

Jim Ludwig White Paper:

CCNA Strategic Plan Proposal

Aug 27, 2022

Meaningful Neighborhood Input to the Land Development Process

Background

The Sarasota Zoning Code does NOT require any community workshops except in certain specific cases. (An early Community Workshop, if required, allows for neighborhood input on a proposed development before the developer/builder submits significantly completed site plans. **However, nothing said at a community workshop is binding. Minutes reflect the community workshops are held early in the process. Responses are nebulous. It is not uncommon for a response to be "I'll look into that."**)

The city staff then completes its review at the DRC without any public input. **The public is allowed to attend but not to participate in DRC meetings.** If a first workshop is mandated, a second workshop is only required under limited circumstances.

No public workshop is held after the submittal of a building permit or site plan and prior to issuance of a building permit or administrative site plan decision.

Without workshops early in the process, the only opportunity for neighborhood input is at a Planning Board public hearing. This, however, is not always required, and at that point, there is virtually no further opportunity for public input. **The PB agenda is usually published one week prior to the PB meeting. There is opportunity for the public to communicate by phone or email to PB members. That is gives PB members time to consider the public's point of view, discuss it with staff and come to the meeting with suggestions. It's better than just showing up at the meeting.**

After a Planning Board public hearing, when required, the plans are effectively etched in stone. Even minor changes are problematic to the developer & staff. **True.**

Intent:

To provide a review of plans at a point where agreed changes can be made at minimal cost to the development and staff effort (before plans are etched on stone).

Action Requested:

City staff improve the Community Workshop process for **meaningful** neighborhood input.

Why now

We are in a time of unprecedented growth. City staff, developers, and neighborhoods working together leads to growth that benefits all. Meaningful neighborhood participation in this process can prevent the deleterious effects of building the right thing in the wrong place or the wrong thing in the right place. Improvement of this process can be completed in 2 years.

Rationale:

Once the plans are accepted by the DRC, realistically they are etched in stone. Even minor changes are problematic to the developers & Staff **and are unlikely to happen.**

This will eliminate a majority (**I'd say some rather than a majority. There are other technical zoning code matters often brought up at PB meetings that are not necessarily a concern of neighbors.**) of the issues that get raised at the Planning Board and require commissioner and staff time effort dealing with the neighborhoods concerns.

Commissioner Strategic Values:

This covers all the Strategic Values requested by the commissioners:

- 1) especially a responsive Government and
- 2) a city that provides accessible Government and
- 3) a city that provides a climate that maximizes the opportunity for success.

CCNA Executive Committee

8/27/21

Neighborhood planning professionals

A discussion paper by Jim Ludwig:

Neighborhoods vs Residents:

Making a distinction between a “resident” and a “neighborhood association”. In general:

- A Resident is focused on their residence, their family’s health and safety, their peace and quiet, their interests, hobbies and activities. There is some focus on their immediate neighbors due to the proximity. In general they don’t get involved in or know issues a person two blocks away has. When residents voice opinions in public meetings they generally are using personal frames of reference and perspective.
- A Neighborhood Association is an organization of residents and businesses in a bounded geographic area. Neighborhood Associations are membership based, elect Officers, Board Members and make Committee Assignments. Many are incorporated. The board and officers represent not only the members paying dues, but all entities in the neighborhood, both residential and commercial. A Neighborhood Association is focused on advocating with the City and other entities to improve neighborhood amenities and build community through organize activities both social and educational.

When advocating for their neighborhood, Officers and Boards of Neighborhood Associations take off their “Resident Hat” and don their “Community Leader” hat. For every call that a City staff or City Commissioner gets about an issue, that Neighborhood President gets 10. They are the first responder on many of their resident’s issues and they have the callouses and lack of sleep to show for it. Neighborhood Association leadership resolves and/or mitigates many issues that never get to staff or the commissioners, giving them a unique perspective on problems and solutions that staff, and commissioners may not have.

Point: “Resident Input” and “Neighborhood Association Input” are different levels and perspectives.

Note: I do not know their background with Neighborhood Associations, but Kathy Kelly told me our City Manager and two of our City Commissioners live In a neighborhood without a neighborhood association. You must wonder if they only bring to the table a “resident perspective” in dealing with neighborhood issues.

Residents vs Developers:

- **MYTH #1:** *Neighborhood Associations are just a collection of activists, resisting development.* Every group has some activists, but most Neighborhood Boards and Leadership **strive to promote what is best for the entire neighborhood and community and many associations have developers as members.**
- **MYTH #2:** *Neighborhood associations will fight any development and resist change.* This is only a convenient excuse for those who do not want to include and work with various stakeholders. They are the same ones that

seek “administrative approval” so they don’t have to take the time to make a project compatible. Neighborhoods will jump on board the “**right project in the right place**”.

