

The Neighborhood Plan

INTENT AND PURPOSE

The purpose of the Neighborhood Chapter is contained in the City Commission's adoption of the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) in June of 1996. It directed that the City develop a neighborhood chapter for inclusion in the Sarasota City Plan update which:

- acknowledges neighborhoods' contribution to the community that is Sarasota;
- provides support to their continued existence;
- seeks to preserve the best qualities of Sarasota's distinct neighborhoods; while
- responding creatively to the pressures of change and growth.

This Chapter is founded on this expressed intent of the City Commission and upon **Sarasota's Strategic Plan**.

Sarasota's Strategic Plan Goals

In 2004, the City Commission adopted "Sarasota's Approach to Strategic Planning", which provides the foundation for the Strategic Plan and six Strategic Goals that have particular relevance to the Neighborhood Plan:

"A City where urban amenities meet small town living."

Neighborhoods play a critical role in realizing this vision statement for the City. The way people feel about their neighborhoods has a lot to do with achieving "small town living". Small towns, and successful neighborhoods offer a sense of community, mutual responsibility, friendliness, visual pleasantness, ease of movement and safety from crime. The intent of this Plan is to achieve this vision.

"Viable, safe and diverse neighborhoods and businesses that work together."

The City's ability to achieve safety in its neighborhoods, both real and perceived, is critical to maintaining healthy neighborhoods. Before people can enjoy the qualities of living in City neighborhoods they must feel secure in their homes and neighborhoods. Objectives and action strategies in the Neighborhood Plan address this defining principle.

Perhaps, the most important qualities of successful neighborhoods are their sense of community, and willingness to work together toward common objectives. The Neighborhood Plan intends to establish a framework that will facilitate and encourage neighborhoods working together as a community.

“An attractive, environmentally-friendly community that is safe and livable and provides an array of cultural and aesthetic enjoyments.”

Attractive, clean and aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods are essential to healthy neighborhoods - to maintaining the City as a desirable place to live - and to achieving this defining principle.

It is the intent of the Neighborhood Plan to pursue actions that further **Sarasota’s Strategic Plan**. The City’s neighborhood initiative is just beginning. Moving forward will require an on-going dialogue between the City Commission, the Planning Board, and neighborhood representatives. It will require a continued refinement of City government and neighborhood relationships in the best traditions of self government.

Florida Statutory Requirements

The Neighborhood Chapter is optional. Therefore there are no State requirements.

Organization of the Neighborhood Chapter

The Neighborhood Plan consists of a goal followed by objectives and action strategies pursuant to the goal.

The Neighborhood Plan is organized around objectives addressing the following topics:

- Objective 1. Neighborhood Identification;
- Objective 2. Neighborhood Information System;
- Objective 3. Neighborhood Planning Process;
- Objective 4. Neighborhood Compatibility;
- Objective 5. Neighborhood Safety;
- Objective 6. Neighborhood Transportation;
- Objective 7. Neighborhood Aesthetics and Identity;
- Objective 8. School Board Cooperation;
- Objective 9. Neighborhood Infrastructure, and;
- Objective 10. Other New Initiatives.

The Neighborhood Plan is one of the eleven plans which collectively represent the Sarasota City Plan. This Plan can neither stand alone nor be interpreted independent of the others.

Implementation of the Sarasota City Plan

Implementation of the Sarasota City Plan will require actions by both the public and private sectors. In this regard many of the plan components speak to “the City” pursuing certain actions to:

promote, provide, consider, identify, enhance, create, maintain, conserve, support, reduce discourage, coordinate, and employ.

While these actions may be initiated by City government itself, City government will also be expecting applicants seeking development approvals to pursue these same type of actions as part of their applications.

GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND ACTION STRATEGIES

Goal

It shall be the goal of the City to achieve healthy and livable neighborhoods by:

- Maximizing opportunities for all citizens to have meaningful involvement in the decisions that affect their neighborhood;
- Maximizing compatibility between residential and non-residential uses;
- Ensuring neighborhood safety and quality of life;
- Developing safe, aesthetically pleasing and efficient transportation networks; and,
- Preserving, protecting and enhancing neighborhood aesthetics, identity, and natural and historic resources; and
- Embracing an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) philosophy by focusing on the capacities and assets of associations and citizens.

Objective 1 - Neighborhood Identification

The City shall encourage the formation of neighborhood organizations and identify, delineate and name all neighborhoods within the City.

Action Strategies

- 1.1 **Composition of Neighborhoods:** The City will recognize and encourage that the formation and composition of “neighborhoods” may be residential, non-residential or both. The City will encourage planning that focuses on the relationship between residential and non-residential uses and on actions that create compatibility between these uses.

1.2 **Neighborhood Organizations:** The City will continue to encourage the formation of neighborhood organizations. These organizations involve residents, owners and businesses that focus on creating healthy and livable neighborhoods. Components of such organizations are listed below:

1. Meet regularly.
2. Have recognized leadership.
3. Communicate with residents.
4. Communicate with government.
5. Take formal action to officially represent.
6. Have articles of association/incorporation
7. On record with the Neighborhood and Development Services Department.

1.3 **Neighborhood Delineation:** The City will facilitate existing neighborhood organizations and neighborhood residents not represented by these organizations to delineate neighborhood boundaries that consider:

- Generally agreed upon and locally recognized boundaries;
- Areas defined by strong historical, cultural, geographic, or business relationships;
- Appropriateness of the area for the planning purpose (e.g. watershed areas for addressing drainage issues);
- Natural or man-made barriers (e.g. roads, major topographic changes, rivers);
- Size of area; and,
- The opportunity for all residents of the City to participate in neighborhood organizations.

Objective 2 - Neighborhood Information System

The City will encourage personal communication between neighborhood associations, staff, and City Commission. The Neighborhood and Development Services Department will act as a liaison between the City of Sarasota and its citizens.

Action Strategies

2.1 **Surveys:** The City will conduct periodic surveys through a multi-pronged approach to determine priorities of neighborhood residents and their perception of what City programs are working and which need improvement. The City will assist neighborhoods in conducting surveys beyond NAS process; distribute surveys at neighborhood meetings over a defined period of time; and communicate results of such surveys expeditiously.

Provided funding is available, the City will conduct a “Community Forum” type event in conjunction with another City event to increase attendance.

- 2.2 **Newsletters:** The City will prepare periodic newsletters informing neighborhood residents, business people and neighborhoods of City neighborhood related actions and programs and will increase accessibility through improved distribution (e.g. Sunday paper insert).
- 2.3 **Mailing List:** The City will create and maintain a frequently updated mailing list of neighborhood organizations that all City departments will use to notify neighborhood leaders of notifications.
- 2.4 **Computerized Data Base:** The City will create a computerized land use and building data base, updated on a regular basis, which would allow easy access by the public.
- 2.5 **DRC Database:** The City will create an active DRC database (eDRC) to include all current applications, DRC comments, Planning Board minutes, Planning Staff recommendations, etc.
- 2.6 **Development Information:** The City will establish a system where NPO staff acts as information liaison to applicable neighborhoods, similar to how a planner is assigned to a developer, and create a document that outlines development processes.
- 2.7 **Neighborhood Meetings:** City staff will continue to attend neighborhood meetings to promote communication between neighborhood associations and the City and listen to citizen issues and concerns.

Objective 3 - Neighborhood Planning Process

The City will build a strong, effective “neighborhood planning process” that establishes the type and level of assistance residents and businesses desire for their neighborhood. This process will be open to all neighborhoods and will be community asset-based, recognizing that long-term neighborhood development and sustained participation require community capacities as a foundation.

