THE HONORABLE MEGAN BARRY

Nashville, TN

Figure 1: Mayor Barry presenting North Nashville case study

Nashville is the largest city in Tennessee and the fourth largest city in the southeast. Situated along the Cumberland River near the Kentucky border, the city was incorporated in 1806, became the state capital in 1843, and established the Metropolitan governing body with Davidson County in 1963. Nashville earned the "Music City USA" moniker in the 1950s and has maintained the high notes as a global center of the entertainment industry ever since. The city of 650,000 boasts a bustling music scene with no shortage of artists, local bands, aspiring singers-songwriters, street performers, and record production companies. The historic honky-tonks lining the Broadway strip in downtown give the city a tongue-in-cheek nickname "Nash Vegas." Each June, the CMA Country Music Festival attracts 250,000 visitors during the four-day extravaganza, infusing more vitality, vigor, and vibrancy to the local economy. From people to policy, Nashville tops the charts on countless tracks, including the No. 1 ranking on Travel+Leisure Magazine's "2015 America's Friendliest Cities" and winning the American Planning Association's "2016 Comprehensive Plan Award" for its general plan vision, NashvilleNext. As a fast growing, rapidly diversifying, and actively gentrifying

community with one million new residents anticipated in the Metro region over the next two decades, Nashville is facing a number of challenges seen in cities twice its size such as growth management, affordable housing, transit, neighborhood revitalization, and social equity.

The study area, North Nashville, has been the economic and cultural heart of the city's black community since the 1920s. It is a defined area of eight square miles bounded by the river to the north, Germantown neighborhood to the east, active rail to the west, and Jefferson Street commercial corridor to the south. Anchored by three historically black universities — Fisk University Meharry Medical College, Tennessee State University, and Watkins College of Art and Design — North Nashville is the birthplace of the city's "Music City USA" identity. Under the guise of urban renewal, state and local officials built Interstates 40 and 65 through the heart of the community in the 1960s, which triggered a shockwave of disinvestment resulting in high unemployment, high crime, and limited opportunities in the area.

Land use in the study area is characterized by low-density, single-family housing, some apartment buildings, a number of active neighborhood churches, and mostly marginal retail along the commercial corridors. Despite the presence of three academic institutions with 11,000 students and faculty, North Nashville lacks the quintessential college town vibe seen in Hillsboro Village located a few miles southwest of downtown and anchored by Belmont and Vanderbilt Universities. Even more striking visually and otherwise is the stark comparison between North Nashville and the abutting Germantown neighborhood on the east side of Rosa Parks Boulevard (Eighth Avenue), a booming area

that is experiencing the resurgence in both residential and commercial development while starting to lose the industrial character through adaptive reuse. Young African-Americans that move to the city are not choosing to live in North Nashville at the historical rate but rather going to other urban neighborhoods, especially farther southeast in Antioch where there is the greatest ethnic and income diversity and newer housing stock.

The city is interested in revitalizing the North Nashville neighborhood and mitigating the connections across the Interstate gash while minimizing displacement and promoting its heritage. However, there is neither a cohesive vision for the area nor a clear strategy for public engagement. Neighborhood residents are not politically active, but the key location means the area is poised to experience even more development pressure in the immediate future.

QUESTIONS

1. Recognizing that growth is encroaching into North Nashville at a rapid pace, where and how should the city begin to start the visioning process for the neighborhood ? What are the key components of a successful vision that are sensitive to social equity and community development?

2. What are some strategies that can help protect the existing neighborhood assets and prevent displacement as more growth and development sweep in the area?

3. What community engagement approaches should the city employ to engage North Nashville residents to generate excitement and community buy-in in the planning efforts at the neighborhood scale?

4. North Nashville is physically separated from the surrounding neighborhoods by the freeway. What design strategies can help mitigate the physical barriers such as street fragmentation, connectivity, and neighborhood isolation?

5. How should the city work with developers to catalyze old commercial corridors along DB Todd Boulevard, Jefferson Street, and Buchanan Street with the adaptive reuse of the existing buildings into artist, creative company retail, office, light manufacturing uses, and commercial activation?

RECOMMENDATIONS

"Unconnectivity" Strategy

• The city refers to the study area broadly as "North Nashville" when in reality the area comprises many discrete neighborhoods (e.g., Jones, Buena Vista, Elizabeth Park), each with a distinct identity, history, and challenges to overcome. While these subareas are facing similar issues as a whole in "North Nashville" (e.g., crime, poverty, housing), the solutions for each neighborhood may be unique and require a deeper understanding and sensitivity to the roots of the problems. Before addressing the connectivity issues by re-knitting the interstates, the city should examine the underlying problems individual neighborhoods are grappling with first. Some communities may not want to close the physical gap until they see the efforts to bridge the social divide (Figure 2).

