



DECATUR, ALABAMA PLANNING DIRECTOR



CITY OF DECATUR, ALABAMA

PLANNING DIRECTOR

DECATUR, ALABAMA (Population: 58,512) Located in Morgan and Limestone counties in Alabama, Decatur is nestled in the Tennessee River Valley. “The River City” boasts a rich and colorful history and serves as the county seat of Morgan County. Decatur is among one of the largest cities in Alabama and its location on the Tennessee River makes it a major transportation hub in the southeast.

Originally a river crossing for settlers west of the Appalachian Mountains, the city became known as Decatur on June 16, 1820. A few years later, in 1826, the Alabama Legislature incorporated the City of Decatur. Settlers were drawn to the community at this time by its fertile river valley soil and easy Tennessee River access to other cities. The year 1836 would prove to be a turning point in Decatur’s history, since at that time it was chosen to become the eastern terminus of the first railroad line west of the Appalachian Mountains. This new outlet provided a boost to the city’s economy and a rapid growth in population ensued. With two major outlets for industry – the Tennessee River and the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad, Decatur became an important industrial hub in Alabama.

The Civil War brought with it a host of changes to the city. Because of its railroad, Decatur was of strategic importance during the war and therefore changed hands several times as the opposing armies struggled to control the all-important railroad. By the end of the war, the city had suffered complete devastation, with all but three buildings burned to the ground.

The citizens of Decatur quickly began the task of rebuilding, and by the late 1880’s – after two yellow fever plagues further decimated the city – Decatur was again expanding. In 1886, the Decatur Land and Development Company decided to promote a new city to the southeast of Decatur called New Decatur. By 1887, the new city, now known as Albany, was incorporated. In 1927, Albany merged with Decatur to become a single city. This merger is still evidenced by the two downtown areas within the city.



During the early 1900's Decatur was a major city in Alabama, with population between 7,000 and 8,000. At that time, many new homes were constructed, and civic improvements were made as the city focused on providing a superior quality of life for its citizens. In 1919 a livery stable was renovated to become the Princess Theater and in 1929 Decatur's first traffic lights were installed. Downtown Decatur was the place to be on weekend evenings, with movies, ice cream parlors and live theater and musical performances all providing a social outlet.

The city rapidly grew into a large economic center within the Tennessee Valley and was a hub for travelers and cargo between Nashville, TN and Mobile, AL, as well as Chattanooga, TN and New Orleans, LA. Throughout the 20th century, the city experienced steady growth but was eclipsed as the regional economic center by fast-growing Huntsville during the space race. The city now finds its economy heavily based on manufacturing, mining, cargo transit, chemical and high-tech companies.

With a total area of approximately 61 square miles, Decatur's business climate is as progressive as it is diverse. It is home to industrial giants such as United Launch Alliance, GE Appliances, Nucor Steel, Daikin America, Indorama Ventures (a parent company to AlphaPet), J.M. Smucker Company, Toray, Bunge Limited, Hyosung, Ascend, 3M and Alabama Farmer's Co-Op as well as award-winning small retailers like Big Bob Gibson's Barbecue and Morgan Price Candy Company and is experiencing significant industrial expansions, retail development, and residential growth.

In addition to three historic districts and Decatur's unique shopping and dining experiences, the city is home to a thriving arts and educational community. From the state-of-the-art Alabama Center for the Arts to the heralded Princess Theatre Center for the Performing Arts, there are several areas of creative inspiration and artistic outlets. The Carnegie Visual Arts Center hosts a variety of exhibits, classes and events featuring all mediums of visual art. The Cook Museum of Natural Science, locally owned and operated, recently opened a brand new, 62,000 sq. ft. state of the art natural science museum that houses live animals, an aquarium, interactive and immersive learning experiences, and variety of educational exhibits designed to cater to all ages. The Cook Museum of Natural Science has recently been recognized by USA Today as one of the top new museums in America.



