



DeKalb County Government

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

Agenda Item

File #: 2025-0681

Substitute Item

5/13/2025

File Status:

Public Hearing: YES ☐ NO ☒

Department: Board of Commissioners - District 6

SUBJECT:

Commission District(s): All Commission Districts

A Resolution Requesting The Administration Reverse The Exchange Of Approximately 40.00 Acres Of Land In The County's Intrenchment Creek Park For Approximately 52.9 Acres Of Adjacent Property Formerly Owned By Blackhall, Reopen Intrenchment Creek Park, And Restore The Park's Land And Trailhead.

Information Contact: Commissioner Edward C. "Ted" Terry

Phone Number: 404-371-4909

PURPOSE:

To request the Administration reverse the exchange of approximately 40.00 acres of land in the county's Intrenchment Creek Park for approximately 52.9 acres of adjacent property formerly owned by Blackhall, reopen Intrenchment Creek Park, and restore the park's land and trailhead.

NEED/IMPACT:

Intrenchment Creek Park is a 136-acre forested park that was purchased by DeKalb County in 2003 with the assistance of a grant by the Trust for Public Land funded by the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation with the use restriction as conveyed in the deed "that it shall be used in perpetuity as park property." This park is in the larger South River Forest area that has been deemed one of the four "lungs of Atlanta" that provide the Atlanta Metro area with clean air, respite from heat, and flood mitigation, ultimately making it a vital component in ensuring DeKalb County is resilient to climate change. On October 13, 2020, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners approved Agenda Item 2020-1235 that "exchanged approximately 40.00 acres of land in the County's Intrenchment Creek Park for approximately 52.9 acres of adjacent property owned by Bouldercrest 70, LLC and Blackhall Real Estate Phase II, LLC, affiliates of Blackhall Studios (collectively "Blackhall")." This resolution requests the Administration reverse the financially disadvantaged decision to exchange the land- allowing the county to hold onto valuable land in the public's interest, reopen Intrenchment Creek Park- allowing public access to a valuable resource in DeKalb County that offers recreational opportunities and natural beauty, and redirect previously planned funds for park renovations such as hard surface trails and other infrastructure to go towards purchase of land, restoring the existing trail head, and overall park restoration.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Unknown at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

To approve the resolution and authorize the chief executive officer or her designee to execute all necessary documents.

A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE ADMINISTRATION REVERSE THE EXCHANGE OF APPROXIMATELY 40.00 ACRES OF LAND IN THE COUNTY’S INTRENCHMENT CREEK PARK FOR APPROXIMATELY 52.9 ACRES OF ADJACENT PROPERTY FORMERLY OWNED BY BLACKHALL, REOPEN INTRENCHMENT CREEK PARK, AND RESTORE THE PARK’S LAND AND TRAILHEAD.

WHEREAS, in 2003, DeKalb County purchased approximately 136-acre forest, that would later become Intrenchment Creek Park, with the assistance of a grant by the Trust for Public Land funded by the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation with the use restriction as conveyed in the deed “that it shall be used in perpetuity as park property;” and

WHEREAS, Intrenchment Creek Park is a forested park in the larger South River Forest area that has been deemed one of the four “lungs of Atlanta” that provide the Atlanta Metro area with clean air, respite from heat, and flood mitigation, ultimately making it a vital component in ensuring DeKalb County is resilient to climate change; and

WHEREAS, in 2024, DeKalb County Board of Commissioners voted to approve “A Resolution to Commit to the Transformation of the South River Forest by Adopting the Recommendations of the "Explore South River Forest" Report and Requesting For the Administration to Coordinate with the City of Atlanta and the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) to Develop a Master Plan.” This report outlines the South River Forest is an opportunity for “an expansive 3,500-acre network of connected greenspaces along the South River and its tributaries” and includes Intrenchment Creek Park; and