Building Social Capital

• Investment in social infrastructure must precede physical infrastructure. Understanding that the city cannot build or design its way out of a community development problem, city leaders should invest and strengthen the social capital before tackling physical planning. Spending the resources on beautification projects (e.g., capped parks, light installations, art murals, bike lanes) first without a framework for community development and housing may accelerate gentrification and displacement to the point of no return. Any solutions that would make North Nashville stronger and more resilient economically and socially will need to come from within.

- The city should tap into the human resource of North Nashville youth and students to cultivate and groom future leaders that will champion the causes and be the voice in their community. Invest in youth outreach and development by incentivizing their engagement through seasonal training, work programs, and internships that lead to jobs at city hall or local nonprofits — with or without a college degree. Another idea is to introduce "Adopt-A-Block" program to encourage middle and high school students to take ownership of city blocks, keeping them clean, reporting any issues they see to the city, and tracking progress and improvements.

- When working in a challenged neighborhood, delivering results at people's front porch is sometimes more important than talking about lofty possibilities (i.e., capped parks). To demonstrate the city's commitment to improving the quality of life for North Nashville residents, city services in the neighborhood (e.g., trash pick up, street light and tree maintenance, clean sidewalks) must not lag the more affluent areas of the city. Strengthening the social service structure and providing high quality healthcare services are equally important because fulfilling basic human needs would improve people's lives (Figure 7).

- Cognizant of North Nashville's legacy, the city will likely find more success in the planning and public engagement efforts if it takes the nuanced and deliberative approaches by going out to the neighborhoods, bringing in the intermediaries, and focusing on the language of reinvestment as opposed to displacement or gentrification. In some cases, however, gentrification may not necessarily be a bad thing if the community can anticipate, adapt, and capitalize on the gentrifying forces. One strategy is to organize neighborhood meetings with the primary goal of identifying local leaders (e.g., pastors, corner store owners, trusted figures) to engage them in future planning and outreach exercises.

- Through non-government actions, the city can rebuild trust in a disenfranchised community by understanding the landscape of assets and resources from the point of view of North Nashville residents. Taking a social practice approach instead of a conventional GIS approach in asset mapping will help the city build relationships with community members and their informal leaders (Minneapolis model).

General

- Partnership and cooperation with institutional anchors are critical to the long-term viability of North Nashville, especially when students can help rebuild the community for the next generation. With an introverted campus plan (and a proposal to build fences!), the physical configuration of TSU presents an enormous urban design challenge because the campus does not lend itself to the vibrancy and livability of the neighborhood. The city should start a dialogue with TSU to explore ways to create synergy among the campus, student body, and the community over time, reminding the school that as a land grant institution, the obligation for the city to the university runs the other way.

- Concentrating affordable housing and public housing in North Nashville will exacerbate the division issue, perpetuating old patterns and mindset about race relations and legacy. Affordable housing should be integrated in the thriving areas of the city (e.g., Germantown, North Capitol), mixing race, class, and income to uplift the city as a whole (rising tide helps lift all boats analogy).

- When the time is right for investing in physical infrastructure, the city should explore a more subtle solution that has the same gesture of connectivity and impact as capped parks but may be less prone to gentrification (Upland, CA model — Figures 4-6).

