

# America in Bloom 2020 Evaluation Report



**Community:** Decatur, IL  
**Evaluation Dates:** June-July 2020

**Lead Judge:** Kristin Pategas  
**Co-Judges:** Barbara Vincentsen, Melanie Riggs

*America in Bloom envisions communities across the country as welcoming and vibrant places to live, work, and play – benefitting from colorful plants and trees; enjoying clean environments; celebrating heritage and planting pride through volunteerism.*

Seven Criteria (Codes)	Possible Points	Actual Points	Percentage
1. Community Vitality (CV)	88.00	62.00	70.45%
2. Flowers (FL)	96.00	63.00	65.62%
3. Landscaped Areas (LA)	80.00	57.00	71.25%
4. Urban Forestry (UF)	74.00	46.00	62.16%
5. Environmental Efforts (EE)	86.00	54.00	62.79%
6. Celebrating Heritage (CH)	70.00	48.00	68.57%
7. Overall Impression (OI)	80.00	54.00	67.50%
<b>Other</b>			
8. Evaluation Tour Preparation & Actions (ET)	10.00	10.00	100.00%
<b>Scoring</b>			
<b>Total Points and Percentage</b>	<b>584.00</b>	<b>394.00</b>	<b>67.46%</b>
<b>Star Rating</b>	<b>7</b>		
<b>Community Involvement Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>70.00%</b>

*Star ratings are based on overall percentage.*

1 star = 0% - 9.99%	2 stars = 10% – 10.99%	3 stars = 20% – 29.99%	4 stars = 30% – 39.99%	5 stars = 40% – 49.99%
6 stars = 50% – 59.99%	7 stars = 60% – 69.99%	8 stars = 70% - 79.99%	9 stars = 80% – 89.99%	10 stars = 90% - 100%

Community representatives to receive the Evaluation Report (three minimum)		
Name	Title	Email
Ellen Hearn	Decatur in Bloom, Chair	decaturinbloom@gmail.com
Jill Davis	Beautify Decatur, Co-Chair	Jlad4ever@gmail.com
Nicole Bateman	Decatur EDC, President	nbateman@decaturedc.com
Marvin Sowers	Beautify Decatur, Volunteer	Sowers1011@yahoo.com
Julie Moore-Wolfe	Mayor, City of Decatur	Jmoore-wolfe@decaturil.gov

### **This Evaluation Report:**

- This Evaluation Report's scoring, general observations, and general and criteria recommendations are based upon the community's efforts including its levels of participation in, or implementation of the metrics in each of the criteria.
- Future projects and programs are not scored.
- The scoring for the seven evaluation criteria is adjusted to the climate and environmental conditions of the community's location. Make sure the judges are made aware of any challenges that were faced during the year.
- Metrics are enhanced to make them more applicable to communities of all sizes and resources. All criteria have additions and/or deletions this year.
- The scores from this year and previous years are not comparable since the metrics and judges are not consistent from year to year.
- Press Control (Ctrl) and use a left mouse click simultaneously to activate Internet links included in the evaluation sections that follow. If they have become inactive, copy and paste them into your browser.

### **Metrics are noted with unique codes based on the criteria. Ratings include:**

**N/A (Not Applicable):** Communities should strive to implement all metrics; however, judges will use N/A when a metric is not scorable in a community. An N/A metric is not included in the point totals and does not affect percentages. Examples when N/A may apply in a metric: commercial/business areas do not exist; state or county statutes prevent implementation of a metric.

**Not Started:** programs or procedures are not in place.

**Launched:** programs or procedures are in place but not fully realized.

**Achieved:** programs or procedures are implemented but could be improved.

**Surpassing:** programs or procedures are well-implemented.

**Excelling:** programs or procedures are exceptional.

**NS (Not Scored):** preset in the Judges' Discretion metric's point box for when a score there is not appropriate.

**Judges' Discretion:** judges may add and score an item not in the metrics. This item must be an unusual or newly implemented project, program, or initiative that can be repeated in other communities and perhaps used as a future metric.

### **Use of this Evaluation Report:**

America in Bloom has a common goal to help make your community a better, more welcoming place to live and visit. Thank you for your understanding and patience as circumstances forced AIB to conduct evaluations differently this year. Without the benefit of seeing details and nuances in person, the judges through multiple calls and online research formulated a sense of your community. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

This Evaluation Report is useful as a tool to encourage discussion and to develop a framework for an improvement process within your community. Communities may wish to assemble a group to review the Evaluation Report. Recommendations offered are often divided by the group into categories such as:

1. Doable next year
2. Two-year time frame
3. Five-year + time frame
4. Not possible

Assigning a point person for each criterion can be a useful way to turn the evaluation into a roadmap toward community improvement. The point person should select the most doable low-scoring elements to focus on

improving them for the coming year. Then in combination with specific doable recommendations for the criteria, they can create a task list.

The key is establishing specific goals that are achievable within a year's timeframe. Holding regularly scheduled meetings where progress, accomplishments, and roadblocks are discussed helps move everyone forward. Email blasts to those that are not attending can be a tool to keep people in the loop and recruit new volunteers.

To close the cycle, be sure to keep a monthly progress chart to create a sense of accomplishment and to use for your next year's Community Profile additions.

**General Observations and Recommendations (recommendations are indicated in italics):**

Congratulations Decatur on your second grant from Canadian National Railroad (CN) and for your second year participating in the America in Bloom National Awards Program.

This was an especially challenging year for all involved in the evaluation. When you initially entered earlier this year, we all expected to visit your community in person, where you could tour us over two days through the downtown, historic sites, beautiful campuses, great recreational facilities, public art installations, and lovely landscapes. However, in March COVID-19 made its introduction and it affected everyone and everything we thought was normal.

Instead of delaying to 2021, Decatur and its team of volunteers rose to the occasion and prepared materials, assembled photos, and orchestrated numerous Zoom meetings to present the judges with a remote, yet comprehensive review of the community. The committee anticipated the judges' questions and made sure that the appropriate leader or expert was present at each meeting to provide insight and answer our questions. Follow-up information was provided in a timely manner. Decatur should write the manual on how to prepare and execute a remote tour evaluation!

Even with the Decatur team's efforts, additional Internet research, and reviewing supplied documents the judges at times were challenged to give a comparative score from the 2018 evaluation due to the inability to be on site. With those metrics, the score was either left the same as the 2018 evaluation, or the metric was given an N/A (not applicable) score. An N/A metric is not included in the point totals and does not affect the final criteria percentages.

In 1958 the Progress Day School was founded to provide education to children with disabilities. Today, Macon Resources, Inc., (MRI) not only continues providing education, but healthcare, housing, and activities for over 800 disabled infants, children, and adults in the Decatur metro area. This year's CN Grant monies were used towards the installation of Meaningful Meadows, an outdoor recreation facility to further support the needs of the developmentally disabled community at MRI. These 1.5-acre grounds include beautifully designed gardens with an emphasis on sensory plants, areas for social activities and skill developmental, exercise with a sports court, splash pad and miniature golf, and private areas for escape. Congratulations on your successful execution of a worthwhile project.

Decatur is a community of supportive, inter-connected organizations that not only serve the residents and businesses in providing beautiful public landscapes, litter-free streets and grants for enhancements, but Decatur was well prepared for this year's challenges brought on by the emergence of COVID-19. Decatur Parks District offers numerous outdoor recreational opportunities, a perfect social-distance respite for isolated families. Decatur also had in place safety nets for those experiencing economic hardships with food collections, soup kitchens, community gardens, and a prescription produce program at Crossings Healthcare and its Community Care Campus.

