



The State of Metro Neighborhoods: The Challenges We Face

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, Neighbor 2 Neighbor (N2N) conducted its biennial *Census of Neighborhood Organizations*. Seventy-seven neighborhood organizations throughout Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County participated in this census. *The State of Metro Neighborhoods* represents the findings of the 2021 *Census of Neighborhood Organizations* (and includes research, subsequent interviews and focus groups) and speaks to the major challenges facing our neighborhoods.

TOP FIVE CHALLENGES FACING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Each neighborhood organization was asked to identify 2-3 of the top challenges facing their neighborhood. Following the reporting period, N2N hosted conversations (in one-on-one and group settings) to better understand their concerns. The top five challenges facing our neighborhoods are listed below:

1. Rapid Development

79% of responding neighborhood organizations listed this as a top issue. Respondents indicated a sense of powerlessness to impact decisions affecting their neighborhood. They were frustrated by the lack of new and maintained infrastructure to meet the growing needs. Likewise, the inability to preserve the character of the neighborhood was felt across all communities. Gentrification and lack of affordable housing were great concerns for lower and moderate- income neighborhoods. Short term rentals were frequently cited as impacting quality of life and affordability. Construction-related concerns were cited as major disruptions and significant impacts on the quality of life. Finally, again and again we heard neighbor leaders express frustration about the lack of support from the Property Standards Division, Planning Department, and Planning Commission.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

2. Neighborhood Safety

75% of the responding neighborhood organizations indicated that safety concerns are a top issue facing their neighborhoods. Safety concerns fell into two categories.

First, respondents indicated that traffic was a major concern. This included street congestion, lack of parking, dangerous driving (speeding, failure to stop, distracted driving), and drag racing. While drag racing was not an issue for most neighborhoods, it was a major concern in neighborhoods where it is happening.

Second, respondents indicated that crime was a major concern. This included car break-ins, porch/mail theft, as well as drug and gang activity. While violent crime was not an issue for most neighborhoods, it was a major concern in neighborhoods where it is happening.

3. Litter and Illegal Dumping

Only 15% of responding neighborhoods indicated that litter and illegal dumping was a major issue facing their neighborhood. However, during our follow-up conversations, it was clear that it is an issue facing almost every neighborhood. Those interviewed felt that their neighborhoods are filling up with litter and a sense of hopelessness was frequently expressed.

4. Disaster Preparedness and Recovery

An overwhelming majority of responding neighborhood organizations did not indicate disaster preparedness and recovery as a top issue. However, we discovered that it was a top issue in neighborhoods where disasters (such as the tornado, floods, and train derailment) occurred.

5. Lack of Engaged Neighbors and Willing Leaders

Again, this was not an issue that neighborhood organizations listed as a top issue. In conversations with respondents, there seemed to be confusion about whether to list it as an issue. There was a focus on external threats as opposed to internal threats facing the organizations themselves.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

However, in follow up conversations, the lack of engaged neighbors and willing leaders quickly rose to the top. Many neighborhood organizations indicated that less than 1% of their residents participated in meetings and other activities. The conversations also revealed the lack of diversity in neighborhood organizations. This lack of diversity is a major concern in more diverse neighborhoods.

Many neighborhood leaders also shared that they lacked the ability to effectively engage residents. This has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the lack of engaged neighbors, there is a lack of willing members to step into leadership roles. The result has been that some leaders have been in the same leadership positions for three or more years.

LESS TALK, MORE ACTION

The challenges our neighborhoods are facing are not new. They have, however, been exacerbated by rapid development, the COVID pandemic, and an increase in localized disasters throughout the county. Neighborhood leaders repeatedly spoke about the lack of leadership in the metropolitan government as one of the greatest barriers to success. As one neighborhood leader put it, “There is a lot of hand-wringing and no real action. We’re tired of it.”

One example cited by neighborhood leaders, particularly in South Nashville, is the delay in opening a ninth police precinct and a fully staffed Metro Nashville Police Department. Another example is the lack of action around specific recommendations neighborhood leaders presented to the Planning Department about needed changes (Metro Planning Think Tank White Paper, N2N, 2019). There has been no formal response to the many needed changes that would remove barriers to achieving significant and meaningful community engagement.

While there is greater appreciation for the work individual Metro Council members are doing, there is an overall feeling that the well-being of residents and neighborhoods is not a real priority for the government as a whole. As another leader stated, “We need less talk and more action.”

I. RAPID DEVELOPMENT

The rapid pace of development in our metropolitan region these past several years, spurred by Nashville's popularity, economic opportunities, and other factors, is forever altering neighborhoods and threatening the quality of life of its residents. The planning and development issues described below are inter-connected to each other. The proliferation of non-owner-occupied Short-Term Rentals, corporate-owned rental neighborhoods, and seemingly constant construction disruptions are linked to zoning policies that favor developers. Our affordable housing crisis cannot be viewed in isolation of gentrification and threats to the cultural and historical integrity of neighborhoods.

Many residents of our local neighborhoods feel powerless to influence development decisions and policies and are struggling to find ways to ensure that development meets their needs, not just those of property investors and developers.

Gentrification Is Harming Our Neighborhoods

"Gentrification in North Nashville is reminiscent of the change that is going on in cities around the country. Under the development, older structures are torn down to make room for denser, taller, and more luxurious housing."¹ Cameron Hightower and James C Frasier

Many of our traditionally lower-income and distressed neighborhoods are gentrifying at an alarming rate. One study of the impact of gentrification on lower-income census tracts found that 21.1% of our 153 census tracts experienced gentrification between 2000 and 2013, up from 11.8% from the previous thirty years combined (1990-2000).² Some of these tracts are historically safe and modest areas, where low-income and working-class individuals could own a home with a yard and driveway. Losing neighborhoods such as Edgehill, Woodbine, and the area surrounding the fairgrounds to very

¹ "The Raced-Space of Gentrification: 'Reverse Blockbusting ...'" Accessed March 14, 2022. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1111/cico.12444>.

² "Gentrification in America Report." Governing. Governing, April 17, 2021. <https://www.governing.com/archive/gentrification-in-cities-governing-report.html>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

expensive rentals and individually owned condos in the \$700-900K range has led and continues to lead to serious deterioration in the diverse tapestry of our community while developers reap fortunes.

Residents who are displaced from the urban core have often relocated to outer-ring suburban neighborhoods in and outside of Davidson County. It is clear that low- and moderate-income households who are relocating to areas like Antioch are placing further demands on infrastructure systems in these areas.

Cultural displacement, defined as “when minority areas see a rapid decline in their numbers as affluent, white gentrifiers replace the incumbent residents,” is occurring in our metropolitan area, particularly within historically Black neighborhoods. *The Tennessean* compared race and ethnicity census data from two five-year time periods, 2007-2011 and 2012-2016, and identified the tracts with the largest decrease in Black residents.³ Our affordable housing crisis cannot be viewed in isolation of gentrification and threats to the cultural and historical integrity of neighborhoods.

