

**2010 CEO Budget Meeting  
Tucker Recreation Center  
February 2, 2010**

Honey Van De Kreke of the Main Street Tucker Alliance opened the session by welcoming participants and introducing CEO Ellis. CEO Ellis greeted the audience and thanked Honey Van De Kreke for the opportunity to present the proposed 2010 budget. The CEO emphasized the budget is a policy decision that drives all other policies throughout the course of the year. Administration is very serious about having the opportunity to present the budget. The current administration is conducting budget hearings differently from the past. 2009 budget gatherings to hear from the community make government more user friendly for community and work the gatherings into citizens' schedules. There are lots of opportunities to participate in budget gatherings. (12 total across the county). CEO Ellis announced DeKalb County has a new website and encouraged citizens who cannot attend live budget presentations to visit the website.

The CEO explained the process for the evening, 30-35 minutes of the presentation of the budget and approximately 50 minutes for questions, answers and comments. Cards are available to jot down questions if they are not answered this evening.

CEO Ellis then acknowledged the elected officials present: Commissioners Elaine Boyer, Larry Johnson, Connie Stokes and Sharon Barnes Sutton.

Judge Gayle Flake Superior Court., Judge Janice Gordon DeKalb State Court, Judge Johnnie Panos, Chief Judge Nellie Withers, Recorder's Court

State Representative Kevin Lavitas - District 82. Representative Lavitas welcomed everyone. Commented CEO Ellis came to the Legislature to begin dialogue on the needs of DeKalb County. State Representative Billy Mitchell.

CEO: Slide presentation of DeKalb County 2010 Budget.

**Questions/Comments:**

1. *Beverly Parsley, citizen who serves on the DeKalb Community Service Board thanked CEO Ellis for the support provided from DeKalb County. She went on to say the Community Service Board provides premier mental health services at the level of one hundred percent compared to other Community Service Boards (CSB) across the state of Georgia. She invited all County Officials and citizens to visit the CSB programs.*

**Response from the CEO:** CEO Ellis thanked the citizen for the comments and the good work the CSB does. CEO Ellis talked with former CEO Levitan and she commented the DC budget is not a "Bare Bones Budget" but a "Scrape Bones Budget". DeKalb County Government made deep cuts. It would be irresponsible to cut more and be able to deliver services at the level citizens expect. We will hear from the courts where services will be directly impacted.

2. *Judge Flake, thanked CEO Ellis on behalf of the Superior Court for the opportunity to share concerns. She also thanked the CEO for the beautiful new library (Reid Cofer). Judge Flake laid out the areas that the Superior Court jurisdiction handles including felony/criminal offenses (murder, rape, child molestation etc.) and domestic matters including divorce/child custody & child support matters. The Judge believes that Superior Court has a very efficient court in DeKalb. The budget for 2010 has fewer positions than in 1998. She stated 80% of her budget is dedicated to personnel including staff, required court interpreters, etc. The proposed budget for Superior Court budget has been cut dramatically.*

*Public Safety also includes police, prosecutors, the court system and public defenders. Eighty to eighty five percent of people in jail are represented by Public Defenders. The proposed budget cuts to the court system would facilitate overcrowded jails and a back log of court dockets. If this happens, there could be an early release of prisoner or charges dismissed. DeKalb County does not need the state or federal courts supervising the overcrowded jails.*

*The CEO added the cost to house a prisoner is 54.00/day as mentioned at previous budget presentations.*

*Judge Flake talked about how Drug Court saves DeKalb County money because participants that go through the program, become employed and return revenue to DeKalb County. Victims and families should have their day in court in a timely manner. Domestic Violence and custody issues should not wait months and months. DeKalb has an efficient system in place. With the cuts proposed, the courts will not be able to keep a balanced system. These are concerns that Superior Court has. DeKalb County disposed of as many cases on an annual basis as Fulton County although Fulton County has 20 Superior Court Judges and DeKalb County has 10 Superior Court Judges.*

**Response from the CEO:** Appreciates what courts have done. What do you propose?

**Response from Judge Flake:** Judge Flake asked that Superior Court be given the authority to work with a realistic number (budget), make some adjustments in positions and operating in the line item as the court sees fit. The court can make some adjustments and they are trying to do that now. Major concern courts cannot reduce the number of Public Defenders without completely shutting down their ability to move cases through the system.