Decatur has much to be proud of; from its revitalized downtown, to its "Believe in Decatur" campaign, their Decatur Park and Macon County Conservation Districts, Decatur Area Arts Council, Millikin University and Richmond Community College, and Decatur's community of volunteers. We look forward to Decatur's participation in 2021 where judges can return in-person to experience its beautiful community.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristin Pategas, Barbara Vincentsen, Melanie Riggs  
America in Bloom Judges

Community Vitality (CV) Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>COMMUNITY VITALITY (CV): policies, programs, activities, and facilities that lead to a vibrant community and a sense of well-being. Includes libraries, community centers, arts/cultural museums; and parks, playgrounds, dog parks, sports fields, water activities, trails, and other outdoor recreational opportunities</b>						
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
CV.a.01 - Municipal volunteer boards are in place and interfacing with municipality and businesses						X
CV.a.02 - Municipality offers grants to neighborhood associations for enhancements				X		
CV.a.03 - Master plan in place for public green space and parks						X
CV.a.04 - ADA accessibility in public areas and other programs for inclusion					X	
CV.a.05 - Promotion of alternative transportation: pedestrian, bicycling, car/van pools, and/or ride sharing			X			
<b>b. Facilities and Events</b>						
CV.b.01 - Outdoor recreation facilities meet community needs: parks, playgrounds, splash pads, dog parks, sports fields, sports courts, swimming pools, golf courses, kayak/canoe trails, public access to water bodies, etc.						X
CV.b.02 - Walking, biking, and exercise trail network in place and is safe, well lit, and connects to a larger network					X	
CV.b.03 - Performances/events for art, dance, theatre, music, and/or cinema available					X	
CV.b.04 - Run/walk/bike/kayak/canoe events are held					X	
CV.b.05 - Benches and seating available near walking, exercise, and playground areas					X	
CV.b.06 - Structures, shade sails, or trees provide shade for spectators and/or participants				X		
CV.b.07 - Play areas exist, age-appropriate ranges of equipment offered, and ADA compliant and conform to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and inspected by Certified Playground Safety Inspector				X		
CV.b.08 - Public library/resources center is available for all ages and abilities					X	
CV.b.09 - Community center is available				X		
CV.b.10 - Farmers' Market(s) is available					X	
<b>c. Community Involvement</b>						
CV.c.01 - Community gardening sites are in use					X	
CV.c.02 - Level of participation in food banks, hunger-relief, Plant a Row for the Hungry (GardenComm initiative), etc.						X
CV.c.03 - Participation in civic events such as Bike to Work Days, Walk to School Days, etc.		X				
CV.c.04 - Voluntary (non-mandated HOA) neighborhood organizations in place					X	
CV.c.05 - Programs in place to encourage youth involvement					X	
CV.c.06 - Recognition programs for volunteers					X	

Community Vitality (CV) Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
COMMUNITY VITALITY (CV): policies, programs, activities, and facilities that lead to a vibrant community and a sense of well-being. Includes libraries, community centers, arts/cultural museums; and parks, playgrounds, dog parks, sports fields, water activities, trails, and other outdoor recreational opportunities	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>d. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
CV.d.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS		X
The design and creation of the Meaningful Meadows outdoor recreation facility for adults with developmental disabilities is truly a great accomplishment and wonderful asset to an often underserved group in the community.						
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>		<b>Actual Points</b>		<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>1. Community Vitality (CV)</b>	88		62		70.45%	

**Community Vitality (CV) Recommendations:**

Decatur is a city striving to create a more vibrant, inclusive community which is attractive to residents, businesses, and visitors alike. Strategies have been put in place to achieve that goal. They are strong in concept, leadership, and in the involvement of the residents. In listening to the presentation outlining the programs available throughout the city, covering areas such as health and wellness, history, recreation, culture, agriculture, food banks and more, it is clear that Decatur is a dynamic place to live and work with a true vision for the future.

Volunteers in Decatur are extremely civic minded with a strong inclination to help those less fortunate. The Prescription Produce Program at Crossing Healthcare, with its five-dollar market bag available to anyone in the community on a weekly basis, is a case in point. Volunteer boards abound and include the Beautify Decatur Coalition. Among other roles, the coalition now functions as an umbrella organization effectively helping to promote communication between and among numerous other organizations.

The Limitless Decatur website and Macon County lists many opportunities for volunteer involvement. The menu board provided by Limitless makes it easy to identify volunteer opportunities across a spectrum of interests. *We recommend that the Decatur Economic Development Corporation reach out to more organizations in the community, such as the Macon County Conservation District, and add more available community-wide volunteer opportunities on its Limitless Decatur website through organization.* They are not currently represented on the menu.

For a city of 75,000 residents, Decatur must be at the top of a list for the number and diversity of parks, museums, zoos, waterfront activities and music venues per capita. Among other things, numerous bike/walking paths have been developed within the city and most are connected, providing the opportunity for a journey of more than ten continuous miles. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit Decatur in person and missed the opportunity to see your trails. *However, we recommend you install QR codes at the head of each segment of bike trail to provide some useful information, including a trail map with “you are here” information along with some history of the trail and its park or district location.*

Also, if you have not already done so, *consider adding shaded seating areas along the trail for either walkers or bikers.* This seating should be of a uniform design along the entire trail, and possibly include markers to indicate the location from the beginning and end of the trail. *If permitted, consider offering memorial benches.* The price per bench should be adequate to cover the cost of the bench, installation, and maintenance.

Decatur has extensive outdoor recreation facilities spanning the gamut from a large amphitheater, numerous active play areas, water resources, including the Sangamon River, Lake Decatur, thousands of acres of natural parks that include woodlands, wetlands, and prairies, and more. About 450 volunteers help in various ways to maintain this treasure trove of nature. Recently, the city converted one golf course and club house into a senior center with walking trails and native habitat. This project is a work in progress but is already quite popular. Having been a golf club in its prior life, this area probably included a putting green near the clubhouse. *Consider maintaining this amenity for the seniors as many can enjoy this activity. Maintain a small area around the green to permit chipping as well. Seniors who use this facility could practice putting, as well as hold impromptu putting tournaments.*

One organization with a highly visible impact on the city is the Decatur Area Arts Council. Numerous handsome sculptures, high-quality murals, and interactive pieces now -exist in the city due to the efforts of this organization. A Google™ map showing the location of roughly 33 works, along with an abbreviated description, is available online. The website, [www.decaturarts.org/murals/completed-murals/](http://www.decaturarts.org/murals/completed-murals/), includes a link to this map as well as detailed descriptions and pictures of eleven of the works. *We suggest you expand the very brief map description of each of the 33 pieces to include a paragraph on each work, like the mural descriptions found on the Decatur Arts website. If that is not possible, consider including a QR code at the base of each piece that leads the interested viewer to a more comprehensive description.*

The Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations is an umbrella organization for 25 different neighborhoods. 16 are active with monthly meetings, litter pick up patrols, and volunteers who become involved in numerous activities. By banding together, the whole becomes more effective than the sum of the parts. This coalition proceeded with projects after receiving funding from PNC Bank, the City of Decatur, and in-kind donations from Lowes and the Habitat Re-Sell Store. Great work.

