a utility box option through a five year lease program.

## **Commitment to Sustainability**

**Economic.** We do not anticipate much activity on the development front and therefore do not anticipate any new additions to the City's tax digest. Our primary focus will be on retaining existing retail and restaurant businesses through marketing and advertising efforts targeted at growing our customer base.

**Community.** As described in our narrative, we have seen an increase in participation in special events and volunteer activities in response to the economic uncertainty in our country. We will continue to find ways to improve and expand special events, festivals and volunteer opportunities by partnering with non-profit organizations and private sector sponsors to assure that important community connection opportunities are provided.

**Environmental.** We will implement the Green Festival initiative developed during the current fiscal year and work to assure that all festivals and special events find ways to recycle and reduce waste. We will be working with local restaurants to develop a local "Sustainable Restaurant" designation for those that have a commitment to buy locally grown food, recycle cooking oil and other waste, and eliminate the use of Styrofoam containers.

**Organizational/Institutional.** We will launch the City's new Tourism Bureau to ensure that the City can access hotel/motel tax to help support a number of marketing and advertising programs.