**Response from the CEO:** I understand you want to get your needs funded. How do we do this? More cuts? How do we get where we want to get to without adding to the proposed budget? How much money are we talking about? Some are talking about cutting you are talking about adding.

**Response from Judge Flake:** We are not adding to the budget but not cutting public defender attorneys.

**Response from CEO Ellis:** That is an add to the budget from what has been proposed.

**Response Judge Flake:** It is not an add in terms of what we have proposed. Government has responsibilities to Public Safety is at the top of the list and there are constitutional and legal mandates that the services must be provided.

**CEO Ellis Response:** With all due respect it is an add to the budget from what is proposed in a \$583 million budget. To get the budget to balance with no millage rate increase would be a \$553 million budget. You are saying we cut too far in courts and public Defenders Office.

**Judge Flake Response:** It is a matter of where priorities are. You can't apply same rule to courts as you do to other departments. The courts are mandated to provide services. We are a different animal.

**CEO Ellis Response:** We cannot cut and fund at the same time. Thank for comments tonight.

3. *Gretchen Richards, Spring Meadow Home Owners Association, President*

*Grants-How aggressive is DeKalb County in seeking grants? There are lots of grants available for public safety. For aiding victims of sexual and physical abuse, spousal abuse? Where are we with grants? We talk about stimulus funds but how much do grants play into the budget.*

*Foreclosures-Has DeKalb County looked at the long term impact of commercial foreclosures? Wants the county to look at how to combat foreclosures. Cited Emory Study. What we looking at and how to combat foreclosure?*

*Education-The raise the superintendant of DeKalb County Schools accepted. How come that money did not go to the Teachers Fund or schools rather than an individual?*

**Response from the CEO:** Thank you for your concern. Looking for Dale to answer some grant questions (community development). Looking for other Directors of Public Safety and Community Development. DeKalb County stacks up well maybe at the top in terms of going after grant dollars as well as other jurisdictions.

Staff: Foreclosure Chris Morris heads the Neighborhood Stabilization Program in DeKalb County. Elected Official: Connie Stokes Chair of the Foreclosure Task Force. The Officer Next Door Program was instituted in DeKalb. Program allows officers to purchase foreclosed properties which help to stabilize neighborhoods and protect neighborhoods. Foreclosure is a nationwide problem. Federal Stimulus dollars were obtained to launch the Officer Next Door program and is the 1<sup>st</sup> in the U.S. that the CEO is aware of. Foreclosure is not only a DeKalb County problem but a national problem. DeKalb County is acting responsibly and aggressively to go after monies and use it responsibly. DeKalb County was the first to implement a Foreclosure Task Force as well.

School- There is a separation of jurisdictional powers between the DeKalb County School System and CEO and BOC and County Government. Everything that is talked about today has to do with the responsible decisions that DeKalb County government must make. No member of BOC or CEO voted to give the Superintendent a raise.

4. *I have been a citizen of DeKalb for many years. My property tax increased \$400. I Retired in November hoping to live a conservative comfortable life. Are you not concerned that seniors will have to walk away from their homes even though the home is paid off because they cannot afford the taxes even though the home is paid off?*

**CEO Ellis Response:** Yes I'm very concerned and that is why I did my best to paint the picture and give a responsible budget where the county made cuts first. I am not only concerned with taxes but with the quality of service we deliver to you. We have fine programs recreation programs, senior programs, transportation and roadways. We cannot continue to cut and cut. We must strike a balance. The recession makes things complex and complicated. One thing impacts something else. One thing impacts another. As taxes go up, people already hurting have less to pay. The early retirement program is necessary to reduce spending but will put more unemployed people on the street. We are doing our best to strike a balance.

We are in a difficult and unique time tough decisions have to be made. The cuts proposed will have an impact and decisions are not being made because the people you put in government do not care.

