

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downtown Community Plan: 2007 Update (Downtown Plan) is intended to guide growth and development in Downtown for the next five to seven years. The community plan update is an opportunity to engage the community in assessing growth and development, to discern a shared vision for future growth, and to adopt principles, policies, and tools to achieve that vision.

Since the Downtown Community Plan was last updated in 1997, Downtown Nashville has experienced impressive growth, including growth in the commercial and office sectors that are the hallmarks of any healthy downtown, and also in residential development and related services as more community members embrace urban living.

This robust, healthy growth is due in large part to a commitment by the private and public sectors, by residents, employers, and investors to a shared vision for Downtown. A review of the previous Downtown Community Plan, the 1997 Subarea 9 Plan, reveals that much of that plan's guidance was put into practice and many of its recommendations have been realized.

The update of the Downtown Plan evaluates the current state of Downtown – its successes and opportunities – and builds on the past while not being bound to it. Instead, the Downtown Plan offers a comprehensive plan for land use policy, related transportation and systems recommendations, and a building regulating plan tailored to each neighborhood, to encourage the creation of the Downtown Nashville that the citizens who work, live, play and invest Downtown have envisioned.

While the Downtown Plan provides specific guidance, each of the individual recommendations, goals and objectives for development are linked to guiding principles. The reader will see these guiding principles repeated in the Downtown Plan's vision, goals, recommendations and in the specifics of the building regulating plans. The guiding principles and the tools used to achieve them are described in greater detail below.

Guiding Principles

Ensure that Downtown remains the civic, commercial and entertainment center for Nashville, Middle Tennessee and the Southeast.

Through cycles of economic growth and downturn, Downtown Nashville has remained the seat of state government, the commercial core of Middle Tennessee and a premiere entertainment destination for aspiring performers and avid fans.

While known for the iconic image of the State Capitol standing atop Capitol Hill, Downtown is also home to all three branches of state and local government as well as numerous government departments. The recent renovation of the Justice A. A. Birch Courthouse and the Metro Courthouse confirmed Metro Nashville's commitment to Downtown as the center of government.

Downtown has recently welcomed numerous businesses, including several national headquarters, relocating to Nashville. These additions demonstrate that Nashville is competitive on the national stage in attracting businesses and that Downtown Nashville remains the logical destination to take advantage of the energy present in the commercial core.

This same energy encourages local businesses to remain Downtown even as they expand, to capitalize on the assets of Downtown. Maintaining and enhancing Downtown as *the* home for relocating businesses, as well as a place for existing businesses to grow, is key to Downtown's continued economic good health.

Finally, Downtown remains the destination for artists and fans of all types of sport and entertainment from football and hockey, to art at the Frist or a local gallery, to an evening at the symphony or a well-loved honky tonk.

The Downtown Plan recognizes the unique and diverse roles played by Downtown as the seat of state and local government, a competitive commercial center in the southeast, and one of the most beloved entertainment destinations in the country. When new civic, commercial or entertainment developments are proposed – from the convention center or a minor league ballpark, to state museums, to relocating businesses and growing local businesses - all efforts should be made to ensure that Downtown remains the logical and most welcoming home for these ventures.

Provide opportunities for continued growth while preserving and enhancing the character that inspires residents and businesses to move Downtown.

As Downtown's attractiveness grows and the community becomes a 24/7 community, existing height and intensity regulations have limited development opportunities. The Downtown Plan provides new opportunities for growth, but in a manner that preserves and enhances the best of urban life – density, a mixture of uses and street-level activity that adds to the vitality of the urban experience.

The Downtown Plan recognizes and reinforces the role of the Core Central Business District (the Core) as the center of commerce in Nashville and Middle Tennessee. The Downtown Plan calls for expansion of the boundaries of the Core, making more properties eligible for Nashville/Davidson County’s most intense zoning. The Downtown Plan acknowledges that additional development intensity may be appropriate and advisable in parts of the Core and should be considered in light of the location and the development’s ability to meet the guiding principles of the Downtown Plan.

