

Neighborhood Planning.

INTRODUCTION.

The core asset of every small city and town is its neighborhoods. As the city pursues its **vision** of being an interesting, pleasant and prosperous place for residents, preserving and creating great neighborhoods takes center stage. Great neighborhoods are the city’s primary product.

The first step is to embrace **the primacy of neighborhoods**, to fully commit to the idea that places where people live are of primary importance to the city.

The primary purpose of every local government is to protect people in their homes and neighborhoods. People must be protected from crime, aggressive drivers, falling property values, structural deterioration and other obnoxious intrusions.

PRINCIPLES OF NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN

- They are walkable from end to end,
- They have a civic core and a mix of uses and amenities,
- They have an interconnected street network,
- They have recognizable boundaries,
- They provide for chance meetings and privacy, and
- They have a variety of housing types.

Source: Urban Land Magazine, May 2004, p63.

A “**Great Neighborhoods**” program is a partnership between neighborhood residents and the city to value and protect the quality of residential life for all residents. The city is only as strong as its weakest neighborhood.

The strategic objectives critical to fulfilling the city’s primary purpose are:

- To **commit** the city to preserving and enhancing existing neighborhoods.

- To **provide leadership training** to residents and stakeholders.
- To **establish neighborhood organizations** by working with neighborhood leaders.
- To **proactively work to improve blighted neighborhoods**.
- To **provide technical assistance** to “Qualified Neighborhood Associations” to prepare plans to serve the social, physical and economic needs of their residents.
- To **enable new investments** with regulations, standards, compassionate code enforcement and infrastructure that encourage improvements and maintenance.
- To **encourage development of infill properties** with flexible regulations and infrastructure systems.
- To **encourage redevelopment** of properties that have been neglected or abused.
- To **connect** neighborhoods to nearby parks, schools, shops and adjacent neighborhoods.
- To **address housing affordability** with regulatory, financial, infrastructure and education programs.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT NEIGHBORHOOD

1. A variety of functional attributes that contribute to a resident’s day-to-day living [residential, commercial or mixed use].
2. Accommodations with multimodal transportation [bike/peds, drivers] systems.
3. Design and architectural features that are visually interesting.
4. Encouragements for human contact and social activities.
5. Promotions for community involvement and maintenance of a secure environment.
6. Promotion of sustainability principles that are responsive to climatic demands.
7. Memorable character.

Source: Planning Magazine, January 2008, p8.

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THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PROCESS.

There are many versions of a planning process. The simplest seems to be to establish a community based vision, let the vision drive the strategy which then directs all actions. If the neighborhood gets the vision right and it is a vision embraced by most of the residents, the strategies and actions follow naturally.

Leadership matters. The residents need to organize, select leaders and coalesce in a group to enable their voice to be heard in city hall and in the neighboring shopping and housing areas.

Technical assistance is important. There are proper ways to conduct a neighborhood planning process that is socially viable and technically valid. The city is usually in a position to provide technical assistance, especially when they see an organization with community-minded leaders.

The critical factor is to enable all neighborhoods to avail themselves of the city’s largess. Blighted neighborhoods usually struggle to get organized and identify leaders who have the support of the neighborhood. City assistance with organization and leadership deficits is usually required. Code enforcement, deteriorated structures, inadequate infrastructure and the absence of parks, schools and shopping make the challenge more demanding.

A system of qualifying neighborhood organizations follows. Qualification, as proposed, is the process to channel city resources into neighborhoods ready to receive assistance.

The Neighborhood Planning Process A Checklist

1. Establish or strengthen the neighborhood organization with a system that provides a guide to neighborhood planning and then “qualifies” neighborhood organizations to receive benefits from the city.
2. Delineate neighborhood boundaries that are defensible by the organization.
3. Prepare a land use and circulation plan for each neighborhood incorporating plans for streets, parks, schools, shops and the pathways that connect them.
4. Embrace a diversity of housing types, styles and price points reflecting the changing composition of the American household.
5. Plan for the full range of physical infrastructure from public safety to health care to stormwater management, including social and economic infrastructure.
6. Establish a financial plan for funding and sustaining the neighborhood organization and its infrastructure systems.
7. Provide a beautification plan with canopy and decorative trees for all streets, parks, schools and shopping districts.
8. Establish communication systems within the neighborhood, the neighborhood organization and the host city government that are interactive and transparent using tradition and digital media.
9. Fully engage the city government in the neighborhood planning, design, implementation and evaluation process.

Source: wck | planning.



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Neighborhood Design Principles

The Inner City Task Force of the Congress for the New Urbanism has developed a set of design principles that have proven effective in inner city neighborhoods. These principles have been tested in several HOPE VI projects. They are proposed as a set of working principles to be further tested and refined through use.

