



# BLUEPRINT FOR IMPROVEMENT II

TASK FORCE ON CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT

2014

## Neighborhood Engagement & Participation

### Issue:

There was widespread concern among neighborhoods that they were not well served by the consolidated government. Specifically, the Task Force heard that:

- CPACs are marginally effective.
- Neighborhoods have no participation in planning or CIP development.
- There is a one size fits all approach to neighborhood issues.
- The CARE system closes issues before resolution, does not provide neighborhood feedback, and is not available on nights and weekends.
- It is difficult for neighborhoods to stay informed and be involved in zoning issues and decisions.
- Technology should be used for community outreach.

### Background:

During the course of its background investigation, the Task Force heard from representatives of various neighborhoods in Jacksonville. The concerns raised by these representatives focused on two main themes: the needs of each neighborhood are different, and residents do not feel that their voice is heard. The Task Force also heard from those who believe that as to land use and zoning matters, neighborhood organizations are not always representative of the broader community and their participation inordinately delays the application process, impacting business opportunity.

The current system for broad-based neighborhood engagement is through six Citizen Planning Advisory Committees (CPACs). CPACs were created through Executive Order No. 93-170 by Mayor Ed Austin on October 5, 1993. The intent behind CPACs was to use their input in "developing the Five-Year Capital Improvement Programs for the City, in the amendment and update of various elements of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, and in the development of other social and economic programs." CPACs have been amended by subsequent executive orders but have never been codified in the Ordinance Code. The area each CPAC serves is aligned with a Planning District of the City. In good economic times, the Neighborhoods Department and the Planning Department each had employees dedicated to a CPAC or a planning district depending on which was appropriate. As budgets have shrunk, the support for CPACs has shrunk.

The Task Force held public meetings at various locations around Jacksonville to allow the public to address their concerns directly to Task Force members about any issue. Although not well attended, the meetings did provide some valuable feedback related to neighborhood engagement and CPACs. One speaker stated that "CPACs are too big and too diverse to be able to adequately represent each neighborhood within their boundaries." Another stated that "resources have been dramatically reduced to the Neighborhoods Department and CPAC staffing in recent years, and the Mayor and department heads don't attend CPAC meetings on a regular basis as they once did. This seems to indicate a waning of support for the CPACs, which in turn leads to dwindling membership activity as participants see less interest on the part of the City." Finally,



another speaker stated that City Council members rarely attend CPAC meetings, and when they do they don't respond with "concrete action." That speaker also felt that CPAC participation is not as high because neighborhood representatives only want to get involved for a single issue, not the entire work of the CPACs.

It was also noted at a public meeting that "CARE complaints to 630-CITY are often marked as "closed" when in fact nothing has been done to remedy the complaint. There needs to be a system, both at the City and at the JEA, of a supervisor making a site visit and confirming that work reported as "completed" has actually been completed and that the work done has adequately solved the problem that was reported." The speaker suggested "the City designating community spokespersons for various parts of the city to meet on a regular basis with City Council members and departmental officials to organize and coordinate complaints and complaint responses to problems in that area of town."

As the Committee on Neighborhoods began to address the issues raised, they initially found fault with the arbitrary and imposed boundaries of CPACs. Such boundaries do not correlate to the political boundaries of Council Districts or the natural boundaries of communities of interest and self-defined neighborhoods. The committee heard from various groups whose mission and purpose is neighborhood organization. Additionally, through research, the Task Force found that the City of Los Angeles, California, has a system of Neighborhood Councils and a Board of Neighborhood Commissioners established by their City Charter. The Board is a policy-setting and oversight commission for their Neighborhood Councils and their Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. As a result, the Task Force first considered a recommendation for the creation of a plan for a series of self-defined Neighborhood Councils.

During the course of the refinement of the recommendations, the Presidents of the six CPACs issued a letter stating that they were not in favor of the recommended plan for the proposed Neighborhood Councils. The CPACs felt that there were changes to the CPAC system that would be beneficial, but overall they were working well. Despite this, the fact still remained that many residents do not feel that CPACs represent them best, or at all, and, perhaps as a result, CPACs are not consistently well attended. Six CPACs simply cannot meet all of the needs of the various neighborhoods, both those that are well organized and those not organized, and individual citizens who are not a part of any neighborhood.

Through neighborhoods, many residents find cultural and familial affinity, social and economic opportunities, historical connections, and their primary interest in, and reason for, civic engagement. Additionally, as Mayor Austin stated in his 1993 Executive Order, "citizens of an area are the best resource for identifying issues, suggesting solutions and developing programs needed to solve existing and future problems in the community." The Committee agrees and believes the Charter should expressly recognize a place for neighborhood organizations.