The Downtown Plan also provides additional development intensity in subdistricts of the Core and SoBro (south of Broadway) neighborhoods for developments providing public benefits such as higher than standard levels of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

The Downtown Plan offers these increased development opportunities in a strategic pattern of concentric growth. This concentric growth calls for the highest-intensity development to be available in the expanded Core. It is flanked by slightly less intense development. For example, moving south from the Core, there is slightly less intense development allowed in SoBro. This is bounded by Gateway Boulevard, which is the transition into the mid-rise development available in Lafayette and Rutledge Hill.

By encouraging this tiered pattern of growth, the Downtown Plan reinforces the Core and encourages the concentrated intensity of development necessary to support mass transit, retail services and other amenities for residents and employees in Downtown.

To expand and enhance the urban experience that draws residents and businesses to Downtown, the Downtown Plan also calls for conscientious mixed use development and creation of active streets and streetscapes, both of which are described below.

Create strategic mixed use to facilitate Downtown’s transformation into a 24/7 community.

The Downtown Plan promotes the Core’s traditional role as the center for civic, commercial and entertainment activity. However, to create the 24/7 Downtown envisioned by the community, a successful Downtown must contain a strategic mix of uses, both within city blocks and within structures.

The Commercial Core (CC) and Core Frame (CF) zoning currently present in most of Downtown allows for a mixture of uses, but does not necessarily encourage mixed use. The building regulating plans included in the Downtown Plan call for a thoughtful mixture of uses including residential, retail and office, to ensure that Downtown doesn’t close at 5 p.m. or even after the concert ends or the restaurants close, but is instead a welcoming home for a diverse residential population.

To create the active Downtown envisioned by the community, the Downtown Plan identifies, in each neighborhood, key streets that are to be the pedestrian thoroughfares in Downtown. On these key streets, the Downtown Plan encourages a mixture of active uses – retail, restaurant, office - on the first floor of buildings. The Downtown Plan also recognizes that parking garages on key streets need to be “lined” with an active use – residential, retail or commercial – to provide active mixed uses while avoiding dead parking garages overshadowing

active streets. To encourage the lining of parking garages, the Downtown Plan recommends that Metro Zoning Code be amended so that the FAR created by linear buildings does not count toward the primary FAR of a building.

The Downtown Plan acknowledges that while the Core should remain the commercial center of Downtown and the region, the surrounding neighborhoods, such as SoBro and the Gulch, are intended to be more diverse and mixed use, with an emphasis on residential and entertainment uses. Development in these neighborhoods is expected to provide residential and entertainment offerings in addition to other uses. Other neighborhoods, such as East Bank, Lafayette and Rutledge Hill, are envisioned to have centers or corridors of mixed use development bordered by residential development.

Create and Nurture Urban Neighborhoods

The 1997 Subarea 9 Plan called for a strong emphasis on urban residential neighborhoods. While residential development has flourished in recent years, the creation and enhancement of urban neighborhoods is still a goal. Residential living will thrive in Downtown when residents feel that they are part of a neighborhood, supported by shared public spaces and the services and amenities needed for daily life.

The Downtown Plan cultivates urban neighborhoods by encouraging a range of housing options throughout Downtown. The variety includes single-family homes in Hope Gardens, townhomes in Rutledge Hill, mid-rise and high-rise living in SoBro and the Gulch, and renovation of the upper floors of historic structures on Lower Broadway and in the Downtown Core. By providing housing choice,

Comment [13]: FAR Amendment

Comment [11]: Housekeeping Amendment

Comment [12]: Height Bonus Amendment

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the Downtown Plan encourages a diversity of residents and creates seamless transitions into surrounding neighborhoods such as Germantown, East Nashville and Houston to the south.

The Downtown Plan encourages development of services and amenities to support residents of Downtown, by encouraging mixed-use development throughout Downtown, active uses on first floors and proposed parks and greenway network connecting Downtown.

To promote additional housing Downtown, the Downtown Plan recommends that the restriction prohibiting residential development in the Capitol Hill Redevelopment District be removed. The Metropolitan Housing and Development Agency (MDHA) is currently working to strike this prohibition from the redevelopment plan.