Ingrid Campbell, president of the McFerrin Park Neighborhood Association in East Nashville, says that renters there are being displaced at an alarming rate and are unable to find new housing with rents they can afford nearby. She says that when this trend started several years ago, some renters “did not know until a sign was put in the front yard that the house they were renting was for sale.” Now, Campbell adds, developers are purchasing whole apartment buildings in her area to renovate with high-end features or demolish and replace, displacing swaths of families. Once these apartments are rebuilt or renovated, rents are too high for former residents to return.

Nationally, gentrification has an outsized impact on elderly low- and moderate-income homeowners, particularly in traditionally Black neighborhoods. There are local reports of property developers targeting elderly homeowners with constant offers to buy their homes, and some developers submitting property code violations as a method to push homeowners who are unable to fix the problem or pay fines to sell their home. Often, these residents are unaware of the true value of their property and are vulnerable to exploitation. Janet Parham with the North Nashville Community

³ Mike Reicher. “Black Share of Population Plummets in Some Nashville Neighborhoods.” *The Tennessean*. The Tennessean, January 3, 2018. <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2017/12/28/black-population-plummets-nashville-neighborhoods/936368001/>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Organization for Community Improvement (NNOCI) says her organization works to educate homeowners, saying, "I tell them 'don't sell your home; it's the most valuable asset that you have.'"

Zoning Decisions and Code Enforcement Favor Developers Over Neighborhoods

"The developers know how to get around the zoning laws. They are well organized and can see the loopholes and ways to get around them. People in the neighborhoods need to be paid more attention to."
Beth O'Shea, Green Hills Neighborhood Association

The residents of neighborhoods in Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County are feeling the impact of rapid development, and many are dismayed to find that a development-friendly zoning process has made it easy for developers to secure zoning changes in their favor while parking, traffic, and the maintenance of traditional greenspace have become serious problems.

Data obtained for rezoning requests from 2012 to 2021, from the Metro Nashville Planning Department showed that, from 2012 to 2021, at least 62% of zone change requests were approved for every year since 2015, except 2021. Approval rates were at least 80% in years 2014-2105 and 2017-2019.

Lack of Code Enforcement Detracts from Quality of Life

Davidson County's exponential growth has not been matched by an expanded Codes and Building Safety Department with enough staffing to effectively monitor and enforce development standards, property standards, environment protection, short-term rental regulations, and the many other codes under their domain. Jordan Huffman, president of the Donelson-Hermitage Alliance, says that developers and construction companies are aware that the Metro Codes Department is understaffed and take advantage of that. He cites an example: "One development is not adhering to blasting regulations. The problem is nobody checks this; there's too much going on for Codes to be able to do anything about it."

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Many neighborhood leaders feel that the fees for environmental, construction, and property code violations are too low to deter developers and construction companies from continuing work as usual. They believe when construction and real estate companies do get cited for a violation, the fees are simply considered a cost of business and not enough money to “hit them where it hurts.”

Short-Term Rentals Invade Neighborhood Streets

“Long-term residents want to live in a neighborhood, but it’s starting to feel like we are living in an entertainment district. When you can count no less than 8 or 9 Short-Term Rentals on one street, it really has an impact.” Leslie Boone, Maxwell Heights Neighborhood Association

Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County currently has 5,700 active Short-Term Rentals (STRs), approximately 10 STR units per square mile.⁴ According to Data.Nashville, there were 766 STR property violation complaints submitted to hubNashville from 2018 to 2021. Half of these complaints originated from only four council districts: District 17 (19%), District 10 (13%), District 6 (10%), and District 5 (8%).

Residents of Urban Metro neighborhoods have somewhat come to accept owner-occupied Short-Term Rentals that enable homeowners to rent out a part of their property to STR guests or to temporarily vacate their home for STR guests. One reason for this is that neighbors know they can alert homeowners of any problems with their guests and can be confident that these homeowners are vested in their neighborhood’s quality of life.

Non-owner-occupied Short-Term Rentals are a different story. These units are owned by investors, many who live outside the Metro area, who are primarily concerned with making a profit, not maintaining neighborhood integrity. Anecdotally, stories are told about large, loud parties, some with plenty of profanity and non-family-friendly balloons and banners that children can see. In the night, families have awakened to drunken STR guests banging on their door, trying to enter their

⁴ “How the Codes Department Achieves 90%+ Compliance with Host Compliance.” Granicus. Accessed March 8, 2022. <https://granicus.com/how-the-codes-department-achieves-90-compliance-with-host-compliance/>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

rental only to have the wrong address. It is reported that STR guests leave their trash in the street and neighboring yards or put garbage in recycling bins, which are subsequently not picked up.

Historical data since the start of STR permit data collection in 2015 shows that about 12,500 Short-Term permits have been processed by Metro since Metro began collecting permit data in 2015. Two-thirds of the total number of processed Short-Term Rental permits have been for non-owner-occupied units. They are also concentrated in certain neighborhoods. The graphic below shows the zip codes and associated neighborhoods within them that contain the greatest percentage of non-owner-occupied STR permit activity.

NOTE: We analyzed the Metro data to compare STR permits by type and to identify the zip codes with the greatest permit activity. Please be aware that there may be duplications of permits for one STR unit. Still, the data provides a view of which zip codes in Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County have the greatest and fewest permits in the system.

Affordable Housing Options Are Disappearing

"We're getting bombarded with investors and people wanting to purchase properties because of our proximity to downtown and Titans Stadium. We are losing affordable housing for people in this community, people who have been living here a long time, who have easy access to get back and forth to jobs, to schools, to hospitals, jobs downtown, and now they are displaced. We are allowing developers to go full steam ahead, and we have no plan for how to deal with affordable housing." Ingrid Campbell, president, McFerrin Park Neighborhood Association

Households who spend over 30% of their income on shelter costs (including mortgages, rent, property taxes, condominium fees, electricity, and water) are considered housing burdened. In Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, 46.5% of renters and 19.5% of homeowners are financially burdened by housing costs. Older home owners are particularly cost burdened, with a 21% increase in the number of cost-burdened older homeowners from 2010 to 2019.⁵

⁵ "Filetransfer.nashville.gov." Metropolitan Social Service Commission. Accessed March 9, 2022. https://filetransfer.nashville.gov/portals/0/sitecontent/SocialServices/docs/plann_coord/WholsPoorDavCo2014.pdf.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the sharp rise of permanent remote workers and the hybrid work environment, particularly white-collar professionals, who can now work and live anywhere. Many of these workers are relocating from expensive, crowded cities to other places that are more affordable, temperate, have lower taxes, and are less crowded, bringing their high salaries and real estate purchase power with them—and Nashville is one of their top destinations.

Local individuals and families hoping to buy homes are being priced out and outbid by out-of-towners with bigger budgets. According to a recent Redfin.com study, the average budget of out-of-towners moving to Nashville in 2021 was \$736,900, 28% higher than the \$573,400 average budget for local buyers. This \$163,500 gap was the biggest gap among 49 cities analyzed. One local real estate agent interviewed by Redfin for this study stated, “People moving from the West Coast will pay way over asking price without batting an eye. In their eyes, they’re getting a deal. It’s really hard for locals to compete right now, and it can be devastating for first-time buyers who aren’t able to offset high prices by selling a home before they buy a new one.”⁶

In the past decade, rents in the Metro area have increased by 50%. In Davidson County, 46.27% of household units rent their homes, a higher number than both the national average (35.89%) and Tennessee state average (33.49%).⁷ Renters are particularly vulnerable to displacement since they can lose their leases and be forced to move, often with short notice.