OUTDOOR/INDOOR ACTIVITIES

With over 1,275 acres of park land, Decatur offers a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational venues that will appeal to any recreational enthusiast. With fishing, water skiing, canoeing, boating and kayaking, there is always plenty to do on the water. On land, enjoy hiking, running, biking, tennis, golfing, swimming, baseball, soccer and other sports through their award-winning recreational programs.

Point Mallard Park, home to one of the first wave pools in America, features 750 acres for recreational use with year-round activities, including the J. Gilmer Blackburn Aquatic Center, Decatur Community Archery Park, Native American Indian Interpretive Walking Trails, a golf course, an indoor ice rink, hiking/biking trails by the river, sports fields and a campground. The North Alabama Birding Trail is also a great outlet for wilderness exploration and scenic relaxation. In addition, the Jack Allen Sports Complex offers a 77-acre park that hosts 30 acres of laser-graded and irrigated soccer and football fields.

The Tennessee River is also easy to explore through the Decatur Riverwalk Marina and Ingalls Harbor. This backdrop allows for a variety of festivals throughout the year to celebrate music, balloons, Dragon Boat Festival, food and fun including the Christmas Tour of Homes, Tour of Gardens, Music by the River, Movies in the Park, Alabama Jubilee Hot Air Balloon Classic and the Spirit of American celebration. Each month the Market on Bank is available for residents and visitors as well as 3rd Friday's which are both community block parties.

Additional reference to all that Decatur has to offer for outdoor entertainment is here: [Decatur Outdoors](#)



SCHOOL SYSTEM/EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Decatur Public School System includes twelve (12) elementary schools, three (3) middle schools, and two (2) newly built, state-of-the-art high schools. Decatur also has five private/parochial schools and three institutions of higher education. It is ranked 3rd in Alabama for Most Diverse School District.

Some notes about the Decatur Education System:

- Decatur is the only school system in the state north of Birmingham that offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program and is the only system in Alabama that has the IB program in middle schools.
- Several elementary schools, all middle schools, and both high schools have award-winning robotics teams.
- The Environmental Learning Center is a unique partnership between public schools and industry.
- Both high schools are consistently above the state and national averages on ACT (American College Testing) college placement exams.
- Decatur City Schools have 23 National Board-certified teachers, which puts it in the top 10 school systems in the state with the most certified teachers.
- Decatur City Schools are a national MOVE (Mobility Opportunities via Education) model site. MOVE helps children and adults with severe disabilities acquire increased independence in sitting, standing, and walking so they may experience, learn and gain mobility, better health, and enhanced personal dignity.
- Decatur City Schools was the first system in the state to have a partnership with the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

Decatur is also home to Calhoun Community College and the Alabama Center for the Arts. John C. Calhoun Community College, the largest of the two-year institutions in the Alabama College System, offers 49 associate degree programs and 52 career/certificate programs. Calhoun serves just over 9,000 students at its 110-acre Decatur campus; its Huntsville/Cummings Research Park site; at Redstone Arsenal,

RANKINGS/ACCOLADES

Decatur is attracting all kinds of attention for its low cost of living, strong economy, and quality of life. Here are some of them: [Rankings & Accolades](#)



a local military installation; and at the Limestone Correctional Facility. Nestled right next to Calhoun is the Alabama Robotic Technology Park, a state-of-the-art facility providing workforce training in automation and robotics systems and technologies.

Athens State University, in neighboring city of Athens, Alabama is the oldest consecutively operated higher education institution in the state and is the only upper-level university in Alabama. Athens State works in direct conjunction with Calhoun Community College to serve students as they transition to complete the last two years of their bachelor's degree programs. The University offers over 50 majors and 40 minors and provides online degree programs with two master's degree tracks.

The Alabama Center for the Arts is centered around a cooperative agreement between Calhoun Community College, Athens State University and the City of Decatur, whereby each institution continues to offer their respective art programs and degrees, but also work cooperatively to address the educational needs of students interested in the visual arts, and to expand opportunities and experiences in the arts for students and members of the regional community.