EXAMPLES

- Chinatown Development Corporation in Philadelphia, PA: A community-led group founded in 1966 to protect the neighborhood
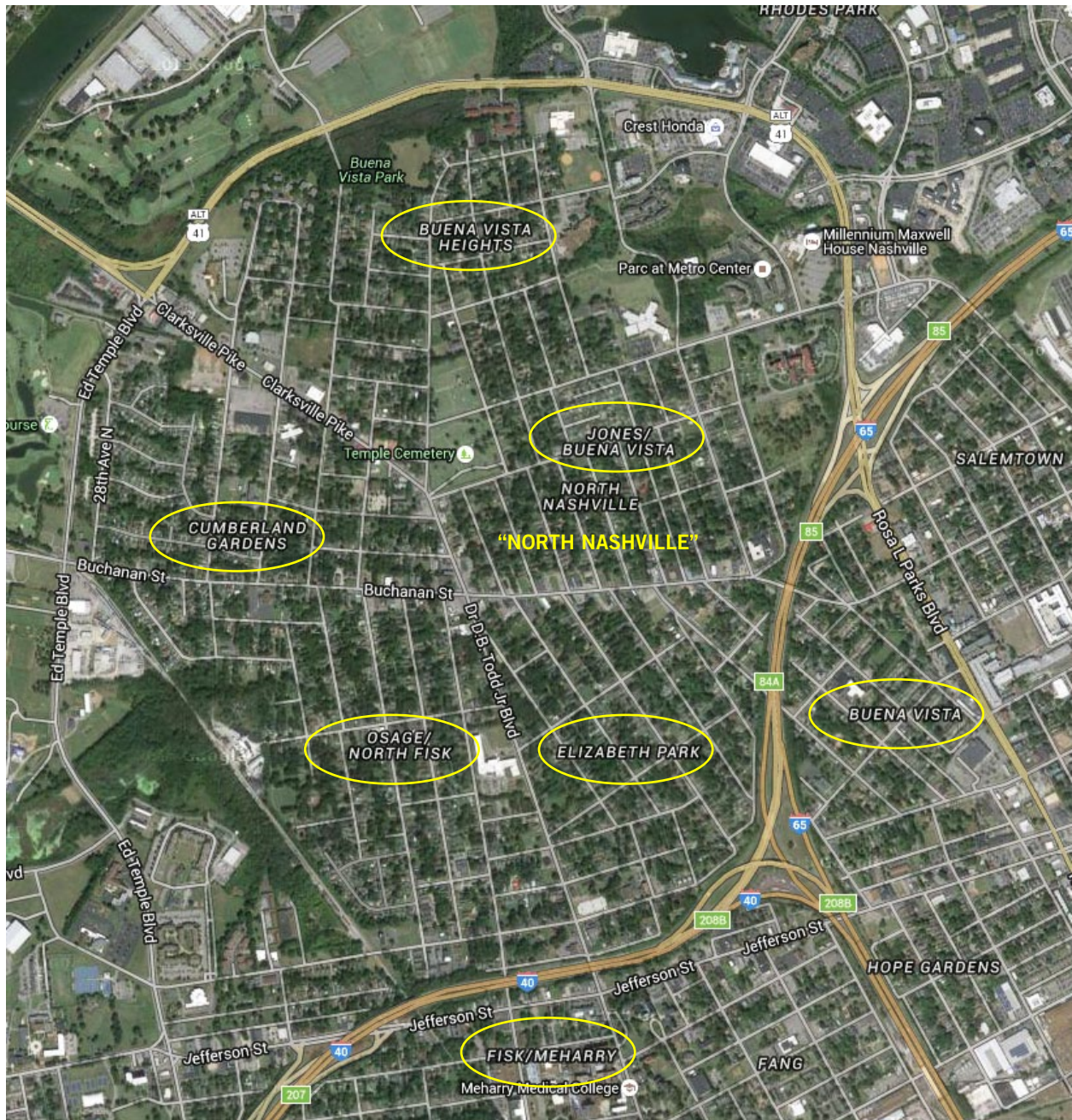
from urban redevelopment in the city.
http://chinatown-pcdc.org/about/history/

- "Creative City Road Map" in Minneapolis, MN: A process of inclusive community consultation and decision-making that helps local government identify resources through non-governmental lens, engaging artists and film makers.
http://www.creativeminneapolis.org/

- Euclid Avenue overpass in Upland, CA: The city widened the freeway overpass by building a median and bike / ped trails on both sides to connect the neighborhoods instead of building a capped park (Figures 4-6).

- "Midnight Basketball League" in Providence, RI: A community development program that engages the residents, city leaders, and community partners in a healthy community interaction to build relationships.

- "The Music They Played on 7th Street Oakland" Walk of Fame in Oakland, CA: The city commemorates the blues, gospel, and jazz artists with 88 plaques on the sidewalks (Figure 8).
http://www.eastbaytimes.com/breaking-news/ci_27662557/blues-walk-fame-unveiled-west-oakland-where-blues

- Project Row Houses in Houston, TX: A non-profit arts organization established by African-American artists and community activists in Houston's Third Ward.
http://projectrowhouses.org/about/about-prh/

- Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, GA: A college campus that lends itself to the livability and vibrancy of the community, invigorating the surrounding neighborhoods (Figure 3).
https://www.scad.edu/sites/default/files/PDF/sav-facilities-map.pdf

