

A Tale of Ten Cities

Benchmarking is “the practice of comparing performance with standards or the performance results achieved by others”ⁱ and it is not a new concept to many local governments. Following the Great Recession many places, including the City of Decatur, began looking for ways to do more with less. This challenge presented a unique opportunity to review internal and external processes and workflows in an effort to make cost-effective and efficient improvements.

In the fall of 2013, the City’s Performance Measurement Team embarked on a project to identify communities around the United States that were similar to the City of Decatur in order to make comparisons and learn best practices. As a starting point, comparable places were drawn from a list of jurisdictions that participate in the National Research Center’s citizen survey program and are members of the ICMA Center for Performance Measurement Program. Nine cities were selected based on criteria that included population, proximity to a large city in a metropolitan region and a council-manager form of government. They are:



1. Cartersville, Georgia
2. Clayton, Missouri
3. Dover, New Hampshire
4. Greer, South Carolina
5. Needham, Massachusetts
6. Piqua, Ohio
7. Queen Creek, Arizona
8. Saco, Maine
9. Suwanee, Georgia

The data gathered and shared by these nine cities plus the City of Decatur tell a unique story about community engagement, transparency and people. This “Tale of 10 Cities” includes short profiles and maps for each city, as well as interesting factors and figures.

But before we get started, let’s get to know the cast of characters.

City	Region	Metro Area	Population ⁱⁱ	Area (Square Miles)	2012 General Fund Expenditures ⁱⁱⁱ
Suwanee, GA	South	Atlanta	15,355	10.88	\$11,844,220
Clayton, MO	Midwest	St. Louis	15,939	2.48	\$24,954,795
Saco, ME	Northeast	Portsmouth-Rochester	18,482	37	\$22,887,000
Decatur, GA	South	Atlanta	19,335	4.3	\$18,809,240
Cartersville, GA	South	Atlanta	19,731	29.15	\$39,532,415
Piqua, OH	Midwest	Dayton-Springfield	20,522	11.62	\$10,900,000
Greer, SC	South	Greenville	25,515	20.64	\$17,588,375
Queen Creek, AZ	West	Phoenix	26,361	28.04	\$18,827,945
Needham, MA	Northeast	Boston	28,886	12.9	\$112,243,325
Dover, NH	Northeast	Portsmouth-Rochester	29,987	26.72	\$86,919,123

City	65+ ^{iv}	Under 18 ^v	Central Business District	County Seat	College or University Present	Independent School System	Bachelors degree or higher ^{vi}
Suwanee, GA	6.60%	27.90%	Y	N	N	N	54%
Clayton, MO	11.80%	15.80%	Y	Y	Y	y	73%
Saco, ME	14.30%	21.90%	N	N	Y	Y	29%
Decatur, GA	11.00%	23.00%	Y	Y	Y	Y	66%
Cartersville, GA	13.20%	26.20%	Y	Y	N	Y	23%
Piqua, OH	14.00%	23.00%	Y	Y	N	Y	13%
Greer, SC	10.90%	26.60%	Y	N	N	Y	25%
Queen Creek, AZ	5.20%	37.40%	N	N	Y	Y	28%
Needham, MA	16.30%	28.20%	Y	N	Y	Y	71%
Dover, NH	14.00%	21.20%	Y	Y	N	Y	38%

The metrics shared with us by the nine cities help tell an interesting story. Even though we range in size from 15,000 to 30,000 people, our residents do not share the same amount of living space or even the same make-up. However, each of the 10 cities cares about the public it serves and this is evident by the answers to the questions in the following eight subject areas. A summary chart of all the responses follows.

Citizen Education: Nine of the ten cities offer at least one citizen education course. Most of the courses are multi-session and touch a number of municipal departments. The average number of courses offered is 41.3 and the median is 15.

Facilities: All ten cities are in the business of maintaining some, if not all, of its municipal facilities. The average age of the facilities is 36.5 years, with Decatur maintaining the newest facilities and Dover maintaining some of the oldest.

Greenspace: Greenspace appears to be an important component for the cities. Within Decatur's 4.3 square miles, it contains 56.5 acres of greenspace. Needham packs in 1,100 acres in 12 square miles. The median acreage of maintained greenspace is 313.7 acres and the average acreage of greenspace maintained per square mile is 27.8.

Online Services: Welcome to the digital age! Nine of the ten cities responded that they offered at least two services via the web. The types of services offered are varied and include citizen request reporting portals, bill payment, business license renewals, court fine payment and recreation program registration. Several places, such as Decatur and Suwanee, even have a mobile app for smart phones and tablets.

