

**2010 CEO Budget Meeting  
Montgomery Elementary School  
January 26, 2010**

The meeting was opened by the CEO, Burrell Ellis. He acknowledged the Elected Officials including former DeKalb County Commissioner Jacqueline Scott, Judge Becker and Judge Del Campo, neighborhood and civic associations, and school representatives present in the audience and welcomed all in attendance. Commissioner Stokes and the majority of the commissioners were unable to attend the meeting due to a Zoning meeting conflict. Audience members displayed signs stating their displeasure over some school district issues as well as a drawing of a “heart”.

**CEO’s Comments** –He began the meeting by telling the audience how good it was to be there with them face-to-face to talk about matters that mean the most to them, which is continued delivery of services to the citizens of DeKalb. He stated that his goal in balancing the budget is to make the citizens’ priorities the priority for DeKalb County’s Administration. “This process is only as good as you make it”, he stated. He further stated that the County is experiencing the most challenging economic times. DeKalb County is not out of money, although revenue has fallen as a result of an economic crisis unlike any the world has faced in years. He assured the audience that prior to the adoption of this budget the Administration will consider the feedback and ideas from the citizens. Adjustments will be made where needed; on February 23<sup>rd</sup> the Board of Commissioners will adopt a budget that was thoroughly scrutinized in order to deliver county services in the best way possible. The end result is to make County government more user friendly for all.

The CEO stressed that Public Safety is a priority for many and assured the audience that it is a priority to the Board of Commissioners as well. He announced the Budget Committee Meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00pm until 4:00pm and welcomed public attendance at these meetings.

*CEO: Slide presentation of DeKalb County 2010 Budget*

**Questions/Comments:**

*1. A citizen from the area asked that the CEO justify the 40% increase in the budget versus the 10% increase in population.*

**Response from the CEO:** The CEO stated that the Administration is continuing to assess where we are now in terms of budget and service. Should we be cutting more? Certainly, Judge Becker who is in attendance can speak to the impact the current cuts will have on the Court System. The CEO continued that he would like to hear from the citizens about their ideas on more cuts. The CEO stated that he is feels fairly comfortable with the budget cuts presented to the Board of Commissioners but does not feel comfortable cutting more because of the potential negative impact on the delivery of services.

**Response from Dr. Bell:** There is more to consider than the percentages pointed out would portray. Greenspace, Transportation, Library and Parks bonds were approved by the voters. From 2001 thru 2009 the debt service on the Greenspace bond (\$13+million/yr) and the General Obligation issue (\$20+ million) make up referendum approved debt service accounting for much of the increase. Additionally there was \$13.7 million in prior annual debt service (GO) before 2001. Those items are separate from population growth so it is inadequate to answer the question based solely on that comparison.

*2. Our budget is driven by property values, which are out of control. People are not blank checks.*

**Response from the CEO:** Rather than impose more taxes, County Government will always tighten our belt first.

*3. I would like to see County government reflect the same accountability as shown in the private sector. Government generally is not a good steward of tax dollars.*

**Response from the CEO:** I am setting standards high and increasing accountability. At the same time I am being careful not to decimate county services.

*4. Over Eighty percent of the Huntley Hills area residents expressed a desire to annex into a municipality. Why does the County oppose the annexation? Why is the county spending money on attorneys opposing this?*

**Response from the CEO:** Regarding the statements on annexation, "I have not taken a position on annexation, the Board of Commissioners set policy." I will have someone follow up with you regarding this issue.

*5. Dr. Lewis is having a negative impact on the school system driving out quality teachers and degrading the school system. There is a need to reasonably adjust the school system budget.*

**Response from the CEO:** Regarding the statement about the school system, "I don't have jurisdiction over the school system. County government can add value. We have added value by holding these neighborhood budget meetings, working with Crawford Lewis and passing on these comments. One prime example of adding value was the "Heart of DeKalb" summer program which was very successful teaching youth about our community (our landfill, etc.)."