- **MYTH #3:** *Neighborhoods and developers cannot work together on projects that both profit from.* There is evidence that **working together increases the project development profits.**
- **MYTH #4:** *All developers are the same.* All developers are not the same and cannot be painted with the same brush. All developers have a common expectation to make a fair return on their investment, but they vary in several ways.
 - Some developers put in projects driven by quickly maximizing profit. Get in, build, and get out, selling to others who would buy that property for a potential income producing property, i.e. making a longer term investment. Many condo projects and others are like this. This type of developer traditionally isn’t concerned about the long term viability of the project or whether it is compatible with the surrounding properties or neighborhood. Time is their most important driver, and they resist anything that slows the project (thus desires administrative approval, no public input and/or anything else and will agree with concession that allows the timeframe to be compressed, because to them time is money).
 - Some developers are interested in building income producing projects with the intent of managing them and attracting long term tenants and or leases. They are in it for the long haul and more receptive to working with the neighborhoods, the surrounding neighbors be they commercial or residential and the community in general, often because they are residents of that neighborhood or community.

My observations:

Advisory Boards and Committees: Sarasota has almost 30 Advisory Boards and Committees.

- Some of these are statutory, others appear to be charged with directly advising the Commission and the remaining appear to be special interest or assist in forming staff strategies.
- In the City Commission meetings I have attended over the past 2-3 years, I have observed that the board or committee involved on an agenda topic, generally does not make a presentation on their recommendations. When a member of that committee does speak, they usually are doing it in the public hearing process, and there is no exchange with commissioners. **I think it used to be that each advisory board chair made a brief presentation to the CC annually. When I was on the Citizens with Disabilities Advisory Board, we did that. It seems that staff speaks for the PB, but there have been situations when the PB made additional recommendations to accompany a motion and staff ignored them when presenting to the CC.**
- I cannot find a single existing Board or Committee that is charged with the specific responsibility for addressing neighborhood integrity or stability and mitigating neighborhood problems and conflicts. From what I can tell some of them feel they have resident input because they are “residents”. None require a member to have “neighborhood association” experience or background.

Suggestions:

Advisory Boards and Committees are staffed by community members with a variety of expertise and interest geared to the focus of that Board. This is as close to having community representatives involved in the process. Consider:

- Reviewing the purpose of all the boards and committees with a focus on identifying which would benefit from having a change in the focus of address related neighborhood issues and identifying which would benefit from having a member with neighborhood expertise.
- Forming a Neighborhood Advisory Committee to make recommendations on projects from a neighborhood perspective. For example, Affordable Housing, Attainable Housing, Urban Mixed Use, Vacation Rentals, Air Bnbs, Residential Speeding and Traffic Calming, Cut-through traffic, Sidewalks, Street Lighting, Public Tree

Planting, Trash Storage, Parking, Compatible Commercial entities, neighborhood parks, green space and amenities and a host of other neighborhood type issues would be fair topics addressed either specifically by the committee or as resources to other committees and staff.

- Require a Commissioner Liaison be assigned to every advisory group as well as a Staff Resource person. The commissioner gives direction and is not required to be at any meeting. Doing so allows the City Commission to take some ownership in the Advisory Boards and Committees that is currently lacking. **When I was on the Citizens with Disabilities Advisory Board, there was a staff liaison, not a commissioner liaison. That staff liaison could serve the same purpose you suggest.**

The DRC (Development Review Committee) per the City's website:

*Development Review staff, through review of new development projects, ensures that the long-range plans of the City are implemented, and that new development adheres to the City's codes and regulations. Every new project is different, and City Planners work with developers, architects, engineers, attorneys **and neighborhood representatives** to achieve a balanced integration between new development and the built environment.*

Although this was most likely written with good intentions, involving “**neighborhood representatives**” is extremely rare. No one on the DRC has that specific responsibility and there are no others representing that interest. **EVERY PROJECT HAS NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACT.** Leaving neighborhoods out of the DRC process is arguably the most significant factor in failed and controversial projects.