There are currently 15 mobile home parks in Davidson County.⁸ Unfortunately, there is a national trend of mobile home park owners selling their property to developers, eliminating one source of affordable housing.⁹ This is happening in the Metro region. For example, close to 50 residents of the close-knit W. C. Company Mobile Home Community on Dickerson Pike were recently evicted when

⁶ Anderson, Dana. “Out-of-Town Buyers Have Nearly 30% More to Spend on Homes than Locals in Migration Hotspots like Nashville, Atlanta and Miami.” Redfin Real Estate News, February 15, 2022. <https://www.redfin.com/news/migrant-local-budget-difference-homebuyer/>.

⁷ “Davidson County Tennessee Residential Rent and Rental Statistics.” Department of Numbers. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/rent/tennessee/davidson-county/#:-:text=Renter%20Fraction%20in%20Davidson%20County%20Tennessee&text=In%202019%2046.27%25%20of%20households,according%20to%20Census%20ACS%20data>.

⁸ “Home.” Mhn 200. Accessed March 30, 2022. <https://www.mobilehome.net/mobile-home-park-directory/tennessee/davidson-county>.

⁹ “Home.” Mhn 200. Accessed March 30, 2022. <https://www.mobilehome.net/mobile-home-park-directory/tennessee/davidson-county>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

the owner sold the property to make way for a mixed-use development. Although displaced residents were able to win compensation, finding new housing has been challenging.¹⁰

Low-income apartment complexes that use federal subsidized housing programs such as low-income housing tax credits are also displacing residents by transforming into market-rate complexes, thus reducing the number of affordable units once their owners complete government requirements.¹¹ The River Chase Apartments in East Nashville is one example; residents and housing advocates are fighting to be able to return to the complex after it is renovated. Housing advocates report that it is extremely difficult for families with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 vouchers to find landlords willing to accept them, particularly for homes with three or more bedrooms.¹² Neighbors are now seeing “affordable” multi-family developments happening at the edge of Davidson County.

Rapid Development Threatens Neighborhood Character and Historic Preservation

“We don’t want tall and skinnies up here on College Hill.” Erskine Lytle, College Hill Neighborhood Association

Historic Preservation and Neighborhood Character Threatened by Development

Residents throughout Davidson County are concerned that unprecedented development is destroying the historic, cultural, and environmental character of their neighborhoods. In 2019, local nonprofit Historic Nashville, Inc., named “Post-War Mid-Century and Minimal Traditional Housing” at

¹⁰ Juliana Kim, “Displaced East Nashville Mobile Home Tenants Win Compensation after a Monthslong Fight.” WPLN News. Accessed April 9, 2022. <https://wpln.org/post/displaced-east-nashville-mobile-home-tenants-win-compensation-after-a-months-long-fight/>.

¹¹ “What Happens to LIHTC Properties after Affordability Requirements Expire?,” HUD USER. Accessed March 30, 2022. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_research_081712.html.

¹² Hannah McDonald, “Developer That Bought Low-Income Apartments in East Nashville Asked to Let Residents Move Back.” WTVF, March 23, 2022. <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/developer-that-bought-low-income-apartments-in-east-nashville-asked-to-let-residents-move-back>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

risk of being lost on their annual list of nine historic places in Nashville. They noted, “Historic doesn’t always mean the most ornate.... Post-World War II suburban neighborhoods, especially mid-century ranch and minimal traditional housing types, are at great risk of being lost as developers find potential for greater density.”¹³

Developers favor “tall and skinny” townhomes because their narrow footprint allows for greater density. As a result, neighborhood streets are dotted with three- and four-story-high townhomes, some with rooftop patios, that dwarf existing homes, block views, and limit the privacy of residents living below. Historic preservation and conservation overlays provide some protection for historic and culturally significant neighborhoods, but these cover less than 10% of the land area in Nashville.

College Hill is a neighborhood northwest of downtown Nashville designed by McKissick and McKissick, a notable Black architectural company founded in Nashville. It was one of the first neighborhoods in the country designed by and for Black professionals with lovely mid-century modern homes on large lots. One College Hill resident, Erskine Lytle, has watched nearby streets transformed by teardowns and newly built homes and says, “Now there’s a high interest in moving up here. We have nice panoramic views of the city, big lots, nice houses, and a great location close to downtown.” Lytle continues, “My dad paid \$30,000 in 1954 for our house, and I get offers all the time, recently for \$275,000. It’s laughable you can’t get anything else comparable in the area for that amount of money, and I’d need to move to another county.” Lytle has no interest in selling his home and says neither do his neighbors.

Honoring Those Who Were Enslaved

Cane Ridge, a semi-rural community near Antioch founded in the 1800s, has many tracts of land that were previously plantations and are dotted with small family cemeteries containing graves of former plantation families and, nearby, those of enslaved families. Much of this land is now being transformed into housing developments, and in the process some graves have been disturbed by construction, particularly hard-to-find slave graves with flat stones and little documentation.

¹³ “Announcing the 2019 Nashville 9” *Historic Nashville Inc.* Accessed March 9, 2022.
<https://www.historicnashvilleinc.org/2019/11/07/2019-nashville-nine-announcement>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Members of the Cane Ridge Community Club (CRCC), familiar with local land, have located 30 cemeteries of enslaved people missing from Metro’s Historic Commission survey maps. Twana Chick, president of CRCC, says, “Sometimes there were only three or five graves, but every grave counts.” She adds that now the club’s development committee works with developers in the planning stage to identify graves before construction crews break ground.

Loss of Greenspace and Trees

Residents are also concerned that intense development is damaging the natural character of their neighborhoods. Wayne Underhill is president of the West Meade Neighborhood Association, a neighborhood with one-acre lots with older homes. As older homes are increasingly demolished and replaced with larger homes, Underhill has observed some construction contractors uproot and destroy mature trees. He says, “Newer residents and developers don’t appreciate the importance of saving 50–60-year-old trees.”

Infrastructure Lags Behind New Construction

The Metro region’s rapid development is taxing existing, and often antiquated, infrastructure systems such as sidewalks, storm drains, and sewers. Capital budget allocations are too low to meet identified infrastructure needs, and some policies enable property developers to evade paying their full share of infrastructure costs associated with their developments. The lack of sidewalks is one of the top issues identified by Metro residents, particularly in Nashville’s urban core. This section focuses on how sidewalk projects are selected and implemented.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Sidewalk Projects Selection Process Is Biased

In Metropolitan Davidson County, only 37% of the streets have sidewalks.¹⁴ The 2017, the Metro *WalknBike* plan used a scoring system to create a list of 71 top-priority missing sidewalk segment miles, out of 1,900 “greatest need” sidewalks, known as the “Priority Sidewalk Network.”¹⁵

The Metro Public Works (MPW) Department is responsible for building and maintaining Davidson County sidewalks (excluding MNPS and Metro Parks sidewalks). The department also recommends specific sidewalk construction projects for capital spending “based on ease of construction, cost, district/geographic equity (typically, one project for each PBZ), and [hubNashville] complaints.”¹⁶ Next, a committee composed of MPW and other Metro departments finalizes this list, which must then be approved by the Mayor’s Office and the Metro Council. This system is open to district-centered favoritism and influence, unlike the objective measures used to identify the Priority Sidewalk Network itself.