While it was beyond the scope of this planning process, the Downtown Plan recommends further study of programs and incentives to encourage workforce housing. Workforce housing is defined as housing with a range of sizes, costs and tenure (both rental and owner-occupied) to accommodate the diverse range of employees, and their families, that are key to Downtown's continued economic health.

Finally, the Downtown Plan also recommends further study on current affordable housing incentives. Currently, the Metropolitan Zoning Code requires 25 percent affordable housing in exchange for a FAR bonus, while MDHA redevelopment districts require 20 percent affordable housing to receive tax increment financing. The Downtown Plan recommends further study of the costs, benefits and impacts of both of these requirements followed by recommendation to align the two requirements.

Create active, attractive streets and streetscapes.

The Downtown Plan provides opportunities for continued robust growth combined with urban design elements that make the urban experience distinctive and enticing. This includes using urban design tools that create active and attractive streets and streetscapes, to make working, living and playing in Downtown both lively and also safe and comfortable. The call for active, attractive streets was identified by community stakeholders as critical to the continued growth and success of Downtown.

To ensure that the principle of active, attractive streets and streetscapes is met, the Downtown Plan identifies specific streets that are to serve as primary pedestrian thoroughfares for the neighborhood. On these streets, active uses – residential, retail, restaurant or office - on the first floor of buildings, lining of parking structures with active uses, and restricted vehicular access to avoid auto/pedestrian conflicts, are means to enhance the pedestrian experience.

The Downtown Plan also recognizes the importance of sidewalks built to the standards of the Walkable Subdivisions Chapter of the Subdivision Regulations as well as application of streetscaping per the *Downtown Streetscape Elements Design Guidelines* as additional components of a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Finally, as the 1997 Subarea 9 Plan before it, the Downtown Plan discourages surface parking lots, which are an inefficient use of land and are detrimental to the urban nature of Downtown because they discourage the density necessary for the urban environment.

Protect and reuse historic structures and districts.

Downtown stakeholders want to honor and preserve historic structures and districts, not as remnants of the past, but as actively-used retail, commercial and residential ventures.

The Downtown Plan makes several recommendations with regard to the protection and adaptive reuse of historic structures and districts.

First, the Downtown Plan calls for the creation of new historic preservation districts to protect the Lower Broadway historic district from Fifth Avenue to the Riverfront and a second overlay to protect the historic buildings on and around Union and Church Streets from Second Avenue North to Fifth Avenue North including the Arcade and Printer's Alley.

Second, the Downtown Plan proposes that tools for transfer of development rights be created to "sell" the development rights entitled to these property owners (and owners of properties in the existing Second Avenue North Historic Preservation District) to other properties in the Core or SoBro neighborhoods. Allowing transfer of development rights can ensure that owners of historic properties realize their full investment on the properties while relieving the pressure to demolish or irrevocably alter the historic structures to build the full FAR allowed by zoning.

Third, the Downtown Plan provides guidance on massing and placement of massing in specific historic districts. These guidelines address the impact that disproportionate massing can have on smaller adjacent historic structures.

Finally, protecting viewsheds to one of Downtown's most recognizable historic

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Create environmentally sustainable and energy efficient development.

To address air pollution, heat island effect and stormwater issues, energy efficient and environmentally sensitive design is needed for development throughout Downtown. Meanwhile, green building technology, now available for over a decade, has been refined and demonstrated to present minimal up-front cost, and long-term savings in building operations.

The Downtown Plan proposes additional intensity of development in exchange for higher levels of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification in parts of SoBro and parts of the Core. The Downtown Plan also encourages, but does not require, that *all* new development in Downtown meet basic LEED certification.

Create “great spaces” throughout Downtown for the enjoyment of citizens and visitors.

Downtown stakeholders revealed consensus in the commitment to creating “great spaces.” Community members who work, live and play Downtown value the unique urban experience and want to see that urban experience expressed in the built environment.

The creation of “great spaces” can be achieved in individual projects and the Downtown Plan encourages use of urban design and architectural features that create memorable, lively urban spaces including active use of sidewalks for

outdoor dining, courtyards and architectural arcades.

The Downtown Plan also offers a number of concrete recommendations and guidelines create “great spaces.”

