

Restoring and Revitalizing Historic 2nd Ave

Feb. 10 Stakeholder Listening Session (12pm – 2pm) – 2nd Avenue Area Businesses & Residents

Summary of Group Discussions – 6 small groups

Below is a qualitative summary of what was discussed during the breakout session. You can also view each group's notes on the project webpage.

What did you love about 2nd Ave area before the pandemic and the explosion? (What made area unique? What do you want to see preserved?)

- History/historic charm (*numerous responses*)
- Historic building character/interesting architecture (iron work/big doors/huge windows/brick) (*numerous responses*)
- Energy/vibrancy/excitement/enthusiasm (*numerous responses*)
 - What a great little street
- Vibe/feeling/appealing/quaintness (*numerous responses*)
- Street trees/shade (*numerous responses*)
- Shops/restaurants (appeal to everyone (residents and visitors) (*numerous responses*)
- Not Broadway crazy/provides balance to Broadway (*numerous responses*)
 - Gem without the honkytonks
 - 2nd Avenue provided a balance to Broadway, which is primarily bars. 2nd Ave had residential, shops and restaurants that might be of interest to residents as much as to tourists.
- Walkable (*numerous responses*)
- People
- Family friendly
 - Local shops/businesses have family elements.
 - When bought in 2007, there were still some remnants of the street not being a safe place. There was a big homeless contingency right by their building with the liquor store. They got to know the folks early on, but it could be a problem for the tourism industry even though we knew they were for the most part harmless. Sometimes there were some very enthusiastic out of towners because it's a party. The evolution of 2nd Avenue has been towards beautification, business development. Now we would take our kids there, but before we weren't likely to.
- 2nd Avenue feels like a big small town/hometown feel
- Prime location
 - Access to so many things (Ryman, Park)
- Scale (makes it calmer)
- Beautiful
- Activity/ place for both day and night activities
- Sidewalks always filled with people
- Strong residential feel
- Sense of community
- Art
- 1st Avenue addresses
- Cobblestone
- Engaging alleyways
- Public square park
- Uniqueness
- Activated streetscape
- Storefronts

- Potential
- Brick walls/first pressed bricks
- Texture
- Acoustics
- Connection to tourists
- Weekend parades
- Courthouse
- Transportainment
- Most pleasant urban street in all of region
- Area is a magic place in Nashville
- 2nd Avenue as center for birthing and rebirthing Nashville
- Big focal point and first impressions for visitors and for residents

What challenges were you facing before COVID and/or explosion? With respect to 2nd Ave? (further prompts: pre-COVID, during COVID, post-explosion)

- Safety/security (*numerous responses*)
 - Prior to 80s and Spaghetti Factory coming in, Downtown wasn't a place you'd go.
 - In 80s/90s didn't feel safe anymore, not a lot of police presence. Corner of 2nd/Commerce called 'murder corner' and police weren't really there. Lots of attention now. Place needs to be safe.
 - 2nd and Church – security issues, not a lot of lighting
 - 1st Avenue has little security
 - Late night crime (shootings)
 - Security situation getting worse and worse
 - After COVID, it's quieter, but then the street people were the only ones left, and it felt less safe for residents.
 - More police presence
 - Gang of people that hang out at Ft. Nashborough (not best intentions). Creepy corner, but not because of Ft. Need to light area more. Natural gathering place but has gotten worse.
 - Youth hostel and empty parking lot, then Gay Street to the bridge – it's dormant. Perfect spot for people to camp out if not activated.
- Homeless (*numerous responses*)
 - Lots of homeless people on the corners.
 - Camp on street at Ft. Nashborough
 - One pulled knife on employee
 - Hard to have any seating in area because of homeless
- Poor lighting/needs more lighting/more visibility/dark areas for walking (*numerous responses*)
- Sidewalk conditions (*several responses*)
 - Brick sidewalks are tripping hazard/bricks are popping up/slippery when wet
- Cleanliness (*several responses*)
 - Birds and their droppings
- 1st avenue has always been this strange back door scuzzy area and improving that area/connection would really improve the area.
 - Backsides of buildings are a challenge
 - 1st Avenue smell with businesses cleaning grease traps
 - 1st Avenue floodplain issue of potentially flooding out any businesses on that side
- Tree diversity/tree health
 - Need different species
 - Trees were nice but got too large
 - Horse hitch posts around trees tacky

