

Neighborhood Stories: Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned from Five Austin Neighborhood Stories

A clear understanding of neighborhood history and dynamics is necessary to ensure adequate outreach and representation.

Dividing large or heterogeneous planning areas into sub-areas reduces conflict.

Adequate outreach is critical during the neighborhood planning process. Being as inclusive as possible helps to avoid later conflicts.

An effective neighborhood planning team has strong representation from all sub-areas and stakeholders.

Relationship-building among neighborhood organizations, residents, non-resident property owners, business owners, developers, and the City is necessary for successful neighborhood planning and implementation.

Early designation of a Neighborhood Planning Team or Contact Team can facilitate capacity-building and outreach. A Neighborhood Planning committee representing all areas and stakeholders/groups in the planning area helped turn conflict into collaboration.

The role of planner as facilitator and planner as advocate for needs or policies of the City is difficult to balance. The roles of the neighborhood and city planning staff must be better defined.

The role of large institutional stakeholders in the neighborhood planning area must be clearly defined up front. How to make them part of the conversation and abide by the outcome is a difficult challenge.

Neighborhood planners can provide valuable support to neighborhoods in implementing their chosen priorities. Sometimes they have to go beyond their job descriptions to do so, but may want to anyway out of their sense of caring.

The learning process around zoning must be thought out very carefully, or participants may feel betrayed. Neighborhoods benefit from continual training on planning procedures, terminology, and tools so they may act as informed participants.

Where the City has larger-scale goals – such as accommodating density, affordable housing, or transportation – making those clear to neighborhoods helps them knowledgeably approach the issues and develop appropriate solutions.

When neighborhoods seek creative solutions to complicated problems, rather than defend the status quo, more gets accomplished. Allowing for and providing a variety of planning tools allows neighborhoods to tailor plans to their particular circumstances.

A City-wide plan would provide overall goals for the City and the neighborhoods and would also provide a useful framework for neighborhood planning.

Stronger backing by the City policymakers regarding plan implementation would give it more credibility. Passing the plan is only half the battle—implementation is important. Neighborhoods must be proactive in monitoring and implementing their action items.