*6. We appreciate help with the State regarding the swim team's ability to compete.*

**Response from the CEO:** Regarding the swim team, "I am glad I could help. I investigated and found correspondence clearing showing that the county was not responsive to the needs of the swim program. I took action. The situation was not right or fair. As a child, I was taught if you train and work hard you can succeed at anything in life. Children have a right to expect to have the opportunity to compete after training and working hard. They have a right to be at the table. Frankly, I called the State and begged. No kids should be turned away. I am sending staff to support the program now."

Final comment, "I have hired a new parks Director, Mr. Wilson. Our parks personnel have begun attending swim meets."

5. *"Be careful what you wish for..." It can take decades to recover. What we need is creative thinking. Guns, ammunition, Alcohol and Tobacco lead to increased taxes on all citizens because of crime and violence. We need to think out of the box and concierge services are a way to generate revenue. Elder and child care offered on the weekend using school buildings that are vacant could generate revenue. Using our police to do more than the usual patrols would generate revenue. We would like to have a menu of choices with their associated fees. We have plenty of police. Creatively thinking about generating revenue using fees for services makes sense these days".*

**Response from the CEO:** "I really appreciate the brainstorming and creative ideas. I'd like to point out that our new IS Director Mr. Darrell Black has created a new method for submitting comments and suggestions. It is called the comment card. It is an on-line suggestion box located at [www.dekalbcountyga.gov](http://www.dekalbcountyga.gov). Your ideas are worth consideration. However, I can see the flip side. I understand there have been more petty crimes. I am asking our Directors and employees to provide services above the ordinary service level. For example, at the landfill we are converting the methane gas and selling it as electricity to Georgia Power".

5a. *Please use school buildings to generate revenue. We appreciate you encouraging the school system. We need to take care of our parents and children. Eldercare and child care are issues.*

**Response from the CEO cont'd:** Alcohol is regulated by the State and Tobacco is a State Legislature issue. The county gets the sales tax revenue from gun purchases. If I remember right, the State regulates and the County taxes. Let me assure you we will look into these issues and ideas.

6. *A citizen from the Huntley Hills neighborhood states "Times are tough. We need balance. The school system is flawed. The school system has proposed cutting a Montessori school. The short term cost was left out of their budget. The cost to save the program is \$15,000. This is not the first time their budget has been wrong. The school system budget has completely inaccurate numbers. It is wrong to pass their budget without public input. The cut to the Montessori school is a negligible savings. Raising taxes and cutting schools is short sided, wrong and irresponsible. Please keep Dr. Lewis accountable. It will hurt the tax base and county."*

**Response from the CEO:** "I completely understand the economic impact our schools have on the County. I tell my staff and others that when you elect a CEO of the county it compares to the CEO of a multimillion dollar organization. My advice is to think of the qualifications you want in a CEO. I have talked with the president of the Chamber of Commerce about the role of the Chamber during the election process. Our Board of Commissioners must be held accountable. Their positions are significant. It causes questions concerning recent news items. So often, elections get overlooked. The elected officials have a major impact on these issues. Government must be transparent. We must all be part of the recruiting of elected officials". The CEO gave example of the day before an election, deciding who to vote for without thorough research into their platform and values. "The pool of choices is not what it was or should be.

We must do better. We must get good people, get them to run for office and share ideas. I appreciate the ideas brought to the table and will take your comments to the School Board”.