Flowers Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
2. FLOWERS (FL): flowering annuals, perennials, bulbs, tropical plants, flowering topiaries, and colorful foliage and/or cut plant material for season-round interest for displays in containers, hanging baskets, window boxes, raised planters, trellises, and in-ground beds	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
FL.a.01 - Public or private management of flower displays				X		
FL.a.02 - Program to encourage, expand understanding of role and importance of pollinator habitats					X	
<b>b. Plan of Action</b>						
FL.b.01 - Action plan developed each season for procurement, scheduling, planting, and maintenance of flower displays				X		
FL.b.02 - Recognition program(s) in place for attractive displays by businesses and/or residential				X		
FL.b.03 - Demonstration/display garden(s) with labelled flowers in place and promoted				X		
FL.b.04 - Effective communication about selection and care of flowers for beautification and pollinator habitats					X	
<b>c. Design</b>						
FL.c.01 - Unity and Variety: plant combinations create visual interest and dramatic effect while appearing coordinated					X	
FL.c.02 - Suitability of Plant Selections: plants selected for location and environmental conditions					X	
FL.c.03 - Distribution and Location: displays found throughout the community					X	
FL.c.04 - Location: displays are located to serve as focal points					X	
FL.c.05 - Seasonal Displays: seasonal displays with spring, summer, fall, and/or holiday displays			X			
FL.c.06 - Scale: if hanging baskets are in use, their size is in scale to their surroundings				X		
FL.c.07 - Scale: if containers are in use, their size is in scale to their surroundings					X	
F.L.c.08 – Scale: inground flower displays are designed with mature plant heights in mind				X		
FL.c.09 - Color: pleasing color combinations (monochromatic, analogous, and/or complementary) are used					X	
FL.c.10 - Form: uses a number of different textures in all floral displays				X		



Flowers Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>2. FLOWERS (FL):</b> flowering annuals, perennials, bulbs, tropical plants, flowering topiaries, and colorful foliage and/or cut plant material for season-round interest for displays in containers, hanging baskets, window boxes, raised planters, trellises, and in-ground beds						
<b>d. Maintenance</b>						
FL.d.01 - Watering procedures to maintain growth in place					X	
FL.d.02 - Fertilization: appropriate fertilization procedures using slow-release, liquid fertilizers, and/or soil amendments				X		
FL.d.03 - Grooming: regular pruning, dead-heading, removal and replacement of dead plants					X	
FL.d.04 - Plant health strategies in place to monitor and manage pests and diseases (IPM-Integrated Pest Management)				X		
FL.d.05 - Health and Vigor: plants are robust and floriferous					X	
<b>e. Community Involvement</b>						
FL.e.01 - Volunteers provide donations and/or funds and/or participate in the design, planting, and/or care of flower displays						X
FL.e.02 - Civic groups, garden clubs, Master Gardeners, school programs, etc., sponsor plant sales, plant swaps, provide information, or educational sessions that contribute to the quality and implementation of the community's flower displays					X	
<b>f. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
FL.f.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS		X
The Library Gardens, designed and maintained by the Macon County Master Gardeners, is an excellent demonstration garden that adds beauty to the downtown. Kudos on your plant labeling!						
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>		<b>Actual Points</b>		<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>2. Flowers (FL)</b>	96		63		65.63%	

**Flowers (FL) Recommendations:**

Through the efforts of a partnership between the Decatur volunteers and Connie's Greenhouses, downtown Decatur has vibrant annual flower displays. The staff at Connie's Greenhouses coaches the volunteers on planting and maintaining these annuals using appropriate fertilization technology and pest control. This education is evident in the successful flowering planters.

Butterflies and other pollinators are flocking to Decatur's schools where young school-aged gardeners, along with volunteer groups, have whole heartedly embraced the environmental concerns facing our pollinators. The Monarch Haven Garden, a new garden at the children's museum, as well as a butterfly garden created on school grounds in 2005, further educate students about the survival needs of the monarch butterflies. These are just a few of the many pollinator gardens in Decatur. Additionally, the Monarch Madness event in September and the

Hummingbird Festival in August offer fun and informative community events that are ecologically focused on the plight of our pollinators.

The colorful planting of annuals used in the downtown planters are showy, exuberant, and well grown. *Bring the planting up a notch by selecting a city flower color or blossom to use throughout the city. Encourage homeowners, shop keepers, restaurants, and other businesses to follow through using a similar planting scheme. Creating a color story will tie the community into a continuous ribbon of color and give a feeling of solidarity during these trying times.*

Adding style and unique plants can also produce bolder, more impressive planters. *When designing planters use the “thriller, filler, and spiller” technique, bold plants such as canna, banana, mandevilla, and ornamental grasses can create the upright thriller. They are also a great starting point to launch your container design. A bonus using a thriller plant: it can act as a safety issue. They grow upright and are easily seen by anyone, so people will not trip over the planter.*

Fillers are plants that add mass to the design. They are often mid-sized plants that will fill up space and add texture and color. These plants can have beautiful foliage or flowers. Some examples are coleus, begonia, angelonia, and upright petunia cultivars. The floriferous spillers anchor the pot by sprawling over the edge of the planter toward the ground. Examples of spiller plants are sweet potato vine, bacopa, Lysimachia, and some petunia cultivars.

*We recommend you extend the planter display season through fall, winter, and into spring. Attractive evergreens used in the planters would make a handsome upright element in the planters surrounded by flowering pansies or edible lettuce or spinach seedlings for both fall and spring. The lettuce and spinach could be harvested for local food banks. Cut evergreen branches and collect pinecones and berries from volunteers’ gardens to display during the winter months. Add ribbon, bows or ornaments for a festive end-of-season display.*

*To encourage downtown businesses to contribute to the floral displays, create a people’s choice award for the best business planter. Make this either a weekly or a monthly ‘award of recognition’ for this type of community spirit competition. Participants and the public can post their favorite planters displayed by local businesses on Facebook and Instagram.*

Landscaped Areas Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
3. LANDSCAPED AREAS (LA): plants and related programs for the leadership, design, installation, and maintenance of landscape. Includes shrubs, ornamental grasses, vines, succulents, edibles, evergreen topiaries, turf, and groundcovers	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
LA.a.01 - Management of planting public landscaped areas					X	
LA.a.02 - Municipal landscape ordinance requires landscaping and maintenance for new and/or improved commercial development			NS	X	NS	NS
LA.a.03 - Municipal ordinance requiring landscaping for new residential developments			NS	X	NS	NS
<b>b. Plan of Action</b>						
LA.b.01 - Planning for restoration of natural areas					X	
LA.b.02 - Strategy for management of invasive plants					X	
LA.b.03 - Demonstration/display gardens with interpretive signage (pollinator, wildlife, native, low-water use, etc.) in place and promoted				X		
LA.b.04 - Effective communication of “Right Plant in the Right Place” and other planting issues	X					
LA.b.05 - Recognition program for attractive landscapes in place					X	
LA.b.06 - School gardening programs in place for multiple grades					X	
<b>c. Design</b>						
LA.c.01 - Unity and Variety: plant combinations create visual interest while appearing coordinated					X	
LA.c.02 - Suitability of Plant Selections: plants selected for location and environmental conditions					X	
LA.c.03 - Distribution/Locations: landscaping found throughout the community and at key locations					X	
<b>d. Maintenance</b>						
LA.d.01 - Grooming: pruning of plants, removal and/or replacement of dead plants					X	
LA.d.02 - Plant Health: Plants display health and vigor, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies in place to monitor and manage diseases and pests				X		
LA.d.03 – Mulch from renewable and sustainable sources is used by the municipality in appropriate places				X		
LA.d.04 - Weed Management: strategies in place to manage weeds (removal, mulching, etc.)					X	
LA.d.05 - Health and Vigor: plants are robust					X	
LA.d.06 - Turf Care: proper mowing, edging, and replacement of dead turf					X	
LA.d.07 - Turf Health: Grassy areas display health and vigor, and procedures such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) are in place to monitor and manage diseases, pests, and weeds				X		

