

Construction to begin in July on Decatur-Avondale LCI

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By Mary Swint

Ground breaking is expected to begin in early July for loft condominiums in Decatur's new Columbia Park neighborhood, which was created through the Decatur-Avondale Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) last year. Construction of a large parking deck and three apartment buildings, which the Decatur Housing Authority is also developing in the nearby MARTA parking lot should begin in January, Executive

Director Paul Pierce said this week. Columbia Park is bound on the west by Commerce Drive/South Columbia Drive, on the north by East College Avenue, and on the east and south by Arcadia Avenue/Katie Kerr Drive.

The four-story condominium building will be built on Talley Street at the intersection with Sams Street across from the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). Construction has been delayed for months as the project

went through the city approval process and negotiations with contractors, Pierce said. The building will have ninety loft condominiums with 10-foot ceilings, 758 to 1176 square feet and private gated patios or balconies. It will also feature a sun deck, fitness center, pool and two-level parking deck in back. Construction should be completed between July and September 2006.

While the plans for the Talley **continued on page 3**

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Street condos have remained pretty much the same since they were announced last June, the site plan for the apartments, parking deck and a second planned condominium building have changed over the last year, according to Pierce.

Originally, the Decatur Housing Authority was going to build one large apartment building on the south parking lot of the Avondale MARTA station, which was annexed into Decatur last year. Current plans call for three apartment buildings with four or five floors and a total of 270 units, about 50 more than expected last year.

Two apartment buildings will adjoin the proposed parking deck, which will have separate levels and entrances for the apartments and for MARTA passengers. "There will be four and a half levels in the parking deck above ground and a partial below grade level," Pierce explained. It will have 750 spaces, including 325 for MARTA passengers. Designing one larger parking deck instead of two separate parking decks for apartments and MARTA "worked out more efficiently," Pierce said.

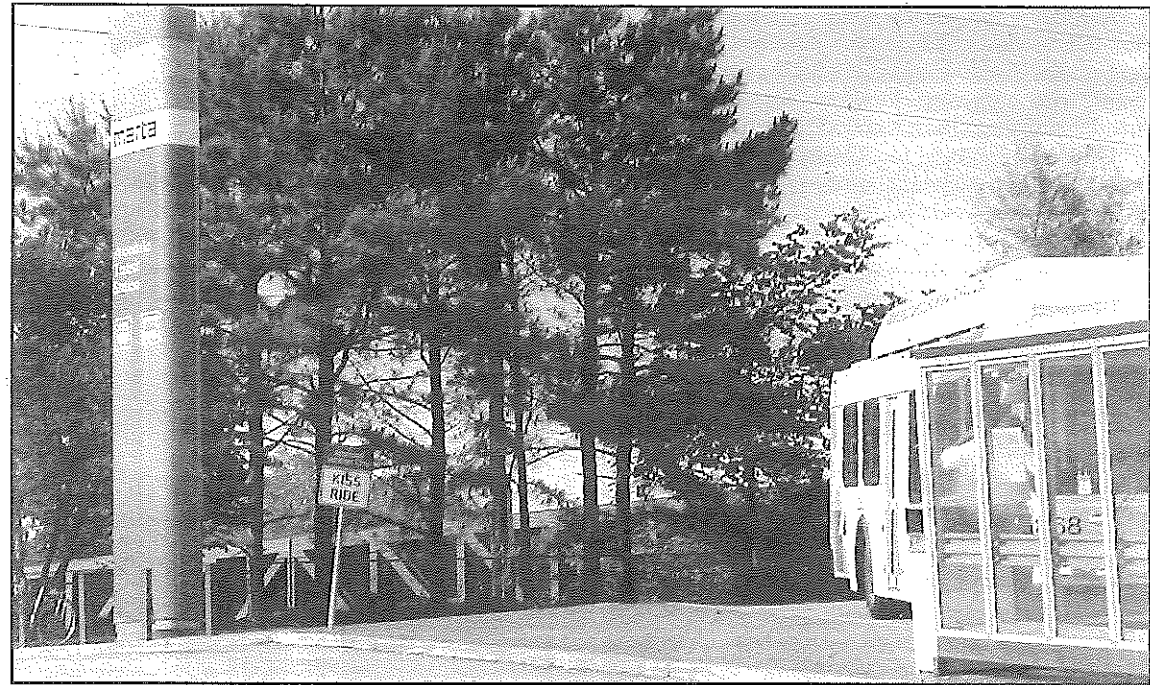
Currently an estimated 250 vehicles use the south parking lot on the busiest days of the week. The Avondale station also has a north parking lot on Ponce de Leon Avenue. Pierce noted that most kiss and ride traffic and buses pick up on the north side of the station. A new bus drop off location will be built on Sams Street to serve the three bus routes currently using the south parking lot.

The third apartment building will be built on the current Kiss and Ride parking area at the Avondale station at the corner of East College Avenue and Sams Street. This will be the only apartment building with retail space (15,000 square feet) on the ground floor.

Rents for all three apartment buildings will range generally from about \$700 to \$1100, but a couple corner units are larger and may rent for \$1200. Pierce said there would be some work force housing with affordable rates. Last year city officials said the apartments would have one or two bedrooms, some balconies, a fitness center, a pool.

The third apartment building will have access to the parking deck by way of a street level crossing and a bridge crossing. A new bridge will be built with two levels. One level will connect the parking deck to the existing MARTA bridge over College Avenue leading to the terminal of the Avondale MARTA station. The upper level will be used by residents of the third apartment building going to or from the parking deck. Some parking will be available along a new interior street, which will follow the path of the current driveway in the parking lot, with entrances on College Avenue and Sams Street.

During construction of the parking deck and apartments, some property at the southern end of the parking lot, the future location of the second condominium building, will serve as a temporary parking lot for MARTA patrons. These condominiums have not been designed yet. They will probably have four



An apartment building with retail space on the ground floor will be built at the corner of East College Ave. and Sam's Street, the current location of MARTA's Kiss and Ride in the south parking lot. Stairs and an elevator will aid MARTA passengers to the pedestrian bridge.

floors and their own parking deck, Pierce noted.

The site plan is undergoing some "fine tuning adjustments needed for MARTA," said Pierce. MARTA is expected to accept the final plan in the next week or two weeks.

MARTA will retain ownership of the parking deck and will lease the property where the apartments will be built, to the Decatur Housing Authority for 99 years. The city will get title to the property at the south end of the parking lot for construction of the condominiums and the interior street will be dedicated to the city, according to Pierce. In

return for the land, MARTA will receive the parking deck, bus drop off on Sams Street, the bridge and other improvements.

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) awarded Decatur a \$3 million grant to build the parking deck; streetscapes and the bus drop off. The Decatur Housing Authority will sell bonds for the construction of the apartments and will finance the condominiums through a bond issue or a normal construction loan, Pierce added. The LCI project has been in the planning stage since 2002.

The Decatur Housing Authority is developing the apartments and condos with the

assistance of development manager Life General Contractors, which will handle inspections and reviews plans.

A public information meeting was held Wednesday at the Friends School of Atlanta on Sams Street to update nearby residents and businesses about the status of the LCI project, which covers 40 acres of warehouse and light industrial property. One phase of the project involves the renovation of the former BioLab Inc. offices and warehouses on East College Avenue. That site is now called East Decatur Station and has restaurants, a church, a theater and retail businesses.