

NASHVILLE CIVIC DESIGN CENTER

THE WORK OF THE NASHVILLE CIVIC DESIGN CENTER THROUGH ITS HISTORY

To understand the importance the NCDC plays in Nashville's development, it is first necessary to understand the important role civic design centers play across the nation, and the value they bring to their cities.

According to an article in October's edition of *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, entitled *Community Design: On Board for Change* (featuring the NCDC):

“As non-profits that do not answer to a specific client base or voting block, design centers have the luxury to focus on innovation. At their best, they become the locus of creative risk taking, which can then be communicated to the political and business communities. It is in this critical space that they do their most valuable work, and as such they offer an invaluable education on how to blend exciting design possibilities with political pragmatism.”

Article written by Stephanie Pankiewicz and Richard Laws

Cities with civic / community design centers include: Asheville, Austin, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Charlottesville, Chattanooga, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Louisville, Memphis and Pittsburgh.

MISSION and WORK

Founded in 2000, the Nashville Civic Design Center (NCDC) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to elevate the quality of Nashville's built environment and to promote public participation in the creation of a more beautiful and functional city for all.

Towards this end, the NCDC:

Promotes the Ten Principles of *The Plan of Nashville*.

Educates the public about civic design through lectures by prominent speakers; classes on the history and practice of urban design; and continuing education classes taken by design and development professionals in the fields of architecture, law, real estate and urban planning.

Provides professional staff and highly qualified design interns to consult on civic and other community development projects.

Facilitates public dialogue about civic design and its impact through the **Urban Design Forum** (the UDF was founded in 1995 to present monthly public discussions of urban design issues). The Forum meets monthly at the NCDC, publicizes events and lectures and provides an open forum for the debate of ideas and issues of interest to its members.

Researches and publishes reports on various civic design issues.

PARTNERSHIPS

The NCDC began as a partnership of the University of Tennessee Knoxville College of Architecture + Design, Vanderbilt University, the Metropolitan Development and Housing Authority (MDHA), the government of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County and the private sector. The NCDC was established in December 2000 and opened its doors in June 2001. The Center does not charge for its assistance, nor replicate the work of existing government agencies, nor provide services that compete with design professionals, rather it provides visionary ideas for the city that in turn become reality. The Center's Board of Directors, as well as its sponsors, represents a cross-section of Nashville and Davidson County's professions and perspectives.

Working with government officials, regional planning groups, neighborhood organizations, businesses and residents, the NCDC listens with independent ears and speaks with an independent voice. The Center leads community discussions and workshops and conducts research to further understanding of the relationship between society and its built environment. The NCDC is not a regulatory institution; rather it advocates and supports the highest standards for contemporary community design.

The NCDC is known and respected for its ability to bring many diverse parties together and facilitating proactive discussion to promote change.

THE PLAN OF NASHVILLE

The NCDC's most ambitious project to date is ***The Plan of Nashville***, a community-based, fifty-year vision of how the urban core of Nashville should look and work in the future. The Plan, completed in 2004, was conceived and orchestrated by the NCDC.

The visioning process that created *The Plan* involved more than 800 people participating in 50 community meetings over the course of two and a half years. *The Plan of Nashville: Avenues to a Great City* book was published by Vanderbilt University Press in 2005, and written by Christine Kreyling.

During the visioning process that created ***The Plan of Nashville***, consensus emerged regarding Ten Principles to guide public policy, development practice, urban planning, and design.

Ten Principles of ***The Plan of Nashville*** are:

1. Respect Nashville's natural and built environment.
2. Treat the Cumberland River as central to Nashville's identity -- an asset to be treasured and enjoyed.
3. Reestablish the streets as the principal public space of community and connectivity.
4. Develop a convenient and efficient transportation infrastructure.
5. Provide for a comprehensive, interconnected greenway and park system.
6. Develop an economically viable downtown district as the heart of the region.
7. Raise the quality of the public realm with civic structures and spaces.
8. Integrate public art into the design of the city, its buildings, public works and parks.
9. Strengthen the unique identity of neighborhoods.
10. Infuse visual order into the city by strengthening sightlines to and from civic landmarks and natural features.