- Large parking lot
 - Crime issues
 - Want to walk fast past these spaces
 - Needs something there
 - Space is like comb with missing teeth
 - Where are the trees?
- Lack connections to 1st Avenue
- Challenge of getting trash out of the buildings
 - 1st Avenue not ideal for trash pick-up
 - Not worked out well with back of house
- Beautification
- Not safe for pedestrians
- Marijuana smell
- Environment today doesn't always encourage/support activation
- Vehicular traffic – sprint zone to get to Union due to the turning sections off 2nd
- Making area pedestrian dominant, especially as more people visiting are being dropped off instead of trying to park
- Maintaining the historical character of the buildings
- Old windows aren't/weren't soundproof so made it very loud indoors
- Pedal bars, hot tub trucks, and loud music
- Lackluster quality of the AT&T building--kind of felt like you were walking by a jail. Important to have the key information there and would be cost prohibitive to relocate it.
- Limited lunch time options
- Scooters on sidewalks/fear of scooters and dangerous to heavy pedestrian traffic
- Need parking permits for workers and residents
- Bars are now closed – hurts business
- East side solid block, no breaks; west block (Church/Commerce) no activity
- No relief on property taxes for people who have been bombed
- There's a grant program that remains unfunded. We tried to start a tax abatement program prior to COVID but State would not allow.
- Stakeholders are suffering
- A bit horrified to hear that people are just waiting to hear what comes next. The people that live down there, if this takes too long, lose residents. Don't want people coming in. Basics aren't moving fast enough. We need to take care of the people affected.
- Where is the light at the end of the tunnel with the financial concerns? How do we get back? How do we recover? People have livelihoods.

What other concerns do you have?

- At one point, traffic was 2-way on 2nd. It was a cruising spot and created gridlock. Mayor Bill Purcell heard about that during his campaign and made it back 1-way. Merchants group does not like that idea. Caution everyone: when we think of these changes, be thoughtful and think of everyone's opinion. This area is inclusive, diverse, mix of community. We're all in it together down here.
- The damaged historical buildings are like missing teeth on the street. Having buildings there is critical. Damaging aspect if more parking...got to get the buildings back. How is that done to look historical or repair the facades? Modern way?
- Want buildings and rooftop accesses to return
- Want to see commercial activities come back
- 178 2nd Avenue building – concern about timeline. Main source of business for them and they are worried about foreclosure. What are the financial assistance mechanisms that can help people?
- Focus on people not cars
- Too much space for cars and not enough for people
- Do not want a pedestrian-only street, too important to vehicular traffic
- Unsure how encroaching into the street would work
- More family dining places
- Public restrooms with signs
- Do not want bike lanes on 2nd Avenue
- Fix drinking on the street
- Drop off area needed
- No more studies. Time for implementation. Tie other studies together. Use Gehl and Bloomberg studies.
- Wasn't quite as dense, was comfortable but it is cramped with more activity. It is well activated but it is becoming compressed with tourism happening more and more.
- The built environment doesn't directly relate to the type of character the street represents.

If you could make one change to the built environment on 2nd what would it be?

- Active street front/façades along both 2nd and 1st Avenues (*numerous responses*)
 - Both sides of the street activated
 - What happens on western side of 2nd Avenue and how we fill those three big gaps along there? It's the missing teeth that we have along 2nd Avenue. If we can do something to incentivize property owners, there is wonderful texture and we begin losing it from Commerce, up on the west side and whatever we can do to enhance it.
 - Public square to Broadway, continuously active on both sides
 - Parking lot must have something (*5 responses*)
 - Needs a building there
 - Development potential
 - Opportunity, should be in line with historic district. It should enhance the street but concerned about developers not wanting that.
 - How do we transition this space to rest of 2nd Avenue?
 - Activate 1st Avenue
 - Closest commerce street to the river should be activated.
 - Riverfront (try to maintain the historic character based on existing character)
 - Cumberland was a main travel way back in 1890, so it makes sense that the buildings were once oriented away from the dirty nasty river it once was.
- AT&T building doesn't fit in/activate street/move it (*numerous responses*)

- AT&T is the ugly stepchild of entire district and if we can do something to transition that functional aspect of our city to another location and would go a long way to transition towards Printers Alley to knit together our fabric.
- Move AT&T building to new location
- Has blocked a big section of street
- Dark and gloomy section that needs to be addressed
- You have to get out of the building to enjoy the space.
- If they move, it will open up a big opportunity.
- Could give a new dynamic to the space to leverage what happens on Broadway
- Looking at AT&T and opportunity for minor building, or contextually appropriate skin that goes through there. Creating a sense of place, and abrupt and harsh change.
- Don't get to rule just because they are big.
- What can we do to incentivize AT&T to do something? There's an opportunity there we should look at.
- On-street/outdoor dining like in other cities (*numerous responses*)
 - Business owners would own that space and it would help with loitering
 - Bulb-outs for sidewalk dining
 - Adding to pedestrian character of east side of 2nd Avenue by possibly taking away on-street parking for bulb-outs for sidewalk cafes in certain areas
 - If we have sidewalk cafes, then sidewalks probably not large enough
 - South of Commerce Street, sidewalk cafes would be wonderful
 - Widening sidewalks on west side doesn't make sense because of buildings/inactive streetfront
 - Study how to create outdoor dining opportunities
- Activate/connections to riverfront (*numerous responses*)
 - When you're on Broadway, don't even know that river is there
 - Tangible things that connect
 - Incorporate elements from previous riverfront planning efforts. Fountain element at base of Broadway.
 - Is there another way to activate the riverfront? Other cities in TN have done such a better job than us.
- Ft. Nashborough
 - Seems waste of money
 - Didn't add a lot of value
 - Does it really need to be there for historic reasons?
 - People have argued in the past for it remaining there.
 - Could be something good if it were properly managed.
 - Space could be used in a more productive manner.
- Activate alleys
- More/better lighting
- Special sidewalk treatments. Don't just pull up bricks and pour concrete.
- More trees/plant the right street trees/light the street trees
- Rebuilding the same character and scale
 - Important that Nashville keeps its charm for 2nd Avenue. Fine line between bringing it back with the charm and allowing it to become a more commercialized zone. Every city needs streets that you walk down and go "wow", walk around the corner and there's the walking bridge and the river...keep it magical! Love 2nd and want to see it stay magical. Sentimental.
 - Scale of street, intimacy of it, different character. Trees were lit up. Made you want to walk down it or stroll in the summer when its shaded. Feels very European. So historic. Architecture. Brick sidewalks, small scale shops...what began to change that character? Changing of lighting and usage switches? Bigger venues. Overwhelming noise...would get to Church Street and there's that big parking lot and it's dark, not lit up. 21c coming in, brings people further up the street and the alley is beautiful and the courthouse and the park. So many things that tried to get there but many obstacles along the way. Be addressed to this street can recapture that character and be something that is different than Broadway...Broadway got a lot of attention and that noise and feel didn't fit 2nd Ave. Hope we can define what makes this street special and bring that back.

