

Meaningful Neighborhood Input in the Development Process – Committee Update Report

(Presented by Jim Ludwig, Committee Chair – CCNA Membership Meeting, November 5, 2022)

We have a really packed meeting agenda today, so rather than go into a deeper discussion about our committee's findings and recommendations, I will highlight what is happening:

Initially the committee, concentrated on understanding the existing process of public input. We all know that trying to have meaningful influence on an issue when it is before the City Commission is in large part a "WASTE OF TIME". Look at the last 5 years, or last 5 months or the last 5 weeks. At that point in the process, Staff has felt they sought public input and made their recommendations, Commissioners have done their research and drawn their conclusions before they get to the meeting. There is little to no chance of making changes, no matter how passionate the public hearing dialogue is and no matter how many bodies show up. This existing process is counterproductive, it unnecessarily divides the community, and fosters disrespect for both City staff and the Commissioners representing us. This is why at the Comp Plan Public Hearing a few weeks ago I said, "THE SYSTEM IS BROKE".

As the committee discovered early on it is a matter of timing. That kind of dialogue and passion would be better served if it were applied before a project or issue ever got to even a public workshop. That's where the need for meaningful input needs to be focused.

Under current zoning codes and development parameters, some of which are State mandated, the community has a relatively short timeline from a development submission to the approval process. There is little time for any real meaningful input. As we have already reported there may be some changes we can make to codify timelines for meaningful input, but the committee feels those are longer term goals and there are a number of things we can explore and implement without making process code changes.

That has been the focus of our committee to date.

Conceptualize with me for a minute.

Our community (staff and City Commission) has designated 40 some “neighborhoods”, each with a name and boundary. Our city government is based on the premise that those neighborhoods are divided into 3 districts, and we elect the majority of our Commissioners on a district basis (3 of the 5).

Every square foot of land in the community is within a defined city “neighborhood” and that includes our parks. Downtown is a neighborhood. Our neighborhoods are a mixture of residential and commercial properties, some predominately residential and some predominately commercial.

More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of our city neighborhoods have established a “recognized” neighborhood association. Many of these associations were established and incorporated decades ago. Their membership is served by a set of Officers and a Board of Directors. Some 30 years ago, these neighborhood associations established a Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations. The makeup of CCNA’s executive committee mirrors that of the City Commission, i.e. specific representation from each of the 3 Districts. So visualize an organization chart of our community. Residents divided into neighborhoods, led by an association, supported by the CCNA district rep, who elects a District wide City Commissioner to set policy and direct staff. From my vantage point, we could solve a lot of communication problems in this community if the District Commissioner, the District CCNA Rep, and the Neighborhood Presidents in that District held regular communication meetings.

Every development in the City of Sarasota is a development in a specified neighborhood. I believe it can be argued that the main benefactor of any new development is the host neighborhood, and that includes properties on the neighborhood boundaries. If the new development is residential, those new residents are potential neighborhood association members. If the new development is professional office or retail, a significant number of the clients supporting those entities will come from the existing or immediately surrounding neighborhood. Those businesses survival depends on how well they attract those neighborhood residents.

In examining how and where we can increase “meaningful input”, the players needing to take a leadership role are already established. It is the affected neighborhood officers and board, the CCNA district rep, and the City Commission District rep, both individually and collectively. This group needs to facilitate meaningful discussion and ultimately champion the development through the process.

Easy to understand the concept but getting there is a significant challenge. It not only requires changes in process but also a cultural mind set change. Ideally, we need to get to a point where a property owner wanting to develop will start the exploration process with the neighborhood leadership. This may include making a presentation (like but not a workshop) at a Board Meeting or a Membership meeting, before going to the City and having the “regulatory clock” start. As neighborhoods we need to welcome property owners as members and encourage those kinds of meetings.

Although the committee has yet to meet with specific developers, some committee members have had informal discussions with them. We get the indication that if set up properly they could support having the neighborhood “buy in” before the application is even submitted. Some, quite honestly, already do this. They know it will not only shorten the City’s review time but also the costs involved.