Sidewalk Policy Benefits Developers Over Residents

Metro Public Works also uses an “in lieu of” sidewalk policy that confounds and frustrates many residents in fast-growing neighborhoods. This policy allows developers of new single-family residences to avoid constructing sidewalks in front of these homes if they contribute to the Metro Public Works “in lieu of” fund, at a rate of \$186 per linear foot of sidewalk.¹⁷ This system is popular with developers because they don’t have to cover the cost of utility pole relocation, improvements to water and sewer pipes, and other expensive infrastructure work that goes along with installing sidewalks.

¹⁴ Emily Benedict. “Metro Nashville Special Committee on Sidewalks,” January 30, 2020.

¹⁵ Emily Benedict. “Metro Nashville Special Committee on Sidewalks,” January 30, 2020.

¹⁶ Elliott, Stephen. “Nashville Missing 1,900 Miles of Sidewalks, Report Finds.” Nashville Post. April 19, 2021. https://www.nashvillepost.com/nashville-missing-1-900-miles-of-sidewalks-report-finds/article_13787ab9-6123-504d-a9e3-f5e57f58e36e.html.

¹⁷ “Sidewalk Requirements.” *Nashville.gov*. Accessed March 9, 2022. <https://www.nashville.gov/departments/planning/long-range-planning/transportation-planning/sidewalks#:~:text=In%2DLieu%20of%20Fund%20Contribution.at%20%24186%20per%20linear%20foot>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

However, funds contributed by developers are allocated directly to the Priority Sidewalk Network budget, instead of for sidewalk construction in front of specific new homes, their streets, or even their neighborhoods. Jennifer Bolton, board member of The Nations Neighborhood Association, says that new homeowners there are unpleasantly surprised to learn that their new home does not have a sidewalk, and they have no way of knowing when one will be constructed. Bolton says her neighbors “think that they’ve paid for a sidewalk when they purchased their home because a developer had paid into the fund, and yet they didn’t receive the service.”

Sidewalk Policy Is Costly

Sidewalk projects are managed and implemented by Metro Public Works employees, without using outside contractors or a bidding process, at a budget of \$1,000 per linear foot of sidewalk; 74% of these costs are spent on stormwater drainage. In comparison, one “peer” region with similar demographics, Cobb County, Georgia, spends only 30% on stormwater drainage costs and uses competitive bidding for site-specific projects.¹⁸

The “in lieu of” sidewalk system gives developers little incentive to prepare land in front of new homes for sidewalk construction, such as grading. As a result, that work is left for MPW crews, who must also remove fencing, mailboxes, driveway infrastructure, and other features added by the homeowner, at a far slower pace and greater expense than if sidewalks were installed at the same time the homes were first built.

Also troubling to many residents is that developer contributions to the “in lieu of” fund cover only a fraction of the \$1,000 per linear foot that MPW budgets to install sidewalks. The delay of sidewalk construction in front of new homes has resulted in “sidewalks to nowhere” on streets, with sidewalks in front of older homes adjacent to new homes without them. Inconsistent sidewalks make it difficult for people who use wheelchairs and push strollers. The lack of sidewalks also poses significant safety concerns, says Bolton. “Our neighborhood is somewhat industrial; a lot of big oil trucks roll by, but there’s no sidewalk for pedestrians.”

¹⁸ Emily Benedict. “Metro Nashville Special Committee on Sidewalks,” January 30, 2020.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Construction Impacts on Neighborhood Quality of Life

Residents have grown weary and frustrated from years of disruption from construction projects throughout the region. Large construction vehicles frequently block local street access, especially in older neighborhoods with narrow streets and alleys. There have been reports of construction crew members parking in front of driveways and using residents' hoses and electrical outlets.

Construction Code Enforcement Lacking

Anita Armstrong, president of the Greenwood Neighborhood Association, says, "People are always asking me, 'Tell me again when construction should start?'" According to Metro Codes, construction projects adjacent to a residential district are only allowed between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays between September and May, and 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays the rest of the year. Unless granted a special permit by the Director of Codes, construction companies are prohibited from working on Sundays.¹⁹ Despite these regulations, residents report that construction noise regularly starts at 5:00 a.m. and continues well into the night, often seven days a week.

Construction and Blasting Noise

There were 443 construction noise complaints submitted to hubNashville between 2018 and 2021. Metro construction codes limit noise in excess of 70 decibels. Blasting codes are enforced by the State Fire Marshal's Office. In 2017 alone, the office received 405 Davidson County blasting complaints.²⁰ Although blasting vibrations can damage nearby property, the office does not have the

¹⁹ "Construction Hours Restrictions in Nashville and Davidson County." *Nashville.gov*. Accessed March 18, 2022.

<https://www.nashville.gov/departments/codes/construction-and-permits/development-services/construction-hours>.

²⁰ An explosion of complaints over Nashville blasting: What you need to know." *The Tennessean*, December 18, 2017.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2017/12/18/explosion-complaints-over-nashville-blasting-what-you-need-know/955808001/>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

authority to determine if building damage was caused by blasting or to require that a company fix damage or pay for repairs of a nearby building.²¹

Metro Residents Feel Powerless to Impact Decisions Affecting Their Neighborhood

“Corporations are getting preference over little people.... We want our voices to be heard.” Wayne Underhill, president, West Meade Neighborhood Association

Residents of our local neighborhoods feel powerless to impact the decisions that directly affect their lives. They believe policy makers prioritize developers and corporations—and the tax money they bring in—over neighborhood needs and concerns. Many are particularly frustrated because, despite their advocacy efforts, developers can easily obtain zoning exemptions and use loopholes to get around zoning and code requirements that should be protecting existing residents.

Jordan Huffman, president of the Donelson-Hermitage Neighborhood Alliance, says his area is one of the “last frontiers” of undeveloped land in the Metro region. He says “Now, developers are coming in, they’re buying up land, pricing everybody out, and then they’re not following the rules and regulations they’re supposed to abide by. It makes it more difficult for all of us.”

Members of The Nations Neighborhood Association have been advocating for years to get sidewalks built in front of new homes there. They were hopeful when the 2020-2021 Mayor’s capital budget included allocations for 80 miles of sidewalks but dismayed to learn that their council district (20) was only allocated two of those miles. Association members protested in response, submitted a petition, and got a lot of press coverage, but to no avail. Says board member Jennifer Bolton, “Our neighbors have been very engaged, willing to put in a lot of shoe leather on sidewalks but unfortunately with very little success.” She adds, “It’s frustrating because you’re only going to put in

²¹ An explosion of complaints over Nashville blasting: What you need to know.” *The Tennessean*, December 18, 2017. <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2017/12/18/explosion-complaints-over-nashville-blasting-what-you-need-know/955808001/>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

the shoe leather so many times, and if you keep failing, you lose interest and become disengaged in improving the neighborhood.”

