



The City of NORTH LITTLE ROCK

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FROM: Bernadette Gunn Rhodes, City of North Little Rock
TO: Brian Lutenegeger, Smart Growth America
CC: Elizabeth Schilling and John Robert Smith, Smart Growth America
DATE: February 22, 2018
RE: Smart Growth America 1-year 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 City will conduct public meetings.

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.

- 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.
- 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.

- As of March 2017, Habitat for Humanity has gained approval to also do revitalization work on rental homes, as long as the landlord or other party pays for materials up front.
- 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.

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.
- 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. Last meeting was in November 2017. 80-90 people were in attendance.
- Neighborhood association did a Thanksgiving and Christmas food drive and gave 20 baskets to people in need for both holidays.
- PAL (Police Athletic League): Runs cost-free football and baseball programming at Vestal Park.
- Movies in the Park has not occurred yet but the neighborhood association is planning Movies in the Park for spring 2018 and is seeking funding.
- Boone Park Elementary: Neighborhood association president taught dance classes with another forty 5th graders in May 2017. Will teach another class in 2018.
- Harlan Hunter, neighborhood association president, is looking for a spot at ACTS Church and Sherman Park Community Center for dance classes.
- Harlan Hunter, Neighborhood Association President, started a mentorship program with Boone Park Elementary, which the school is now continuing on Thursday afternoons.

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

Current projects under construction & scheduled for the Baring Cross area of North Little Rock:

- 2013 Safe Routes to School – Sidewalk project funded through ArDOT
 - Construction of new sidewalks along the west side of Nona St. from Boone Park Elementary to West 18th Street.
 - Cinergi will be awarded contract and should begin construction soon.
- 2016 Safe Routes to School – Sidewalk project funded through ArDOT

- Construction of new sidewalks along West 18th St. (Franklin to Crutcher), West 16th St. (Augusta to Nona), West 15th St. (Moss to Frank), and Park Dr. (West 12th to West 13th & West 12th to Crutcher) near Boone Park Elementary.
- Currently being designed.
- Large developments are planned for the property just south of the Pike Ave. roundabout.
- Parker Street Improvements from Rockwater Blvd to West 4th St. Widening and drainage improvements.
 - The Porches at Rockwater – Townhomes on the west side of Parker St. (Rockwater to 4th).
 - Installation of decorative lighting, similar to that which is along the river trail.
- Pike Ave. Pedestrian/Street Improvements
 - Currently, Garver is in the design process of the improvements along Pike Ave. from the roundabout to Pershing Blvd.
 - Will include a 12' shared use path and raised concrete medians to serve as a refuge for pedestrians.
 - Have been awarded \$260,000 in construction funds from Metroplan.

4. Identify additional locations for neighborhood-serving retail.
and

5. Grow Baring Cross Businesses

- A coalition of community advocates has begun meeting with the Mayor's Office to discuss possible solutions to the food desert in Baring Cross, including ideas around co-ops, grocery delivery, and supporting a neighborhood grocery.
- 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.