



April 17, 2026

Dear Board Chair Sulton, Superintendent Whitaker, and Board Members:

This letter contains the comments from the Historic Preservation Commission of the City of Decatur (HPC) on plans for the Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC) submitted to the HPC by Jody Charles Campbell of Blum & Campbell, LLC, on February 18, 2026.

On February 11, 2026, HPC accepted a complete application for designation of the proposed Beacon Hill Local Historic District. The proposed local historic district included the property at 103 Electric Avenue—formerly 346 West Trinity Place—the Property) owned by the Board of Education of the City of Decatur (Board of Education). Per Unified Development Ordinance Section 5.2.2.D.3.b, the HPC adopted Resolution R-26-HPC-01 establishing a moratorium on permitting and construction for the Property.

On February 18, 2026, Mr. Campbell wrote to Mayor Powers and the HPC Chair on behalf of City Schools of Decatur (CSD) asserting, among other things, that CSD is exempt from Certificate of Appropriateness requirements under Georgia law. Mr. Campbell asserted that CSD therefore need only to submit its proposal to the HPC and provide the HPC with 45 days to offer comments. Mr. Campbell's letter included architectural renderings and engineering plans for a proposed ECLC building to be constructed on the Property.

On February 24, 2026, HPC recommended that the City Commission of the City of Decatur (City Commission) approve a modified proposed ordinance for designation of an expanded historic district to include the Property and several surrounding properties. HPC adopted Resolution R-26-HPC-02 establishing a moratorium on permitting and construction for the Property and other properties in the proposed expanded historic district.

On February 26, 2026, HPC wrote to the Board of Education and Superintendent asking that CSD postpone submitting its proposal for the Property until after the City Commission voted on the proposed historic designation ordinance on April 20, 2026.

On March 2, 2026, the Board of Education Chair responded and, among other things, proposed that HPC submit its comments on CSD's proposal for the Property by close of business on April 17, 2026.

On March 16, 2026, City Commission voted to accept the CSD's request to extend the HPC's review and comment period through April 17, 2026, and to forbear receipt of the requested land disturbance and building permits until after April 20, 2026, for the purpose of exemption from the moratorium.

HPC reviewed and discussed CSD's proposal for the Property during our March 17, 2026, regular meeting, and April 14, 2026, special called meeting. This letter memorializes HPC's comments on CSD's submitted proposal for the Property. Many of these comments were verbally presented during the March 17 and April 14 meetings.

As you know, Beacon Hill has been erased multiple times. Only three physical historic resources remain. State power has repeatedly been marshalled to marginalize, silence, and displace the Beacon Hill community. The current greenspace at the Property which previously contained churches, markets, schools, and homes, is nothing less than

less than sacred ground for the Beacon Hill elders and their descendants.

HPC makes the following specific comments:

1. Without delay and prior to groundbreaking, meet in person with the Beacon Hill elders and the Beacon Hill Grassroots Coalition, including Doris Sims Johnson, Wanda Sims Waters, and others they recommend, at a neutral location to gather their input to inform CSD's proposal for the Property. HPC encouraged CSD to do this at our March 17, 2026, meeting.
2. Establish a working relationship with and solicit and consider the recommendations of the Decatur Reparations Task Force.
3. Revise the design to reduce the building footprint and maximize the contiguous, public greenspace usable for community events, including Decatur Day.
4. Before breaking ground, engage a registered professional archaeologist to conduct a full archeological survey of the Property. This survey should consist of a shovel test or ground-penetrating radar survey, and any additional testing recommended by the archaeologist. Furthermore, for the duration of construction, engage a registered professional archaeologist to monitor all construction on the Property.
5. Collaborate with registered professional archaeologists, other preservation professionals, the City Archivist, and the Beacon Hill elders to curate and prominently display any found artifacts in a publicly accessible display integrated in the design of the Property where possible, and if not, in designated appropriate alternative repositories.
6. Incorporate into the design for the building features that relate to the history of Beacon Hill and its architectural elements such as—but not limited to—referencing the historic Herring Street School, the historic neighborhood buildings and their scale, the infrastructure, and the materials and finishes of the historic neighborhood.
7. Revise the building elevation so that the long, low nature of the proposed facade, particularly on West Trinity Place, is revised to better fit the scale of the neighborhood that existed in Beacon Hill. The school should be multi-storied to fit better within the scale of the site.
8. In the public greenspace, create an experience that educates the public about the history of the Beacon Hill community and its residents—such as displaying street names on their former locations, indicating the locations of homes, businesses, and community gathering spaces—and contextualizes their importance to the community.

If CSD modifies its proposal for the Property to differ from what Mr. Campbell submitted to HPC on February 18, 2026, HPC should have the opportunity to provide revised comments.

Sincerely



Andrew Navratil
Chair