

## **NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING TOWARD BUILD-OUT**

Sustaining Chandler's excellence as a place to live depends on the continued strength of its neighborhoods. Fewer new ones will be added as the City approaches build-out. Attention turns to aging areas -- some constructed a decade or less ago, others dating back to the original Townsite, circa 1912. To some degree, all neighborhoods require maintenance and/or improvement.

Revitalization represents a City-wide challenge. As build-out proceeds with selective additions to commerce, industry and housing absorbing the remaining land resource, the developed community has to fight decline. That is why neighborhoods' importance is at its greatest.

That is the reason a Neighborhood Planning Element is being added to the General Plan Update. It is not now required by Arizona State Statutes. However, emphasizing grassroots citizen involvement demonstrates faith in the abilities of residents and businesspeople to help lead Chandler to on-going, long-term, City-wide stability.

With Build-Out and Beyond policies stressing commercial and employment development, demand for quality housing in Chandler should increase. Property owners can expect their real estate investments to yield higher values, but appreciation depends on maintaining homes and retail/service establishments in sound condition.

Planning neighborhoods involves all of the General Plan's Elements. Land Use, Housing, Redevelopment, Safety and others will have different applications according to a particular location's demographics. The broad framework for neighbors planning together, however, can be established by recognizing common Goals and Objectives.

### **GOAL: PROMOTE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AMONG NEIGHBORS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.**

- Objective:* Encourage interaction and support between traditional neighborhoods and homeowners' associations.
- Objective:* Organize traditional neighborhoods to extend their sense of community character.
- Objective:* Initiate and continue City programs for empowering both traditional neighborhoods and HOAs.
- Objective:* Form neighborhood committees to partner with City agencies (e.g., code enforcement, police) in addressing specific, localized issues.
- Objective:* Work together with adjacent jurisdictions for mitigation of industrial or business impacts on Chandler neighborhoods.
- Objective:* Address special needs of individuals and families in the neighborhood to identify and refer assistance resources.

### **GOAL: PRESERVE AND REVITALIZE OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS.**

- Objective:* Discourage inappropriate business incursion into neighborhood interiors.
- Objective:* Target maintenance or replacement of sidewalks and other infrastructure with special attention on older, central areas.
- Objective:* Introduce retrofitted amenities, such as parks or paths, into mature, aging residential enclaves.

*Objective:* Respect the character of traditional neighborhoods or county islands by encouraging them to preserve and improve upon the positive qualities that make each area unique.

**GOAL: IMPROVE APPEARANCE WITH LANDSCAPING AND DESIGN.**

*Objective:* Ensure compatibility by buffering residential areas from industry.

*Objective:* Focus on neighborhood beautification, landscape themes.

*Objective:* Eliminate blight in unsuccessful strip malls or vacant "big box" structures.

*Objective:* Emphasize porches, not walls and garages, to achieve socially interactive neighborhoods.

**GOAL: MAINTAIN POSITIVE NEIGHBORHOOD IMAGE.**

*Objective:* Enforce existing codes by coordinating with Neighborhood Resources and public safety personnel.

*Objective:* Cooperate with schools, law enforcement, social service agencies and other entities to deter criminal activity.

*Objective:* Support home ownership programs to counteract absentee owner rentals.

*Objective:* Continue to support organizations that aim to improve Chandler's neighborhoods.

*Objective:* Promote enhancements of alleyways.

*Objective:* Encourage small, local neighborhood businesses to reinvest in image improvements.

**Existing Conditions**

The City of Chandler has a history of supporting its varied residential and mixed-use areas. More than 250 organizations (voluntary groups from traditional neighborhoods as well as homeowners' associations) are registered with the City. These contacts serve as a communications network with links into all parts of Chandler.

An annual "Congress of Neighborhoods", hosted by the Chandler Neighborhood Advisory Committee and Neighborhood Resources Division, has for a number of years convened representatives from all over the City to discuss neighborhood prospects and problems. A framework for cooperative planning is in place.

As build-out approaches, conserving existing development becomes paramount. General Plan principles deal increasingly with enhancing the established community fabric with new amenities, upgraded infrastructure and coordinated design/landscape themes.

**Assets.** Organization, enthusiasm and caring among Chandler's citizens constitute potential driving forces for neighborhood planning. City departments, institutional, social agency and private sector resources are available to assist localized improvement initiatives.

As one participant at a General Plan community meeting put it: "You don't have to move to live in a better neighborhood." Good schools, parks, churches and nearby shopping opportunities anchor most Chandler neighborhoods. Residents' watchful eyes with responsive municipal enforcement personnel can deal with safety hazards, eyesores, suspicious activities or attractive nuisances (such as vacant structures) before they become chronic area problems.

Families living in older, central Chandler neighborhoods have access to social service agencies as well as income-based home rehabilitation assistance programs. (See Redevelopment Element) Planning initiatives undertaken by the City, such as the South Arizona Avenue Entry Corridor Study, promote revitalization in downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

**Challenges/Issues.** The Plan Update's build-out scenario focuses a great deal of responsibility on the new Neighborhood Planning Element. Maximum participation by property owners may be the greatest challenge in fostering City-wide neighborhood plan efforts. Commitment to action by individual associations and among adjacent organizations is the main ingredient to grassroots empowerment. Information-sharing contacts should be facilitated by the City.

Compelling issues, such as a neighborhood's potential for preservation or aging shopping centers' impact on surrounding residences, may serve as obvious objectives for creative change in older areas. Counteracting negative influences of all types, however, is applicable in every neighborhood. Even relatively recent development can experience decline in pride of ownership, increased criminal activity or vandalism.