Action Strategies

- 3.1 **Establishing Priorities:** The City will consider the following criteria in establishing priorities for allocating available neighborhood asset strategy planning resources:
 - Established set of standards of interest among the residents and businesses in an area to participate in a neighborhood asset strategy plan;
 - On a first-come, first-serve basis, associations that have successfully completed the asset-survey/mapping component; and
 - Opportunity to influence positive change through connecting community assets to needs.
- 3.2 **Scope of Planning:** The City will conduct preliminary assessments of neighborhoods to determine the scope of planning to be undertaken. The degree of neighborhood association activity/organization shall be included as a measurement in such assessments.
- 3.3 **Initiation of Neighborhood Plans:** The City will permit either neighborhood organizations or itself to initiate neighborhood asset strategy plans with City support, to the extent provided in the City’s annual budget.
- 3.4 **Standards for Plans:** The City will provide standards and guidelines for neighborhood asset strategy plans that establish the content and technical analysis and which result in plans with a consistent level of quality and with sufficient information for decision-making by the City Commission. The review or locating of funding sources for these plans shall be performed as part of these standards. The City will continue to include standardized planning elements in NAS plans and continue to encourage neighborhoods to drive content based on individual issues.
- 3.5 **Adoption of Plans:** Upon completion of the planning process for a particular neighborhood, the City will adopt a plan by resolution or ordinance that provides the foundation for improving the neighborhood in a positive manner. The neighborhood plan shall be consistent with the *Sarasota City Plan*.

- 3.6 **Implementation of Plans:** The City will implement adopted neighborhood asset strategy plans through consideration of the recommendations during the annual budget process recognizing the City’s legal, administrative and fiscal constraints. The City will continue to give priority to adopted NAS plan action items.
- 3.7 **Monitoring of Plans:** The City will monitor implementation of adopted neighborhood plans and communicate the results to the City Commission, and the general public.
- 3.8 **Neighborhood Preservation and Enhancement Program:** The City will explore the feasibility and interest in developing and implementing a Neighborhood Preservation and Enhancement Program to address neighborhood issues and assist neighborhoods in improving and maintaining their intrinsic characteristics and values.

Objective 4 - Neighborhood Compatibility

The City will promote compatibility of new and re-development projects within neighborhoods.

Action Strategies

- 4.1 **Involve Neighborhood Organizations:** The City will continue to involve impacted neighborhood organizations in the review of private and public development projects which require review by the Planning Board.
- 4.2 **Design and Compatibility Guidelines:** The City will explore the feasibility and interest of creating “Design and Compatibility Guidelines” to:
- Build awareness of design principles with developers and the general public;
 - Evaluate new development and re-development projects; and,
 - Guide future modifications to the City’s Land Development Regulations.
 - Ensure that new development is compatible with the existing scale of the neighborhood where it is located and encourage “like facing like” development when reviewing development proposals located on the periphery of residential neighborhoods.
 - Establish design and compatibility guidelines on a neighborhood, community, and/or regional basis.
- 4.3 **Land Development Regulations:** The City will include measures that enhance neighborhood compatibility in the Land Development Regulations.

Objective 5 - Neighborhood Safety

The City will promote neighborhood safety and cohesiveness by encouraging resident and neighborhood involvement in crime prevention and elimination.

Action Strategies

- 5.1 **Neighborhood and Business Watch:** The City, in conjunction with the Sarasota City Police Department, will continue to encourage the formation of “Neighborhood and Business Watch” groups and encourage existing groups to remain active.
- 5.2 **Neighborhood Crime Fighting Programs:** The City, in conjunction with the Sarasota City Police Department, will continue to support neighborhood-based crime fighting programs, which have proven to be a successful at reducing crime.
- 5.3 **Volunteer Programs:** The City will continue to promote and encourage participation in the Sarasota Citizen Volunteer Program other volunteer programs and annually recognize all volunteers.
- 5.4 **Crime Statistics:** The City will increase public access to City crime statistics.

Objective 6 - Neighborhood Transportation

The City will provide safe, efficient and aesthetically pleasing neighborhood transportation networks for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and mass transit.