5. *Citizen. Regarding Judge Flake's comments, there is an old adage in business. "No job is done till the paperwork is complete". The clerk of court does the paperwork. I have not seen reduction in crime, foreclosure, or divorce or anything else that warrants any dollars being taken from the courts. Services are mandated and required by law. This will cause the county more problems if the court's budget is reduced. How do we pay for services? Every service not mandated should be privatized (sanitation department). Why aren't there hard numbers on line items? I asked one of the commissioners about a budget that shows line items and he said that was a good question. Show us where money is going. Privatize non-mandated services (sanitation) and eliminate this money out of the county budget. How much is sanitation in the county budget? I would like to have an answer.*

**Response from the CEO:** When you finish, I will answer.

**Citizen:** *Will you reduce your staff to where it was when you came into office?*

**Response from CEO:** I will answer each of your questions. Services like sanitation come out of Enterprise funding through user fees. Court cuts have nothing to do with reduction of services they have delivered. Budget cuts have to do with reduction in revenue, decrease in sales and property tax numbers declined. \$83 million over last 2 years. \$53 million is being made up by budget cuts. The presentation tonight is not the budget in detail to access the full budget go to [www.dekalbcountyga.gov](http://www.dekalbcountyga.gov). Go to website to see the full budget. Send questions in online and they will be answered.

The CEO's staff has increased staff but not his budget last year. The people voted for the CEO to be hands on. You voted for accountability, make priorities of county government citizen priorities and citizens have a voice. You can agree or disagree. This is a process of engagement where the CEO listens. Budget is not about services being cut because of bad services.

**CEO Ellis Response:** Thank you for your comments I have 20 more minutes.

6. *I am a citizen who has paid DeKalb County property taxes for 36 years. I am looking for common sense and integrity in DeKalb County. An increase in taxes 10% is a mistake. Suggestions to cut costs including no pay increase for employees and if they are not happy, there are slots in the unemployment line. All departments should eliminate employees who do not do their job. Freeze all spending. Eliminate non-essential programs. Go to a four day work week and go to furlough days for all upper management employees including the CEO. DeKalb County tax payers have lost confidence in the county government. DeKalb County has to become efficient, use common sense, integrity and fairness, not higher taxes.*

**Response from the CEO:** I appreciate your constructive ideas. You talked about common sense, integrity and fairness. Let's start with integrity. I started 2009 with firing a corrupt police chief, provided new leadership in Recorder's court, leadership with integrity and doing the right thing. In all fairness, I put forward something which is budget neutral and established the office of Transparency and Accountability headed by an independent Inspector General. Regarding common sense issues, I understand we may not agree. The reason for the proposed increase in salary is that we will have a downsized workforce and employees will need better customer service training. Employees also need to be paid competitively. We eliminated spending by \$53 million from the budget, reducing by cutting deeply into spending. A four day work week is a dialogue citizens will have to have. I work 7 days a week and you elected me to work seven days a week. Don't expect the same level of service in a reduced work week. Ask the people of Atlanta about that. Furloughs mean the same thing. School system not operating up to standards because of leadership as you said. Who is Crawford Lewis' boss? Citizens elected the superintendant. School system is not controlled by DeKalb County. Four day work week, on days employees are not working, phones will not be answered.

7. *We do not need garbage trucks 4 days a week. There should be no tax increase to pay salary increases, it is not acceptable. Services were great in 2006. Roll back to 2006. Cut elite employees salary 20%. Employees who choose not to stay choose not to stay. We will have 100 applicants in line for jobs the next day.*

**Response from the CEO:** Thank you for your comments.

8. *Judge Gordon DeKalb State Court. I second everything Judge Flake said. Decrease crime, state court deals with domestic violence and domestic violence misdemeanors, injury felonies in state court. Watch program is a highly aggravated DV program and very successful. Has little recidivism. State court use staff to put the program together. Staff*

*works way beyond their job descriptions. Without staff, the program could not be run. Concerned about inmates in jail are not sent to domestic violence classes. DeKalb County jail has the "Safe Program". The money used to conduct the program was money received from a civil case. Four classes were conducted thus far. There is zero recidivism and it does not cost the county a penny. We cannot do the program without the staff. We are doing things the CEO does not know about. Do not cut state court to bare minimum staff.*

**Response from the CEO:** I applaud you for the work you are doing and the ways to deliver the service at no cost to the county. How would you feel if we could come up with ways that we do not cut staff?

