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Sandtown communities move forward, seeking annexation into Atlanta

BY [DOMINIQUE HUFF](#)

While many in the Atlanta area are eager to be part of a new city, others are using these few months to go to established cities. The Sandtown community is continuing to press on to be annexed into Atlanta. The community yielded some success with communities in Midwest Cascade and the Horseshoe Community being annexed. These communities include neighborhoods on Danforth, Cascade and New Hope Roads. The Cascade Glen community located near interstate 285 and several other communities failed to get enough signatures for the city to act on their annexation applications. Currently, the Regency sub-division on County Line Rd. and the Huntington Community on Old Fairburn Rd. are having their annexation applications reviewed by the city. "We just think it is time for a change," John Davis, president of the Sandtown Community Association (SCA) said. "We do not have the commercial development to keep up with the residential growth nor do we have adequate recreational facilities." Davis cites problems with the Fulton County School System as another major factor in Sandtown's desire to annex. "You have school board officials who look out for their districts rather than the entire system," he said. South Fulton has two full members and one half member on the board of seven. The half comes from the district that is shared by the Tri Cities area and Sandy Springs. While Davis understands the concerns about children moving from Fulton County schools to Atlanta Public Schools, he wants the parents to have the facts. "Atlanta is making progress with their schools while Fulton County has not with our schools. It took us to announce that we wanted to annex out for them to move forward with the rebuilding of Westlake High School," he said. "We have been working that for years. The cafeteria gets crowded and the children are skipping lunch to avoid the crowds and the toilets are backed up due to the high volume of use." Susan Hale, communications director for Fulton County Schools, stated that the initial plan for Westlake was to do an 80 percent rebuild, as the system just built a new auditorium, cafeteria, and classroom wing. "When our new superintendent came, he decided to build from the ground up," she explained. "We are here for the kids regardless of what side of the county they reside in. Every community is different and every school is different." She adds that changes have been implemented and parental support from South Fulton has increased. "With Westlake High School and the new South Fulton High School, we began a new committee on construction," she said. "We even brought on some of our critics and they fight to ensure that they are getting dollar per dollar as other schools received. I think we are making great strides with the community." Fulton Commissioner Bill Edwards, who represents the Sandtown area, believes the community needs to stay where they are. "My office gets in calls everyday from people who are annexed into Atlanta and complaining about their services," he said. "There taxes have increased, they have no choice in their trash service and they are upset that their kids have to leave Fulton schools for Atlanta schools." Initially, Edwards supported the City of South Fulton but later reversed his position about the new city. When asked about this move, he stated it was about education and research on the facts. "There is too much uncertainty about forming a new city. If South Fulton were to become a city it would stunt their growth," he explained. "I am lobbying to make sure South Fulton remains unincorporated." He states that he has gone to many community meetings and plans to go to more to spread the word. He also wants to have more debates with people who support

the new city. The South Fulton Concerned Citizens (SFCC), initially outraged over the annexations and land grabbing, filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn all the annexations. The suit was dismissed by a judge and the judge reopened the window for continued annexations. Davis poses the question to opponents of the annexation efforts of why Sandtown should continue to stay as it is and be ignored and isolated. He explains that economic development is another factor for wanting to leave the county. The Board of Commissioners and State Rep. Roger Bruce defeated a Kroger that was initially supposed to be built on Campbellton Rd. near Boat Rock Rd., he said. "A developer wanted Kroger to go to his property [at the intersection of Camp Creek and Campbellton] but Kroger opted not build there. They are not going to reward developers who work like that," he said. "This developer told us that he was going to bring more commerce to our area with his project and now it will be mixed use. The community wanted more than just a simple CVS." The SCA invited Mayor Shirley Franklin out to the meeting to field questions from concerned citizens about going into Atlanta. Catherine Woodling, media relations officer for the city, quickly explained to The Story that the mayor was only informing citizens about the state of the city. "Mayor Franklin was not there recruiting communities to come to Atlanta," she said. "She was a featured guest and answered their questions about the city. She does this for many areas such as Roswell." Franklin did extend the offer previously to those interested as giving them another option. Charles Hammonds, a student in local governance at Georgia State, conducted research on the community, including analyzing the City of South Fulton. While his community was not initially annexed, he did state he wants to be a part of Atlanta. His personal favorite was the famed Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU) that make recommendations that are often adopted by the City Council. "My property taxes would be lower. I also hold the governance of the city in high regard," he said. "There are several subdivisions in my area that are continuing to collect petitions in favor of annexation into Atlanta." Hammonds, like Davis and Edwards, agree on the "too many unknowns" that the City of South Fulton will bring. Davis and many others in Sandtown are simply fed up with Fulton County. "If you continue not to respond to my concerns and the need of my community, I have the right to look at the city of Atlanta," he said. "The decision regarding annexation is by our community. This is not a personal feeling or vendetta; we are going off the facts." The stance on annexation has led to some minor, coincidental retaliation, according to Davis. "Since we have taken this stance, our association has been targeted. We were kicked out of Sandtown Gym; a community facility where we had our meetings," he said. "Sandtown Middle School has discontinued allowing us to have meetings there also. It is a political campaign to weaken our efforts." Yet, Davis remains optimistic. "We have obstacles but we are pushing forward and looking east to Atlanta," he said.

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