Further, neighborhoods are often self-defined by the residents, only sometimes conforming to specific geographic or legal definitions. Regardless of whether a neighborhood is self-defined, formally recognized, or legally defined, its residents require a clear path to initiate connection to consolidated government for purposes of affecting policy, capital investment, and planning issues. It is important that this role not be limited solely to one of reacting to zoning and land

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use applications, but that it include active participation in identifying issues, developing solutions, and in development of the CIP.

Currently, the ways in which local government entities communicate with citizens, neighborhoods, and neighborhood groups is based upon the needs of the local government entity. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) has the Sheriff's Advisory Councils (ShAdCos), which are organized based upon Sheriff's Office Zones and the crime rates in differing areas of the City. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority took area clusters of zip codes and created six geographically connected Community Advisory Groups (CAGs). Finally, CPACs were created to align with the six planning districts.

The Task Force is not suggesting that these groups were not created in the best manner possible to meet the needs of the organization creating them. It is likely that they were, and with great study and greater intentions. However, they were organized based upon the needs of the organization rather than the needs of the neighborhood or its residents. The first step must be elevating the importance of neighborhoods by creating a place for neighborhoods in the City Charter that is truly focused on the needs of neighborhoods and their residents, rather than the needs or abilities of the consolidated City.

In addition to recognizing neighborhoods in the Charter, the Neighborhood Bill of Rights, created by Ordinance 95-247-106, should be included in the Charter. Neighborhoods deserve the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights, most notably inclusion in the Capital Improvement Process and the creation of the budget. Additionally, the Neighborhood Bill of Rights needs teeth. It was thought that rights of neighborhoods would be sufficiently respected so that it would not need an enforcement mechanism. As it currently stands, the Bill of Rights is not included in the published Ordinance Code. Created in the Charter, as part of the Bill of Rights, should be a mechanism of recourse where neighborhoods who believe their rights have been violated can have their issues mediated and resolved—not to determine right or wrong, but for progress and continual improvement.

In addition to the above Charter amendments, several changes to the Ordinance Code must be made to support residents through their neighborhoods, including a procedure for them to register with the City for communication and notices, inclusion in the design of public projects, opportunity for input in and provision of documents related to land use and zoning issues, and input on the budget.

The next step in the evolution of neighborhood engagement must be the codification of CPACs. CPACs suffer from a lack of meaningful financial support, which is demonstrated by the continued decrease in administrative support, mostly due to their existence as a creature of executive order. CPACs must be supported financially and administratively so they can, in turn, meet the needs of residents, individually and as members of their neighborhoods. The expectation for support must be placed on local government by residents through support for CPACs and then through the processes of the CPACs. CPACs must be a forum for neighborhoods and residents. They must allow neighborhoods and residents to be recognized as an asset of the City and local government's best resource for on-the-ground input. They must clearly pinpoint responsibility in administrative matters by engaging the Mayor's administration

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in a conversation. At consolidation, it was intended that residents would be able to go straight to the Mayor's administration for resolution of their problems. Almost immediately, this process was diverted and residents began going to their district Council Member. This is not likely to change, unless it becomes faster, easier, and more productive to get resolution for issues at a regular CPAC meeting. Next, CPACs must continue to educate themselves on land use and zoning issues, and improve their capacity to provide well-reasoned and relevant responses and feedback to the Planning Commission and City Council. Finally, CPACs must serve as the mediator for violations of the Neighborhood Bill of Rights—again, not for right or wrong but for process improvement

Additionally, there should be Ordinance Code changes to coordinate and assist with the codification of CPACs. These Ordinance Code changes ensure certain requirements for membership and to establish the powers and duties of the CPACs.

The Task Force considered but did not approve committee recommendations that registered Neighborhood Associations and CPACs have an extended opportunity to speak and present opposition during a quasi-judicial hearing on a land use application, and that the City Council consider delegation to CPACs of the authority to hold public meetings prior to Council vote. The former was suggested in addition to the current opportunity the public has to speak in these instances. Currently, a member of the public has three minutes to speak on an issue. The applicant also has three minutes, but is often asked questions that extend his or her time beyond three minutes. An applicant is also afforded three minutes of rebuttal time. Since a Neighborhood Association also has the opportunity to be asked questions that result in an extension of time, the current system works effectively and no change is necessary. The latter recommendation was suggested as a means of having the discussion that currently takes place at Council meetings and subcommittee meetings take place at CPAC meetings, at the Council's discretion. Ideally, this would lead to greater involvement. On a quasi-judicial matter, such a delegation is not feasible, but that does not mean that CPACs cannot provide whatever forum they wish on such issues.