Long-time neighborhood dwellers also feel that their deep knowledge of their neighborhoods’ history, topography, and environmental challenges is not appreciated by outside housing and commercial developers. The Cane Ridge Community Club development committee reviews plans for new developments in that area, near Antioch. However, club president Twana Chick has found that when they bring concerns to the attention of development teams, project engineers and architects frequently disregard their advice, saying, “I have a degree and therefore I know that we’re doing exactly what the guidelines say.” All too often, ignoring local advice results in all too predictable environmental and other issues that could have been avoided.

II. NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

Neighborhood safety is one of the highest-ranked challenges identified by the local neighborhood organizations across the county.²² Residents have vocalized their concern for crime and traffic issues that prohibit them from feeling safe in their communities. As our metropolitan community experiences the influx of people moving into the area, and developers continue to build, residents are concerned that the safety of their neighborhoods will continue to diminish. Residents hope that there can be efforts set forth by the Metro Government to restore their peace of mind.

Traffic

Traffic safety issues have been a serious concern for those who live in the Warner Park Neighborhood. “The speeding into our neighborhood is horrible,” says Juliana Ericson, Warner Park Community Association member. “People use it as a cross between Highway 70 and Highway 100.... I understand that it’s a long straight road, but it’s really not good. People have gotten hurt. The police were involved, a child was hit, two cars were smashed, bicyclist [was injured]. It’s been bad the past three years.” Juliana hopes to see changes made for the safety of her neighbors. “We’d like traffic calming. We were hoping to have a sign like when you enter Bellevue that says, ‘You’re now entering Bellevue.’ I wish there was a sign saying that we are not a thoroughfare; we’re a neighborhood.”

Reports from *WalknBike Nashville* reflect a similar concern. In 2020, approximately 248 people were injured while walking, with an additional 39 pedestrian-involved car crashes being fatal.²³ While most of the injuries and fatalities have taken place on streets with 4+ lanes, the concern for the traffic is a continuously growing issue. When broken down over the last four years, there has been a decrease in pedestrian-involved accidents in the Greater Nashville area.²⁴ While there is a significant decrease,

²² The ranking only considers results from the Census of Neighborhood Organizations and not the Greater Nashville community.

²³ “Reports.” *Walk Bike Nashville*. Accessed February 19, 2022. <https://www.walkbikenashville.org/reports>.

²⁴ Metro Nashville Police Department, Information Technology. “Traffic Accidents: Nashville Open Data Portal,” *Data.Nashville.gov*, February 19, 2022. <https://data.nashville.gov/Police/Traffic-Accidents/6v6w-hpcw>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

readers should consider any outside factors that could have caused the change, such as resident petitions to increase safety measures.

What Is Being Done About It?

Mayor John Cooper and Metro Government are also working with community members to promote safer streets through Vision Zero. The Vision Zero working document has compiled the concerns of residents to create an action plan on how to make our streets safer for its residents. Five themes included in the document are: creating safe streets for everyone, prioritizing equity, increasing collaboration and transparency, promoting the culture of safety, and improving data quality.²⁵ By partnering with the residents, the project seeks to create actionable steps to finding solutions to the issue.

Traffic calming is the solution many residents such as Juliana are hoping will impact speeding and drag racing in their neighborhoods. Between 2019 and 2020, the Metro Government received 130 requests for traffic calming.²⁶ These requests are submitted through the “Nashville Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program,” which seeks to help identify and alleviate traffic issues in neighborhoods. Furthermore, the Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure is recorded to be taking on 25 new projects related to traffic calming. “Slowing down traffic on our neighborhood streets is essential to promoting safety and enhancing quality of life for our neighborhood residents,” says Interim Director Faye DiMassimo.²⁷ Our Metro Government worked with council members and neighborhoods to gather information to create a design for their streets. The neighborhoods in which the traffic calming initiatives will take place are as follows: District 21: Buchanan Arts District; District 19: Historic Buena Vista; District 16: Neese Dr; District 9: Rio Vista Dr; District 13: Karen Dr; District 21: 23rd Ave N; District 17: SNAP (South Nashville Action People);

²⁵ Access the Vision Zero Action Plan at https://www.nashville.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/NashvilleVZ_DraftPlan_12142021.pdf?ct=1639576638.

²⁶ Metro Nashville Government. “Hubnashville Service Requests: Nashville Open Data,” *Data.Nashville.gov*, February 19, 2022. <https://data.nashville.gov/Public-Services/hubNashville-311-Service-Requests/7qhx-rexh>.

²⁷ “Nashville Department of Transportation to take on 25 new traffic calming projects,” *Main Street Nashville*, https://www.mainstreet-nashville.com/news/nashville-department-of-transportation-to-take-on-25-new-traffic-calming-projects/article_6a01a0d2-52cc-11ec-9b08-5bb0ebfd73dc.html.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

District 16: Glenclyff-Southlake Dr Neighborhood Group; District 2: Haynes Manor Neighborhood Association.²⁸

Crime

Local organizations also identified topics of crime in their neighborhoods on a general level. Their concerns included car break-ins, drug/gang activities, and mail/porch theft. In the last five years, there have been 2,169 reports of postal larceny (mail theft). Mail theft reports were the highest in 2020 within the last five years, with 782 reports. Last year's reports were approximately half of the previous year. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in drug-related reports in the last five-year period. In 2017, there were 12,790 reported incidents related to drugs. However, by 2021, the number decreased significantly to 3,582 reported incidents.

Jena Armistead lives in West Nashville and is a member of the West Meade Park Neighborhood Association. She identified car break-ins as one of the top crime-related issues in her neighborhood. "Previously, we were having break-ins every 3-4 months. One of the house cameras recorded someone trying to break into a car with a gun in their hand. This motivated the neighborhood association to install a FLOCK security system [Automatic License Plate Recognition, or ALPR] that reads license plates, identifies the type and color of the vehicle, and can identify if a car is owned by a resident or not." Armistead believes that the new implementation of security measures, such as the FLOCK system, has made a positive impact on crime in West Meade. She states, "We don't have any businesses, just residential, and I think that helps keep crime down, and with the FLOCK camera, what crime we did have has subsided."