Landscaped Areas Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>3. LANDSCAPED AREAS (LA): plants and related programs for the leadership, design, installation, and maintenance of landscape. Includes shrubs, ornamental grasses, vines, succulents, edibles, evergreen topiaries, turf, and groundcovers</b>						
<b>e. Community Involvement</b>						
LA.e.01 - Volunteers assist in funding, design, installation, and/or care of landscaped areas and/or turf in public areas					X	
LA.e.02 - Community educational programs offered related to plant material, including specialty gardens				X		
<b>f. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
LA.f.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS		X
The Enterprise Living Science Farm provides high school students with a 15-acre living laboratory for production of crops and livestock, and the design and maintenance of a Sensory Garden.						
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Actual Points</b>	<b>Percentage</b>		
<b>3. Landscaped Areas (LA)</b>		76	54	71.05%		

### Landscaped Areas (LA) Recommendations:

Decatur has fabulous places to see and enjoy all kinds of demonstration gardens for inspiration as well as for beauty: the library demonstration gardens, Millikin University grounds, The Decatur Park District with 1975 acres, Decatur Hospital with planters, and the newly landscaped Devon G. Buffet Amphitheater. There are endless opportunities to enjoy the cultivated landscape in Decatur. There is an important focus on planning for the restoration of natural areas. Volunteer opportunities to make a difference in Decatur’s neighborhoods abound, including joining the Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations.

Decatur, like many cities, faces the dilemma of native plants vs. traditional lawns. Too often, native plantings are left to their own devices as homeowners think they do not require maintenance. These “native lawns” become over-grown, go to seed, and resemble a tangled mess. We understand Decatur is drafting a native grass ordinance to give guidance to homeowners who wish to replace their traditional turf lawns with native alternatives. *Our first suggestion is to re-name the ordinance as native plants, not native grasses.* There are many low-growing native plants that could also be used for turf substitutes. Look to the City of Minneapolis and their native plant ordinance as an example:

[https://library.municode.com/mn/minneapolis/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=COOR\\_TIT11HESA\\_CH227NUG\\_ARTIISPCOAC\\_227.90OFCOVEDE](https://library.municode.com/mn/minneapolis/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COOR_TIT11HESA_CH227NUG_ARTIISPCOAC_227.90OFCOVEDE). They have an excellent model that supports wildlife friendly landscapes while also ensuring public safety. Minneapolis residents can plant a prairie habitat, but it must be “planned, intentional and maintained, devoid of noxious weeds and not create a safety issue.” This pdf also discusses native plant ordinances found throughout Minnesota: <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2019-12/Native%20Landscaping%20Ordinance%20Examples.pdf>. Restricting the height of plantings can also ensure that the lawn is maintained and tidy. The Austin, TX native plant ordinance requires that grasses and weed be cut if plants are more than 12 inches tall.

A no-mow lawn is a lawn made up of several varieties of low growing grasses blended together. These blends can be used for lawns that cannot be mowed as often as traditional lawns. These no mow lawns form a soft green carpet of grass with flowing leaves and seed heads. They are not a manicured cut lawn, but their advantage is that they do not need weekly mowing, use less water, and often do not require pesticide applications. Prairie Nursery at <https://www.prairienursery.com/> is a leading expert in this field, they offer products as well as consulting. High

Country Gardens, <https://www.highcountrygardens.com> is another source in this field. The potential lawn is cultivated and seeded much like a traditional lawn. Prairie Nursery also offers Shoreline Buffer Gardens of native plants that can be planted along a lakeshore or riverbank to ensure shore stabilization and erosion control. *Partner with the library or another organization to invite specialists like these to present informative programs on sustainable garden ideas.*

The COVID-19 pandemic increased interest in vegetable gardening in the United States exponentially. This is a great opportunity for people to learn how to grow their own vegetables. With many people working from home and students taking remote learning classes, a vegetable garden can be a great stress-reliever and encourage healthy eating. *Help promote this trend toward a healthy living lifestyle by encouraging each neighborhood within the Coalition of Homeowners Organization (CONO) to develop new edible community gardens for 2021. Potential locations include parks, schools, and neighborhood common areas. Partner with local schools and the Illinois Extension, College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences (<https://extension.illinois.edu/dmp>) for their expertise.*

To encourage Decatur residents and businesses to design and install more natives in their own landscapes, we suggest developing a model residential garden that displays sustainable landscaping ideas that look and function more like natural areas. *Incorporate ecological planting with traditional horticulture. Cover space with plants instead of mulch by planting native and cultivated plants in harmonious groups. Use both groundcover and smaller stature plants to cover the ground. Landscape beds will require less maintenance and the extra work of annual mulching to keep weeds away. Claudia West and Thomas Rainer speak to this in their groundbreaking book 'Planting in a Post-Wild World'. An ideal location for this model garden would be at The Schaub Floral Display Center in Sportman's Park.*

Urban Forestry Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
4. URBAN FORESTRY (UF): trees and related programs for the leadership, management, design, installation, and maintenance on public and private lands	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
UF.a.01 - Qualified personnel are on staff or accessing trained individuals such as arborists and/or urban foresters				X		
UF.a.02 - Tree board/commission and/or department is active		X				
UF.a.03 - Municipal ordinance(s) enacted/enforced for tree preservation on public and/or private property			NS	X	NS	NS
UF.a.04 - Municipal ordinance(s) enacted/enforced for protection of trees during construction			NS	X	NS	NS
UF.a.05 - Currently a Tree City USA community			NS	X	NS	NS
<b>b. Plan of Action</b>						
UF.b.01 - Tree inventory for public areas is complete and current within the past ten years			X			
UF.b.02 - Annual tree planting program for public areas				X		
UF.b.03 - Management strategies for removal of dead, imperiled, and invasive trees in public areas				X		
UF.b.04 - Policy for recognition and protection of historic trees				X		
UF.b.05 - Effective communication to residents of recommended trees, proper planting, "Right Tree in the Right Place," mulching, placement and spacing, and/or maintenance					X	
<b>c. Design</b>						
UF.c.01 - Variety: current practices include appropriate selection and diversity of tree species being planted					X	
UF.c.02 - Placement: current practices include appropriate spacing and planting area for optimal root and canopy growth					X	
UF.c.03 - Planting: current practices include correct tree planting depth (trunk flare at/above grade)					X	
UF.c.04 - Arboretum/Park in place with labels and descriptive signage				X		
<b>d. Maintenance</b>						
UF.d.01 - Tree Health: strategies in place to monitor and manage diseases and pests				X		
UF.d.02 - Watering, mulching, and pruning for new trees: procedures for watering and proper mulching (i.e., no volcano mulching) in place and effectively communicated to the public					X	
UF.d.03 - Pruning for established trees: appropriate pruning, removal of dead limbs, and canopies raised adequately above vehicle and pedestrian areas	X					

Urban Forestry Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>4. URBAN FORESTRY (UF): trees and related programs for the leadership, management, design, installation, and maintenance on public and private lands</b>						
<b>e. Community Involvement</b>						
UF.e.01 - Policy for donations to tree planting in public areas (memorial trees, etc.) in place						X
UF.e.02 - Community participates in Arbor Day activities				X		
UF.e.03 - Volunteers assist in tree planting and/or care				X		
<b>f. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
UF.f.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS		X
The fruit orchard at Crossing Healthcare is an excellent example of adding tree canopy while providing a food resource.						
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>Possible Points</b>		<b>Actual Points</b>		<b>Percentage</b>
<b>4. Urban Forestry (UF)</b>		74		46		62.16%

**Urban Forestry (UF) Recommendations:**

Tree canopies enhance neighborhoods while also benefiting ecological, economic, and social aspects of community life. Not only do they provide beauty, they also mitigate heat and pollution, and increase property values. As recommended in the 2018 evaluation, a comprehensive tree inventory can give you the knowledge of where new trees are needed to increase Decatur’s shade coverage, what species should be planted to maintain a balanced population, and establish a priority list to replace imperiled trees. *If budgets do not allow the city or the park district to initiate a tree inventory database, turn to a volunteer-based inventory collection.* One example of an innovative, volunteer tree inventory can be seen in New York City’s latest tree inventory: Trees Count (<https://www.nycgovparks.org/trees/treescount>). Engaging 2,200 volunteers, it was the largest participatory municipal urban forestry project in US history. Volunteers, called citizen mappers, using high tech tools, tape measures and tree ID keys created an accurate inventory of the city’s street trees. Facts collected include street tree density, street tree map, and species of trees. What a truly genius idea.

