

HOMESTART DOWNPAYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

**DEKALB COUNTY HOUSING
INVESTMENT PROGRAMS**

October 2026

Decide DeKalb is a development authority and public body corporate and politic, duly created under the Development Authorities Law, O.C.G.A. §36-62-1, et seq., as amended, and an activating resolution of the Board of Commissioners of DeKalb County, Georgia adopted on September 24, 1974. Pursuant to an intergovernmental agreement with DeKalb County, dated as of February 25, 2014 (the "IGA"), Decide DeKalb conducts economic development activities under various provisions of applicable law, promotes the revitalization and growth of DeKalb County, and serves as DeKalb County's redevelopment manager pursuant to the Redevelopment Powers Law, for the purpose of implementing redevelopment initiatives within the five (5) County-supported tax allocation districts.

Decide DeKalb has several financial incentive programs that it administers for real estate development. These programs include: the Housing Investment Bond Program, EPA Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund, and Tax Allocation Districts. Finally, Decide DeKalb administers 501(c)3 bonds, and the Property Tax Incentive program issuing lease-purchase bonds which provide a 10-year reduction on property taxes in exchange for a project with public benefits such as workforce housing or permanent job creation.

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I. PROGRAM PURPOSE

The DeKalb HomeStart Downpayment Assistance Program ("HomeStart") is designed to expand access to homeownership opportunities in DeKalb County by reducing the financial barriers associated with purchasing a home. The program provides down payment and closing cost assistance to qualified first-time homebuyers purchasing a primary residence within DeKalb County, with enhanced incentives for DeKalb County employees.

The initiative supports DeKalb County's broader housing strategy by:

- Expanding attainable homeownership opportunities
- Supporting workforce housing
- Attracting and retaining residents in DeKalb County
- Strengthening neighborhood stability and community investment

A. Program Outcomes

The DeKalb HomeStart Down Payment Assistance Program aims to:

- Increase homeownership opportunities for working households.
- Reduce barriers to purchasing a home.
- Strengthen neighborhood stability.
- Support long-term community investment in DeKalb County

B. Program Administration

The program will be administered by the Decide DeKalb, responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Program outreach and marketing
- Application intake and review
- Eligibility verification
- Coordination with lenders
- Compliance monitoring
- Program reporting

II. PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

A. Definition of First-Time Homebuyer

For purposes of this program, a First-Time Homebuyer is defined as an individual or household that meets any one of the following conditions:

1. The applicant has not owned a primary residence within the past six (6) months; or



2. The applicant does not own any other residential real estate property at the time of application; or
3. The applicant currently owns a primary residence but sells that residence at least ten (10) days prior to closing on the purchase of the new home.

All participants must occupy the purchased property as their primary residence.

B. Income Eligibility

Eligible households must have gross household income that does not exceed 120% of the Area Median Income ("AMI") for the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell Metropolitan Statistical Area ("MSA"), adjusted annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") and adjusted for household size.

Income-Based Assistance Tiers	
Household Income Level	Maximum HomeStart Assistance ¹
Up to 100% AMI	Up to \$20,000
101-120% AMI	Up to \$15,000

C. DeKalb County Employee Incentive

Eligible DeKalb County employees may qualify for an additional \$5,000 in HomeStart Downpayment Assistance so long as all of the following conditions are met:

1. Be a current DeKalb County employee in good standing;
2. Have household income not exceeding 140% AMI; AND
3. Execute a 3-year employment retention agreement.

Income-Based Assistance Tiers		
Household Income Level	Maximum HomeStart Assistance	With DeKalb County Employee Incentive
Up to 100% AMI	Up to \$20,000	Up to \$25,000
101-120% AMI	Up to \$15,000	Up to \$20,000

D. Housing Affordability Requirement

To ensure sustainable homeownership, the borrower's total housing payment may not exceed 35% of gross household income. The total housing payment includes all of the following items:

1. Mortgage principal;
2. Mortgage interest;
3. Property taxes;
4. Homeowners insurance; AND
5. HOA or condominium fees (if applicable).

¹ Maximum HomeStart assistance amounts may be adjusted by the DeKalb County Chief Housing Officer from time to time and in such amounts as they deem appropriate to reflect inflation.



E. Eligibility Property Types

Eligible homes must be located within DeKalb County, Georgia and may include:

- Single-family homes
- Townhomes
- Condominiums
- Newly constructed homes
- Existing homes

The property must be the borrower's primary residence.

F. Home Purchase Price Limits

The purchase price of homes eligible under this program shall not exceed the annually published purchase price limits established by the Georgia Dream Homeownership Program for DeKalb County, Georgia. These limits are updated annually based on housing market conditions.

III. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

A. Form of Assistance

Assistance will be provided in the form of a deferred, forgivable loan secured by a second lien on the property.

B. Use of Funds

HomeStart Downpayment Assistance funds may be applied toward:

- Down payment
- Closing costs
- Prepaid escrow items (insurance and property taxes)

Borrowers may not receive cash back at closing from program funds.

Borrowers may be subject to a household liquidity maximum which would reduce the funding.

C. Loan Terms

HomeStart Downpayment Assistance forgivable loans shall have the following terms:

- Interest Rate: 0%
- Repayment: Deferred
- Forgiveness Period: 10 years

The assistance will be fully forgiven after ten (10) years, provided the borrower:

- Maintains the home as their primary residence.



- Does not sell or transfer ownership of the property.

If the property is sold or no longer used as the primary residence before the end of the affordability period, the full assistance amount must be repaid to Decide DeKalb.

This structure is consistent with the deferred-loan structure used in previous DeKalb homebuyer assistance programs supported by federal housing funds.

D. Mortgage Requirements

Applicants must obtain financing through a licensed mortgage lender. Eligible mortgage products include:

- Conventional loans
- FHA loans
- VA loans
- USDA loans

The mortgage must be a fixed-rate mortgage product. Predatory or high-risk mortgage products are prohibited, i.e., interest rates that exceed 2.25% above the corresponding treasury bond rate.

E. Subsidy Layering

HomeStart Downpayment Assistance may be used with other forms and sources of down payment assistance. Applicants must meet eligibility requirements of HomeStart and any other downpayment assistance programs.

IV. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

A. Application Availability

Applications for the HomeStart Downpayment Assistance Program are not yet available. Decide DeKalb is in the process of selecting implementation partners for the program. The application process will be finalized and included in an update to these program guidelines in December 2026.

B. Supporting Documents

Applicants must submit a complete application package including:

- Mortgage pre-approval letter
- Income documentation
- Tax returns and pay stubs
- Credit authorization
- Executed purchase and sale agreement
- Homebuyer education certificate (see below)

Applications will be reviewed for:



- Income eligibility
- First-time homebuyer eligibility
- Housing affordability compliance
- Program compliance

C. Homebuyer Education Requirement

All participating households must complete a HUD-approved homebuyer education course prior to closing. The course must address:

- Mortgage financing
- Homeownership responsibilities
- Budgeting and financial management
- Property maintenance

A Certificate of Completion must be included in the applicant's program file.

V. POST-CLOSING REQUIREMENTS

A. Compliance Monitoring

The County or its designee will monitor assisted properties during the affordability period to ensure:

- Continued owner occupancy
- Compliance with program guidelines
- Adherence to fair housing requirements

B. Fair Housing Compliance

All program activities shall comply with federal, state, and local fair housing laws. No person shall be discriminated against based on:

- Race
- Color
- Religion
- National origin
- Sex
- Disability
- Familial status
- Any other protected class

