



Central Gardens Association

2016 Strategic Plan: Focus on the Future

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Introduction & Background

The neighborhood development of Central Gardens began in the early 1900s and concluded in 1930, when the area had achieved most of its present density, order and character. In 1982 Central Gardens Neighborhood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is composed of approximately 83 blocks, 1540 structures and 511 acres. The great majority of the structures are single-family residences; the area also contains multifamily dwelling units, churches and schools. Central Gardens is significant for its architecture, community planning and influential residents.

Central Gardens Association (CGA), established in 1966, is a well-organized community organization with approximately 500 members, approximately 25% of total households. The board consists of an executive committee and approximately 25 board members representing three geographic districts of the neighborhood. CGA enjoys an excellent reputation in the community characterized by its listing on the Registry of Historic Places, an annual Home and Garden Tour among the region's largest, and beloved neighborhood events such as the 4th of July Parade. CGA maintains relationships with local police, elected officials and businesses, churches and schools. The organization has a number of well-established communication vehicles: a website, a monthly electronic newsletter reaching 1,400 community stakeholders, a Facebook page reaching 1,000 neighbors, and a Nextdoor presence reaching approximately 1,650 subscribers. One hundred to 150 neighbors typically attend an annual meeting held in May.

The CGA Board of Directors has been leading the cause to position the neighborhood as a premier historic residential district in the Mid-South. In 1975, a neighborhood plan was completed with a primary goal of fighting deterioration with revitalization. In 1996, a new plan was created to outline goals and activities for the association for the next 20 years. Both plans gave a voice to residents to plan for the future of the neighborhood. In 2015, the board again embarked on a strategic planning process, listening to a broad range of neighbor input that ultimately focused on the neighborhood's needs and residents' quality of life.



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Planning Process

In late 2015, the CGA board engaged a consultant to lead the input phase of the strategic planning process. Planning efforts resulted in input from a broad range of neighbors. In addition to a board session, four Listening Sessions were held in homes throughout the neighborhood, and one Institutional Stakeholder Listening Session was conducted at the University Club with businesses, non-profits, schools and others. These sessions were promoted in the CGA newsletter, online and by personal invitation. Input was also elicited through an online survey that gave participants access to Listening Session results and asked follow up questions.

More than 100 neighbors attended the listening sessions. Over 20 institutional stakeholders attended a separate session. The online survey resulted in over 400 responses. Board members were also engaged in a three-hour strategic retreat to review the findings and seek opportunities for future focus and direction.



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Key Findings

Input received from neighbors, stakeholders and board members resulted in the following key findings below. For a full findings report, see the Addendum (Discovery Report).

Major Themes

A. Strengths and Weaknesses Themes

Strengths and weaknesses were gathered from board members and neighbors via a process described in Addendum A, the Discovery Report.

Strengths

- Proximity to culture, entertainment, and employment centers
- Neighbors and neighborliness
- Neighborhood educational institutions
- Mature trees
- Historic homes
- CGA events and the CGA itself
- Infrastructure that has created walkability
- Belvedere Blvd
- Churches

Weaknesses

- Home maintenance
- Traffic
- Sidewalks
- Crime
- Businesses (not the right mix of businesses to meet neighbors' needs)
- Vegetation overgrowth
- Unkempt green space
- Unkempt medians

The themes that emerged and found in the Discovery Report follow. Where noted, definitive results are reported from the online survey described in Addendum B.



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B. Neighbor Themes

Themes (inclusive of points of agreement and divergence) from the neighbors' answers to each question, across all four listening sessions, are described below:

Relationships with Businesses

Neighbors expressed a great desire to maintain close relations with businesses and commercial real estate companies for several purposes:

- To influence the type of businesses that locate in and around CG, with a preference for local businesses and a desire for some national chains that can bring convenience goods to the neighborhood;
- To influence the construction style so that facades are attractive and conform with the character of the neighborhood; and
- To influence the infrastructure – quality landscaping and orientation for walkability.

Relationships with Neighboring Neighborhoods

Neighbors expressed a great desire to coordinate with nearby neighborhoods on common issues, such as crime, business locations and relationships and infrastructure issues. There was much acknowledgement that CG is not an island and we all get stronger together.

Several mechanisms to accomplish this were suggested – periodic meetings of the presidents of neighborhood associations, reviving a council of midtown neighborhoods, working with the Midtown Memphis Development Corporation (MMDC) and working with neighborhood associations on specific common issues of concern (safety being the most mentioned).

