



Neighborhood Planning:

Personal Stories

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Why Neighborhood Planning?

- What I want is really very simple. That's really to create a process so people can start looking at each other anew.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- For as much as we hear people want change in the planning process, it's almost equally as vehemently that we hear criticism when we do something different.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- A complaint we hear a lot is, “This plan is all about zoning.”



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- We spent probably eleven months on zoning. And a lot of it, you know, you would just dread going. You would dread going to the meetings. But you knew that you had to.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- The way the FLUM works is that the last person who is heard gets their way. The years and years of process is lost.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- People start out with passion to solve a problem and then it gets into the FLUM and it loses the passion and reasoning behind it.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- They changed the rules on us.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- The inclusion of zoning has made everything else in the plan go away. It's down to the parcel to parcel.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- That's the other thing that's so wrong with our whole city's way of doing business – is granting zoning when there are no plans. That is what enables the flippers to flip.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- It is a flawed process. It is a tremendous waste of money. And it has been evolving, some for the better, mostly for the better. It still has some inherent problems. So I am in the process come hell or high water. That's why two years later we are still in it.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- So we kind of took that concept and said, ok, what we want to do is divide us into sub-districts because we don't want this one size fits all thing. One size fits all is not neighborhood planning.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- There was a plan. We didn't have any input into it. It doesn't really reflect us, and then it was time to choose the team to implement the plan.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- Part of it is racism... This is a black neighborhood, and then it was surrounded by a white neighborhood of more affluent people. So the people over here were always pretty much disenfranchised.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- I really think that they need to rethink the entire NP process. What's the point? ... Why have this? And once you have a plan, are you going to back the neighborhood when zoning cases come up that contradict the plan?



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- I guess, you know, the thing that makes me the saddest is there is – you lose any option for creativity and brainstorming to address the challenges and opportunities in your area. And, that's what made us all so excited at the beginning.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- My concern about the process as it's coming up now is that it's not neighborhood planning anymore, but planning area land use. I know why it happened: because of staff resources and it was taking too long and taking up too much money. But it's a shame because you really miss a lot.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- Here's what we got, we all love our neighborhood, we're not saying to go nuke this apartment complex, you know. We don't want to get rid of what we have, we just want to go forward from here knowing this already exists, and what can we do to create a better mix in the future.



Why Neighborhood Planning?

- If you did any kind of research on the web, in terms of planning, and what is planning, I mean you get really excited. God, there's so much out there, you know. It got us all just incredibly excited. And, we kept waiting for it to happen, and it never did.



Finding Common Ground

- The neighborhood overlay happened when we realized what they wanted was the same thing as what we wanted.



Finding Common Ground

- How do you get everyone to sit at the table, stop shouting, and agree on what we can agree on? At the same time, it was the fuel that kept me coming back for more, to work with these unbelievably committed, passionate, intelligent, bright individuals.



Finding Common Ground

- You've got to prepare citizens that you're going to go through a process that's sometimes emotional, and not just intellectual. If it was just intellectual, the city could just do it. But it's emotional because we live in these neighborhoods.



Finding Common Ground

- I'm talking about the human process, about how you can come together and disagree with your neighbors, and it's ok.



Finding Common Ground

- When you are in business, you can't afford to antagonize the neighbors. You want to get along.



Finding Common Ground

- It's just so much easier when developers who want to do something different come and meet with you, and find out – I mean, that makes the whole project attractive and supported by everybody who lives around it every day.



Finding Common Ground

- And we had a unique combination of, kind of, some developer interests with the neighborhood interests. And we think we came out with some pretty good, original solutions to our concerns.



Finding Common Ground

- I felt like they were being bullied into one perspective. Versus it just being okay for someone to have a different opinion.



Finding Common Ground

- You know, that developer worked really hard with neighbors, to come up with solutions. And not everybody was ecstatic, but it was a plan that they felt they could live with.



Finding Common Ground

- We were blindsided that night.



Larger Austin Concerns

- The first thing we learned and benefited from is that a larger geography does work, and is important, because you bring...if you have a large enough area, you are able to do broader things. You can say where the density goes, and where it doesn't go. You can have tradeoffs about those items, you can talk about uses, where to locate all the different uses.



Larger Austin Concerns

- Whenever you deal with the commission you deal with their slavish devotion to smart growth. You have to know that. No one would say it out loud. If you don't have honesty you can't compromise.



Larger Austin Concerns

- They are trying to push density down our throats. They thought this area would be easy pickings because we would not be very vocal people and they did not count on us.



Larger Austin Concerns

- The City always has an agenda. It always has an agenda that may or may not be the neighborhood's agenda.



Larger Austin Concerns

- We didn't have any protection against the bad that could happen while getting the good of more density. And it wasn't integrated with transportation planning, which I thought was absolutely critical. You can't get more people into your neighborhood if you can't get them out.



Larger Austin Concerns

- There was some underlying bitterness in the process in that we were having this density thrust upon us, while the outlying areas are being developed in this hideous way. So why isn't the city putting their resources into improving the way those are, instead of trying to make a dense area even more dense?



Larger Austin Concerns

- The city, it's just really ridiculous to focus so much energy on densifying the core when there is so much nonsense on the outside. That's just crazy. Now's the time to be addressing those things in new neighborhoods.



Larger Austin Concerns

- There should be integrity within the plan, within the planning process so that the neighborhood also recognizes that you have four other areas, north south east and west areas, that bound your neighborhood. To say that you don't really care what goes on across the street, doesn't really make sense.



Larger Austin Concerns

- If I could wave a magic wand I'd like to see people think more holistically. And...yeah, look at their neighborhood and care about it, of course, but see that no neighborhood is an island unto itself and that they are always a part of something bigger.



Larger Austin Concerns

- We felt like... in the plan we drew a perimeter and we felt like we were drawing the line and saying we're defending this perimeter. I think that we need a city-wide plan that kind of says what the city is really after so the neighborhoods understand...the context they are operating in. They may not agree with it, but they'd understand the context.



Larger Austin Concerns

- The City needs to do its own neighborhood plan. An overall neighborhood plan.



Larger Austin Concerns

- I say that is the best thing: to help people understand the environment in which they are doing the NP better so they can make choices.



Plan Implementation

- The scariest thing is, we all wonder a couple of city councils from now, will they uphold these plans? Or did we waste three years working on this?



Plan Implementation

- People think when you finish a plan that you're through. But you're never through.



Plan Implementation

- There is a very clear disparity between the way the City enforces its rules in different parts of town.



Plan Implementation

- The plan is more of a living document than we anticipated, and it's taking more maintenance than we expected.



Plan Implementation

- I think zoning enforcement is one of the top problems and challenges facing this. The rules were put in place for a reason, and if the rules are not being followed, or if they're not being enforced, what's the point of the rules?



Plan Implementation

- There was complete lack of trust in the City process, because at that point, it was still new, it was evolving, it was diffuse, unidentifiable, amorphous, whatever you want to say out of those words. There wasn't anything there that you could get a hold of and trust that it was going to be effective.



Plan Implementation

- There's a lack of commitment from the City leadership in neighborhood planning and preservation in enforcement. That's been the main cry that I've heard, from all across the City, in every setting, the City won't enforce its own rules.



Plan Implementation

- If we can't implement the plan, if there is no money to implement the plan, if there is no process that is supported and recognized by the City, then what's the point?