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## Atlanta District's Secession Bill Is Dead, Georgia Leaders Say.

- **Lieutenant governor, House speaker say Buckhead will remain**
- **Losing the neighborhood would have dealt blow to revenue**

The wealthy district known as Buckhead will remain a part of Atlanta for now after key Republicans in Georgia's state legislature said they oppose letting citizens vote on secession.

House Speaker David Ralston told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that he was putting the legislation on hold. Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan, who presides over the Senate, told the newspaper in a separate interview Thursday that he opposed the secession movement. Without support from the leadership, the move stands little chance of passing.

"It takes two chambers to pass a bill. The Senate was very clear and I respect their decision," Ralston told the newspaper.

Efforts to reach Bill White, a resident who heads the pro-deannexation Buckhead City Committee, weren't immediately successful.

Duncan said Atlanta's new mayor, Andre Dickens, deserves an opportunity to resolve issues, such as an increase in crime, that secession proponents say are the reasons they seek to separate the majority White area from the predominantly Black city.

The Democratic mayor, who took office in January, applauded the move in the legislature.

"We will remain one city with one bright future," Dickens said in a statement. The lawmakers "have given me and my administration the runway we need to take off, and we will continue in our work to move Atlanta forward."

The deannexation of Buckhead would have been devastating to Atlanta's finances. The pro-Buckhead group estimated that it contributed about 40% of Atlanta's revenue. Groups opposed to deannexation warned that it could result in Atlanta seeing credit-rating downgrades.

Tom Gehl, director of governmental relations for the Georgia Municipal Association, said the lawmakers' comments splash cold water on the deannexation effort. The group, which represents municipal governments in Georgia, opposed the idea.

"Both of those are very encouraging signs that the proposed Buckhead City won't be on the docket for this 2022 session," he said.

In February, businesses in Buckhead urged lawmakers to table legislation to create Buckhead City. "The proposed Buckhead City worsens many of the problems it aims to solve in Atlanta and simultaneously creates new issues across the state," they said in the letter.

Gehl said the Buckhead deannexation efforts could have threatened Atlanta's reputation as being

friendly to business.

“Having this distraction, having this assault on the brand, is detrimental to the state in general,” Gehl said.

## **Bloomberg Politics**

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February 11, 2022

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