

**City of Gainesville
Neighborhood Planning Framework
Executive Summary**



January, 2006

The City of Gainesville Planning and Development Department contracted with Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc. to develop a framework for the establishment of a Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) program as an institutional mechanism for continual, detailed land use planning that will be a bottom-up or *micro-level* planning approach. Focusing on various approaches of how to establish and maintain a NPU, the analysis addresses the overall planning and options for establishing a NPU program. More specifically, the report provides information on how to draw boundaries for neighborhoods so as to ensure a cross-section of area representation in each NPU planning process and how to “codify” the outcomes of neighborhood planning processes, suggesting such ways as land use refinement plans and design guidelines.

The report analysis discusses methods for delineating neighborhood boundaries. One suggested approach is to delineate the boundaries for a NPU using the census tract boundaries, which assures availability of census data for the NPU assuming the boundaries of the census tracts and neighborhoods align. Based on the research conducted, such an approach may not prove effective given that only four census tracts are located wholly within the City. The other census tracts extend beyond the city limits, and thus, are not appropriate boundaries for a municipal neighborhood planning unit. Furthermore, the boundaries of the four census tracts located wholly within the City are not necessarily representative of the perceptions of neighborhood boundaries. In short, the census tracts and associated data will provide a basis for the delineation of boundaries for Gainesville’s Neighborhood Planning Unit(s) but will not be the sole determining factor.

In addition to census data, the report puts forth other factors that should be considered when proposing neighborhood planning unit boundaries, indicating that how one goes about delineating neighborhood boundaries depends upon their perspective. As such, the report outlines differing viewpoints and lists representative stakeholders who should be involved in the delineation of neighborhood boundaries so as to ensure adequate representation. Furthermore, the report emphasizes the need to involve area residents because (1) the residents are in a better position to decide what constitutes the boundaries of their neighborhoods, and (2) the residents can play an active role in implementing their neighborhood plan using a number of “self-help” activities summarized in the report.

Based upon the aforementioned research and analysis, it is recommended that the Planning and Development Department coordinate a citywide neighborhood planning workshop that gauges interest and provides direct neighborhood input. Such a citywide workshop would provide an opportunity to residents and the other stakeholders identified (including members of the City Council, Planning and Appeals Board, Historic Preservation Commission, and other City departments) to share their perceptions of neighborhood boundaries. In short, it is recommended that the Planning Department use a “cognitive mapping” approach to encourage stakeholders to delineate what they perceive as neighborhood boundaries.

Although the report stressed some of the demographic, sociological, and community development aspects of neighborhood planning, the City’s focus for neighborhood planning efforts is more in the arena of land use. As such, the primary anticipated outcomes of neighborhood planning units in Gainesville are to refine the future land use map of the Comprehensive Plan at the parcel level and provide more guidance to site planning and architecture as new development or redevelopment occurs. The report also specifies ways in which the neighborhood planning efforts can be integrated formally into the Unified Land Development Code, including (1) adopting neighborhood plans as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan which allows the City to evaluate the consistency of a proposed zoning or

other development application, or (2) amending the Unified Land Development Code to provide for and anticipate for the adoption of neighborhood plans.

Based upon the research analysis and the fact that the Comprehensive Plan incorporates as policy the neighborhood planning approach, amending the Unified Land Development Code is the chosen course of action. The Planning Department staff envisions integrating the adopted neighborhood plan(s) as an overlay zone, an approach that will allow for the inclusion of neighborhood-specific design and development guidelines. However, because the NPU overlay zone(s) potentially could overlap with existing overlay districts, it is anticipated that the NPU overlay zone(s) will incorporate or lead to the refinement of existing overlay zones. Rather than providing formal review authority to the neighborhood planning unit(s), Planning Department staff foresees instituting an informal procedure whereby representatives of the NPU have an opportunity to review and comment on new development or redevelopment proposals within the designated neighborhood boundaries. Thus, it is recommended that the City's zoning and development application procedures be amended to recognize the desirability of such input.

The level of staff resources needed to implement and maintain a successful Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) Program was evaluated as part of this framework study. It was determined that at a minimum a staff planner will need to be assigned to attend meetings of neighborhood groups, organize cognitive mapping exercises, and serve as a daily contact for inquiries from citizens. Additionally, staff will need to be assigned to prepare the neighborhood planning document consisting of such elements as those outlined in the report. Upon review of the Planning and Development Department's current workload, it was determined that existing planning staff cannot take on such roles without compromising other assigned functions.

Thus, based on the report analysis and given existing staff and current workload, it was determined that the Planning and Development Department will use a **hybrid** approach involving a predetermined neighborhood planning area (i.e. Ward Three, given it is a well-established neighborhood effort with active participation at monthly meetings and demonstrated interest in the impact of continued community development). Working under the direction of the City Manager and the Ward Three Councilmember, the Planning Department staff will coordinate the organization of an area advisory committee consisting of (1) a select few residents and property owners; (2) staff from the Planning and Development, Public Works and Code Enforcement departments; and (3) a representative from the Housing and Neighborhood Program. It was determined that such an advisory committee would hold several working meetings to further define the neighborhood planning unit and to generate ideas and discussion of how to improve existing and future conditions as they pertain to the neighborhood and city as a whole. The end-product of this hybrid approach will be a written report summarizing the ideas and actions believed to be necessary to improve the neighborhood and community as a whole. This report will be presented to the City Council for further direction on the NPU process (i.e. fund additional Planning and Development Department staff to perform a full-scale NPU).