*8. I feel I must clarify; a millage rate is a tax rate. The tax is on property owners. Adjustments to fines and fees make sense. It is good to routinely compare to other jurisdictions. I feel that the cost of everything is being raised. I've been doing everything regarding my personal finances right but feel that everyone is trying to pay their bills by charging me. I can't afford the hit. Please increase police and fire protection and balance the budget. "I would like a break". Creative ideas are good.*

*I understand there are new flight patterns at PDK. I would like to see the County cut the number of flights and raise the fees and raise revenue for the county. It would be a win/win.*

*Also, we are watching what is happening at the Doraville plant site. We envision an Atlantic Station type development.*

*The city of Dunwoody wants to buy facilities. That could add some short term revenue.*

*Dunwoody seceded because citizens were feeling their pockets were being picked. Many people moved away. The mayor of Dunwoody donated his salary for the public good. So far, so good with the city.*

*I do not like the CEO's answer that he will take suggestions. It is too late in the game. It is not fair to put blame on the Board of Commissioners. Things are going OK, but there needs to be a shift in power now.*

*I would like to see answers in the budget.*

**Response from the CEO:** “I'd like to see true representatives elected, not robots. Representatives must exercise their best judgment on your behalf, not a county manager. I promised I would listen and since December 2008, I feel responsible. At this point, I am asking for feedback on the budget.

Regarding this form of government, the proposed changes are based on wrong premise. DeKalb County is not only government with a CEO. I serve in NACo (National Association of Counties) representing 3000 counties. I am running for office in NACo. The modern trend is to elect Chief Executive responsible to the people. I serve on the NACo Large Urban Caucus representing over 50 % of the U.S. population. Is Fulton County better managed?

Do you want a Commissioner who is responsible for a portion of the county responsible for contracts or someone who is not accountable for the entire county? I believe this is the best form of government. I have spoken with Charlie Bannister (Gwinnett County) and Sam Olens (Cobb County). We all have fulltime responsibilities and full time salary. I work seven days a week.

I would recommend you look at Jefferson County, Alabama. The proposal to change the form of government came from a group of Commissioners.

I have a 52 million dollar budget gap to close.

The proposed Inspector General's office will be used to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse and therefore save the County money. When I came into office there was mismanagement and corruption. We need an inspector general.

We don't want to be compared to Clayton County. Clayton is a county with massive problems. I will work with Dr. Lewis and I will continue to work to keep DeKalb competitive.

Thank you for coming. I understand you want a good School system and you want good budgeting.

Now I would like to give Judges Becker and Del Campo time to make comments. I appreciate their attendance here tonight".

**Judge Becker:** " Thank you, Mr. CEO. We appreciate the dialogue. There is a perception that the courts are a money pit but they are the third branch of government and the 1<sup>st</sup> step in the continuum of Justice. In 13 years, DeKalb has not added a single judge. Case volume has increased 24 %. Costs are \$57.00 a day for every lock up. We are efficient but the workload is increasing. These are tough times. We are signing volumes of foreclosure orders and Judge Delcampo is signing volumes of possessory notes. We must ensure justice. Justice denied wrongly is justice denied to all. Judge Del Campo and I will be available to answer any questions after the meeting. Thank you."

**Judge Del Campo:** "Thank you, Mr. CEO. It is refreshing to have a CEO who takes the time to listen to his constituents' concerns on matters that affect their lives. I commend your continued support of Public Safety; however, public safety is much more than more police officers on the street. We cannot talk about supporting public safety without also addressing the need to process those arrests. Cutting the courts is akin to funding ambulance services, and then cutting the funding for the hospitals and the doctors. In short you cannot have effective public safety without funding the Courts. In addition to the thousands of civil filings each year, the State Court of DeKalb County handles approximately 12,000 cases per year. Roughly, forty percent of those involve domestic violence and driving under the influence offenders. We must continue to have the ability prosecute those cases. While DeKalb is known for its efficient and speedy resolution of cases, we cannot continue to this level of service with the cuts that have been proposed. As the saying goes: Justice delayed is justice denied. With the proposed budget cut, we are facing cutting staff and potentially closing our DUI court program, which has been so successful and effective in combating multiple DUI offenders. Thank you for listening to our concerns".

**CEO Ellis:** Thank you Judge Becker and Del Campo and the West Nancy Creek association.

Six neighborhood budget meetings have been held and six more are scheduled.

Watch the county web page on-line for more information. We will be adjusting the budget

Thank you for staying engaged.