Regarding Green Space and Public Infrastructure

Opinions diverged on how to maintain green spaces and public infrastructure (such as sidewalks and alleys), but there appears to be much passion around the issue.

* Online survey results suggested a strong interest in sidewalk repair, maintaining medians and alley improvements.

Many discussed the medians, citing inconsistent care and wondering whose responsibility they fall under.



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Some expressed the opinion that CG needs a traditional park within its boundaries, while others focused more on exploring alternative green spaces – such as using alleys as linear parks and the use of vacant lots.

* Online survey results moderately suggested they would be willing to support parks near us. Some discussed the need for intentionality around rebuilding the tree canopy in front yards and medians, particularly on Belvedere.

Some discussed the need to calm traffic, with some advocating for speed bumps and others against speed bumps.

Relationships with Neighborhood and Neighboring Institutions

The vast majority of conversation prompted by this question surrounded public schools. There was much discussion about the importance of neighborhood public schools and the need to support them. Concern was expressed about the quality, and many neighbors expressed a desire for a formal relationship with the schools to help them improve. Some mentioned the work that has happened in Cooper-Young with Peabody Elementary and the transformation of Fairview to Middle College in partnership with citizens and with CBU as examples.

* Online survey results suggested a strong recommendation to unite with other neighborhood association to solve common problems with a strong willingness to help.

Regarding Neighborhood Events

When asked opinions about CGA events, neighbors in each session began with expressing general happiness with events (with the notable exception that events seem overly family-oriented). However, in each session, the conversation quickly turned to block parties and other mechanisms for neighbors to get to know each other. While many noted specific blocks that are excelling at neighborliness, many others said they don't know their neighbors and expressed a strong desire to get to know them.

* Online survey results strongly suggested that neighbors would prefer gatherings that are located close to their neighbors rather than neighborhood-wide.

Some called for successful block clubs to educate other blocks.

Some called for neighborhood-wide events – participation in National Night Out either on the national day or on another day with a milder temperature, and street parties with streets organizing a party and inviting other streets to participate.



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Others called for other types of get-to-know-each-other activities like book clubs, cooking clubs, and group landscaping efforts. There was also a conversation about organizing neighbors to help neighbors age in place.

C. Regarding CGA's Primary Purpose

Opinions were quite varied regarding CGA's primary purpose.

Many discussed protection of the historic nature of the neighborhood with comments about Landmarks and advocacy for appropriate zoning, housing styles and businesses.

Many discussed safety and CGA's role in developing a relationship with the police and advocating for support of Phelps.

Others discussed CGA's role in helping neighbors to be in community with one another.

Others discussed CGA's role as a facilitator – seeking neighbor input on issues and advocating accordingly and mediating forums when opinions are divergent.

Regarding Perceptions about How to Get Involved

Many people said it is easy to get involved by finding opportunities through the website and the newsletter, or by calling a member. Some mentioned that there are committees seeking members.

Others talked about the need to be sure to welcome new neighbors in and discussed ways of doing that – from welcome packets to neighborhood-wide gatherings.

Regarding How Neighbors Want to Be Engaged and about What

Some neighbors volunteered for specific tasks (to help with historic preservation, with residential infill advocacy and with an effort for neighborhood-wide sidewalk repair), but most neighbors returned to comments about helping neighbors get to know each other. Others mentioned more robust communication of board agendas and neighborhood events.

* In the online survey of 400 responses, 96 neighbors (almost 25%) offered to volunteer in the neighborhood.

Regarding Time Horizon



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What we learned is that our community of neighbors very much appreciated the opportunity to be heard and have direct face-to-face input into identifying issues and opportunities related to their neighborhood.

We also learned that stakeholders are open and available to engage with us to work as well.

Though this planning process, we understand the importance of strategically refocusing our board's efforts more frequently than every 20 years.

Therefore, the time horizon for this strategic plan is intended to be for three to five years.

Regarding Board Resource Allocation

The board's structure tended to allow for an increase in additional committees, which over time required more and more personal and financial resources.

The structure was flat, not ideally responsive to community need, and had limited flexibility.

Recruitment of a diverse board was difficult because of the time commitments required.

Monthly board meetings had become cumbersome and did not allow enough time to engage in conversation around larger more strategic issues.

