

This paper is the 9/21/2022 draft work in progress. The Meaningful Neighborhood Input committee is sharing it to begin the discussion process with the CCNA EC.

“Meaningful Neighborhood Input in the Development Process”

Committee – Use our Neighborhoods

A Whitepaper – drafted by Jim Ludwig (9/21/2022) with committee input

Neighborhoods:

The City of Sarasota has divided the community into neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are identified by name and are contained by delineated boundaries, usually streets. All residential, commercial, vacant and other parcels in a neighborhood are considered a part of that neighborhood. The City currently has identified 56 named and bounded neighborhoods and 6 named but unbounded associations or alliances.

On the [City Website Neighborhoods page](#), taken verbatim from the [City’s Comprehensive Plan](#) is the following:

"Meaningful citizen participation yields better long-term solutions for neighborhood issues." and

"It shall be the Goal of the City to achieve healthy and livable neighborhoods by:

- ***Maximizing opportunities for all citizens to have meaningful involvement in the decisions that affect their neighborhood;***
- ***Maximizing compatibility between residential and non-residential uses;***
- ***Ensuring neighborhood safety and quality of life;***
- ***Developing safe, aesthetically pleasing and efficient transportation networks;***
- ***Preserving, protecting and enhancing neighborhood aesthetics, identity, and natural and historic resources; and,***
- ***Embracing an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) philosophy by focusing on the capacities and assets of associations and citizens."***

Neighborhood Associations:

Residents of almost every neighborhood are organized through Neighborhood associations, many of which are incorporated, elect boards and officers and conduct regular resident meetings. Many of these associations are and have been active advocating for the betterment of their neighborhood and their community for more than 40 years.

The City also recognizes Neighborhood Associations as ***"groups of residents, property owners and or merchants that have created a recognized association"***. Again, from the [City’s website Neighborhoods page](#):

"Below are typical characteristics of active City neighborhood associations:

- ***Meet regularly.***
- ***Have recognized leadership.***
- ***Communicate with residents.***
- ***Communicate with government.***
- ***Take formal action to officially represent.***
- ***Have articles of association/incorporation.***
- ***Have delineated neighborhood boundaries.***
- ***On record with the Planning Dept."***

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City Commission:

The Community has set up the Sarasota City Commission with 5 members, 2 at Large and 3 representing specific geographic boundaries coinciding with neighborhoods. Resident voters elect the commissioner that represents that set of neighborhoods. The resident voters of the entire city elect the two at-large commissioners.

District Commissioners are looked upon by the Community to know and understand the needs of their represented neighborhoods and champion the resolution of those issues at the table. If an issue affects a neighborhood in District 2 then the Commissioner representing District 2 is expected to take the lead on that discussion after consulting with that neighborhood's association leadership. The other commissioner as part of their homework for that issue should listen to not only that neighborhood's position, but also the positions of the neighborhoods they represent and the entire community as well. An issue in one neighborhood can easily be a future issue in another neighborhood.

Florida sunshine laws prohibits any two commissioners from discussing any city issues outside of a public noticed meeting. There are pros and cons on this statute, but that is not the topic of this discussion. From a Commissioners standpoint, they cannot rely on another commissioner for input.

Our City Commission like many municipalities have set up (at last count) 29 topic specific advisory boards some of which are statutory. **There is no advisory board charged with advocacy for neighborhood issues.**

Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA):

Seeking a collective voice, the established neighborhood associations 30+ years ago formed a Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA). Their stated purpose in the CCNA Articles of Incorporation is:

To protect and enhance city neighborhoods. The Coalition shall address the needs of neighborhoods and stand in support of these needs. The Coalition shall consider action when requested by a neighborhood and shall work with the City Commission in a cooperative spirit.

CCNA has organized itself based using the same districts the City Commission uses. Their Board (Executive Committee) includes officers and a representative from each commission district. Their membership also is aligned with the designated neighborhoods established by the City, i.e. the same boundaries and same names. CCNA currently has 33 member associations, over 95% of those that are organized. CCNA both through their Officers and their Executive Committee and their member Neighborhoods are very active and involved in issues affecting a neighborhood or the Community.

Opportunity Seemed Lost:

Logic would say that City and Commissioners:

- Would benefit from an advisory board for neighborhood issues.
- Would benefit from an advisory board for housing issues.
- District Commissioners would meet regularly on an ongoing basis with their District, i.e., the respective CCNA District Representative and the Presidents of the neighborhoods in that district.
- Would confide in and seek advice from CCNA and their Executive Committee on an ongoing basis.

Logic would say that the City and Commissioners would look to and support CCNA to change its role:

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- Be a platform for community education.
- Provide neighborhood leadership training and community education
 - Grants and other fundraising for both developing educational materials and for bringing in informative speakers
- Be a collective voice for the neighborhood associations, establishing positions on critical issues and bringing those on a timely basis
- Be a communication platform for developer education
- Be a facilitator for public workshops
- To empower the role of their Executive Committee District Reps to establish and maintain a professional working relationship with each neighborhood president in that district and with the City Commissioner elected from those neighborhoods, including the scheduling of ongoing meetings set up to identify and discuss those specific neighborhood issues.
- To reach out and include all nonmember City neighborhoods, by education in forming or adoption from an adjoining neighborhood with the goal of representing the entire community.
- To encourage their neighborhood association members change their bylaws to reach out and include in some form of membership all parcels within their neighborhood (i.e. retail, offices, vacant and public land, etc.) The goal being to establish the Neighborhood Association represent a broader population than those residents that have paid dues.

Arguably Neighborhood Associations and their elected leaders, per se have no designated role particularly at public input meetings. At best, a neighborhood President or other Board Member will speak at meetings allowing public input.

Having more meaningful input from the Community through our neighborhoods needs to become a Community priority. It is a stated objective of the City as demonstrated on their website. This is not a one way street. All parties need to make changes on how they deal with issues, **to act in good faith**, with mutual respect and trust.

Note: This is intended to be a setup for the set of recommendations regarding empowering the Neighborhoods.

Anticipate possible recommendations like (just a representative list):

- More interaction and alignment between CCNA and City Neighborhood Services.
- Development of enhanced education materials from the development department and the “public input” prior to workshop.
- Development of an executive summary of any proposed ordinance in a manner that the State and Federal government legislative service departments do that puts the prospective ordinance into understandable language. Even some commissioners would benefit from this.
- Encouraging, both systematically and perhaps codified requirement that developers meet with the effected neighborhood boards prior to submission to the City (i.e. prior to the clock starts).
- Requiring the case manager (assigned by Development Services predevelopment) to attend workshops and represent neighborhood interests at the DRC (which the manager moderates). Allow comments from Developers and from Neighborhood Representative during the process. The case manager would be charged with making sure all the issues brought up in public workshops are addressed.

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- Complete review and possible rewrite of the Development Process website pages, including all the input forms for identifying affected neighborhoods and for communication with them. May need to have the neighborhood designate a representative for each development.
- Better and more direct communication at all points of the development review to a designated neighborhood representative.
- More and better communications between CCNA EC District rep and the corresponding City Commissioner rep from that District. Orchestrate periodic meetings that also include all the presidents in the district. Both entities represent the same constituency. We need to have the Commissioner believe and utilize that reaching out the CCNA EC District rep and the corresponding Neighborhoods Presidents is there most trusted ally.
- Encouraging the use of current design software (like 3D Modeling) (even if paid for and made available to the developer from the City or CCNA) that would allow public workshops to have more graphic images of the anticipated development, i.e. encourage visuals.

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