Personnel: Each city appears to be staffed by seasoned employees. The average years of service is 11.2 years and the median is 12.2.

Public Safety: On average, it doesn't take long for help to arrive in the ten cities. With an average response time of 4.12 minutes for Police calls and 3.96 minutes for Fire calls in FY12-13, the staff in the Police and Fire departments are doing a great job of taking care of business.

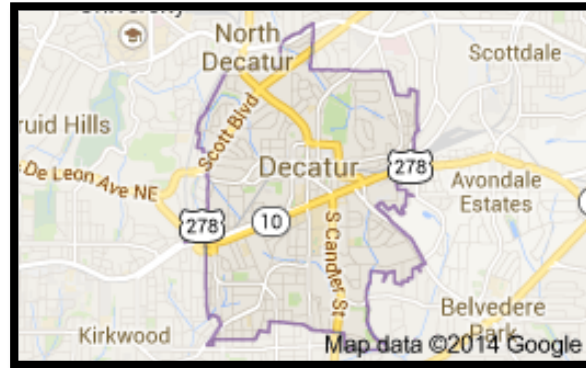
Special Events: From the Decatur Beach Party to Saco's Pumpkin Fest to Clayton's Centennial, our residents are never far from something fun to do. We averaged 20 special events each in 2013!

Taxes: Great services and fun festivals are not free. On average, eight of the ten cities derived 60% of their property tax revenue from residential properties and 40% from commercial and industrial properties. Two places, Saco and Piqua, rely more on sales taxes than property taxes. But even though the average is right on target, Decatur and Needham rely mostly on revenue from residential properties and have a significant number of tax-exempt properties located within their incorporated limits.

Subject Area	Benchmarking Metric	Decatur	Cartersville	Clayton	Dover
Citizen Education	How many citizen education classes did your city host in 2013? (Ex. Citizen's Public Safety Academy, Civics 101, etc.)	29	8	146	7
	How many municipal facilities do you maintain?	10	17	4	18
Facilities	What is the average age of your municipal facilities?	5.5	-	55.5	64
	How many acres of greenspace do you maintain in your city?	56.5	-	109	211
Greenspace	Amount of greenspace per square mile?	13.14	-	43.95	7.90
	How many online services does your city offer? (Ex. Citizen request portal, bill payment, business license renewals, etc.)	12	2	12	3
Online Services	How much did you spend on employee training in FY12-13?	\$153,040	-	\$15,557	-
	How many budgeted full-time employees did you have in FY12-13?	205	349	180	143
	Amount spent per employee?	\$746.54	-	\$86.43	-
	What are the average years of service for your full-time employees?	11.3	-	14	12.2
Personnel	What was your average response time for Police calls in FY12-13?	1.38	4.87	3.56	4.58
	What was your average response time for Fire calls in FY12-13?	3.18	3.82	4.53	4
Public Safety	How many special events did your city host in 2013?	21	36	30	15
Special Events	What percentage of your tax base is residential?	87%	25%	55%	73%
	What percentage of your tax base is commercial?	13%	75%	45%	27%
	What is the overall value of tax-exempt properties in your city?	\$178,419,000	\$12,835,902	\$618,383,600	\$359,549,700
Taxes					

Greer	Needham	Piqua	Queen Creek	Saco	Suwanee	Median	Average
4	0	17	13	58	131	15	41.3
3	33	9	16	13	6	11.5	12.9
14	62		24.06	50	17.3	37.0	36.5
148	1,100	263	260	-	362	235.5	313.7
7.17	85.27	22.63	9.27	-	33.27	17.9	27.8
2	7	3	9	-	4	4	6
-	\$351,433	-	-	\$74,608	\$56,435	\$74,608	\$130,215
169	346	189	157	155	85	175	198
-	\$1,015.70	-	-	\$481.34	\$663.94	\$663.94	\$598.79
8.3	13.5	15	6	12.6	8.3	12.2	11.2
7.30	4.60	2.22	5.11	5.07	2.02	4.59	4.12
4.97	3	3.18	-	5.02	n/a	3.91	3.96
14	13	25	4	4	38	18	20
51%	87%	-	55%	-	43%	55%	60%
49%	13%	-	45%	-	57%	45%	41%
-	\$628,641,295	-	\$51,394,523	-	\$76,800,000	\$178,416,000	\$275,416,289

Decatur, Georgia



Population: 20,000+
Area: 4.3 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1823

Decatur, Georgia is an urban city six miles east of Atlanta. Decatur is the county seat of DeKalb County, one of the most densely populated counties in the state. The City strives “to assure a high quality of life for its residents, business and visitors both today and in the future.” Decatur’s downtown attracts people from all over the Atlanta metro area due to its diverse selection of restaurants, pubs and shops. Riding on a Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) train or bus, it’s easy to get here. Just step off the train at one of three stations located inside the City.