The combination of Charter amendments and the codification of the system of CPACs, with the purposes outlined above, elevates the importance of neighborhoods and provides a system created for the needs of the citizens.

## Recommendations:

### Neighborhood Organizations

#### *Charter Amendments:*

1. Amend the Charter to recognize that citizens are government's best resource for identifying issues, suggesting solutions, and developing programs needed to solve existing and future problems in the community; to recognize the importance of neighborhoods as assets of the City that provide the basic units for civic participation and the inspiration for civic engagement; and, further, to amend the Charter to require the City Council, the Mayor, the constitutional officers, and the agencies of the City to



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establish procedures for receiving input from citizens and neighborhoods as a regular course of conducting their business. (NE)

2. Amend the Charter to incorporate the current Neighborhood Bill of Rights and to allow for violations of the Neighborhood Bill of Rights to be mediated by a Citizens Planning Advisory Committees (CPACs). (NE)

The Neighborhood Bill of Rights states that every organized, officially recognized neighborhood in the City of Jacksonville has the right to expect and receive the following from the officials, employees, and agencies of the City of Jacksonville:

- a. Prompt, courteous, informed responses to all questions regarding City business.
- b. An opportunity to participate in the design of publicly funded projects within or adjacent to the neighborhood, including the opportunity early in the planning process to express neighborhood preferences regarding all aspects of the project. Projects include but are not limited to any City-related public works or utility projects.
- c. An opportunity to provide informal and formal input into any proposed land use or zoning change and new development. The input from a neighborhood organization shall be considered, and when possible, incorporated by the Planning Department and the City Council.
- d. Advance notification of any City-related public works or utility projects taking place within or adjacent to a neighborhood (e.g., road paving; water, sewer or drainage work; tree trimming; traffic signal installation or removal; park renovation or substantial maintenance; land purchases, etc.), including the day(s) and probable length of any street closures, utility interruptions, or other adverse impacts on the neighborhood, and the name and phone number of the City representative most knowledgeable and able to immediately answer questions during the course of the work.
- e. Notification of the submission of any application for rezoning, zoning or land use change, variance or exception, Development of Regional Impact (DRI) or Planned Unit Development (PUD) application, Comprehensive Plan change, or other significant land use action; a clear explanation of the date, time, and place of all applicable public hearings (including notification of deferrals and new hearing dates) and other opportunities for public input on the application; and a clear explanation of the type of testimony that is allowable and relevant from neighborhood organizations and residents.
- f. Opportunity for formal input into the annual budget process, including the opportunity to express preferred city government priorities, suggested capital improvement projects, and other statements that fairly represent the opinion of a majority of the neighborhood's residents.

- \* g. A timely personal response from its district councilperson or that councilperson's aide to questions directed to the City Council office.

*Ordinance Code Changes:*

1. Amend the Ordinance Code in accordance with the new Charter amendment(s) to include the following:
  - a. Definition of "Neighborhood Associations" to include a geographic boundary submitted by the neighborhood association and a procedure for registering the neighborhood association with the City. (NE)
  - b. Registered Neighborhood Associations, CPACs, and applicants for any land use or zoning change shall have the opportunity to meet with the Planning Department to ask questions or to voice support, objections, concerns, or suggestions regarding the application prior to the issuance of the Planning Department's staff report. (NE)
  - c. Registered Neighborhood Associations and CPACs shall be given the final version of all documents related to a land use or zoning-related application at least seven days prior to the final public hearing on the matter. Failure to do so shall constitute a violation of the Neighborhood Association's rights. (NE)
  - d. Procedures for formal input into the annual budget process, including an annual list of priorities and suggested capital improvement projects. (NE)
  - e. Procedures for providing input into the design of publicly funded projects within or adjacent to the neighborhood, including the opportunity early in the planning process to express neighborhood preferences. (NE)
  - f. Process by which the ordinance will be enforced, including designated actions to correct violations. (NE)
  - g. Establishment of procedures for receiving input from Neighborhood Associations prior to decisions by the City Council, City Council Committees, boards and commissions, and the Independent Authorities. (NE)

**Citizens Planning Advisory Committees (CPACs)**

*Ordinance Code Change:*

**CPACs' Purpose**

1. Amend the Ordinance Code to create Citizens Planning Advisory Committees with the purpose of:
  - \* a. Providing a forum for neighborhoods and residents to
    - i. Be recognized as local government's best resource for identifying issues, suggesting solutions, and developing programs needed to solve existing and future problems in the community; recognized as assets of the City that provide the basic units for civic participation and the inspiration for civic engagement. (NE)(PT)