RESOURCES

- "Choice Neighborhoods" program from HUD supports locally driven strategies to address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation.
http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/cn

- "Every Place Counts Design Challenge" from U.S. DOT seeks to raise awareness and identify innovative community design solutions that bridge the infrastructure divide and reconnect people to opportunity.
https://www.transportation.gov/opportunity/challenge

- National grants program from ArtPlace America.
http://www.artplaceamerica.org/our-work/national-creative-placemaking-fund/introduction

- "Our Town" creative placemaking grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).
https://www.arts.gov/grants-organizations/our-town/introduction
http://arts.gov/exploring-our-town/showcase

- PolicyLink: A nonprofit working to use local, state, and federal policy to create opportunities for people in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.
http://www.policylink.org/

Figure 2: "North Nashville" planning area comprises discrete neighborhoods, each with a distinct identity, history, and challenges to overcome (Source: Google Maps)

Figure 3: Savannah College of Art Design (SCAD) lends itself to the livability and vibrancy of the city by spreading auxiliary uses (dark grey figures in map) throughout the neighborhood to animate the streets with students (Source: scad.edu)
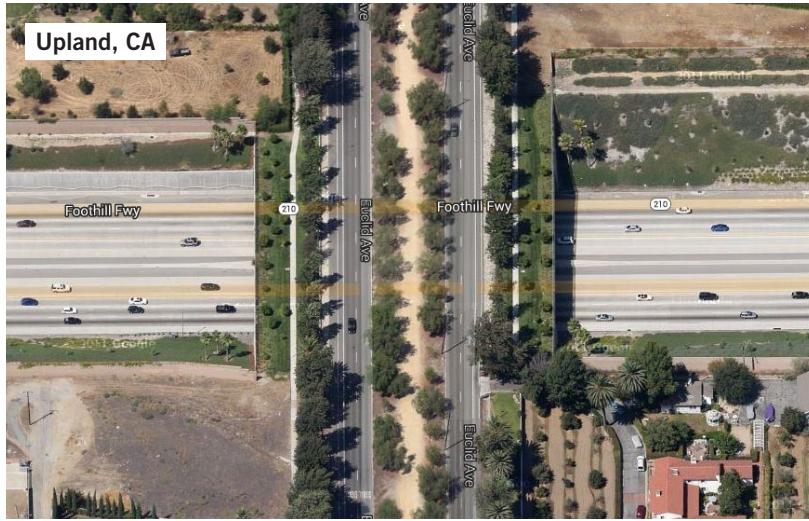
Figures 4-6: Instead of a capped park, the City of Upland, CA built a median with bike / ped trails on both sides of the Euclid Avenue overpass as a gesture to connect neighborhoods across 210 freeway (Source: Google Maps)
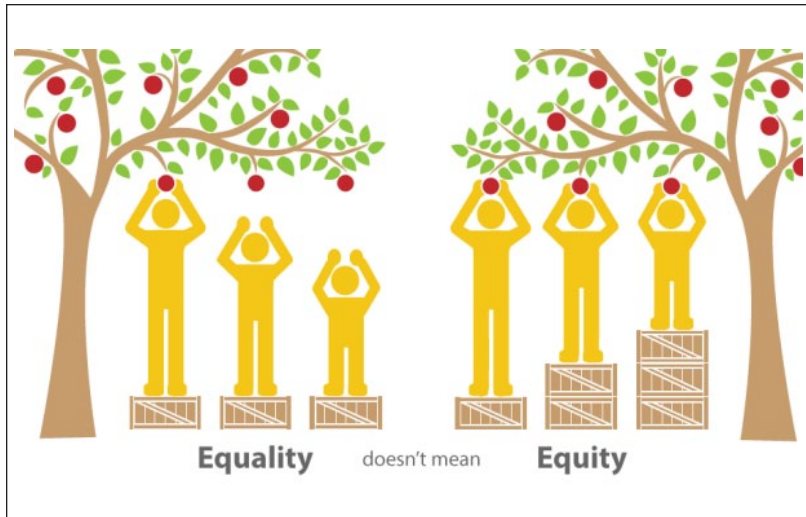
Figure 7: Distribution of city services, social support structure, and healthcare services should uphold the mayor's goal of equity (Source: MICD Resource Team Member Michaele Pride)

Figure 8: One of 88 plaques from "The Music They Played on 7th Street Oakland" Walk of Fame honors area musicians (Source: contracostatimes.com)