Decatur is home to Agnes Scott College, a small liberal arts college for women; DeVry University; the Art Institute of Atlanta-Decatur; and, Columbia Seminary. 66% of residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income^{vii} is \$42,000 and the median property value is \$344,000. The City has 213 full-time employees and 262 part-time employees including 60 Police personnel and 39 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Administrative Services; Community & Economic Development; Children & Youth Services; Active Living, Public Works, Design, Environment & Construction; Police and Fire.

Metric	Decatur
Number of municipal facilities maintained	10
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5 years
Number of acres of greenspace maintained	56.5
Number of online services offered	12

Cartersville, Georgia



Population: 19,000+
Area: 23.5 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1872

Cartersville, Georgia is located 42 miles northwest of Atlanta in the rolling hills of North Georgia. The City’s vision is “to provide dependable service while preserving an exceptional quality of life for its residents.” Cartersville was the first city to adopt the city manager form of government in the state of Georgia. The City has a low property tax base (less than 2 mills) because it is not dependent on property tax because of large industrial base. Anheuser Busch Brewery is based in Cartersville.

Twenty-one percent of Cartersville residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$21,980 and the median property value is \$151,500. The City has 349 full-time employees and 65 part-time employees including 62 Police personnel and 72 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Electric; Water; Planning & Development; Police; Public Works; Finance; Recreation and City Clerk.

Metric	Decatur	Cartersville
Number of municipal facilities maintained	10	17
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	5.27
Fire response time in FY12-13 in minutes	3.18	4.22
Number of special events in 2013	21	36

Clayton, Missouri



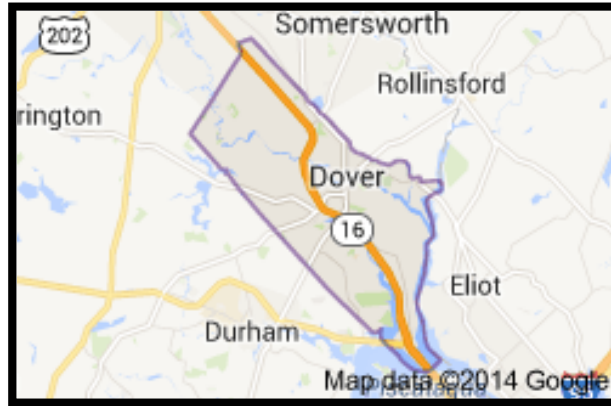
Population: 15,000+
Area: 2.48 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1913

The county seat of St. Louis County, Clayton Missouri is just 8.1 miles from St. Louis. While 81% of Clayton's land is dedicated to residential or park use, the City's central business district combines 7,000,000 square feet of office space with 1,000,000 square feet of retail space. The City's mission is "to foster a vital, balanced community composed of outstanding neighborhoods, quality businesses, commercial and government centers, premier educational institutions, and a healthy natural environment through an open, accessible and fiscally responsible government."

Seventy-four percent of Clayton residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. The City's per capita income is \$57,700 and the median property value is \$618,600. The City has 180 full-time employees and 300 part-time employees including 61 Police personnel and 36 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Parks & Recreation; Economic Development; Public Works; Planning & Development; Fire and Police. The Number Two high school in the state of Missouri, based on the annual ranking by US News and World Report, is located in Clayton. The Metro transit into St. Louis has two stops in the City of Clayton.

Metric	Decatur	Clayton
Average years of service for FT employees	11.3	14
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5	55.5
Fire response time in FY12-13 in minutes	3.18	4.53
Number of road races in 2013	7	2

Dover, New Hampshire



Population: 30,000+
Area: 29 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1855

Dover is located in the seacoast area of New Hampshire, and is only a one hour drive to Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Maine and the New Hampshire Lakes Region and White Mountains. Dover is approximately 11 miles from Rochester, New York. Dover is the oldest permanent settlement in New Hampshire and the 7th oldest in the US. It is a suburban community that strives “to be a city with an emerging urban vibrancy guided by a small town sense of community.” Dover is considered to be Tree City USA with over 178 species.

Thirty-seven percent of Dover residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$31,158 and the median property value is \$342,900. The City has 143 full-time employees and 98 part- time employees including 23 Police personnel and 18 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Schools; Finance; Planning & Economic Development; Police, Fire & Rescue; Community Services; Public Library; Public Welfare and Recreation.