Areas of Strategic Focus

Three main areas of focus emerged from all of the listening sessions.

1. Community Building
2. Green Spaces/Infrastructure
3. Midtown Relationships

These will be identified going forward as pillars, as we want them to remain top of mind to help us focus on efforts both on board structure, neighborhood and board engagement.



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Vision

Central Gardens is the premier historic, residential neighborhood in the Mid-South

Mission

Sustain and enhance the quality of our historical, residential neighborhood; preserve its unique environment and architectural character; and foster a sense of community and belonging among neighborhood residents.

Pillars

GREEN SPACES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Protect and enhance to ensure the historic nature and beauty of the neighborhood.

COMMUNITY BUILDING & EVENTS

Increase neighborliness through facilitating block and quadrant parties rather than neighborhood-wide events.

MIDTOWN RELATIONSHIPS

Develop relationships between our neighborhood and other neighborhoods, schools, retail and other organizations around common issues.

Goals and Objectives

I. Enhance Organization Structure

A. Restructure the board

1. Develop new format for board meetings
2. Develop decision matrix to guide board decision-making (education/facilitation, official viewpoint/advocacy)
3. Develop new guidelines for board member nominations process (board matrix)

B. Restructure committees to enhance effectiveness and increase neighbor engagement

1. Focus committees on pillars and operations

C. Enhance neighbor engagement with CGA and with one another

1. In tandem with membership, create new engagement position
2. Identify all touch points to the association and neighborhood and create a mechanism to connect individuals to neighbors, members, issues and volunteerism.
3. Track and monitor in database
4. Conduct at least one listening sessions per year so neighbors can prioritize issues



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- D. Remain fiscally sound through balance of revenue generation and cost controls
 - 1. Continue annual fundraising events such as Home Tour
 - 2. Pursue new revenue streams such as grants
 - 3. Continue budgeting processes/controls

- II. Develop Community Infrastructure and Green Space
 - A. Create a yearly plan for green space and infrastructure support
 - B. Form ad-hoc committees of engaged neighbors for projects and facilitate
 - 1. Connecting with city and vendor support services
 - 2. Assessing leadership
 - 3. Communication
 - 4. Assess progress
 - 5. Report back and define best practice
 - C. Seek out grant opportunities for sidewalks or median care
 - D. Facilitate neighbors' access to building and renovation guidelines and other architectural resources
 - E. Communicate progress regularly to neighbors

- III. Build community through increasing neighborhood interaction and events
 - A. Restructure "events" so encourage more neighbor-focused activities
 - B. Provide support to neighbors wishing to hold quadrant, street, and block parties
 - C. Arrange topical groups to encourage neighbors to discuss issues with one another
 - D. Continue to host the Annual Meeting to report on results of CGA's efforts, offer opportunities to volunteer, and provide input related to the neighborhood's future.
 - E. Continue to host the historic 4th of July Parade
 - F. Continue to host the Home Tour

- IV. Build stronger relationships with the organizations and entities that share common goals within the Midtown area.
 - A. Create a MMDC liaison
 - B. Meet yearly with other neighborhood associations
 - C. Engage schools on a regular basis on common issues
 - D. Continue to build relationship with Memphis Police Department and other law enforcement/safety organizations
 - E. Engage with Public Works, Landmarks Commission, City Beautiful on mutual areas of interest

- V. Educate neighbors on issues affecting the neighborhood, and equip them to respond
 - A. Provide ongoing, enhanced neighborhood communication
 - B. Continue robust communications (newsletter, website, social media)
 - C. Enhance communications related to board activities



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- D. Develop and digitally publish toolkits/information sheets to support neighbors in effectively working individually or in groups to solve key issues (i.e., code enforcement, street permitting)
- E. Hold, as needed, open forums to discuss neighborhood-wide issues





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Strategic Plan Steering Committee:

Chair: Barbara Sysak, CGA Vice President

Facilitator: Shannon Dixon

Members:

Phase 1 and 2

Holly Hagan, CGA Board Member

Mia Henley, CGA Past President

Anna Holtzclaw, CGA Board Member

Barrie Simpson, CGA President

Phase 2

Dan Reid, CGA Treasurer

Kathy Ferguson, CGA Board Member

Ellen Whitten, CGA Board Member

Addendum

A. Discovery Report

B. Online Survey