Each year since the Plan's unveiling, the NCDC has hosted the **Living the Plan of Nashville** event. LTPON is an opportunity for the NCDC to present the work it has accomplished over the past year, while highlighting the projects

in Nashville that are consistent with the Plan's Ten Principles, and how the city is moving forward in quality development, policy and practice.

The LTPON also serves as the NCDC's major fundraising event. This program, now in its 6th year, has raised over \$400,000 in support of the NCDC's mission and programs.

URBAN DESIGN PROJECTS & RESEARCH

Since its inception as an organization, the Nashville Civic Design Center has played a direct role in numerous major urban design projects undertaken within the city of Nashville. The NCDC's has conducted design charrettes, hosted public meetings and forums, brought in guest lecturers to address specific design-related topics, and provided design concepts and recommendations reports – all with the goal of improving the quality of these major projects in the city of Nashville.

Major urban design projects in which the NCDC has played a direct role include:

- The Cumberland Bridges Report
- The Nashville Public Square
- Capitol Boulevard and Church Street Revitalization
- The Public Art Plan
- The Sounds Ballpark Planning Process
- Green Hills Streetscaping and Signage Study
- The Location and Design of the Proposed Music City Center
- Nashville Riverfront Redevelopment Master Plan

Another part of the NCDC's mission is to research relevant civic design issues in Nashville and to educate the public on these topics. The NCDC has recently completed 15 Case Study reports that represent research in the following topics: Architecture, Housing, Policy, Public Art, Sustainability and Transportation. These studies are available on the NCDC's website.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Through its Neighborhood Revitalization Projects, the Nashville Civic Design Center works with residents, business owners and other community members to address specific challenges within their communities, creating a unified vision for improvement and change. The goal is to create a long-term vision that addresses the issues of the neighborhood, with specific action steps and goals for implementation over time.

Neighborhoods in which the NCDC has produced studies include: Germantown, Salemtown, Buena Vista, East Germantown, Edgehill, Chestnut Hill, Wedgewood Houston, Lafayette, Northeast Nashville and the ReDiscover East Neighborhoods,

INTENSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Since its inception, the Nashville Civic Design Center has offered 55 internship opportunities to students and young professionals in the fields of architecture, urban planning and design, landscape architecture, graphic design and community development – providing education in an intense hands-on learning environment. These interns also bring valuable insight to Nashville's development community from their various different educational backgrounds, enabling the NCDC to complete many projects that it would otherwise be unable to accomplish due to personnel constraints.

Educational Institutions represented by these interns include:

The University of Tennessee Knoxville (13), Vanderbilt University (14), University of Virginia, University of California Berkeley, Auburn University, Stanford University, Tulane University, University of Miami, University of Chicago, Tennessee State University, Harvard University, Yale University, Sewanee: The University of the South, Oberlin College,

Barnard College, Colorado College, Wheaton College, Fuilford College, McGill University (Canada), Leiden University (Netherlands), Julius-Maximilians University (Germany), Hume Fogg High School, and the University School of Nashville.

EVENTS & MEDIA

Since 2004, the NCDC has co-hosted the “Live It Up Downtown Home” with the Nashville Downtown Partnership. This successful event showcases urban living, and the contemporary developments under construction.

In its first six years, the Home Tour has had over 6,500 attendees, with a direct economic impact of at least \$46 million in sales and leases (based on Nashville Downtown Partnership’s tracking of sales based on the one-day event). The event is also a successful fundraiser for each organization, raising \$197,000 - or approximately \$100,000 for each.