**Opportunities.** The General Plan Update sets the stage for more detailed, neighborhood-based planning. It extends an invitation to associations, whether traditional neighborhood organizations or HOAs, to fine-tune improvement objectives for their specific areas. Chandler has several established Area Plans (e.g., Southeast Chandler, Chandler Airpark and Redevelopment Area) that represent a second tier, under the General Plan, for designated portions of the City. Neighborhood Plans such as South Arizona Avenue (which are more specific still), can establish a new planning level. These exercises, consistent with the General Plan, may create directions for integrating development or redevelopment into existing neighborhoods.

Maintaining living quality represents a shared concern of residential neighbors whether their homes are new or older. The LEED program, developed by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) and advocated in Chandler's Energy and Housing Elements, is expanding to bring smart growth for entire neighborhoods: LEED for Neighborhood Development is geared to new construction and infill. LEED-ND practices could help knit urban residential areas together.

Connectivity is another opportunity offered by this Element. Linkages between neighborhoods, pathways for instance, encourage common activities and shared destinations.

Design themes, also, may allow residential enclaves, their institutions and businesses to adopt a distinctive appearance, set apart from other parts of Chandler. Architectural features, select landscape materials, customized street furniture, banners/signage and environmentally-sensitive streetscape design all could contribute to specific neighborhood identity. "Outreach" design -- front porches, rather than barriers -- is an indicator of friendly, open living relationships. Infill developments should respect the existing character of the neighborhood while at the same time provide an upgrade in living quality.

### **Build-Out Policies**

Neighborhoods become even more important as build-out approaches. While the City's remaining land resources are being utilized, existing urban/suburban development comes into sharper focus as the substance of living in Chandler.

The maturing City is ready for "bottom up" planning. Municipal government can help to facilitate, but property owners and residents need to lead neighborhood reinvestment. "Where values make the difference!" is key to localized success.

- ◆ Citizen-driven neighborhood planning, consistent with the General Plan is encouraged.
- ◆ Organized neighbors must take initiative, become involved.
- ◆ City and private sector assistance to homeowners and businesses should be made available.
- ◆ Older, sensitive locations deserve upgrading priority.
- ◆ Intra- and inter-neighborhood connections are promoted to knit Chandler together.
- ◆ Detrimental factors need to be combated at the neighborhood level, stressing improved security, appearance and property values.
- ◆ Prefer revitalization over land clearance.

### **Implementation Recommendations**

Public input contributed to the Goals, Objectives and Policies for neighborhood self-determination. Recommendations respond to those citizen suggestions by leading directly into implementation steps.

**Coordination.** Communication -- among neighborhoods, with City officials, involving owners and residents -- is fundamental to effective stakeholder coordination. Interested associations ought to consider adopting local strategies consistent with the General Plan.

Residents should be encouraged to educate themselves about the General Plan by their HOA or neighborhood representatives. Homeowners/business people should be aware of ways to articulate problems and seek solutions. Citizens may file direct feedback through the City of Chandler website: <http://www.chandleraz.gov/default.aspx?pageid=639>.

**Recommendation:** Participation in affirmative neighborhood activities -- such as agreeing to be represented at the annual Congress of Neighborhoods -- should be expected of all Registered Neighborhood Organizations.

Schedule regularly-assigned public safety and code enforcement personnel to maintain contacts with neighborhood groups.

**Revitalization.** Most attendees at Community and Neighborhood General Plan Update workshops favored the broader planning approach under Title 9 of the Arizona Revised Statutes instead of Title 36's targeted, more site-specific municipal redevelopment initiatives. (See Redevelopment Element). "Revitalization" is regarded as the preferred term for preserving older areas or upgrading stagnating retail centers. Nonetheless,

"redevelopment and slum clearance" (ARS 36-1471-1491) continues to be available as a tool for enabling the re-use of declining vacant or underutilized land.

**Recommendation:** Publish an expanded "Neighborhood Planning and Redevelopment Primer" (derived from planning process handout materials) for use by citizen groups and property owners. Evaluate neighborhood-generated proposals for consideration in formulating Chandler's annual Capital Improvement Program.

Background assistance for neighborhood planning should be provided. Examples could include:

- Education programs to instill the "do's" and "don'ts" relative to nuisance and/maintenance standards, both for existing residents and those incoming.
- Action strategies to deal with maintenance challenges brought by absentee landlords or to collaborate with owners of declining neighborhood shopping centers in modernizing and redeveloping their properties.
- City staff availability for planning advisory communications with neighborhoods
- "How to" suggestions for partnering with private contractors to obtain group discounts for neighborhood improvement projects (e.g., masons, painters, roofers, landscapers, concrete layers, etc.); or establishing a neighborhood "tool bank".
- Help residents help themselves (i.e., leverage limited City resources for residents to take ownership and have a real stake in neighborhood preservation).

**Neighborhood Quality.** Chandler's desirability as a place to live results from the variety, attractiveness and upkeep of its residential areas. Strategic planning can celebrate each neighborhood's points of pride. Programs to encourage reinvestment and/or maintenance by property owners may range from assistance (e.g., grants, revolving loans, sweat equity) to guidelines for remodeling or landscaping projects.

Retention of owner-occupied homes, discouraging absentee owner rentals, has become a priority concern in many neighborhoods. Grassroots plans, possibly with lending institution or City assistance, could include innovative techniques to facilitate home ownership.

Neighborhood plans may also include voluntary standards for buffering, plantings and beautification of common areas or entry points.

**Recommendation:** Assistance should be provided by appropriate City department(s) and others to neighborhood-based groups who wish to plan or set quality guidelines for their area.

Sample self-help aids and, possibly, volunteer expertise could support Neighborhood Plan start-up. Evaluation criteria would enable prioritization of those neighborhoods with immediate needs for assistance.