- **Citizen and Community Involvement:** Engage residents, neighbors, civic leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, developers, and local institutions throughout the process of designing change for neighborhoods.
- **Economic Opportunity:** The design of neighborhood development should accommodate management techniques and scales of construction that can be contracted to local and minority businesses.
- **Diversity:** Provide a broad range of housing types and price levels to bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction – strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community.
- **Neighborhoods:** Neighborhoods are compact, pedestrian–friendly, and mixed use with many activities of daily life available within walking distance. New development should help repair existing neighborhoods or create new ones and should not take the form of an isolated “project.”
- **Infill Development:** Reclaim and repair blighted and abandoned areas within existing neighborhoods by using infill development strategically to conserve economic investment and social fabric.
- **Mixed Use:** Promote the creation of mixed use neighborhoods that support the functions of daily life: employment, recreation, retail, civic and educational institutions.
- **City-wide and Regional Connections:** Neighborhoods should be connected to regional patterns of transportation and land use, to open space, and to natural systems. The primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets and public spaces as places of shared use. Neighborhoods should have an interconnected network of streets and public open space.
- **Public Open Space:** The interconnected network of streets and public open space should provide opportunities for recreation and appropriate settings for civic buildings.
- **Safety and Civic Engagement:** The relationship of buildings and streets should enable neighbors to create a safe and stable neighborhood by providing “eyes on the street” and should encourage interaction and community identity. Provide a clear definition of public and private realm through block and street design responding to local traditions.
- **Dwelling as Mirror of Self:** Recognize the dwelling as the basic element of a neighborhood and as the key to self-esteem and community pride. This includes the clear definition of outdoor space for each dwelling.
- **Accessibility:** Buildings should be designed to be accessible and visitable while respecting traditional urban fabric.
- **Local Architectural Character and Design Codes:** The image and character of new development should respond to the best traditions of residential and mixed use architecture in the area. The economic health and harmonious evolution of neighborhoods can be improved through graphic urban design codes that serve as predictable guides for change.

Source: *Principles for Inner City Neighborhood Design*; A Collaboration of the Congress for the New Urbanism and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999.

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A “QUALIFIED” NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM.

Once the city has a neighborhood program, it can then measure the level of commitment from the residents in each city neighborhood. Neighborhoods are offered an opportunity to express interest in partnering with the city to plan and protect their neighborhoods by demonstrating organization and leadership. Organized neighborhoods are then entered into a program to “qualify” them for city assistance.

The city will take several actions to “qualify” interested neighborhoods:

1. Establish a city-wide Great Neighborhoods Committee to create *A Guide for Neighborhood Planning* including:

- A Community Education Program to Develop Neighborhood Leadership.
- Neighborhood Plan Standards and Methods for a city-approvable plan.
- Neighborhood Infrastructure Standards for utilities, flood protection, police and fire, street lighting, traffic calming, zoning, school access and recreation programs for each neighborhood.
- A Physical Improvement Grant Program with a system for the annual selection of qualified neighborhoods to receive city grants and staff support.

2. Establish criteria for “Qualifying” Neighborhood Organizations to receive city staff and financial assistance, such as:

- A name.
- A board of directors with Bylaws,
- An agreed-upon boundary,
- A meeting place for the membership,
- A revenue source, and
- A “Certificate of Qualification” from the city indicating the association meets city standards.

3. Process organized neighborhoods to be certified as “Qualified Neighborhood Associations” eligible for city support.

- Solicit neighborhoods to organize themselves and seek certification as a “Qualified” Association.
- Solicit applications each fiscal year from “Qualified Associations” for city funding and technical assistance to complete a plan to city specifications.
- Enable “Qualified Neighborhood Associations” not funded by the city in a specific annual cycle to proceed at their own pace, should they choose, by using the *Guide for Neighborhood Planning*. Such neighborhood action will enable future city assistance.

CONCLUSIONS.

1. **Neighborhood primacy.** The primary responsibility of every city is to protect people in their homes and neighborhoods.
2. **City commitment** is critical to a successful Great Neighborhoods program based on standards and “Qualified Associations”.
3. **A holistic approach** recognizes that neighborhoods are more than a collection of houses; a neighborhood includes homes of all types, parks, schools and shops.
4. **Needs are varied.** Housing and neighborhood design should include a wide variety of housing types, locations and prices that reflect:
 - a. Households have fewer children,
 - b. Over a quarter of Americans live alone.
 - c. Affordable housing is beyond the reach of many residents, and
 - d. Blighted neighborhoods require special attention.