The NCDC has produced 15 *CityVisions* television programs, exploring current urban design topics and issues affecting Nashville’s built environment. The 30 minute shows were hosted by TK Davis (previous NCDC Design Director) and Christine Kreyling; funded by a grant from the Tennessee Arts Commission; and appear on the Metropolitan Educational Access Corporation cable Channel 10. *CityVisions* is the only regularly occurring television show airing in the entire country

In addition to playing a direct role in urban design planning, the NCDC Staff has served or currently serves on numerous different committees throughout the city, including:

- Mayor’s advisory committee for the redesign of the downtown street system (co-chaired)
- Design committee for Watkins Park for the Nashville Rotary Club
- Mayor's advisory committee for the Cumberland Bridges
- Mayor's advisory committee for the Courthouse Square
- Mayor's advisory committee for Lower Broadway
- Exploratory committee for the Nashville Convention Center
- Downtown Nashville Living Initiative
- Downtown Nashville Holiday Decorations Initiative
- Nashville Gas Christmas Parade Advisory Committee
- The District - Board of Directors
- Downtown Partnership’s Residential Committee
- Cumberland Region Tomorrow Quality Growth Toolbox Steering Committee
- African American Museum of Music, Art and Culture Design and Building Committee
- Nashville Agenda 2007 Public Partnership
- Governor Bredesen Conservation Advisory Group
- MDHA Design Review Committees
- Leadership Nashville
- Nashville Wayfinding Project (with Public Works and consultants Informing Design, Inc)
- Urban Land Institute Nashville District Council Founding Executive Committee
- Nashville’s Poverty Initiative
- Green Ribbon Committee – Co-chaired Education & Outreach Subcommittee
- Open Space Plan Committee
- Trees Nashville

The NCDC conducts collaborative work with numerous local non-profits and national professional affiliations, including:

- Cumberland Region Tomorrow
- Cumberland River Compact
- Nashville Downtown Partnership
- Neighborhood Resource Center

- Vanderbilt University (Gentrification Studies for Edgehill, PhotoVoice Project with residents of the Napier Homes)
- Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee / Re/Storing Nashville
- Transit Now
- American Institute of Architects (AIA)
- United States Green Building Council (USGBC)
- Urban Land Institute (ULI)

Communities in which the NCDC has worked with on urban design projects outside of Davidson County include:

- Robertson County
- Lebanon
- Kingston Springs
- Clarksville

The NCDC works regularly with the following Metro Government Departments: Planning, Public Works, MDHA, Arts, Parks, Historical; as well as the Mayor's Office and NES.

The NCDC hosts semi-weekly Metro Staff Meetings to convene representatives of each of the above city departments. These meetings allow for open dialogue and communication among departments dealing with the built environment of the city. Representatives of these departments serve as NCDC liaisons - providing information on the various different projects in which the NCDC is involved.

As a part of the NCDC's partnership with the University of Tennessee College of Architecture + Design, numerous UT Faculty members have focused their semester-long design studio work on projects based in Nashville. The NCDC works closely with these professors to determine relevant and important project ideas that will help affect positive change in Nashville – or to promote a “Big Idea” for the city.

These studio projects typically involve 15 students working over the course of 3 ½ months. Students typically travel to Nashville at least twice during the course of the semester. This studio work represents a significant time commitment from the University of Tennessee College of Architecture + Design and greatly benefits the NCDC in advancing its mission. Work produced in these studios is collected and published on the NCDC web site. When possible, the NCDC also produces an official report of the work.

Student Projects in the past include:

- Designs for the Public Square
- Designs for Revitalizing Demonbreun Street
- A New Downtown Baseball Park for Nashville
- Infilling the Hard Rock Café Site on Broadway
- A Downtown Magnet High School for the Visual & Performing Arts
- “The Next Door” Projects for Marginal Sites in Downtown Nashville
- A Future for SoBro
- Infill Development Sites for Downtown Nashville
- Designing a Liner Building for the Public Square Garage
- A Museum for Centennial Park
- An Urban Island for Nashville on the East Bank of the Cumberland
- A New Neighborhood for the North Gulch
- Center for Environmental Sustainability in SoBro
- Transit Oriented Development at Lebanon's Historic Town Center (partnership with Vanderbilt's Owen School of Business)
- Urban Design for the Arts Center Redevelopment District