Trees are an important part of a community. Encouraging the planting of new trees and the care of older trees is vital to fostering a healthy environment. For every dollar spent on trees, cities see over a doubling in economic dollar value. *Developing a tree ordinance is one way to assure that the community is aware of the benefits and importance of protecting existing trees.* ISA, the International Society of Arboriculture, is an informative resource regarding trees. Their Guidelines for Developing and Evaluating Tree Ordinances (<https://www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification/Tree-Ordinance-Guidelines.pdf>.) is a great place to start in drafting a tree ordinance. Also view the website <https://www.treesaregood.org/>. This organization helps provide consumers with information about trees including: the benefits of trees, choosing and planting the right tree, recognizing tree risks, pruning and care.

Standing dead ash trees on the approach to Decatur creates both a safety and aesthetic issue. These trees are on a state road, but within Decatur’s city limits. *Inquire if this might be a project for the National Guard or the Army Corp of Engineers.* These organizations often partner with communities to help with work that is beyond the scope of the community.

It is important to engage young people in the planting, care and investment of trees. It is a lesson that they can carry with them the rest of their lives. Presently, one tree is planted at a local school on Arbor Day. *We encourage Decatur's schools to think big and have each school plant at least one tree in celebration each year. Maybe a high school graduation class could plant a forest or an orchard on the school grounds or a nearby park.* Bartlett Trees, as well as other tree care companies, often supply young seedlings for such projects at no charge. Team up with your local Lowe's or Home Depot for loans of needed hand equipment. Be sure an expert is on hand to show the proper way to plant and supervise the installation.



Environmental Efforts Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>5. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFORTS (EE): environmental leadership, policies, plans, and programs for resource conservation; pollution control; trash, recycling, and reuse; and alternative fuel vehicles</b>						
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
EE.a.01 - Environmental Advisory Board(s) and/or Green Team(s) in place			NS	X	NS	NS
EE.a.02 - Electric/alternative fuel vehicle(s) used by municipality		X				
EE.a.03 - Electric vehicle charging station(s) provided			X			
EE.a.04 - Stormwater management policies in place and enforced					X	
EE.a.05 - Pet waste policies in place and enforced					X	
<b>b. Plan of Action</b>						
EE.b.01 - Sustainability Action Plan in place						X
EE.b.02 - Effective municipal/civic education about environmental efforts for children and adults					X	
EE.b.03 - Effective notification to community regarding pesticide applications and mosquito spraying	X					
<b>c. Resource Conservation</b>						
EE.c.01 - Bio-swales and/or rain gardens in place to reduce stormwater run-off pollution					X	
EE.c.02 - Home energy audit/incentives available				X		
EE.c.03 - Waterwise irrigation in place	X					
EE.c.04 - Low-flow water device incentives available		X				
<b>d. Trash, Recycling, and Reuse Management</b>						
EE.d.01 - Residential curbside trash collection is available and/or required					X	
EE.d.02 - Residential curbside recycling collection and/or collection points are in place					X	
EE.d.03 - Recycling containers available in public areas and for private use, and standardized and/or consistent labels used on containers				X		
EE.d.04 - Yard waste composting pick-up and/ or drop-off available				X		
EE.d.05 - Prescription drug drop-off(s) available					X	
EE.d.06 - Hazardous waste and/or electronics waste collection or drop-off(s) available					X	
EE.d.07 - Plastic bag and/or foam container collection point(s) available				X		
EE.d.08 - Reuse opportunities are available (clothing, books, household goods, repair initiatives, etc.)					X	

Environmental Efforts Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>5. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFORTS (EE): environmental leadership, policies, plans, and programs for resource conservation; pollution control; trash, recycling, and reuse; and alternative fuel vehicles</b>						
<b>e. Community Involvement</b>						
EE.e.01 - Community events that enhance public awareness of environmental issues and distribution of information on effective recycling (lack of contamination), i.e. Earth Day participation					X	
EE.e.02 - Garden clubs, Master Gardeners, and/or Soil and Water Conservation District, etc. provide educational opportunities for rain barrel usage, backyard habitats, and other environmental initiatives					X	
EE.e.03 - School curricula programs and events to encourage youth involvement				X		
<b>f. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
EE.f.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS		X
We applaud the Beautify Decatur Coalition's efforts to educate, manage and recognize litter control in the community with volunteers.						
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>		<b>Actual Points</b>		<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>5. Environmental Efforts (EE)</b>	86		54		62.79%	

**Environmental Efforts (EE) Recommendations:**

It is readily apparent that Decatur is actively involved in a wide range of environmental sustainability efforts. At the community level, the Community Environmental Council seeks to engage residents in environmental conservation and restoration awareness in Macon County. Quarterly meetings are advertised both in print and online, and residents are encouraged to attend these meetings and become actively engaged in the organization and its projects. In conjunction with the Decatur Audubon Society, the Council hosts the annual Spring Celebration and River Cleanup. It brings many families together in a popular social event that sweeps the river in the early spring. The council also sponsors speakers at the quarterly meetings. They highlight the environmental and sustainability initiatives pertinent to Decatur.

In November 2010, members of Decatur city staff worked with Teska Associates, environmental planners, and appointed a sustainability team and numerous community groups targeted to various topics. Together, these people worked to develop a Comprehensive Sustainability Action Plan. This plan, impressive in the breadth and depth of its scope, created a clear pathway to a more sustainable community. Specific goals to be accomplished by 2020, as well as goals for 2030, were outlined and fleshed out. *This lengthy document is worthy of frequent review. Beyond that, we suggest that on the tenth anniversary of its publication, you create a 2020 update. Clearly state the goals achieved, initiatives in process, and where the City stands vis-a-vis the original vision for 2020. Where bragging rights are clearly warranted, brag about it. Send a report card to the residents of Decatur so they can take credit for the progress to date. Highlight accomplishments completed ahead of the target date. Finally, update and modify the list of 2030 goals in a way that energizes the residents of Decatur into action.*

We were pleased to hear that the parks in Decatur now include well -identified recycling containers paired with all trash containers. However, it appears that recycling containers have yet to make a significant appearance in the commercial district. *To correct this, perhaps the Chamber of Commerce or Rotary Club could sponsor a project to purchase attractive trash and recycling containers of a design consistent throughout the downtown district. With funding from the sponsors, these could be picked up by the haulers under contract to the city for waste and recycling pickup.* Sponsors could be identified through logos on individual containers, adding name recognition to downtown businesses and organizations.