WHEREAS, on October 13, 2020 the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners approved Agenda Item 2020-1235 “Authorize the exchange of approximately 40.00 acres of land in the County's Intrenchment Creek Park for approximately 52.9 acres of adjacent property owned by Bouldercrest 70, LLC and Blackhall Real Estate Phase II, LLC, affiliates of Blackhall Studios (collectively "Blackhall"); and accept the donation of a number of improvements to be made by Blackhall, valued at an amount of approximately \$1,500,000.00.” The 52.9 acres of land formerly owned by Blackhall are referred to as “Tract 3”, “Tract 4”, and “Tract 5” as labeled in a “Master Plan Concept for Intrenchment Creek Park, Public Meeting #2” presentation conducted by DeKalb County Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs on May 19, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the DeKalb County Tax Assessor’s appraisal for the land indicates that the “40.00 acres of land in the County’s Intrenchment Creek Park” is appraised at \$3,136,300 and the “52.9 acres of adjacent property owned by Blackhall” is appraised at a total of \$194,700 (Track 3: \$136,300, Track 4: \$36,100, and Track 5: \$22,300). Further, an appraisal conducted in 2021 by a resident of DeKalb County appraised the “Land to Blackhall Studios” (“40.00 acres of land in the County’s Intrenchment Creek Park”) at \$2,681,000. With the included “improvements to Blackhall Studios” valued at \$261,00 the total value was \$2,942,000. The “Land to DeKalb County” (“52.9 acres of adjacent property owned by Blackhall”) was appraised at \$2,060,000 with \$0 “improvement value to DeKalb County”. This appraisal sited a “-\$882,00 value benefit to DeKalb County” in 2021. This indicates DeKalb County did not receive land of higher or equal value; and

WHEREAS, only two public meetings took place to discuss the Intrenchment Creek Park Master Plan on March 31, 2021 and May 19, 2021. Both of these meetings were virtual, extremely limited with no live questions allowed, and the exchange of land was in controversy; and

WHEREAS, Intrenchment Creek Park was closed due to “safety reasons” by an Executive Order on March 24, 2023. In July of 2023, former CEO Michael Thurmond announced a “\$1.8 million plan to reopen Intrenchment Creek Park” with the funding going towards “a pavilion, trailhead, remote control airplane runway and walking trail.” For over two years, Intrenchment Creek Park has remained closed to the public, despite reports of safety hazards being removed and several DeKalb County parks remaining open during renovations; and

WHEREAS, there is a large public interest in protecting the park as a part of the South River Forest and discouraging further development in the form of paved trails and other infrastructure that may disturb biodiversity, destroy wetlands, and cut down remaining trees;

WHEREAS, the exchange of land was a financially disadvantaged decision and by reversing it, DeKalb County will be saving money and be holding onto valuable land in the public’s interest; and

WHEREAS, Intrenchment Creek Park is a valuable public resource that has offered recreational opportunities and natural beauty for all DeKalb County residents and visitors.

NOW THEREFOR BE IT RESOLVED, that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners request the Administration reverse the exchange of approximately 40.00 acres of land in the county’s Intrenchment Creek Park for approximately 52.9 acres of adjacent property formerly owned by Blackhall.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners request the Administration open Intrenchment Creek Park for public use, therefor lifting the Executive Order issued by former Chief Executive Officer Michael Thurmond on March 24, 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners requests redirection of funds originally planned for hard surface trails through Intrenchment Creek Park go towards investment of the park by purchasing Tract 3 and overall restoration of the park, including restoring the original trail head, removing invasive species, and wetlands restoration.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 20__ by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners.

Michelle Long Spears
Presiding Officer
Board of Commissioners
DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED by the Chief Executive Officer, this _____ day of _____, 20__

Lorraine Cochran-Johnson
Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

ATTEST:

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Barbara Sanders
County Clerk
Board of Commissioners and
Chief Executive Officer

Matthew Welch
Acting County Attorney
DeKalb County, Georgia

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ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 20__ by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners.

Michelle Long Spears
Presiding Officer
Board of Commissioners
DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED by the Chief Executive Officer, this _____ day of _____, 20__

Lorraine Cochran-Johnson
Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

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APPROVED AS TO FORM:

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County Clerk
Board of Commissioners and
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Matthew Welch
Acting County Attorney
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