

**A RESOLUTION COMMITTING DEKALB COUNTY TO HELP FULFILL A TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUTH RIVER FOREST, ADOPTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE “EXPLORE SOUTH RIVER FOREST” REPORT COMMISSIONED BY THE ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION, AND REQUESTING DEKALB COUNTY CEO AND ADMINISTRATION OFFICE TO PREPARE AND DELIVER AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN BY DECEMBER 5, 2023.**

**WHEREAS**, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) has identified the South River Forest as a 3,500 acre network of connected greenspaces and forests inside I-285 in SE Atlanta and SW DeKalb County; and

**WHEREAS**, forests are vital for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, slowing the rate of climate change, preventing erosion, reducing stormwater runoff, and filtering pollutants from our water supply; and

**WHEREAS**, DeKalb County has acknowledged the importance of protecting our trees and forests lands through the Tree Ordinance, Tree Recompense Fund, and No Net Loss of Tree Policy; and

**WHEREAS**, protecting existing forestlands is a more effective solution as opposed to replanting trees due to a mature tree’s ability to capture more carbon than a young tree; and

**WHEREAS**, only 2% of land in DeKalb County is undeveloped and the need to conserve the remaining green spaces and natural resources is vital for the county’s ecosystem and public health; and

**WHEREAS**, the DeKalb County 2050 Unified Plan acknowledges the opportunities for the South River Forest as a Conservation and Open Space Character Area and declares the necessity of smart and sustainable development and land use in this area; and

**WHEREAS**, DeKalb County has already begun investment in the South River Forest with the South River Trail and has included connecting the South River Trail to Constitution Lakes in the 2021 Parks and Recreation Master Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, over the last century, the South River Forest communities, including those surrounding the Atlanta Prison Farm, became a historic “dumping ground” for landfills, correctional facilities, truckyards, and heavy industrial uses that have contributed significantly to economic disinvestment and environmental degradation, making the South River Forest one of the state’s most strategic investments to address environmental injustice; and

**WHEREAS**, DeKalb County is committed to environmental justice and repairing histories of disinvestment and damage.

**WHEREAS**, in 2021 the South River was named among America’s most endangered rivers due to it’s sewage pollution threatening the health of the environment and DeKalb County residents; and

**WHEREAS**, The City of Atlanta and DeKalb County, collaborating and together with nonprofit, community, and philanthropic partners, can repair this long history of disinvestment and environmental damage by co-investing in the greenspace and neighborhoods of the South River Forest, maximizing the quality-of-life of its residents; and

**WHEREAS**, The City of Atlanta and DeKalb County have taken steps towards this vision: participating in consent decrees and other efforts to prevent further pollution of the South River watershed; preserving

greenspace like Glen Emerald Park, Constitution Lakes Park, and the Lake Charlotte Nature Preserve; and building out infrastructure like the PATH trail along the South River; and

**WHEREAS**, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and private partners in the South River Forest, have made commitments to further economic development in the area; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County have expressed a desire to coordinate the further development, activation, management, and programming of parks within the South River Forest, including the Atlanta Prison Farm, with a new intergovernmental partnership; and,

**WHEREAS**, Much like the work taking place as part of the Chattahoochee River Lands, the transformation of the South River Forest will require a significant investment of both public funding – from local, state, federal sources -- as well as philanthropic support; and

**WHEREAS**, The proposed 2024-2028 Capital Improvements Element Plan contemplates a \$50 million public investment, and similarly sized philanthropic support, for the Chattahoochee RiverLands project; and

**WHEREAS**, Such a public and philanthropic investment will be needed to realize the vision of the South River Forest; and

**WHEREAS**, The South River Forest concept unites existing greenspaces in southwest DeKalb County and southeast Atlanta and the neighborhoods nestled around them into a distinct, definable area that protects the over 60,000 native trees which make up the forest’s canopy, restores the water quality of the South River and its tributaries, supports economic mobility of community members, and provide additional recreation and transportation options for forest communities. When implemented, the result will be a roughly 3,500-acre territory where nature is woven into the built environment, creating spaces that are unprecedented within Atlanta’s perimeter highway.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE DEKALB COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS** that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners accepts and adopts the recommendations included in the attached ARC “Explore the South River Forest,” report (<https://cdn.atlantaregional.org/wp-content/uploads/explore-south-river-forest.pdf>)

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the DeKalb County CEO and administration office is requested to prepare an implementation plan that will include, but not be limited to, strategies and cost estimates around: Land acquisition, park design and development, trail design and construction, invasive removal, reforestation, stream restoration, sewer system improvements to improve water quality, addressing storm water runoff, infrastructure improvements to watershed and sewer systems, and other conservation and restoration efforts.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the DeKalb County CEO and administration office is requested to provide a written copy of the implementation plan to the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners by December 5, 2023.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the DeKalb County CEO and administration office is requested to present the implementation plan to the Planning, Economic Development, and Community Services (PECS) Committee on December 12, 2023.