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ESB Email Distribution List

City of Decatur

Attn: Zoning Board of Appeals; City Manager;
Environmental Sustainability Board
509 N. McDonough St.
Decatur, GA 30031

Re: Comments on WSE Development / Weekes Street Project Stream Buffer Variance

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals, Mrs. Arnold, and Members of the Environmental Sustainability Board:

Friends of Shoal Creek (FoSC) is a coalition of neighbors in the Oakhurst and Winnona Park neighborhoods. Our coalition has formed to protect the natural and ecological resources in the Shoal Creek watershed. FoSC submits these comments on the pending variance request submitted by WSE Development for its Weekes Street Project, seeking a departure from the City's stream buffer variance protections.

FoSC supports the protection of existing green space and natural resources in the City of Decatur. We understand that the proposed variance would result in the undergrounding of an east-west segment of Shoal Creek on site, specifically, approximately 281 feet of a tributary that forms part of the headwaters to the main branch of Shoal Creek. In addition, impervious surface would encroach upon the protected buffer area of another headwaters segment of the creek. A mature tree forest canopy in buffer area would be removed, as would additional trees to the south of the creek outside of buffer area.

FoSC supports protection and restoration of the all branches of Shoal Creek. We urge the City to consider alternatives to the Weekes Street Project which would not pipe the creek or remove the existing tree cover on the project site. Many of these trees are in protected stream buffer area, and all trees on the site serve as valuable green space and habitat. We understand the City is considering creating a passive park near the project site, and we support inclusion of the east-west segment of Shoal Creek and the tree cover to the south of the creek as part of this planned greenspace.

The east-west creek segment also presents an opportunity for increasing recreational and pedestrian connectivity. We request the City consider a creekside trail not just on the north-south creek segment, but also the east-west segment. This type of trail could further connect the Commerce/S. Columbia corridor to College Avenue and points east including the MARTA station and potential PATH linkages. Off-street creekside trails and paths are safer alternatives for pedestrians given the high level of traffic in this area.

Finally, we have concerns about the lack of sufficient environmental analysis and studies that have been done to date on the proposed project. We urge the City and developer to fully study and understand the environmental implications of its actions before a final decision is made.

We thank you for your attention to our comments, and look forward to continuing to work with the City to improve the quality of life and environmental conditions in our community.

Sincerely,

Friends of Shoal Creek