Single stream residential recycling is available to residents of Decatur for no additional fee beyond the annual assessment charges mandated for trash hauling in the residential communities. We understand that more than 60% of residents subscribe to this service and receive standard size recycling containers at no additional cost. Larger containers are available for an additional one-time charge of \$15. Despite this, it is reported that over half of the solid waste going to the landfill could have been recycled, but was not. *We suggest that residents be actively encouraged to recycle more conscientiously using several tools. First, enlist the schools to start a program that encourages at home recycling.* As the children become more aware of the importance of recycling at home as well as at school, they will actively encourage their parents to “get with the program.” *Second, provide tiered fees for trash hauling; smaller containers for waste are charged a smaller fee. As more qualifying waste is recycled, less trash heads for the landfill. Third, work with your waste hauler to provide periodic inspections for recycle containers when at the curb.* If upon opening the lid and seeing contamination, a tag is affixed to the container with a note as to the type of contamination (plastic bags, food scraps, etc.) and a gentle reminder of acceptable recycle items.

Litter Critter with its load of plastic and metal waste is a brilliant visual reminder both to recycle and to “Be a dear, put it here” rather than litter. Kudos to the creativity of the team that developed this icon. This litter critter deer has shown up in selfies, graced stickers and was even featured on a billboard. *Keep the momentum going by partnering with the park district and the city to create receptacle container stickers featuring your icon and logo, and give information on what is recyclable and what is trash.* Indecision at the point of tossing leads to contamination or needless landfill.

Highly visible construction projects in Decatur have brought sustainable construction techniques to the forefront of the public eye. Many qualifying sustainable strategies were employed in the renovation of two high schools; one even received the coveted LEED Gold Status. Similarly, the new Center for Sustainability and Innovation on the Richland campus qualified as a LEED Platinum project, the highest level of certification. Aside from the professionals and owners intimately involved in the construction projects, few are aware of the efforts required to reach these elevated LEED ratings. If you have not already done so, *we recommend that strategies employed at the high schools be highlighted with plaques placed throughout the buildings.* Those strategies, such as geothermal heating and cooling, could be described diagrammatically for greater effect. *Building components fabricated from recycled materials can also be identified with signage.*

Richland Community College and Millikan University are rich resources for Decatur. Both are deeply involved in environmental awareness. Richland emphasizes its environmental studies program by developing educational displays at its facilities and hosting school groups. Boasting several wind turbines as its most visible symbol, it is also home to the Center for Sustainability and Innovation and to the National Sequestration Education Center. *We*

*assume that Richland Community College and Decatur high schools have developed some joint programs to introduce younger students to some of the initiatives being studied at the community college. If this is not the case, we urge you to begin to develop programs along those lines.*

Celebrating Heritage Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>6. CELEBRATING HERITAGE (CH): recognition, designation, protection, commemoration, and celebration of historical, cultural, natural, agricultural, and industrial resources</b>						
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
CH.a.01 - Historic preservation ordinance effectively provides commercial and residential designation and protection from demolition			NS	X	NS	NS
CH.a.02 - Incentives offered to promote preservation: tax credits, waived permit fees, eased setbacks, rebates, etc.			X			
CH.a.03 - Historic Preservation and/or Architectural Review Board in place and effective				X		
CH.a.04 - Historical Society is active					X	
<b>b. Plan of Action</b>						
CH.b.01 - Effective communication of ordinances, policies, and restoration methods					X	
CH.b.02 - National Register of Historic Places district and/or individual designations in place						X
CH.b.03 - Natural and/or agricultural areas are protected					X	
CH.b.04 - Archives, artifacts, cemetery records, and/or oral histories collected, properly stored, or preserved					X	
CH.b.05 - Education: historical publications/websites, interpretive signage, tours, and programs in place					X	
CH.b.06 - Programs in place to encourage youth involvement, including curriculum-designated tours and available to multiple age levels				X		
<b>c. Commemoration</b>						
CH.c.01 - Signage in place for historic neighborhoods and/or structures				X		
CH.c.02 - Historical museum(s) and/or interpretive displays maintained					X	
CH.c.03 - Cemeteries, monuments, and/or plaques in place and well-maintained					X	
CH.c.04 - Community heritage promoted through tours (guided or self), brochures, Smartphone apps, etc.				X		
CH.c.05 - Parades, festivals, events, programs commemorating a community's heritage are held					X	
<b>d. Community Involvement</b>						
CH.d.01 - Volunteers participate in planning and implementing recognition of a community's heritage through historical tours, parades, festivals, etc.					X	
CH.d.02 - Volunteers participate in maintaining historical sites and structures					X	

Celebrating Heritage Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>6. CELEBRATING HERITAGE (CH):</b> recognition, designation, protection, commemoration, and celebration of historical, cultural, natural, agricultural, and industrial resources						
<b>f. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
CH.e.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS	X	
Heritage Network acts as an umbrella group to maintain communication and develop synergy among all the historic organizations						
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Actual Points</b>	<b>Percentage</b>		
<b>6. Celebrating Heritage (CH)</b>		70	48	68.57%		

**Celebrating Heritage (CH) Recommendations:**

In both the 2020 Decatur Community Profile prepared for America in Bloom and in the lively discussion with the judges, it is obvious that the community is committed to celebrating, studying, and preserving its heritage. Numerous organizations work tirelessly with several of the historic sites and museums such as the Staley Museum, the Mueller Museum, the African American Cultural and Genealogical Society Museum, the Oglesby Mansion, and more. Each of these museums, as well as the local library and the Macon County History Museum and Prairie Village, maintain historical archives. They contain a treasure trove of information about Decatur and Macon County.

We understand that these organizations work cooperatively, with many knowledgeable volunteers at the ready to assist those doing research into the area’s history. Additionally, the Macon County Heritage Network (aka Heritage Network of Decatur) is working with many volunteers to digitize the voluminous records of the past. The goal of this effort is to connect the resources of the various museums, the library, and the historical societies to facilitate studies by those researching the history of Decatur. This group currently meets four times per year to share their progress on the project. *We strongly recommend that the network develop a presence on the web to increase its name recognition and that the network’s web page include a full list of all the museums, historical societies and other organizations that are working together.* As we searched the web for more information, we were stymied. *Consider listing the Network on the Historic and Architectural Site Commission (HASC) section of the city website with the other listed organizations, using a link to connect from the HASC web page to that of the network, as further described below.*

The website for the City of Decatur provides a link to HASC. It in turn offers an excellent synopsis of this organization and its goals. Within the HASC link is a list of a few of the local historic organizations. *By listing the network on this location, you can be assured that the many organizations within the network can be reached through the city website.* Currently, of the six listed organizations, three include links leading to further information, while two do not. One of the organizations with a link is City Center Decatur. Unfortunately, when clicking on this link one finds that the domain name is “for sale.” *We recommend either activating the site or removing that link altogether.*

Decatur boasts several sizable historic districts within the city. Macon Place Historic District and Nearwest Historic District are both local historic districts. West End Historic District, Nearwest Decatur Historic District and Downtown Decatur Historic District are on the National Register of Historic Places. The boundaries of these historic districts are well defined in the maps posted on the city’s website. *Consider developing an award program*

*that recognizes excellence in design and execution of projects in the historic districts.* For example, categories could include landscaping, building restoration, or exterior paint. Awards could be announced in the local paper and further advertised with signs in the front yard.

