

## **DISGRACE TO DEKALB Take whatever steps needed to keep Pine Lake in check**

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With just three-tenths of a mile to police, **Pine Lake** generated an unbelievable \$860,000 in traffic tickets in a single year. If the city can raise such a huge amount along 1,500 feet of a two-lane road, imagine what it'd do with another half-mile. That's what city officials petitioned DeKalb County's legislative delegation for just this year. They wanted to annex land down Rockbridge Road to South Hairston Road, so they could police that section and generate even more revenue from traffic stops.

And you know what they told legislators in their unsuccessful pitch for annexation? That they'd changed their ways along Rockbridge Road. That they'd written only a few speeding tickets (true, but deceptive), and stashed away the radar gun. **Pine Lake** tried to convince DeKalb legislators that they'd changed their revenue-generating tactics for the better. Actually, they changed them for the worse.

From 1989 to '98, tiny **Pine Lake** collected 57 percent of its budget from fined motorists, far more than any other jurisdiction in the state, an Atlanta Journal-Constitution/WSB-TV study showed. And if that were not enough, last year the city got serious about raising money on Rockbridge Road. It more than tripled its police force (from three to 10), and more than tripled the amount of fines collected. In '98, 76 percent of the city's \$1.1 million budget came from traffic fines. And then, in a grab for more of Rockbridge Road, they told legislators they'd changed their tactics. Yeah, right.

When a city exists to rip people off, it should cease to be a city. It's that plain and simple. **Pine Lake** would not have a \$1.1 million budget if it did not collect a dollar for every dime residents pay in property taxes. The modest community of small cottages might not have leaves vacuumed at curbside, or be able to display \$8,700 worth of Christmas lights on the town's lake, if it did not collect 76 percent of its budget on the roadway.

And it seems not to faze some **Pine Lake** residents that they collect most of their fines from black motorists for the benefit of this overwhelmingly white town.

The new mayor, Alfred Fowler, vows changes. He asked that a city judge drop contempt-of-court charges against protesters Darryl Dorton and Douglas Coffey. Fowler says police will no longer lay in wait for motorists but will make only rolling stops, and that the officers that motorists complain are rude and abusive will be more "courteous."

But at a town meeting in DeKalb last week, he did not say **Pine Lake** will stop living off motorists, or that **Pine Lake** residents will start living within their own means.

"The city of **Pine Lake** has been absolutely a disgrace to DeKalb County," said Dan Covington, 57, a white, lifelong DeKalb resident who says he was stopped for no reason -- and that **Pine Lake** ticketed his neighbor for having one taillight brighter than another. "They have a legal authority to steal money from people."

That stealing must stop, even if it means yanking **Pine Lake**'s city charter.

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