

## Fulton County Judge Overturns Atlanta's Annexations

A Fulton County judge ruled on Thursday that Atlanta's recent annexations of several neighborhoods in unincorporated South Fulton are not valid.

Atlanta annexed five neighborhoods in the area earlier this year – neighborhoods that could become part of a different city: the city of South Fulton. In November, voters in the only unincorporated part left of Fulton County will decide whether or not to incorporate.

In his decision Thursday, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey ruled the city's annexation process was "untimely" and didn't follow state law.

State lawmakers passed legislation earlier this year allowing for a referendum on the city of South Fulton. The law said the proposed borders of the city would include all of unincorporated Fulton County except for the areas that had been annexed into other cities before July 1, 2016. Judge Dempsey ruled Atlanta's annexations occurred on July 1 – not before, as the law states.

**Josh Belinfante**, a lawyer for the South Fulton residents who sued the city, said the residents wanted a chance to vote in the referendum.

"They filed because they did not want to be part of the city of Atlanta," he said.

A spokesperson for the city of Atlanta says the city is "disappointed" with the judge's order and is weighing its legal options. The spokesperson said the city had "welcomed the annexed neighborhoods of South Fulton" and was providing services to residents since July 1, 2016.

"Our constituents have expressed their concerns about annexation and we believe the court rendered a fair decision," said Fulton County Chairman John Eaves.

State Rep. Roger Bruce (D-Atlanta) and state Sen. Donzella James said they would take a look at changing annexation procedures in the next legislative session.

"Annexation was not meant to be a land-grabbing thing for someone, for other bordering cities to come and just cherry pick whatever area they wanted," said James, who sponsored the city of South Fulton bill.