Metric	Decatur	Dover
Number of municipal facilities maintained	10	18
Overall employee satisfaction level in 2013	96%	91%
Number of citizen education classes in 2013	14	7
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	4.58

Greer, South Carolina



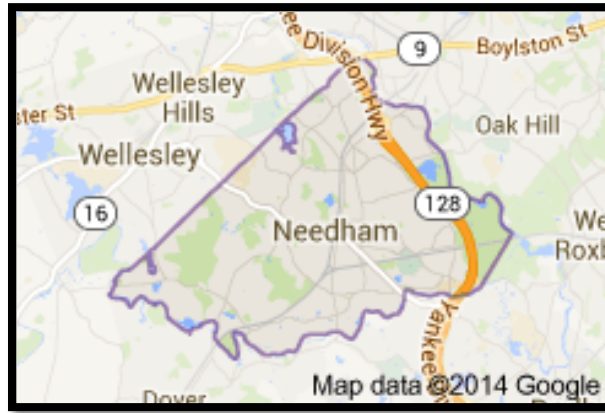
Population: 26,000+
Area: 20.64 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1876

One of South Carolina’s fastest-growing cities, Greer is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains — in the heart of the state’s bustling upstate region. Greer, South Carolina is located 12 miles from Greenville. Greer's Central Business District, also known as Greer Station, is 12 square blocks of retail, dining, entertainment, and professional service organizations. Greer Station has more than 40 buildings on the National Historic Register. In addition to the BMW manufacturing plant, Greer is the longtime home of the North American Headquarters for Michelin North America and Mitsubishi Polyester, Inc. In 2013, South Carolina Ports opened its Inland Port at Greer, just the second facility of its kind on the East Coast.

Nearly 26% of Greer residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$23,000 and the median property value is \$138,000. The City has 169 full-time employees and 24 part-time employees including 70 Police personnel and 34 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Administration & Finance; Building Codes & Zoning; Fire; Municipal Court; Parks & Recreation; Police; Public Service and Engineering.

Metric	Decatur	Greer
Number of special events in 2013	21	14
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5 years	14 years
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	7.30
Average years of service for FT employees	11.3	8.3

Needham, Massachusetts



Population: 28,000+

Area: 12 sq. miles

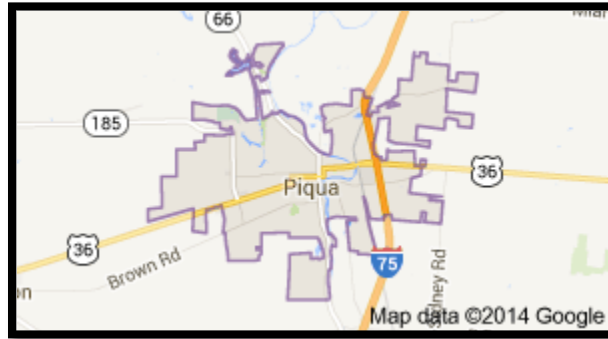
Incorporated: 1949

Needham, Massachusetts is located 19 miles from Boston. Needham residents can travel between Needham and Boston using Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) rail service. Needham prides itself on its community engagement.

Seventy-two percent of Needham residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$61,000 and the median property value is \$646,000. The City has 346 full-time employees including 58 Police personnel and 74 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: General Government; Education; Public Safety; Public Works; Public Facilities and Community Services.

Metric	Decatur	Needham
Number of special events in 2013	21	13
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5 years	62 years
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	5.00
Employee training expenditures in FY12-13	\$153,040	\$351,433

Piqua, Ohio



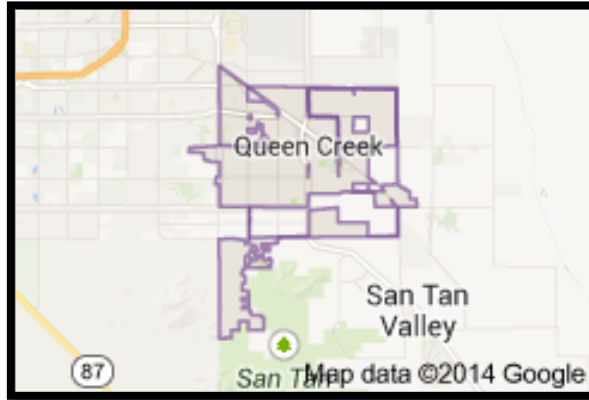
Population: 20,000+
Area: 11.9 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1807

Piqua, Ohio is located 28 miles from Dayton, Ohio. The City’s mission is to “promote the health, safety and welfare of the community through the efficient and effective delivery of services based on addressing the needs of and making continuing improvements in the city in partnership with the community.” Piqua has a wide range of recreational activities in public parks, trails, and an inter-city lake system as well as the Great Miami River.