**Judge Gordon Response:** *We deliver services at no cost to the county. Do not cut staff. I am 100% with the CEO. Suggestions to increase revenue is increase library fines, don't give 1% raise, give jurors the option to check they do not want the \$15.00 for jury duty on the jury duty form and let the county keep the money. Mandate furlough days. It's the little things that do make a difference.*

9. *Thank you for the information it is helpful. I am a DeKalb County tax payer and resident. On page four of your proposed budget I see 419 million to 670 million 2009 which is a 20% increase in revenue over the last 8 years. We have more money than we did 8 years ago. We need to work to make county government more efficient. On the first page of the budget with regard to developers, I do not want to see developers taxes raised. Hold the line on property taxes. "Pennywise pound foolish". Community development will go to other counties. Hold the line on taxes and make cuts, be careful to look at staff that go through the motion and think government will never get rid of them. Be very vigilant look at people who have been around too long. Build revenue and people will want to come to DeKalb.*

**Response from the CEO:** We are in an unusual economic environment. It would be wrong to say not to raise taxes at any cost. I do say a tax increase is the last resort. If there is waste in the ranks, what better way to start than at the top? If employees see leadership, they will know the expectation. Neighboring jurisdictions are raising taxes. I have looked at how we size up with personnel. We cannot continue to have the large number of employees as we do. Thank you for your comments. I appreciate it.

10. *I am a property owner and am being taxed out of my home. I understand services and how we pay for services. I understand reassessed and reappraised homes. Homeowners south of Lawrenceville Highway pay lower property taxes than homeowners north of Lawrenceville Highway. Between October of 2008 and June of 2009, DeKalb County took in over 3,000 refugees. Who pays for Metro PCS phones, the household, MARTA card, health care/services, apartments and education? This has a big impact on DeKalb County schools. Clarkston High School did not make AYP. Why are you asking us to give more money on millage rate on our taxes? Not everyone in the county is treated equal. I would love to be a refugee in DeKalb County.*

**Response from the CEO:** I am not sure how to answer the question. Please write the question down and I will do my best to get the answer.

**Citizen Response:** I asked the same question last year at the budget hearing and your response was how diverse DeKalb County was. I am still asking the question one year later.

**Citizen:** *Sign Ordinance in DeKalb County affects business owners in Tucker. Over the last six month, with any sign ordinance violation there is no warning. There is an immediate citation is issued and business owner must appear in court. This overloads the courts. I understand you must enforce the sign ordinance but to appear in court immediately is a burden on business owners who must spend a half day minimum to appear in court. Change the sign ordinance for business owners to receive a warning. This issue may need to be addressed with the commissioners because this is a waste of time for business owners.*

**Response from the CEO: Thank you for your suggestions.**

11. *I am a lifelong resident of DeKalb County and I see property taxes growing and growing.*

**CEO's response.** I am not here to convince citizens to agree to a property raise. That is not correct. I am here to present the proposed budget and respond to questions. I am not pretending to know all the answers. I want to hear from the citizens.

12. *Past property taxes. Suggestions ways to cut budget is 2 miles down the road (referring to libraries). Parks and Recreation, can we afford to keep them up. Have neighbors volunteer upkeep in the libraries. Keep emergency services and courts. Increase sales tax. There are more folks in DeKalb but less money.*

**CEO Response:** Objective is to keep EMS, courts, police, fire, public safety, courts. See what budget looks like.

13. *Citizen: Millage rate increase, which I am in favor of. I would like to study budget more.*

14. *Citizen: Fiscal responsibility and accountability. You should apologize to us for being in this situation (referring to saving up for a rainy day).*

**CEO Response:** I have been CEO for 1 year.

**Citizen Response:** *How long were you on the Board of Commissioners?*

**CEO Response:** 8 years.

**Citizen:** *Ideas to generate revenue in DeKalb County could include going after the bad guys fine them.*

15. *Regarding apartments in DeKalb County? Do apartment dwellers pay taxes?*

**CEO Response:** Apartment complex owners pay commercial property taxes which are passed on to residents who rent the apartments. Apartments do not receive HOST credit but do pay commercial property taxes.

*16. Citizen: Regarding hiring an independent chief appraiser, citizens should not have to pay for this. The millage rate increase worries me. Increase and cutting budget.*

**CEO Ellis Response:** With no millage rate increase, there would be even more severe cuts. Go back and look at millage increase. Once done, there is no turning back. Every action has an effect on something else.

*17. Citizen: DeKalb County courts' staff work hard and are dedicated. A third category is civil cases. Magistrate court cases will not be handled if Superior court cannot handle criminal cases.*

*18. Citizen: Phil Brantley a Tucker homeowner and business owner is against a millage rate increase unless we put a hold on the Tax Assessor's office. There have been 9,800 appeals due to increased taxes.*

The CEO finished answering all questions and thanked the host Honey Van De Kreke of the Tucker Neighborhood Alliance for hosting the budget presentation.