- Preserve/engage historical character
 - Balance the modernization of the city and how you bring in the historical factors, how to back historical society and tell history and develop more of a historical walking tour
 - History is engaged, preserved, and cherished
- Crosswalk from Butler's Run to 1st Avenue
 - Walkway at Butler's Run is key to connecting 2nd and 1st Avenue – incorporate more of that
- More events, street festival
- Engaging greenspace
- More connections to east-west from 2nd to 1st that are publicly accessible so we don't have an entire block where you couldn't make the transition to permeate the barrier.
- Kiosks pop up shops
- Outdoor promenades to host concerts
- Create "walk ways"
- Making it accessible, use of pedestrian to revitalize it to make it a place where people want to go and walk and see the history of Nashville
- Food trucks on the street
- Landscaping
- Seating
- Homeless management
- More lunch time options, such as a food hall
- Is there a thought to have that style of the French Quarter? Cafes above and up top to preserve street
- Easier access for 2nd Avenue
- More small businesses, more options
- Business will be better. Not only a party city but also family friendly.
- Do we need all that parking?
- Diversity is important, but things should be cohesive.
- Foot traffic from Broadway could help solve the 2nd Avenue problems.
- Art
- Bring back the energy and make it better.
- Programmatically design the street so that it can be a pedestrian dominant street a day or two or a couple times a year.
- Reduce vehicular traffic
- Strengthen aspect to Arcade
- Pull all these streets together
- OKC example: New things sprung out of a tragic event/revolving loan fund
- Street had potential before, need more of the hometown feel, want visitors to have a feeling of what it is like to be a resident in the city, not only a tourist. We want to go from ok to great.
- Building owners are saying we are coming back. Raise enough money to be able to see the trees from space. We want to light the trees. Fundraiser for new brick sidewalks for people to buy a brick to be placed in sidewalk.
- A lot can be thought of and done there. Make all that consistent and coordinated together.
- City needs to provide more services, including housing to homeless. Need less homeless activity and aggressiveness.
- Street material – granite pavers? Investment is going to make the street more beautiful and fun and safe.
- Traffic management when several large events are happening downtown all at once
- In order to make this area successful, it may not be able to look the way we want it to.
- Increase commerce sense from the residential aspect
- At the top of the hill add a beacon and allow a lot of architects that are engaged and imaginative to fill the ground.
- What is the comprehensive plan--I know the mayor is very interested in making sure this goes well. Need an action plan not just a design plan.

Additional discussion/thoughts on rebuilding process:

- Pre pandemic businesses were seeing increases every year.
- Focus needs to be that the street comes back as quick as possible for owners so that people don't suffer because of the explosion. Street is improved only to make sure that the businesses thrive, while having a plan that makes sense when it should, especially when it comes to 1st Avenue which is going to take a while. Not scaring the owners by saying we need to improve the street to this level now.
- Business owner response to above: Love that and appreciate that. It gives me hope to see that we are doing this listening session. My temperature gauge is if there was a plan--this is going to add value, amenable to the adding value if there was some way to help the folks financially. Took an extra 6 months they would be fine if there was a financial solution to help them out through that. This has kind of felt like we business owners feel alone in this even though people are making speeches and saying they will help but nothing has really happened yet.
- Maybe one of the best things is that the Civic Design Center is affected by this, but their space could get fixed quickly to be available to assist.
- Haven't heard from the city if the building isn't going to survive or not. There are business owners that are wondering "what are we really talking about" "how long is this going to take". This could spell financial ruin for some business owners. How do we integrate visioning and sustaining businesses?
- Need to make a seamless process for inspecting and process and not to go through red tape.