Gina Coleman of the Haynes Park Neighborhood Association also discussed how neighborhood organizing around safety helped address the number of crimes in her Northwest Nashville (Bordeaux) neighborhood. "2020 was like a nightmare year for crime.... We hadn't seen that level of

²⁸ "Nashville Department of Transportation to take on 25 new traffic calming projects," *Main Street Nashville*, https://www.mainstreet-nashville.com/news/nashville-department-of-transportation-to-take-on-25-new-traffic-calming-projects/article_6a01a0d2-52cc-11ec-9b08-5bb0ebfd73dc.html.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

crime since we started in 2004.”²⁹ Coleman described incidents in her neighborhood that motivated the residents to search for solutions to the increasing crime. The first was a drug bust, where the police confiscated drugs, firearms, and money from a home in the residential area. In other accounts, shootings and other violent behaviors erupted in the entrance of the neighborhood, which, Coleman explains, is typically peaceful. “[The neighbors inquired] can we get neighborhood security cameras... and the most powerful words were “We are willing to pay for them.” We held Zoom calls with FLOCK Safety educating neighbors and local leadership, received a proposal from FLOCK, made 250 Flock Safety proposal packages and went door to door explaining the problem and the anticipated solution, gave neighbors the opportunity to review the information, and posted a FLOCK video on HPNA’s Facebook page for review, and neighbors started writing checks. We raised \$3,500 in four months.

²⁹ Gina Coleman, “Neighborhood Safety,” *Neighbor 2 Neighbor*. Accessed March 2022.

III. LITTER AND ILLEGAL DUMPING

“Pride in a neighborhood is difficult to maintain when there is trash and litter around. The more ‘bad actors’ are allowed to get away with littering and illegally dumping large garbage and household items, the worse it will become.” Alma Sanford, Secretary of the Long Hunter Chase Subdivision HOA

As our metropolitan community grows, it continues to inherit problems of illegal dumping and littering. In a 2021 report by the state of Tennessee, people in urban or suburban areas identified trash being more of an issue than those in rural areas.³⁰ The report concludes that the difference in perspective is due to urban and suburban areas having more visible trash than their rural counterparts. Tennessee residents agree that littering has many negative effects, such as damaging the environment, being a safety and health hazard, being costly to clean up, and decreasing property value.

In Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, the perspective of littering does not differ from those mentioned in the state survey. During a five-year period,³¹ beginning in 2017, the Metro Government has received over 23,000 reports of littering or illegal dumping.³² The data suggests there is a growing number of reports over the last five years, with 2021 receiving the highest number of complaints. The Metropolitan Government has joined with a statewide program, Nobody Trashes Tennessee, to promote community clean-ups. According to the Nashville Department of Transportation & Multimodal Infrastructure, in 2021 alone, approximately 98,100 pounds of trash were recovered.

Neighbors are growing weary of the issues that follow illegal dumping and littering. South Nashville seems to be a hotspot for the issue. Alma Sanford, Secretary of the Long Hunter Chase Subdivision HOA, expresses her frustration with the carelessness of those who disregard the fact that their unwanted trash is affecting residents in the area. “This is a huge issue all over Southeast Nashville.

³⁰ Nobody Trashes TN, *Tennessee Department of Transportation*, <https://nobodytrashestennessee.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Final-April-2021-NobodyTrashesTN.pdf>.

³¹ The five-year period only includes completed years. Therefore, reports made in 2022 have not been calculated.

³² Metro Nashville Government. “hubNashville Service Requests: Nashville Open Data.” Data.Nashville.gov, February 19, 2022. <https://data.nashville.gov/Public-Services/hubNashville-311-Service-Requests/7qhx-rexh>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

My neighbors often talk about it on social media, Next Door, and at neighborhood meetings.... Our Homeowners Association Board recently signed up to 'Adopt-a-Street' to clean .7 mile of Mt. View Road every three months. Within three days after the clean-up crew has cleared all litter and trash, there is almost as much litter again. When we contact hubNashville, it sometimes takes weeks to get the trash and dumping items removed." Sanford believes residents should not be left to address the issue alone, but there should be a greater level of involvement by Metro Government to help address the problem.

While Miriam Mimms states that the Midtown/Hillsboro area has moderate littering compared to other areas across the county, she believes that it raises a significant health concern. "Dumping attracts rodents. We had to call Metro Health and Sanitation to address dumping in residential alleys. It detracts from the quality of life. It is unsafe for residents, and especially the many children in District 18 who walk to school, ride bikes, and play in the community. Additionally, it causes people to feel less happy about where they live." Mimms says, "Because dumpsters are everywhere due to increased construction, we often see builders leaving piles of debris for months on end and overfilling their dumpsters..., which is a violation. Besides being an eyesore, untidy construction debris sometimes blocks sidewalks." Her hope is that there will be a stronger coordinated campaign addressing dumping and greater fines for commercial dumpers.

IV. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RECOVERY

Davidson County has had more than its share of disaster events in the past few years. The March 3, 2020, tornado occurred shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As 2020 ended, the Christmas Day explosion occurred downtown. In March of 2021, there was both the second worst flooding disaster in Nashville's history and also the CSX train derailment, which ended with multiple train cars in the backyards of one Madison-area neighborhood (luckily with no one hurt). As of the end of March 2022, there have been 1,621 deaths and 206,980 reported cases of COVID-19 in Davidson County.³³

Outsized Impact on Vulnerable Neighborhoods

"Right after the tornado, property developers in pick-up trucks were spotted here scoping out neighborhoods, to try and make a killing from buying damaged or destroyed property." Janet Parham with the North Nashville Community Organization for Community Improvement

The impact of major disasters on our local neighborhoods mirrors national research that shows disasters have a greater impact on households in lower-income neighborhoods and recovery takes much longer, compared to households in more wealthy neighborhoods.³⁴ Many lower-income and working-class areas have older housing structures that are more likely to be seriously damaged or destroyed than more modern homes that are fortified by more recent, stringent building codes.³⁵

In addition, compared to wealthier residents, residents of low-income and distressed neighborhoods are less likely to know about historic preservation financial programs, to have

³³ The New York Times. "Davidson County, Tennessee Covid Case and Exposure Risk Tracker," *The New York Times*. The New York Times, January 27, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/davidson-tennessee-covid-cases.html>.

³⁴ Walter Gillis Peacock et al., "Inequities in Long-Term Housing Recovery After Disasters," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 80:4, 356-371, DOI: 10.1080/01944363.2014.980440.

³⁵ Shannon Van Zandt, "Natural Disasters Can Wipe out Affordable Housing Forever Unless Communities Plan Ahead." *Louisiana Illuminator*, February 9, 2022. <https://lailuminator.com/2022/02/09/natural-disasters-can-wipe-out-affordable-housing-forever-unless-communities-plan-ahead/>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

disaster insurance, or to have the political influence that enables wealthier residents to access more recovery resources and access them more quickly. Research also shows that natural disasters hasten gentrification of older, lower-income neighborhoods in “hot” housing markets because they create an opportunity for developers to buy property from distressed property owners, and then replace them with homes out of the financial reach of long-time residents.

Impact of March 3, 2020, Tornado

On March 3, 2020, a series of tornadoes tore through Nashville, Donelson, Hermitage, and other communities in Davidson County, causing catastrophic damage, destruction, and the death of two East Nashville residents. The tornadoes also struck communities in neighboring counties, ultimately killing 25 people and damaging more than 4,000 buildings in Middle Tennessee.³⁶ The tornado caused massive damage to homes and businesses, particularly in East and North Nashville and the Hermitage/Donelson area.

