



The City of NORTH LITTLE ROCK

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FROM: Bernadette Gunn Rhodes, City of North Little Rock
TO: Will Reckley, Smart Growth America
CC: Elizabeth Schilling and John Robert Smith, Smart Growth America
DATE: February 1, 2017
RE: Smart Growth America 6-month report

Background

The City of North Little Rock participated in a Smart Growth 101 workshop facilitated by Smart Growth America in April of 2016. The presentation and workshop were attended by a diverse group of approximately 80 stakeholders. Below is our six-month report to address specific recommendations provided in the Next Steps Memo dated August 5, 2016.

Targeted strategies

1. *Develop collaborative visions for investments in Baring Cross*

Public meetings around Pike Avenue improvements

- The City has \$140,000 in grant funding to do environmental assessment and design for improvements to Pike Avenue, from the roundabout in the south to Pershing Blvd. in the north (more details on specific improvements in Strategy #3). As a part of the design process, the selected engineering firm will conduct multiple public meetings in partnership with the City.
- Target timeline: Under contract with engineer no later than March 1. Then begin design & engineering work. Public meetings targeted for mid-April with 10% concept plans.

School & neighborhood input regarding new sidewalk placements around schools

- The blocks receiving sidewalks through Safe Routes to School funding have been finalized. The engineering is currently being done.

Wetlands

- Technical assistance provider Guy Headland with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program has reached out to 5th grade Science teachers at Boone Park Elementary in Baring Cross to do wetland planning in partnership with Parks and Recreation. They have not responded yet.
- Guy Headland met with Harlan Hunter (neighborhood association president) about what area of wetlands needed to be done (end of Beech St) and how to incorporate with the bike trail.
- Grant funding will be needed for actual construction.

2. *Support existing homeowners and renters in historic Baring Cross.*

City staff is researching a rental registration program, but has some hurdles to overcome:

- Part of the Baring Cross neighborhood from 16th to 25th Streets is 80% rental.

- Habitat for Humanity has compiled a list and map of all rental properties with landlord contact information. They have also taken photos of rental homes in especially bad disrepair.
- The neighborhood association and Habitat for Humanity are still eager to work with Code Enforcement to address abandoned homes and rental units in disrepair.
- Code Enforcement has only one officer dedicated to rental properties; needs more manpower.
- When a new landlord applies for a business license, they have to visit the Planning Department first for a zoning certificate. As a result, the city has a record of all landlords.
- Police will red flag homes that have had four or more calls in three months. However, police still have difficulty tracking problem groups as they move from place to place.
- Out of state landlords are a particular challenge because they are difficult to get in contact with.

The City and its partners currently offer the following residential self-help opportunities:

- The Office of Community Development offers emergency assistance & home repair grants up to \$5,000 for homeowners at 80% or below the household median income. It also offers grants up to \$2,000 for weatherization projects.
- A group of volunteers, the “Telephone Pioneers,” builds one wheelchair ramp per week. Community Development can provide the construction materials.
- Habitat for Humanity organizes regular “Rock Your Block” events in Baring Cross, where homeowners partner with volunteers to finish important improvement projects in their homes.
- Habitat for Humanity will hold another Rock the Block home improvement event on March 18th. Volunteers work with residents to complete improvement projects.
- City staff and the Baring Cross Neighborhood Association president, Harlan Hunter, have discussed designating “neighborhood captains” who would be responsible for organizing and supporting residents who want to improve their homes and need some help.
- Neighborhood association trying to assist renters who want to buy homes in Baring Cross. They are calling it “Transition Phase.”
- Habitat for Humanity is currently in the process of building three homes.

The neighborhood has added the following programming at Vestal Park/Boone Park Elementary:

- Stop the Violence: Speakers from NLR who had lost people from violence, 65 people in attendance. Another event scheduled for next week at ACTS Church.
- PAL (Police Athletic League): Runs cost-free football and baseball programming at Vestal Park.
- Neighborhood association is planning Movies in the Park in spring 2017.
- Harlan Hunter, neighborhood association president, is looking for a spot at ACTS Church for dance classes
- Boone Park Elementary: Neighborhood association president taught dance classes with forty 5th graders in November. Will teach another class this year.
- Harlan is also exploring a mentorship program with Boone Park Elementary.

3. Redevelop Pike Avenue to increase walkability and improve access to jobs, goods, and services.

- The City has secured \$140,000 in Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding for the environmental assessment and redesign of Pike Avenue.

- Preliminary plans include a roundabout at Pike and Pershing St., improved intersections including medians, pedestrian refuges, and improved landscaping with street streets in medians and along landscaped buffers between the sidewalk and street.
- Transit will be accommodated with crossings at bus stops between the existing roundabout at the southern terminus of Pike Ave. and its intersection with 18th St.
- Target timeline: Under contract with engineer no later than March 1. Then begin design & engineering work. Public meetings targeted for mid-April with 10% concept plans.

4. Identify additional locations for neighborhood-serving retail.

and

5. Grow Baring Cross Businesses

- High-end bicycle company Orbea opened in Baring Cross' "Works at Rockwater" commercial area on Rockwater Blvd in October. Two other businesses are poised to move in: Big Brothers Big Sisters and Jackson Law Firm.
- The Baring Cross business community has suffered a setback. The Timex distribution center on Pike Avenue is closing, and 64 employees will be laid off. Furthermore, the Ben E. Keith food distribution center on Pike Ave. is relocating within NLR, so it will no longer be in the Baring Cross neighborhood.
- The Chamber of Commerce is working aggressively to bring more businesses into the area.
- There is discussion about the long-term plan for the vacant Kroger building on Pike & Pershing and the soon-to-be vacant Ben E. Keith food distribution center. Finding new owners/tenants for these buildings will be crucial to the vitality of the commercial corridor.
- There is support for commercial & residential overlay districts.

Other

- City planning has approved a Planned Unit Development for a pocket neighborhood at Rockwater & Parker Street. Council will vote on the PUD on 2/13/17. Construction proposed to begin March/April 2017 on 9 new homes. Homes will be approx. 1,700 sq ft. and will be offered for sale for \$250,000.