Suggestions for new parks and greenway connections include a heavy emphasis on incorporating the Riverfront Concept Plan recently completed by planners for the Corps of Engineers and Metro Government. The Riverfront Concept Plan is discussed in greater detail in the East Bank, the Second and Broadway, and the James Robertson neighborhoods in Chapter V.

Given the distinctive and diverse character of Downtown, the Downtown Plan recommends that an Open Space Plan be created to further study the needs for open space Downtown and the unique types of open space available to meet those needs. Creation of the open space plan should engage relevant government agencies as well as the broader community of stakeholders.

The Downtown Plan recommends the continued funding and implementation of the Metro Public Art Program under the leadership of the Metro Arts Commission. The Concept Plan map, found in Chapter IV, includes specific locations for public art.

On a related note, the Downtown Community Plan update revealed continued community interest in the creation and promotion of the Fifth Avenue of the Arts. The Downtown Community Plan offers specific guidance in each neighborhood through which Fifth Avenue of the Arts passes. The Plan is supportive of public and private sector efforts to enhance this arts-related corridor.

The Downtown Plan also recognizes the importance of the entrances into Downtown – corridors that frame the first glimpse of the Downtown skyline and first perceptions of Downtown. Currently, many of the entrances into Downtown do not do justice to the energy and vitality present in Downtown. The Downtown Plan includes special policies on entrances, found in Chapter V, which are meant to guide public and private sector action to establish standards for the landscaping, streetscaping and land use around key entrances into Downtown.

Provide for improved mobility in and through Downtown to support other principles for healthy growth in Downtown.

Efficient mobility into and within Downtown is crucial to Downtown’s continued economic growth. Downtown has, however, limited ability to expand roads. This, paired with the increased interest in living and working Downtown, means that future transportation planning will need to put a strong emphasis on expanding other modes of transportation including walking, cycling and transit.

The community’s vision for growth, translated into land use policy in this document, should guide future transportation planning. Now that the vision for future growth and development is established and tools to reach that vision are available, the Downtown Plan offers some specific transportation recommendations and one overarching transportation recommendation.

Most importantly, the Downtown Plan recommends that a broad, multi-modal transportation plan be created for Downtown. This transportation plan should capitalize on the research Metro Public Works is currently conducting on innovative options for improving

Comment [14]: Boundary Amendment

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In the interim, the Downtown Plan makes some specific recommendations for better connectivity throughout Downtown and re-establishment of the street grid in neighborhoods such as SoBro, Rutledge Hill, and Lafayette. These recommendations are found in the Transportation Plan section of Chapter IV and in the respective neighborhood plans in Chapter V.

As part of the Downtown Community Plan Update, Metro Planning Department staff has also reviewed the three primary transportation plans that guide road improvements in Nashville/Davidson County – the Adopted Major and Collector Street Plan, the Community Plans Major and Collector Street Plan and the Long Range Transportation Plan. Metro planners will make recommendations for the alignment of these three plans with regard to street designations, which are the basis for discussion on prioritizing road improvements.

Finally, the Downtown Plan encourages walking as a primary mode of transportation in Downtown. Walking is encouraged in the Downtown Plan by making the walk safe, interesting, and comfortable by having wide sidewalks and, on key streets, requiring active uses on the first floors of buildings, lining parking garages with active uses, and limited entrances into parking structures to avoid pedestrian/auto conflicts. As Downtown becomes home to many of its workers, and mass transit options into Downtown improve, providing welcoming routes for pedestrians will

provide benefits in terms of improved mobility and reduced traffic congestion.

Conclusion

The creation of the Downtown envisioned by the community can only be achieved through cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors and through the informed involvement of residents, businesses and investors in Downtown.

The specific guidelines in the building regulating plans and the specific recommendations found throughout this document are tools to reach the guiding principles described above and referenced throughout the Downtown Plan. Property owners and developers are also encouraged to offer their own tools and techniques to achieve the guiding principles. Adherence to these guiding principles in the development actions of both the public and private sector will create the Downtown Nashville that the community has envisioned – an expanding, vibrant Downtown with opportunities for growth and development that embody the urban experience of a great city.