We understand not every developer will buy in to this and equally not every neighborhood will be open to discussing new development. That is something we as neighborhood leaders need to address. Only after the developer and neighborhood community demonstrate the advantages of working together will this be successful. IT WILL TAKE TIME AND PATIENCE!

There are dozens of things we (the neighborhoods, CCNA, Staff and the City Commission) can do to influence the time this will take.

What has been very rewarding for those on the committee is our meetings with City staff, our City Attorney and others. Everyone wants this process to be successful.

Just sitting down with Lucia and other staff discussing what we see as issues immediately led to Lucia coming up with ways to mitigate those issues. She has

already begun to implement changes in the process that will be very key. As an example:

1. They are reviewing notices that go out making sure it is designed and written in language so the public can understand the project, and where specifically they can get more information about it.
2. They are looking for ways to get more information out regarding a workshop in advance of the required number of days, with the goal of having the public come to those workshops to participate, not just listen and react.
3. Still being worked on but moving ahead is augmenting the role of the case manager. A case manager is assigned to every development project, i.e. to help the developer through the process. That case manager also leads the discussion at DRC meetings. The City's website regarding DRC states:

*"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."*

The public may attend but has no input opportunity at DRC meetings. The change staff is considering is having the Case Manager work directly with neighborhood representatives and make sure neighborhood issues are signed off. This would be a HUGE CHANGE.

Lucia and staff have more ideas, and we will be looking together at the development process flow chart, various forms and their instructions and the supporting websites for clarity and consistency. It is a classic case that any operation needs to take a step back from time to time and review processes and procedures to make sure they efficiently work and effectively represent community goals.

Steve Cover reached out to CCNA following weeks of "discussion" we had with the Comp Plan changes asking to work together as we move forward on the Zoning Text Amendments. It goes without saying that no one wants a repeat of that last

few weeks of the Comp Plan process. Norm and I had an opportunity to sit down with Steve, Ryan and Briana a week ago and talk about the “process” of meeting with our committee so we can move forward with allowing the Zoning Text Amendments to be presented and discussed in a meaningful manner.

It was a very good discussion and we talked about a number of things including having future meetings to jointly review the process timeline, when and how to get meaningful information out prior to any public workshops, ideas on format and timing of those workshops, etc. I volunteered to put up a special page on the CCNA website specifically for the ZTA’s and the City indicated they will be as well. Ryan has already given me a contact person to work with. If anyone here wants to help, give me a call.

Steve had already set up our next meeting before Norm and I left the building. We will meet right after Thanksgiving. In response to my summary of the meeting, Steve wrote back and said:

“I thought it was an excellent meeting, and I think we’re off to a really good start. I’d like to approach this effort as if we’re one big team, and we really look forward to working with you and CCNA on this.”

From a committee standpoint, we have a lot of people we would still like to meet with, in no particular order:

- Additional developers and their supporting trades.
- Nancy Kelly and staff. There are so many things we can do in concert, including adding a new designated “neighborhood contact” for development notifications and issues in each neighborhood.
- Herminio and other staff on Modeling software. Yes, we have the million dollar 3D modeling applications, but today we also have 3d modeling software that is an app on your phone. We need to look at all possibilities. Pictures are worth 1000 words and having tools for developers to create visuals before application would help the meaningful input process. I also want to challenge staff and ourselves to find other technology we can come up with to help us work smarter. Again, anyone with ideas, shoot us an email.
- Neighborhood leaders, commissioners, Pat, CCNA EC members, some members of select Boards and Commissions and others.

In summary, don't look at our committee as one that will strictly study, make recommendations, seek approval and then implement. There will be some aspects of that, but many of the things we are exploring with staff, they enthusiastically say "we can fix that" and **they do**. You will see both subtle and obvious changes while we continue to work.

Anyone with thoughts or ideas, get a hold of anyone on our committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Ludwig, Committee Chair and
First Vice Chair, CCNA Executive Committee

Committee Members:

Ron Collins

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