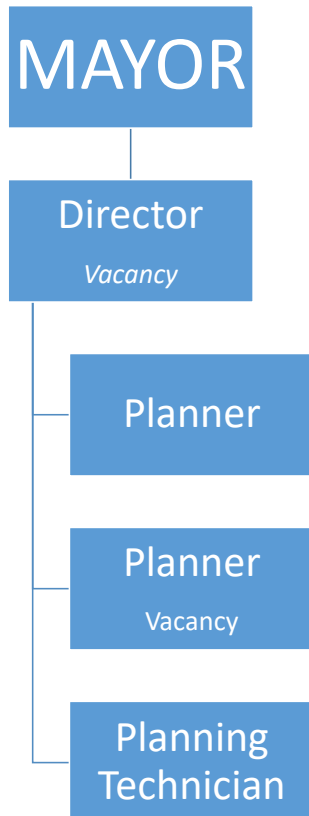
DECATUR CITY GOVERNMENT PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Since 1968, the City of Decatur has been governed by a Mayor-Council form of government. The Mayor is the Chief Executive Officer of the city and is elected by general election to a four-year term. The City Council is the legislative body and consists of five (5) members, who are elected for four-year terms. Prior to 1988, members of the city council were elected on an “at large” basis. In 1988, the city council established five (5) electoral districts at which time a “single member district” basis vote was done to fill all five places on the city council and since then, elections continue to be held on this basis quadrennially.

The City of Decatur provides a full range of services including Finance, Public Works, Community Development, Fire and Police Protection, Parks & Recreation, Sanitation services and general administrative services. Utility services are provided through a separate Municipal Utilities Board, which is a major proprietary fund included in the city’s financial statements.

Decatur is a fiscally conservative driven community placing value on keeping the financial stability of the community at the forefront of their capital planning and growth. They are a value-driven organization dedicated to responsive, respectful and courteous customer service. The general fund budget for 2024-2025 is approximately \$91 million. The city budgets for 563 FTE employees.

The Planning Department is comprised of the Director, two planners (one vacancy currently), and a Planning Technician, and serves as a key governmental agency responsible for managing and guiding the growth, development, and land use within the City of Decatur, Alabama. Its purpose is to promote sustainable, orderly, and efficient development while balancing economic, environmental, and social needs to enhance the quality of life for the City’s current and future residents. It is their goal to continue to help the city expand and grow both residentially, commercially and industrially. The 2025 operating budget for the City of Decatur’s Planning Department is \$416k.



CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PLANNING DIRECTOR

This department will provide the new director with an opportunity to build a solid reputation as a competent, thriving and visionary municipal planning department that is continuous improvement and progress focused, while guarding the sustainability of the community and its history and growth. The new director will be responsible for developing existing staff talent, as well as building the team with experienced and competent planners when filling a current vacancy.

The priority challenges including filling a Planner vacancy; the review, implantation and deployment of the City's current Zoning rewrite efforts toward modernizing the existing 70-yr old ordinance; and a review and update to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Northern Alabama is poised to have an increase in their employment base as well as their housing stock based upon the current construction of a major employer and the off shoot of other businesses. Decatur is feeling the effects of this as well as some of the challenges it will bring in the development arena.

Link to Department Website: [Decatur Planning Department](#)



CANDIDATE QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

The Mayor and City Council are seeking candidates who are strong leaders in urban planning and zoning with a proven record of providing effective leadership in a complex organization, preferably in a city, municipal organization or another level of government of similar size as Decatur. Ideal candidates will be able to drive innovation and move agendas forward in a multi-stakeholder environment.