Almost 12% of Piqua residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$20,120 and the median property value is \$91,500. The City has 189 full-time employees and 22 part-time employees including 35 Police personnel and 35 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Administration; Development; Information Technology; Human Resources; Fire; Law; Health; Police; Utilities; Power and Engineering.

Metric	Decatur	Piqua
Number of special events in 2013	21	25
Number of municipal facilities maintained	10	9
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	2.22
Average years of service for FT employees	11.3	15

Queen Creek, Arizona



Population: 27,000+

Area: 28 sq. miles

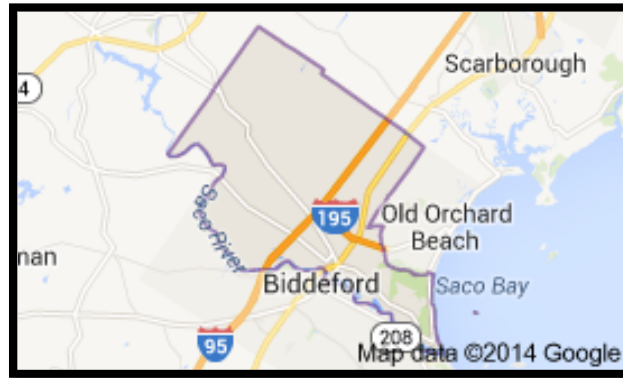
Incorporated: 1986

The rural community of Queen Creek is located 38 miles from Phoenix, Arizona. Queen Creek residents enjoy the benefits of small-town living close to a metropolitan area: low crime rates, easy commuting to and from metro Phoenix and a variety of recreational activities, all elements of a low-stress lifestyle. The City's vision is "The Town of Queen Creek strives to honor our past, manage our present and embrace our future to create a quality, unique place for families and businesses."

Thirty-three percent of Queen Creek residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. The City's per capita income is \$28,000 and the median property value is \$264,000. The City has 157 full-time employees and 32 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Fire; Development; Workforce & Technology, Utilities and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Metric	Decatur	Queen Creek
Number of special events in 2013	21	4
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5 years	24.06 years
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	5.11
Number of online services offered	12	9

Saco, Maine



Population: 18,000+
Area: 38.4 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1718

Saco, Maine is a suburban community located 34 miles from Rochester, New York. The City’s vision is “a high quality of life for Saco Citizens. Central to this vision is a sustainable economy that offers an opportunity for everyone to have rewarding employment and for business to prosper, now and in the future.” Residents can take Amtrak to both Boston, Massachusetts and Portland, Maine.

Twenty-nine percent of Saco residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$28,000 and the median property value is \$229,000. The City has 155 full-time employees and 225 part-time employees including 47 Police personnel and 18 Fire personnel. The City has the following departments: Parks & Recreation; Building Inspection; Finance; Planning & Development; Assessor; Fire; Police; City Clerk; Information Technology; Public Works; Emergency Management and Wastewater.

Metric	Decatur	Saco
Number of special events in 2013	21	4
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5 years	50 years
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	5.07
Employee training expenditures in FY12-13	\$153,040	\$74,608

Suwanee, Georgia



Population: 16,000+
Area: 10 sq. miles
Incorporated: 1838

Suwanee, Georgia is a suburban community located about 30 miles north of Atlanta. The City’s vision is to be a “a diverse and forward-looking community actively engaged in shaping its own future.” The City has more than 500 acres of parkland and miles of walking and biking trails. Residents appreciate public art, special events and their town center.

Fifty-six percent of Suwanee residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The City’s per capita income is \$36,000 and the median property value is \$257,000. The local transit system in Suwanee is the Gwinnett County Transit system. The City has 85 full-time employees and 11 part-time employees including 45 Police personnel. The City has the following departments: Administrative Services; Economic Development; Financial Services; Planning and Public Works.

Metric	Decatur	Suwanee
Number of special events in 2013	21	38
Average age of municipal facilities	5.5 years	17.3 years
Police response time in FY12-13 in minutes	1.38	2.02
Employee training expenditures in FY12-13	\$153,040	\$56,435

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ⁱ Municipal Benchmarks: Third Edition, David Ammons, 2012

ⁱⁱ Source: 2010 US Census

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Budgets of responding cities

^{iv} Source: 2010 US Census

^v Source: 2010 US Census

^{vi} Source: 2010 US Census

^{vii} Source for all per capita income and home data values: 2010 US Census