- Neighborhood representation is clearly their intent. We must find a way to seat a neighborhood representative on the DRC. **I love this idea.**

Sarasota Planning Board:

The board consists of 5 members, plus an alternate who possess the technical, professional, financial, business or administrative skills necessary to accomplish the work of the board and who must be residents of the City. Nothing requires any neighborhood association experience required, although historically the board has been staffed with neighborhood experienced residents. **It's only had persons with neighborhood experience because those with neighborhood experience have been encouraged to apply. It doesn't happen automatically.**

Ordinance Drafting:

Ordinances are drafted by the City Attorney many times after consultation with City Staff. We need to figure out a way to include CCNA or a neighborhood representative in that drafting. **Or at least review it when it's in draft form.**

Urban Mixed Use and the North Trail Redevelopment:

We are embarking on a new zoning of Urban Mixed Use and will be using it for the North Trail and Fruitville corridors. Those corridors abut adjacent neighborhoods. You can also say those corridors are the gateway into those neighborhoods.

To be truly effective this new Urban Mixed Use zone must be **exclusively focused** on neighborhood compatibility. It needs to blend into the existing neighborhood and the commercial aspect must be geared to the surrounding neighbors. To be effective those neighbors will be the largest consumer group/patrons for those establishments. Those businesses will be made or will fail depending on the neighborhood's support. Build with that in mind, not that there are 5000-10000 cars every hour driving past. Some of those cars will stop but the neighborhoods will be the bulk of the support for establishments. The neighborhoods are already established, and the new zone will encourage mixed use development. It must be neighborhood friendly. Extremely important is:

- Structures compatible in height, structure and feel. You want to make the new development have the feeling of that neighborhood.
- Use that is tailored to that neighborhood. With significant input from the residents of that neighborhood want in commercial neighbors, with emphasis of what might you use that can walk or bike to. This might be a convenience store, a pizza or other restaurant, a daycare or early childhood learning center, a ready care center, a community center, a hardware store or community activities, etc.
- Placement of parking, restricting commercial hours of operation, making access and egress from parking lots with emphasis of deterring neighborhood cut throughs.
- Easy access to the commercial centers through walkways directly into the neighborhoods (public access easements, etc.
- Lighting and mitigation of lighting into the residential areas.
- Landscaping to mitigate US-41 and Fruitville traffic noise.
- Have that mixed use create an amenity for the neighborhood, increasing values and making those neighborhoods more desirable.
- Sort of the attraction of a downtown residence, but with the benefits of living in a single family or smaller multifamily residential dwelling.

We must establish a way that these Neighborhood Associations work with the Property Owners and Management in developing site plans, building design and prospective merchant tenants. Doing so is a win-win-win scenario. **However, the proposal currently on the table takes public/neighborhood participation totally out of the process!**

Random thoughts:

- How can we bring together residents, neighborhood and community leaders, community organizations, faith-based institutions and local businesses?
- How can we preserve our existing safe affordable housing and protect our legacy residents?
- When talking about affordable and workforce housing how do we include the residents of those target housing developments, many of which are long term renters. They have been left out of previous planning projects. **I'm not sure if you're talking about low income housing which is operated by the Housing Authority and also talking about the affordable/attainable/workforce housing, which is different from low income housing. I'm not sure both housing types will be regulated by the same set of rules and operated by the same governmental agency.**
- Planning with residents and Neighborhood Associations, rather than for them, will transform disconnected neighborhoods into a single, whole community. **We believe that, but it's pretty clear that planning staff does not. We must convince the CM and staff that increased density combined with Administrative Approval are not the only incentives that are proven to work.**
- We need to stimulate critical investments in economic development and other neighborhood assets that are focused on long-time residents.
- In the new mixed use neighborhoods, assemble all stakeholders and challenge them to identify local assets and identify solutions to the neighborhood's persistent challenges to increase opportunities for residents, improve the existing housing stock, promote economic development, and enhance the image of the neighborhood. **It's pretty clear that as written, the mixed use corridors will likely improve existing housing stock, promote**

economic development, and enhance the image of the neighborhood. However, it's being sold as an affordable housing initiative and it will probably not produce affordable housing.

- Build into the Comp Plan or create a new future development neighborhood compatibility plan for the City that specifically supports more meaningful input.
- Many older adults want to contribute to the community. Look for opportunities to engage our seniors as volunteers, mentors, or older workers, even if they are only here seasonally. An incredible pool of top executives and renown experts in their fields call Sarasota home. Find, identify and engage them. If we can leverage this talent and experience, we will all be better for it.
- There is a national movement encouraging communities to be “age friendly” sponsored by AARP and others. That is another strategy we can bring to the community and work into meaningful input process. [gnv005.pdf \(silverchair.com\)](#) [An Introduction to the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities](#)