



DeKalb County Government

Manuel J. Maloof Center
1300 Commerce Drive
Decatur, Georgia 30030

Agenda Item

File ID:2026-0550

Substitute

6/9/2026

Public Hearing: YES ☐ NO ☒

Department: Board of Commissioner - District 3

SUBJECT:

Commission District(s): To Adopt an Ordinance to Amend the Code of DeKalb County to Address Public Safety, Drifting, Unauthorized Camping and Certain Public Nuisance Behaviors.

Information Contact: Commissioner Nicole Massiah, District 3

Phone Number: 404-371-2425

PURPOSE:

There has been a noticeable increase in homelessness, and it is important to distinguish between individuals experiencing homelessness and those engaged in drifting. Additionally, consideration should be given to the impact of policies and enforcement actions in neighboring municipalities that have led to the clearing of encampments, which may be contributing to the influx into the area.

NEED/IMPACT:

To establish a clear distinction between individuals who are unhoused and those who pose a threat to public safety through drifting, harassment, or other unsafe behaviors.

FISCAL IMPACT:

While there may be minimal direct financial impact, this ordinance is expected to enhance public safety, mitigate property damage, and reduce costs associated with property maintenance, cleanup, and related services.

RECOMMENDATION:

To approve and authorize the Chief Executive Officer to execute all the necessary documents.

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA

CHAPTER 16 PERTAINING TO URBAN CAMPING, DRIFTING AND OTHER BEHAVIORS THAT INTERFERES WITH PUBLIC SAFETY AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners of DeKalb County is responsible for protecting the public health, safety, and welfare of residents and ensuring that public property, including public streets, highways, sidewalks, benches, parking lots, medians, and other publicly owned spaces, remains accessible and available for its intended public use; and

WHEREAS, the DeKalb County Commission recognizes the need to provide a balanced approach to urban camping that promotes public safety and addresses the needs of individuals experiencing being unhoused; and

WHEREAS, the County acknowledges that being unhoused is a condition that cannot be criminalized and seeks to ensure enforcement targets obstructive behaviors rather than the status of being homeless; and

WHEREAS, the Commission aims to establish clear definitions and regulations regarding urban camping on public property to promote community safety and compassion; and

WHEREAS, activities occurring on public property that block entrances, driveways, streets, alleys, or other access points may materially interfere with ingress and egress, meaning activities that obstruct or hinder the ability of individuals, businesses, or emergency services to enter or exit buildings, driveways, or other real property; and

WHEREAS, local governments across the State of Georgia, including Chatham County, have adopted regulations addressing urban camping in order to preserve public safety, maintain access to infrastructure, and ensure that public spaces remain safe and accessible for their intended use; and

NOW, THEREFORE, be it ordained by the Governing Authority of DeKalb County, Georgia, and it is hereby ordained by the authority of the same, that Chapter 16 of the Code of DeKalb County, as Revised 1988, be and the same is hereby amended as follows:

PART 1. ENACTMENT

By repealing section 16-65 in its entirety and adding a new section to read as follows:

Sec. 16-65. – Urban Camping

- a. *Definitions*. The following words, terms and phrases, when used in this section shall have the meanings ascribed to them below except where the text clearly indicates a different meaning:

Camp means to reside in or use a location for private living accommodations in a manner that obstructs public access for an extended period.

Interference with ingress and egress means engaging in activities that materially impede entry to and exit from public infrastructure.

May 26, 2026

Public park means and includes all county parks and trails, public playgrounds, public plazas & squares, attractions, and monuments.

Public property means and includes all public streets and highways, public sidewalks, public benches, public parking lots, public parks, and medians.

- b. It shall be unlawful for any person to camp in a manner which interferes with ingress and egress or obstructs public property.
- c. *Warning:* No person shall be arrested for violation of this section without having first received an oral or written warning and verbal offer of services (including, but not limited to transportation, shelter, and/or agency referral) to cease such unlawful conduct.
- d. *Exceptions;* No person shall be in violation of this section where:
 - 1. The person is sitting or lying down as a result of a medical emergency;
 - 2. The person is sitting in a wheelchair while using a sidewalk;
 - 3. The person is sitting down while attending a parade;
 - 4. The person is sitting down while patronizing an outdoor café;
 - 5. The person is sitting down while attending a performance, festival, concert, fireworks display or other special event taking place in any public park or on any street or sidewalk closed by permit for such purpose;
 - 6. The person is sitting on chairs or benches supplied by a public agency or abutting private property owner;
 - 7. The person is sitting on seats in bus zones while waiting for the bus.
- e. Prior notice will be provided a minimum of 24 hours before the removal of personal property, except where immediate safety concerns require urgent action.
- f. Before the removal of any camping sights, the local government will engage in outreach efforts to inform individuals of available services and opportunities to retrieve their belongings.

PART II. EFFECTIVE DATE

This ordinance shall become effective immediately after adoption by the Board of Commissioners and approval by the Chief Executive Officer.

PART III. SEVERABILITY

Should any section or provision of this ordinance be declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such decision shall not affect the validity of the ordinance as a whole, nor any part thereof, other than the part so declared to be invalid or unconstitutional. All ordinances or resolutions, or parts thereof, in conflict with this ordinance are repealed.

ADOPTED by the Board of Commissioners of DeKalb County, this _____ day of _____, 2026.

CHAKIRA JOHNSON

May 26, 2026

Presiding Officer
Board of Commissioners
DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED by the Chief Executive Officer of DeKalb County, this _____ day of _____, 2026.

LORRAINE COCHRAN-JOHNSON

Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

ATTEST:

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

BARBARA NORWOOD-SANDERS, CCC

Clerk to the Board of Commissioners and
Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

TERRY PHILLIPS

Interim County

May 26, 2026