The following factors of education, experience, leadership and management skills have been identified as *ideal* attributes for the Planning Director to possess to function effectively in the position.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

- Bachelor's degree in urban/regional planning, public administration, or other course of study related to this occupational field, or equivalent work education, experience and knowledge consistent with competency developed through formal education and training. Graduate degree is preferred and highly desired.
- Experience sufficient to thoroughly understand the work of subordinate positions to be able to answer questions and resolve problems, usually associated with ten (10) or more years' experience or service in a similar position, including prior supervisory and management experience.
- Must be proficient with computers, including Microsoft office products such as Outlook, Word, Excel and Adobe, as well as other departmental systems or software programs that may be required as part of this position. Prior experience in functional information management system implementation is highly desirable.
- Must possess a current AICP (American Institute of Certified Planners) certification and be willing to complete seven (7) hours of Continuing Education Courses (CEC's) per year and one CEC on planning every three years or have the ability to obtain certification within one year of employment.
- Ability to strategically analyze and interpret complex public policy issues and prepare comprehensive staff reports while being astute to the political environment.
- Serves as technical advisor to the Planning Commission on city planning and development matters; recommends projects and programs.
- Directs and coordinates the implementation of the city's master plan and in the coordination of public interests and with the needs of the private sector in the development and enforcement of land development policies.
- Plans, supervises, and participates in the development and updating of the City's comprehensive plan and other planning studies and special projects.
- Reviews and evaluates all proposed subdivision layouts, preliminary plans, site plans, and subdivision construction plans for compliance with the regulations, ordinances, and plan requirements; reviews and evaluates apartment site plans and other projects.
- Prepares a variety of regular and special reports; prepares planning recommendations for consideration by the Technical Review Committee, the Planning Commission, and the City Council.
- Manages major projects or particularly complex planning problems, coordinates preparation, review, and implementation of planning work with other city departments, property owners, neighborhood associations, developers, and other jurisdictions.
- Research zoning and subdivision topics; formulates zoning and subdivision policy; drafts amendments to the zoning ordinance, zoning maps, and subdivision regulations.
- Prepares and delivers reports and presentations to public officials, boards and committees, private organizations, and the general public.
- Assists in the preparation of Zoning Adjustment and Planning Commission agenda minutes and public notices.

MANAGEMENT STYLE/PERSONAL TRAITS

- Must possess unquestionable character, integrity and ethical standards in the performance of the Planning Director duties.
- A progressive, servant minded leader with a collaborative spirit who demonstrates excellent oral and written communication skills and the ability and willingness to communicate openly and transparently with a variety of elected officials from local (i.e., Mayor, City Council) to federal and state; department heads; appointed boards; employees; and the community.
- Demonstrated ability to navigate a path through various interests and demands of multiple stakeholders while maintaining a clear perspective and commitment to the overall objective.
- Exhibit a style characterized by candor, directness, tactfulness, and diplomacy, with the ability to build consensus and find common ground for discussions, agreements, and partnerships.
- A strategic thinker with ability to establish short-term and long-term planning goals and objectives, as well as the ability to develop metrics for evaluating progress and monitoring strategic priorities and challenging staff to do the same.
- Be “hands on” and excel in a team environment and maintain an open rapport with colleagues and staff members, empower and support staff while valuing the talents and accomplishments of everyone; project an “unflappable” demeanor with the ability to meet challenges and adversity through leadership.
- Possess the ability to be a self-directed achiever with the ability to conceive, communicate and carry out effective strategies for implementing broad policy and goal directives as communicated by organizational policy makers.
- Have experience in the professional development, mentoring, and leadership of a staff with varying levels of experience; understand the importance of developing new staff, providing experience and opportunities that will anchor them to the city organization and be “easily accessible” and approachable as a director.

HOW TO APPLY:

Position is open until filled with the first review of applications on January 20, 2025. The salary range for the position is \$87,523 to \$133,178 DOQ with excellent benefit package including Alabama state retirement. Residency is not required, but highly preferred and as such, relocation assistance is offered if residency is met. Interested candidates should apply online at GovHRjobs.com with a cover letter, resume, and contact information for at least five professional references. For further information, contact Senior Consultant Sarah McKee at 847-380-3240 ext. 120.

The City of Decatur is committed to compliance with the American Disabilities Act and is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Diversity and inclusion are critical to their success. They seek to recruit the most talented people from a diverse candidate pool and strongly encourage all qualified candidates to apply.

