Creating a City of Buckhead

By Lauri Strauss
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There has been talk of creating a city of Buckhead. How is a city created and how would it impact Atlanta?

Buckhead has been annexed into the city of Atlanta since 1952. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Atlanta had nearly 490,000 residents in 2019. The area of Buckhead has a population of nearly 90,000, so if Buckhead incorporated into its own city, it would reduce Atlanta’s population by about 20 percent.

Forming a Buckhead City is a divided issue among Atlanta’s leadership. People in favor of the idea say a new city would help reduce crime and improve infrastructure for Buckhead. People who oppose the idea are concerned how it would impact the city of Atlanta. About one third of Atlanta’s revenue comes from property taxes. According to the AJC, more than 40 percent of the city’s real estate is in Buckhead. Opponents worry losing Buckhead’s tax revenue may be catastrophic to Atlanta’s budget. Others believe the savings in expenses from not having as many business and residential areas to provide public services — such as police and infrastructure — would offset Atlanta’s decreased revenue. The Buckhead Exploratory Committee is leading an effort to determine whether a Buckhead City is financially feasible and how it will impact Atlanta.

Opponents also are concerned how a Buckhead City would impact the racial make-up of Atlanta. Graphs from the AJC show the current racial breakdown of Atlanta and what would be the racial make-up of a city of Buckhead. As the charts reflect, more than 60 percent of Atlanta residents are not white, whereas a proposed city of Buckhead may be nearly 75 percent white. Atlanta is known for its diversity and history of civil rights. What would it mean for Atlanta if many of its white residents left to form their own city?

What are the steps to create a city of Buckhead?

On the last day of the 2021 legislative session, lawmakers introduced a bill to create a city of Buckhead. This means lawmakers will consider the legislation in the 2022 session. The bill would have to be approved by both the State House and Senate and would require the Governor’s signature in order to move forward. If that were to happen, residents of Buckhead likely would then vote on becoming a city in the next election cycle.

According to the Georgia House Budget and Research Office, Georgia is one of seven states that require the state legislature to approve a new city. South Fulton is the state’s newest city and was incorporated in 2017. Several other areas also have been proposed to become cities, such
For Your Information

as Greenhaven and Vista Cove in DeKalb county. They have not yet received approval from the state legislature. The following graphic illustrates the steps necessary to create a new city in Georgia:

Resources used for this article:

AJC: A Bill Would Carve “Buckhead City” out of Atlanta. Here’s What Could Happen Next
AJC: What History and State Law Say About the Push for Buckhead to Become Its Own City
AJC: What Would Buckhead City Look Like? We Crunched the Numbers
Buckhead Exploratory Committee
Buckhead Reporter: Legislation is Filed to Make Buckhead Its Own City
Georgia House Budget and Research Office: Cityhood in Georgia