

Avenues to a Great City: The Ten Principles

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As many avenues lead into a city, so planners and designers have pursued many paths of collaboration with the community to arrive at the Plan of Nashville.

A Vision Plan

The Plan outlines an ideal vision for Nashville which respects the city's cultural history, natural landscape, and built legacy. While the Plan cannot foresee all future challenges and opportunities, its "Ten Principles" provide guidance with flexibility for future decision-making. Achieving the civic ideal is not merely possible but realistic--with coordinated efforts, with a sense of common purpose, and with the common vision embodied in the Plan.

The intellectual foundation of the Plan of Nashville is the concept of a "community-based vision plan." The Plan was developed through numerous public meetings staged during the course of 2003 at community centers and other public gathering places within the study area, and involved over 800 citizens who raised and discussed issues that affect their sense of community and quality of life.

The product of this collaboration between planners and the community is a vision plan, not a master plan. The latter is a plan for a clearly defined site developed in response to a fairly specific program. For example, the master plan for Rolling Mill Hill--an area south of the central core--involved a market study to predict the amounts of residential, retail and commercial square footage that the market could absorb in approximately 10 years. The plan then plotted these different land uses onto the 34-acre site, with design criteria to guide the forms that build-out can take.

A vision plan openly engages the optimal; it is more daring in that it strives for the ideal of the matter rather than the fact of the matter. Such a plan presents possibilities and opportunities, usually for a larger and less specifically defined territory than that encompassed by a master plan, and projects further into the future.



A vision for Church Street. Drawing, 2004: Mark Schimmenti and Gary Gaston

As a vision plan, the Plan of Nashville is intended to guide public policy with regard to the city's physical form, to serve as a litmus test to help determine the acceptability of future development proposals. By enabling each part of the city to be understood in relation to the whole, the Plan can empower public policy makers to avoid the piecemeal planning that Nashville has endured in the past.

Because the vision springs from the community, the Plan is a testament to the collective ambition to make the best Nashville possible, a "great city" that delivers a high quality of life to its citizens and visitors alike.

"The best city is, of necessity, a utopia. The actual city we live in is the best imitation we can make of that city."

Carroll William Westfall

The Process

The validity of the Plan of Nashville, and its eventual success, hinge on the acceptance of community-based planning assisted by professional design expertise. This process produces principles and goals developed by, and reflective of, the will of the people at large. These principles serve as the guidelines for future development proposals--for example, a new downtown elementary school or convention center.

The process had four stages:

1. Research by design professionals, planners and historians on Nashville's history, culture, and prior planning led to a better understanding of why the city looks and works the way it does today.
2. Citizens identified current concerns and priorities in the neighborhoods, in the city, and in the region.
3. The community's aspirations and ambitions for the city directed the development of the principles and goals of the Plan.
4. A team of design professionals--most particularly the staff of the Nashville Civic Design Center--assisted by writers and editors, formulated The Plan of Nashville as the embodiment and amplification of the three prior stages.

The community meetings during the visioning process helped set the geographical scope of the Plan: the down

town and its "first ring" neighborhoods; i.e., the original suburbs surrounding the downtown. The study area contains the inner loop of the interstate highway system as well as the east and west banks of the Cumberland River.

The Ten Principles

During the visioning process, consensus emerged regarding ten principles to guide public policy, development practice, urban planning and design:

1. Respect Nashville's natural and built environment.

Goals:

- The preservation and enhancement of the landscape's natural features;
- Environmentally sensitive building practices;
- A responsible approach to historic preservation.

2. Treat the Cumberland River as central to Nashville's identity--an asset to be treasured and enjoyed.

Goals:

- Protection of riverbanks, waterways, and wetlands;
- Environmentally sensitive uses of the river and riparian areas, balancing habitat,
- recreation, transportation, and water supply issues;
- Amenities and public access along the riverfront;
- A variety and multiplicity of connections across the river;
- Strong connections between neighborhoods and the river.

3. Reestablish the streets as the principal public space of community and connectivity.

Goals:

- Physical connections among the neighborhoods and downtown by means of a rational network of streets and avenues;
- Design standards for streets that ensure a high level of quality--physical and aesthetic--for the pedestrian.

4. Develop a convenient and efficient transportation infrastructure.

Goals:

- The road and street system reconfigured to distinguish between the mobility needs of
- high speed through traffic and the access needs of local traffic;
- A system that balances the needs of pedestrians, bicycles, mass transit and automobiles--including car storage;
- An interconnected network of mass transit opportunities that fully integrate a 24-hour life style.

5. Provide for a comprehensive, interconnected greenway and park system.

Goals:

- Greenways and parks linking public spaces, streets, neighborhoods and the Cumberland River;
- Parks for all neighborhoods equipped for a variety of recreational, generational and cultural activities.

6. Develop an economically viable downtown district as the heart of the region.

Goals:

- More--and more diversified--residential opportunities in downtown;
- Public investment leveraged with private development;
- A variety of uses that support workers, residents, and visitors; i.e., schools, retail, after-hours and weekend activities;
- A downtown that is “Nashville” and not an average or generic place.

7. Raise the quality of the public realm with civic structures and spaces.

Goals:

- Civic buildings and spaces that reinforce a sense of civic pride;
- Locations that are significant sites in complementary relationships;
- Connections to the city network by means of vistas, streets, and greenways;
- Civic buildings and spaces that set high standards for the design of the city at large.

8. Integrate public art into the design of the city, its buildings, public works and parks.

9. Strengthen the unique identity of neighborhoods.

Goals:

- Strong neighborhood centers and boundaries;
- A mixture of land uses and residential diversity within each neighborhood;
- Cohesive organization for each neighborhood, with a hierarchy of streets as well as a range of parks;
- Appropriate private development directed by public policies that reinforce each neighborhood's natural features, cultural history and built heritage and support commercial needs;
- Continued community involvement through strong neighborhood organizations.

10. Infuse visual order into the city by strengthening sightlines to and from civic landmarks and natural features.

Goals:

- View corridors to and from significant landmarks, especially the State Capitol.
- View corridors and vistas of all types, from small and intimate to sweeping and grand.

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