We were pleased to see that some of the buildings listed on the National Register for Historic Places proudly display plaques commemorating their lineage. We learned that plaques are available, as well for houses and other structures located within the defined historic district. *We suggest you advertise the opportunity to purchase these plaques to the residents of the historic districts and encourage them to mount them on the front of their houses. We also continue to urge you to update street signs to indicate the boundaries of the historic districts in the city.*

During our discussion, you indicated that state and local funds for rehabilitation of historic properties are not currently available, given the current state of the economy. However, income producing properties listed on the National Register for Historic Places or contributing properties in a district listed on the National Register are eligible for federal tax credits of up to 25%. This provides a dollar for dollar reduction of federal tax liability. To qualify for this assistance, the project must meet the Secretary of the Interiors' Standards for Rehabilitation and receive approval prior to commencement of the work. Although this program is mentioned in passing on the HASC website, *we suggest you increase the visibility of this program within the commercial district and offer to assist interested building owners in applying for it.* This is a great way to encourage restoration of privately owned historic structures in the downtown commercial district.

We learned that you are currently working on developing a façade program incorporating an \$8000 grant for work done to upgrade the buildings along Merchant Street. Such a grant, if successfully developed and in conjunction with the federal tax credit program, can act as a strong incentive to move forward with a restoration project in the downtown historic district.

The mural program in Decatur is outstanding. While we were not in town to see the murals in person, the pictures we saw were captivating and we appreciate those that celebrate the historic heritage of Decatur. This collection is clearly as good or better as any we have seen in our travels. We are glad you are continuing to expand the program. *We encourage the Decatur Area Arts Council to partner with the Heritage Network in choosing future mural subjects that continue to celebrate the cultural, natural, agricultural or industrial heritage of Decatur.*

Overall Impression (OI) Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
7. OVERALL IMPRESSION (OI): adequate and effective amenities are provided in good condition, and the community is welcoming and attractive	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>a. Leadership and Policy</b>						
Ol.a.01 - Signage ordinances enacted and enforced					X	
Ol.a.02 - Ordinances in place to address overgrown lots, abandoned vehicles, unscreened dumpsters, public nuisances, unregulated garage sales, empty storefront windows, etc.					X	
Ol.a.03 - Code enforcement/compliance officer on municipal staff and codes are enforced				X		
Ol.a.04 - Design style determined, applied, and consistent for site furnishings, crosswalks, gateway entry features, banners, wayfinding signage, etc.				X		
<b>b. Amenities</b>						
Ol.b.01 - Site furnishings in place: water features, lamp posts, benches, bicycle racks, drinking fountains, trash and recycling receptacles, containers, planters, and cigarette receptacles				X		
Ol.b.02 - Crosswalks well-marked				X		
Ol.b.03 - Public restrooms available				X		
Ol.b.04 - Effective community gateway entry features					X	
Ol.b.05 - Effective use of banners, murals, and/or public art						X
Ol.b.06 - Effective wayfinding signage					X	
Ol.b.07 - Effective use of non-plant seasonal decorations (lights, ornaments, etc.)				X		
<b>c. Condition and Maintenance</b>						
Ol.c.01 - Condition of structures, buildings, decks, patios, etc. related to lack of vandalism, graffiti, peeling or faded paint, and rust					X	
Ol.c.02 - Condition of infrastructure: roadways, road shoulders, curbs, medians, sidewalks, railroad crossings, crosswalks/pavement markings, transformers, and utility poles related to lack of weeds, vandalism, litter, graffiti, peeling or faded paint, and rust					X	
Ol.c.03 - Condition of signs and site furnishings: water features, lamp posts, benches, bicycle racks, drinking fountains, trash and recycling receptacles, containers, planters, and cigarette receptacles				X		
Ol.c.04 - Condition of vacant lots, stormwater retention ponds, and swales					X	
Ol.c.05 - Control of excessive stake signs, billboards, and posted flyers					X	
Ol.c.06 - Regularly scheduled street sweeping				X		



Overall Impression (OI) Criterion Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)					
	Not Applicable N/A	Not Started (0 pts)	Launched (1 pt)	Achieved (2 pts)	Surpassing (3 pts)	Excelling (4 pts)
<b>7. OVERALL IMPRESSION (OI): adequate and effective amenities are provided in good condition, and the community is welcoming and attractive</b>						
<b>d. Community Involvement</b>						
OI.d.01 - Volunteer participation and/or funding of community revitalization and improvement initiatives, such as Adopt-A-Spot, Habitat for Humanity, River Sweep, home repair programs (CHIP), disaster relief, clean-up days, etc.					X	
OI.d.02 - Process is available for residents to fund public amenities such as memorial benches, brick pathways, etc.					X	
<b>e. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>						
OI.e.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	NS	NS		X
We recognize the Coalition of Neighborhood Revitalization Organization. It works with 16 of the 25 residential neighborhoods in Decatur to improve their quality of life.						
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Actual Points</b>	<b>Percentage</b>		
<b>7. Overall Impression (OI)</b>		80	54	67.50%		

**Overall Impression (OI) Recommendations:**

Decatur continues to grow as a vibrant community that offers unique business opportunities, great recreational destinations, and a revitalized downtown with improved public amenities. In 2019, the Decatur Park District and the City of Decatur opened the highly anticipated Devon Lakeshore Amphitheater, the crowning jewel of the Lakeshore Landing development includes Overlook Adventure Park, Historic Nelson Park, the Scovill Zoo and Children’s Museum, and Pier 36 with its restaurants and a marina on Lake Decatur.

Both the downtown revitalization and the Lakeshore Landing development created outdoor furnishing guidelines for styles, colors, and materials for signage, outdoor furnishings, banners, and other amenities. We were happy to learn that both the city and park district are now using these “pattern books” as guidelines for future developments and refurbishing of existing parks, etc.

During our evaluation meetings it became clear that the city must deal with a number of abandoned homes, derelict commercial buildings and vacant lots. The city, through its Neighborhood Revitalization Program purchases these properties with the intent to create contiguous properties that can be sold for repurpose and redevelopment. In the interim, these properties need to be mowed and kept cleared of trash. However, city staff is stretched, especially during the summer months. *With the success of The Beautify Decatur Coalition’s Adopt-a-Street Program, we recommend developing an Adopt-a-Lot Program to assist the city in maintaining city-cared for properties, especially in residential neighborhoods.*

*Three ideas to assist in accomplishing this goal are; to tap into other volunteer resources, have cleanup tools available and develop a volunteer cleanup handbook. First, to recruit additional help, turn to schools, business, churches, and other organizations that require or encourage students, employees, congregants, and members to fulfill community hour commitments. Look to youth organizations like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Lion’s Club International Leos or AmeriCorps (<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/what-ameri-corps>) for volunteer assistance. Schools, businesses, and houses of worship that serve these targeted Neighborhood*

*Revitalization areas have a vested interest in keeping the neighborhood looking good and encouraging purchase and redevelopment.*

The Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations has already secured a landscape work trailer with tools donated by Lowe's. *The city could look to develop a partnership to use this trailer for lot cleanup days. As the city sells properties, monies should be set aside to purchase an additional trailer and tools dedicated to remaining properties. Lastly, a volunteer cleanup and landscape maintenance handbook are needed to ensure that volunteers have a clear goal, work safely, and maintain tools in good repair. If this guidebook is not already in existence, Beautify Decatur can certainly champion this project with its many years' experience in litter control and landscape cleanup programs.*

The community profile provided a link to the Decatur Park District's inventory of facility amenities including pavilions/shelters, restrooms, drinking fountains, and play equipment. *Another amenity that we feel should be included is bike racks.* To encourage residents to leave their cars at home and bike, offer racks at key destinations throughout the community. This not only includes Park District destinations, but schools, businesses, city offices and downtown destinations. Take a city-wide inventory of existing bike racks and develop a priority list of locations in need. Approach businesses that would benefit as well as environmental groups and bicycling clubs to sponsor these racks. *The Decatur Arts Council could build on its mural project with artists' creations for bicycle racks. To create an art tour for bicyclists and art-lovers add these installations to the digital public arts and monuments map.*

After reviewing photos of seasonal decorations in the downtown area, *we feel that Decatur can incentivize retail shops, restaurants, and downtown businesses to do more with a people's choice contest. Prizes should be awarded as well as publicity for the best seasonal display (Halloween, fall season, Christmas, and/or other end of year holidays). Consider partnering with Ameren Illinois or the city's water utility to offer discounts on a month's utility bill as prizes.* Participants would benefit from increased visitation and potentially save money.