Action Strategies

- 6.1 **Truck Traffic:** The City will continue to develop and implement strategies to discourage through truck traffic on residential streets. The City will consider the use of truck by-passes where feasible.
- 6.2 **Through Automobile Traffic:** The City will continue to develop and implement strategies to discourage through automobile traffic on residential streets within neighborhoods.

- 6.3 **Automobile Speed and Pedestrian Safety:** The City will continue to develop and implement strategies to manage the speed of automobile traffic within residential neighborhoods and City thoroughfares so the street environment is inviting to pedestrians and bicyclists. The City will increase traffic enforcement where feasible. The City will utilize controlled turn lanes and medians where necessary. The City will also encourage the use of center medians or “rescue spots” with pedestrian signal buttons where appropriate and will continue to extend pedestrian light timing where warranted.
- 6.4 **Sidewalks:** The City will continue to identify, construct and maintain sidewalks where they are needed to improve pedestrian safety and encourage walking. Private funding will be used whenever possible.
- 6.5 **Bicycle Paths:** The City will continue to design and construct paths for with links to Citywide bicycle systems. Private funding will be used whenever possible.
- 6.6 **Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT):** The City will request SCAT to design comfortable and aesthetically pleasing improvements in the transit system to interface with neighborhood walkway systems. Bus stop shelters and their subsequent maintenance should be a priority.
- 6.7 **Aesthetic Improvements:** The City will continue to incorporate landscaping and other appropriate aesthetic improvements into all neighborhood transportation projects in order to enhance neighborhood aesthetic quality and identity.
- 6.8 **Traffic Safety:** The City will continue to encourage residents to promptly report traffic safety problems, including such items as potholes, blocked or damaged signage, malfunctioning traffic controls, and visual obstructions. The City will respond appropriately and in a timely manner.
- 6.9 **Studies:** The City in conjunction with other public and private agencies will conduct studies of intersections and roads with noted problems to identify when additional traffic controls and improvements are warranted to ensure traffic safety. The City will consider expediting the process relating to the installation of traffic calming measures.
- 6.10 **Traffic Calming Signs:** The City will continue to promote the use of traffic calming signs, such as Keep Kids Alive-Drive 25, and decrease the costs to the public of purchasing such signs. The City will also study the use of traffic calming decals on garbage bins.
- 6.11 **Crosswalks:** The City will support the use of crosswalks City-wide for increased pedestrian safety and as a traffic calming measure.
- 6.12 **Notification of Transportation Projects:** The City, where appropriate, will notify affected neighborhood associations of local and state transportation projects.

Objective 7 - Neighborhood Aesthetics and Identity

The City will enhance the unique aesthetic identity of individual neighborhoods.

Action Strategies

- 7.1 **Historic Resources:** The City will continue to identify, designate and encourage the preservation of historic structures and districts within neighborhoods and will create a “historic structure” data layer within GIS and also allow for the public to access/view this data layer.
- 7.2 **Unique Architecture:** The City will continue to identify and encourage the preservation of architecture that contributes to the unique quality of neighborhoods, and will create a “unique architecture” data layer within GIS and also allow for the public to access/view this layer.
- 7.3 **Landscape:** The City, where appropriate and feasible, will make landscape improvements incorporating *Florida Friendly* principles that contribute to neighborhood identity and to a pedestrian friendly environment.
- 7.4 **Open Space:** The City will, where appropriate and feasible, create open spaces that facilitate neighborhood gatherings and contribute to neighborhood identity. The City will also study the issue of creating an open space fund (similar to affordable housing and public art funds) for developers to contribute to for the purpose of acquiring additional open space areas.)
- 7.5 **Public Art:** The City will continue to consider the use of public art to enhance other public improvements and to create neighborhood identity. The City will create a public art database for the public to access. The database will include, at a minimum, descriptions of public art and locations, as well as potential sites for consideration. The City will also increase programs and incentives for neighborhoods to install public art and market such programs accordingly.
- 7.6 **Signage:** The City, where appropriate and feasible, will design and implement signage that contributes to neighborhood aesthetics and identity, and will increase opportunities for signage at neighborhood entrances, parks and trails.