Recovery Assistance for the Long Haul

The Tornado Recovery Connection initiative, created by the Middle Tennessee’s Community Foundation’s Middle Tennessee Emergency Response Fund, has distributed more than nine million dollars to support intensive case management and other long-term services aimed at preventing displacement and the financial exploitation of tornado victims. These efforts have been spearheaded by members of the Nashville VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters).

Case management services were provided to 518 households that lacked insurance or other financial resources to aid their recovery after the tornado. We looked at the zip code distribution of these cases and found that 47% of assisted households originated in North Nashville neighborhoods (37208), 14% in East Nashville (18%), followed by 14% in the Hermitage area (14%).

³⁶ Tony Gonzalez, “Two Years Later, a Small Fraction of Tornado Survivors Are Still Rebuilding.” *WPLN News*, March 4, 2022. <https://wpln.org/post/two-years-later-a-small-fraction-of-tornado-survivors-are-still-rebuilding/>.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Impact of March 27-28, 2021, Flooding

The flooding event of March 27-28, 2021, was the most severe flooding event in the Middle Tennessee region since the May 2010 flood. Four lives were lost in Davidson County, one of twenty-three counties impacted by the flood.³⁷ Two of these victims resided in the Seven Mile Creek homeless encampment in South Nashville.³⁸

Many lower-income households rent homes within their budget and are not informed that these homes are located on flood plains (generally a flat area of land next to a river or stream). They do not discover that they are living in a flood plain until a flood event damages their home. These households usually do not have flood insurance; many are not aware of government flood assistance programs and may not know how to identify and avoid fraudulent insurance and construction vendors.

Residents, particularly those in South Nashville, have struggled to recover from the March 2021 flood, even one year later. According to Hands On Nashville, 429 households have received help applying for FEMA assistance and other resources, and more comprehensive case management services have been provided to over 150 households. VOAD organizations have also been providing key assistance to flood victims.³⁹

Flood Prevention Hampered by Inadequate Storm Drainage Infrastructure

Although massive flood events get broad attention, chronic flooding is an ongoing issue in many Metro neighborhoods, for example, the East Thompson Community in South Nashville. Ross

³⁷ US Department of Commerce, NOAA. "March 27-28, 2021 Historic Flash Flooding." NOAA's National Weather Service, April 13, 2021. <https://www.weather.gov/ohx/20210327>.

³⁸ "After Severe Weather Events, Immediate Recovery Efforts ..." Accessed March 9, 2022. https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/citylimits/after-severe-weather-events-immediate-recovery-efforts-are-just-the-beginning/article_0398cc-7dfa-11ec-9cc5-7f804523fe49.html.

³⁹ Lena Mazel, "After Severe Weather Events, Immediate Recovery Efforts Are Just the Beginning." *Nashville Scene*, January 26, 2022. https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/citylimits/after-severe-weather-events-immediate-recovery-efforts-are-just-the-beginning/article_0398cc-7dfa-11ec-9cc5-7f804523fe49.html.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Holmes, president of this group, reports that “the big flood twelve years ago changed Mill Creek tremendously. Ever since [then] we can plan on at least one big flood coming down every year.” He adds that the only green space in the community—by Mill Creek—is currently unusable because of possible ground toxicity and debris from materials that flowed downstream from flooded industrial warehouses further upstream. Debris such as thousands of straws from a restaurant supply warehouse are still blanketing the green space, and trees are still filled with debris. As of March, 2022, Metro crews have not yet removed this debris.

The damage caused by flood events and heavy rains is exacerbated by outdated and inadequate storm drain infrastructure in the Metro region. Frequent basement flooding from heavy rains is a top concern for residents in Holmes’ South Nashville community. He says, “Storm water just has nowhere to go, so it comes and certainly finds your basement.” Beth O’Shea of the Green Hills Neighborhood Association reports that during heavy rains, new structures with large roof lines soak the lawns of more modest, older homes nearby. O’Shea says, “Building two houses on one lot might seem like a good idea here [Green Hills] because the lots are big, but the infrastructure—the water, the sewers, and so on—cannot handle additional houses.”

IV. LACK OF ENGAGED NEIGHBORS AND WILLING LEADERS

“People have to have a cause. Effective leaders have a way of galvanizing people around a specific issue, and without that, it’s challenging.” Leslie Boone, Maxwell Heights Neighborhood Association

Social interaction is a crucial element to the strength of a community.⁴⁰ As residents interact, they can better understand their community’s needs. In communities where residents interact, groups are better equipped to address community issues.⁴¹ In this section, we will discuss the national and local engagement of residents and how it impacts the overall civic health of neighborhoods. Social interaction allows individuals to understand shared experiences and issues, which creates a space to make community action possible.

A national survey by the Pew Research Center found that less than half of community residents reported knowing most or all of their neighbors.⁴² Residents in urban areas ranked lowest, with only 24% of respondents reporting that they know other community members. Individuals over 65 years old also reported knowing more neighbors than their younger counterparts. However, the level at which individuals knew their neighbors did not truly change across community types. For example, both rural and suburban residents reported a somewhat similar knowledge of their neighbors to those in urban communities. Therefore, the report suggests there is national social reclusivity among community residents despite community types.

The lack of social interaction prohibits the acquisition of the social capital necessary to positively affect communities. When social interaction is present, residents are more likely to create and maintain participation in community organizations and associations.⁴³ According to the 2021 Census of Neighborhood Organizations, only 5% of reporting neighborhood organizations stated that 75 or

⁴⁰ David Matarrita-Cascante, and A. E. Luloff. “Profiling Participative Residents in Western Communities.” *Rural Sociology* 73, no. 1 (2008.): 44–61. doi:10.1526/003601108783575899.

⁴¹ David Matarrita-Cascante, and A. E. Luloff. “Profiling Participative Residents in Western Communities.” *Rural Sociology* 73, no. 1 (2008.): 44–61. doi:10.1526/003601108783575899.

⁴² Kim Parker et al., “What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities.” Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>.

⁴³ Karen Fulbright-Anderson and Patricia Auspos, eds. “Community Change: Theories, Practice, and Evidence.” Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. Aspen Institute, 2006. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/KCRT_FINAL.pdf.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

more individuals participated in organization meetings. However, 43% reported an attendance between 1 and 14.⁴⁴ While the issue with resident engagement is common in neighborhoods across the United States, local neighborhood leaders agree that it is a barrier to addressing the needs of the community.

Ross Holmes of the East Thompson Community believes that COVID-19 has caused some of the barriers to the level engagement. “Because of COVID we haven’t had any social gatherings.... We’ve been on the fence about whether or not to hold meetings in person or not. Each time we have tried to schedule an in-person meeting, there has been one of the COVID surges.... It’s been tricky and we haven’t been able to find a way to get the ‘drive’ to motivate residents to become involved.”

With COVID providing a hindrance for creating a space for engagement, Holmes also fears that there will be a lack of leadership at the end of his term. According to Holmes, their association has seen a decrease in numbers for those who have participated in leadership positions. Typically, the vice president automatically transitions to the role. However, Holmes is unsure of current leadership who will want to take on such a task. He poses the question, “How do we discover neighbors who would like to be involved with a lack of in-person meetings or ways to meet our neighbors?” Holmes is hopeful that participation and engagement will become consistent again but is interested in determining how others may suggest ways to be successful in their recruiting efforts.