During these COVID -19 times an underserved group of residents are seniors. With the added concern to self-isolate, they may need additional assistance with shopping, meal deliveries, and help with outdoor chores. *Consider an Adopt-a-Senior Program for a variety of needs, such as home repairs, yard work, or simply emotional support and friendship within social-distancing guidelines.* Conversely, many seniors can offer reciprocal years of experiences for those in need of financial, relational, and career mentoring.

Evaluation Tour Preparation and Actions (ET) Definition	Metrics Ratings (NS = Not Scored)		
8. EVALUATION TOUR PREPARATION AND ACTIONS (ET): community's readiness prior to and the action during the Evaluation Tour	Not Applicable N/A	Unmet (0 pts)	Met (1 pt)
<b>a. Prior to the Evaluation Tour</b>			
ET.a.01 - Community Profile provided to judges at least two weeks prior to the first official judging date			X
ET.a.02 - Community Profile includes contacts with emails			X
ET.a.03 - Community Profile from a returning community makes it clear what is new and/or implemented from judges' recommendations (scored as N/A for a new community)			X
ET.a.04 - Evaluation Tour Itinerary and Community Map with boundaries provided to judges at least two weeks prior to their arrival			X
<b>b. During the Evaluation Tour</b>			
ET.b.01 - Evaluation Tour provided a representative cross-section of the community			X
ET.b.02 - Judges met with elected/appointed municipal leaders and/or staff			X
ET.b.03 - Judges met with the business and/or non-profit community			X
ET.b.04 - Judges met with the media	X		
ET.b.05 - Judges met with volunteers			X
ET.b.06 - Judges were asked to give a presentation(s)	X		
<b>c. Final Wrap-Up</b>			
ET.c.01 - Enough time was allotted for judges to work on the Evaluation Tour Report in a quiet place with adequate Wi-Fi availability	X		
ET.c.02 - Community participated in a wrap-up session at the end of the Evaluation Tour	X		
ET.c.03 - Evaluation Report metrics were adequately addressed in the Community Profile and/or Evaluation Tour Itinerary and during the Evaluation Tour			X
<b>d. Judges' Discretion: Recognition by the judges of an item of special note</b>			
ET.d.01 - Judges to enter text below		NS	X
Kudos in rising to the challenge of providing an excellent Community Profile and comprehensive Zoom meetings during this year's COVID-19 pandemic.			
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Actual Points</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>8. Evaluation Tour Preparation and Actions (ET)</b>	10.00	10.00	100.00%

### **Evaluation Tour Preparation and Actions (ET) Recommendations:**

Once again Decatur produced an excellent Community Profile, building on the last one created in 2018 by updating existing projects, adding new information, and current photographs. The addition of the colored header sections was extremely helpful in determining what was new since 2018, what projects were inspired by the symposium and other AIB materials, and accomplishments that came directly from previous judges' recommendations.

The imbedding weblinks offered immediate information for the judges to review instead of relying on attached supplemental documents. A few links did not always work, but a simple Google™ search soon arrived at the proper website. This year's profile also directly covered the 2020 metrics, helping to organize information into the correct criterion, and clarify the specific metric it addressed. The community map and Visitor's Bureau weblink was appreciated, as well as the list of community contacts with titles. This page was invaluable when attending Zoom meetings with multiple attendees.

As mentioned in the General Observations, Decatur excelled in organizing and producing the review Zoom meetings. The appropriate members of the community were present for each criterion, each engaged and excited about sharing how they and their staff, organization, or volunteers contribute to Decatur. Images were shared on screen during the meeting to support the topics discussed. Judges had the opportunity to ask many questions. We were also pleased to see the increased support and participation from the municipality.

Although we cannot predict the future, our hopes are we will be able to return to our in-person evaluation tours so we can personally see and experience Decatur. If we must return to this virtual format, *we suggest that Decatur, as well as all communities, schedule a live walking/driving tour of key areas in the community (downtown, historical sites, business districts, etc.)* Even if it is only for an hour, having eyes on the ground would give the judges additional insight and a sense of place.

**DISCLAIMERS:**

1. Communities are responsible for addressing the metrics in the Community Profile, Evaluation Tour Itinerary, and during the Evaluation Tour. Please note that the metric calculations contained herein are final, and each community is encouraged to focus on any changes during the following year's entry in the America in Bloom National Awards Program.
2. All information is given to the best of America in Bloom's knowledge and is believed to be accurate. Your conditions of use and application of recommendations and/or suggested products are beyond our control. There is no warranty expressed or implied regarding the accuracy of any given data or statements. America in Bloom specifically disclaims any responsibility or liability relating to the use of the recommendations and/or suggested products and shall under no circumstances whatsoever, be liable for any special, incidental or consequential damages which may arise from such use.
3. Reference herein to any specific commercial products, processes, or service by trade named trademark manufacturer or otherwise does not necessarily constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation or favoring by America in Bloom. The views and opinions of authors expressed herein shall not be used for advertising or product endorsement purposes.

# 2020 Community Recognitions

**Community:** Decatur, IL

**Recognized Criterion:** Community Vitality

Decatur was well prepared for this year's challenges brought on by the emergence of COVID-19. Decatur Parks District offers numerous outdoor recreational opportunities. Among them, a diversity of parks, a children's museum, the Scovill Zoo, waterfront activities at Nelson Park, and the new Devon Lakeshore Amphitheater. Numerous bicycling and walking paths exist within the city with connections that provide the opportunity to journey more than ten miles. All offer the perfect social-distance respite for isolated families.

Decatur already had safety nets in place for those experiencing economic hardships through local food collection efforts, soup kitchens, community gardens, and a prescription produce program at Crossings Healthcare and its Community Care Campus.

Volunteer boards abound and include the Beautify Decatur Coalition that now functions as an umbrella organization effectively helping to promote communication between and among numerous other organizations. At last count there are 14 volunteer organizations in Decatur that support the various aspects of the American in Bloom mission.

**Noteworthy Project or Initiative:**

In 1958 the Progress Day School was founded to educate children with disabilities. Today, Macon Resources, Inc., (MRI) not only continues its special needs education, but also provides healthcare, housing, and activities for over 800 disabled infants, children, and adults in the Decatur metro area. This year's CN Grant monies were used towards the installation of Meaningful Meadows, an outdoor recreation facility to further support the needs of the developmentally disabled community at MRI. These 1.5-acre grounds include beautifully designed gardens with an emphasis on sensory plants, areas for social activities and skill developmental, exercise with a sports court, splash pad and miniature golf, and private areas for escape. Congratulations on your successful execution of a worthwhile project!

America in Bloom  
PO Box 44005 • Columbus, OH 43204 • 614-453-0744  
[www.AmericaInBloom.org](http://www.AmericaInBloom.org) • [aib@AmericaInBloom.org](mailto:aib@AmericaInBloom.org)