The City will consider attaching neighborhood signs to MURT signs, e.g. “You are in the _____ neighborhood.”

- 7.7 **Unique Features:** The City will continue to identify, preserve, and enhance unique features, such as natural features or institutions, that contribute to neighborhood identity, and consider creating a database of such features. The City will consider installing signage at unique features as part of an identification process.

- 7.8 **Urban Design:** The City will, where appropriate and feasible, use urban design in programs such as the NAS process to create a cohesive whole while preserving the integrity of the neighborhood relating to improvements in transportation, architecture, landscape, open space, and public art.
- 7.9 **Keep Sarasota County Beautiful:** The City, will continue to encourage programs to maintain and beautify neighborhoods. Such programs may be in conjunction with the Keep Sarasota County Beautiful program and include “Adopt-a-Street” or “Adopt-a-Park.” The City will continue to market programs, promote them on its website, and encourage decreasing the two-mile minimum for street adoption.

Objective 8 - School Board Cooperation

The City will cooperate with the School Board of Sarasota County in order to provide a high quality education for children of City residents.

Action Strategies

- 8.1 **Use of School Facilities:** The City will encourage the School Board to maximize the use of school facilities by allowing civic and recreational groups to utilize school properties when not in use for school activities.
- 8.2 **Neighborhood Involvement:** The City will encourage the School Board to hold Community Workshops for all applicable school board development proposals within the City, based on the requirements for applicants where the City is the regulating authority, located in Administrative Regulation No. 029-A--Procedures for Community Workshops.

Objective 9 - Neighborhood Infrastructure

The City will develop infrastructure through its Capital Improvements Program that enhances Neighborhood Quality, including downtown.

Action Strategies

- 9.1 **Special Districts:** The City will consider creating a clear application and review process for organizations seeking to create special taxing districts.

- 9.2 **Long-Term Stormwater Management:** The City will continue coordination with Sarasota County to design long-term regional stormwater management improvements.

Objective 10 - Other New Initiatives

The City will investigate innovative plans, programs and initiatives associated with neighborhoods.

Action Strategies

- 10.1 **Landlord Training Program:** The City will implement the Police Department's "Landlord Training Program" to educate existing and prospective landlords about their rights and responsibilities; the City will also increase community awareness and availability of the program.
- 10.2 **Front Yard Parking:** The City will draft an ordinance regulating front yard parking.
- 10.3 **Neighborhood Self-Help Fund:** The City will continue the "Neighborhood Grant Program" to fund neighborhood projects on a bi-annual basis. Neighborhood grants may be used for planning, technical assistance, and small-scale projects. The grant would be set at a level that would allow a reasonable number of "ranked" projects to be funded each year.
- 10.4 **Neighborhood Coordinating Committee:** The City will explore the feasibility and interest in creating an interdepartmental "Neighborhood Coordinating Committee, made up of both planning and operating agencies/departments that deliver services to neighborhoods. Neighborhood representatives shall be part of this committee. The Committee's functions could include:
- Coordinating departmental responses to neighborhoods;
 - Keeping the City informed about neighborhood issues;
 - Monitoring commitments made by the City to neighborhoods; and
 - Evaluating and identifying ways the City could be more responsive to neighborhoods.

- 10.5 **Neighborhood Maintenance Program:** The city will explore the feasibility and interest in initiating a “Neighborhood Maintenance Program,” for use in targeted neighborhoods. The program would be designed to coordinate the resources of various City departments toward addressing deteriorating conditions within neighborhoods. Items for study should include but not be limited to:
- Neighborhood Maintenance Education Program Alternatives;
 - Code Compliance Alternatives;
 - Rental Inspection Programs, as an alternative, for neighborhoods that desire it;
 - Relationship and coordination of City departments
 - Cost, benefits and relationship to the City budget;
 - Landlord contact/registration program; and
 - Strengthen code compliance ordinance and increase fines for repeat/long-term violators.