

IMPROVING NASHVILLE'S NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT IN LAND-USE DECISION- MAKING: A PAPER COMMISSIONED BY NEIGHBOR-2-NEIGHBOR

A core principle of NashvilleNext states: "Nashville is stronger due to its diverse neighborhoods..." and acknowledges, "neighborhoods reflect our rich history and diversity and will ensure that, as neighborhoods become more complete, they will retain and enhance the basic elements of their character."¹ The implementation of NashvilleNext over the next few years will have far-reaching and long-lasting implications and will require on-going consideration of our city's neighborhoods. *As the city continues its rapid growth, how to better involve neighborhood residents in land-use decision-making is becoming a central and pressing question for many Davidson County citizens.* This paper presents the ten-month work of approximately 30 well-known and respected neighborhood leaders from across Nashville to address this question.

The work reflected in this paper was facilitated by the staff of Neighbor-2-Neighbor (N2N), seeded with the technical expertise of the Metro Planning Department as requested, and enriched by the participation of four council members. It is intended for presentation to other neighborhood leaders and Metro departments as an impetus to continue the conversation, to enhance initial strategies with additional ideas, and to form key partnerships to implement the ideas put forth.

I. Why should neighborhood members be more involved in Nashville's land-use decision-making? The rationale for more community involvement put forth by N2N think-tank members is grounded in the following rationale espoused by Stanford University's International Association for Public Participation:²

1. Democratic legitimacy as tied to participatory processes;
2. The historical and cultural basis for participation at the local level;
3. The empowerment and/or protection of marginalized groups as a way to counter prevailing and/or perceived power imbalances; and
4. Practical justifications emphasizing the ability of community participation processes to improve long-term planning and efficiency.

II. What actions can be taken to help residents better participate in Nashville's land-use decision-making?

- 1) Improve notice of new development applications:
 - a) Leverage technology.
 - b) Improve mailed notices and early notification.
 - c) Improve notice sign posting and sign effectiveness.
 - d) Accommodate neighborhoods in ways that can provide meaningful input into the proposed development.
 - e) Mandate a pre-application meeting with the community.
- 2) Address and improve the understanding of the process necessary to change zoning:
 - a) Consider varying the times, locations, and format of Planning Commission meetings.
 - b) Improve staff reports.
 - c) Help neighborhoods follow up on planning decisions and understand the impact of these decisions.

III. What strategies are needed to enhance neighborhoods' long-term engagement in Nashville's land-use decision-making?

- 1) Lay a firm foundation:
 - a) Engage residents rather than being content for them to simply react.
 - b) Increase opportunities for community feedback.
 - c) Codify enforcement mechanisms for collaborative decision-making
 - d) Create additional training and educational opportunities
- 2) Hold big-picture briefings on future development that impact neighborhoods.
- 3) Assign a full-time staff person to be an ombudsman to neighborhoods.
- 4) Start a Planning and Zoning Academy.
- 5) Take advantage of readily available tools and resources from other cities to build Nashville's toolbox of best practices.
- 6) Learn from what other communities across our nation have accomplished.

¹ Available at https://www.nashville.gov/Portals/0/SiteContent/Planning/docs/NashvilleNext/2017Update/next-volume1-F-Guiding%20Principles_Amended2017.pdf

² Available at https://ssir.org/articles/entry/community_engagement_matters_now_more_than_ever