While the pandemic placed constraints on some neighborhoods, others have identified differences in priorities/philosophies and turnover in residents as a barrier for a cohesively engaged neighborhood. Leslie Boone, a member of Maxwell Heights Neighborhood Association, sees how the differences have affected their community. “I sense that we’re not—no one’s fault—we’re not as organized as we could be. [This is] in part because of differing philosophies of what it means to be part of the community. People want to come to meetings, but they don’t want to be part of leadership.... Some of our older neighbors have different priorities than those who are newcomers. To them it’s their forever home as opposed to newer residents, who do not feel that this is their forever home.”

⁴⁴ This report does not measure the level of engagement of neighborhood members in external organizations such as religious institutions, nonprofits or other groups that serve the community. Instead, it provides information for singular neighborhood organizations that seek to serve the entirety of a neighborhood.

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Boone says that communication also differs across age demographics. “The older residents were used to getting together in person. They all know each other, went to church together, [went] to school together.... They like to be called on the phone and do not tend to respond to texts, as opposed to newer people, who prefer other ways to communicate besides talking on the phone.” Boone believes, “People have to have a cause. Effective leaders have a way of galvanizing people around a specific issue, and without that, it’s challenging.”

Homeowner Associations

Homeowner Associations are facing all of the previously mentioned challenges and several more that deserved to be mentioned here. There are three major challenges that these neighborhood leaders expressed.

1. Maintenance and Upkeep of Property

Homeowners associations are struggling to keep pace with the rising costs associated with the maintenance and upkeep of common property. Residents expect the property to be maintained, but are often unwilling to increase HOA fees to ensure that the expectations are met.

2. Increased Corporate Purchasing for Rentals

Many homeowners associations are seeing sharp increases in the number of units purchased by corporations for rentals. Quite often, these corporations are not local and reaching a decision-maker to discuss common property issues is difficult if not impossible. Some neighborhood leaders expressed concern that the new corporate owners are more concerned about filling the units with someone who can pay than ensuring a responsible renter is selected.

3. Residents Not Complying with Rules

Again and again, we heard the leaders of homeowners associations complain about residents not complying with the rules established by the HOA board. Frequently, new members complain that they were never told that their property was part of a homeowners association and resist complying with the rules and paying the fees. This problem is compounded when a neighborhood had a weak HOA board in the past and a new board is elected to regain control.

Acknowledgements

Neighbor 2 Neighbor is a local nonprofit and nonpartisan organization founded and led by neighborhood leaders throughout Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County. We envision a city of connected communities where residents know their neighbors and work together to preserve and improve their neighborhoods. For over twenty-five years, Neighbor 2 Neighbor has equipped residents and neighborhood organizations with the tools they need to build safer and more vibrant neighborhoods. Additional information is available at www.n2n.solutions.

The *Census of Neighborhood Organizations* was conducted by Neighbor 2 Neighbor. The chair or designate of all 161 known neighborhood organizations were invited to participate in the census. Over 77 neighborhood organizations from throughout Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County participated. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the full membership of each responding organization. A full list of organizations participating in the census is presented later in this document.

The State of Metro Neighborhoods: The Challenges We Face, is based upon responses from the biennial Census of Neighborhood Organizations, interviews and focus groups with local neighborhood leaders, and research by our lead authors.

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STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

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- Twana Chick (Cane Ridge Community Club)
- Gina Coleman (Haynes Park Neighborhood Association)
- Juliana Ericson (Warner Park Community Association)
- Ross Holmes (East Thompson Community)
- Jordan Huffman (Donelson Hermitage Neighborhood Alliance)
- Erskine Lytle (College Hill Neighborhood Association)
- Miriam Mimms (Hillsboro - West End Neighborhood Association)
- Beth O'Shea (Green Hills Neighborhood Association)
- Alma Sanford (Long Hunter Chase Homeowners Association)
- Wayne Underhill (West Meade Neighborhood Association)

Census Respondents

- 12 South Neighborhood Association
- Arden Place Homeowners Association
- Avalon Neighborhood Association
- Bellaire Terrace Neighborhood Watch
- Bordeaux Hills Residential Association
- Buchanan Area Neighborhoods Alliance
- Burkitt Springs Neighborhood Watch
- Caldwell Abbey Hall Neighborhood Organization
- Cambridge Forest, Phase II Homeowners Association
- Cane Ridge Community Club
- Cane Ridge Farms Homeowners Association
- Castlegate Neighborhood Watch
- Castleman Hobbs Neighborhood Association
- Chadwell Retreat Townhomes Owners Association
- Charlotte Park/Beacon Square Neighborhood Association

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Cleveland Park Neighborhood Association
College Hill Neighbors
Crieve Hall Neighborhood Association
Cross Timbers Neighborhood Watch
Donelson Hermitage Neighborhood Alliance
Donelson Hills Neighborhood Association
East Thompson Community
Eastwood Neighbors, Inc.
Edgehill Neighborhood Partnership
Elm Hill Pike Neighbors
Fairlane Park Neighborhood Association
Farmingham Woods Homeowners Association
Forest Pointe Home Homeowners Association
Four Maples Homeowners Association
Friends of Oakwood Park
Friends of Whites Creek
Glenclyff Neighborhood Association
Green Hills Neighborhood Association
Greenwood Neighborhood Association
Harborview at Cheswicke Homeowners Association
Haynes Heights Neighborhood Association
Haynes Manor Neighborhood Association
Haynes Park Neighborhood Association
Haynes-Trinity Neighborhood Coalition
Haywood Lane Neighborhood Group
Highland Heights Neighborhood Association
Hillsboro West End Neighborhood Association
Historic Buena Vista Community Association
Historic Edgefield Neighbors
Historic Germantown Neighborhood Association
Honey Brook Homeowners Association

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

Inglewood Neighborhood Association
Kemper Heights Neighborhood Association
Lakeside Cove Homeowners Association
Lincoya Hills Neighborhood Association
Lockeland Springs Neighborhood Association
Long Hunter Chase Homeowners Association
Maplewood Neighborhood Association
McFerrin Park Neighborhood Association
North Nashville Organization For Community Improvement (NNOCI)
Oakland Acres Neighborhood Organization
Parkwood Neighborhood Association
Richland West End Neighborhood Association
Rosebank Neighbors
Salemtnow Neighbors Neighborhood Association
South Inglewood Neighborhood Association
South Madison Neighborhood Association
South Nashville Action People
Sylvan Heights Neighborhood Association
Sylvan Park Neighborhood Association
The Nations Neighborhood Association
The Pennington Bend Neighbors Association
The Villages of Riverwood Homeowners Association
Tomorrow's Hope Neighborhood Watch
Warner Parks Community Association
West Meade Hills Neighborhood Association
West Meade Neighborhood Association
West Meade Park Neighborhood Association
White Bridge Neighborhood Association
Whitland Area Neighborhood Association
Woodland Pointe Single Family Homeowners Association
Woodycrest Community

STATE OF METRO NEIGHBORHOODS: The Challenges We Face

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