

# Cherry Avenue Small Area Plan

## Public Engagement Process to-date

August 20<sup>th</sup> 2018

### BACKGROUND

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Charlottesville's Fifeville Neighborhood is working with the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) to create positive change in their community. By December of 2018, the City and the Neighborhood will have a detailed plan for bringing about that change. The process to get there will be as important as the results, as the community comes together to create a plan for the future of this historic neighborhood.

To accomplish this, the original scope of work for the Cherry Avenue Small Area Plan called for two committee groups to assist with the planning process. The first, the Community Team which would later become the Think Tank, consists of residents from the community who were identified for participation in this effort by the Fifeville Neighborhood Association. The Think Tank is tasked with providing feedback and guidance on the planning process. They also serve as the project champions for the neighborhood, informing their neighbors about the project and soliciting their feedback. The second committee group, the Advisory Panel, is more technical in nature and consists of representatives from stakeholder groups in the area. This group is tasked with providing feedback on recommendations identified by the community.

The original scope of work also called for two open house community meetings and a Better Block demonstration event to further engage with Fifeville residents.

### THE THINK TANK

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The Cherry Avenue Think Tank consists of 11 community residents who were identified by the Fifeville Neighborhood Association, each contributing a diverse level of expertise and background to the process. The Think Tank held its first meeting in November of 2017 and has met monthly since. The Think Tank meets the third Thursday of every month from 6-7:30 at Tonsler Park. As the project has progressed, the Think Tank has taken on a greater role with community outreach and engagement, maybe more so than staff originally intended. They have provided feedback and oversight on project deliverables, brought ideas/suggestions/concerns from the neighborhood to the attention of staff, and served as project champions for the neighborhood. The Think Tank's Meeting schedule and topics covered is below:

1. **November 30<sup>th</sup>**: Planning process overview, project background, and getting to know you exercise
2. **December 20<sup>th</sup>**: Measures of success, update on UVA research, focus group topic identification
3. **January 25<sup>th</sup>**: Brainstorm on focus group and tech committee, zoning discussion, project timeline
4. **February 15<sup>th</sup>**: March open house event brainstorm
5. **March 22<sup>nd</sup>**: March open house event preparation
6. **April 19<sup>th</sup>**: Open house debrief, visual zoning analysis review, Better Block planning session
7. **May 8<sup>th</sup>**: Better Block walking tour of Cherry Ave
8. **May 24<sup>th</sup>**: Review of Think Tank group structure, UVA student work conclusions

9. **June 21<sup>st</sup>**: Focus Group report, zoning conversation, modeling exercise discussion
10. **July 19<sup>th</sup>**: Preparation for August 26<sup>th</sup> Open House
11. **August 16<sup>th</sup>**: August 26<sup>th</sup> Open House preparation

## **THE ADVISORY PANEL**

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The Advisory Panel is more technical in nature and consists of City staff and community stakeholder groups such as; UVA Health Systems, representatives from the business and development community, Neighborhood Development Services staff, City Parks and Recreation Staff, CAT, JAUNT, two Think Tank members, a City Councilor, and a City Planning Commissioner. They are primarily tasked with responding to issues identified by the community and identifying ways to implement project recommendations. The Advisory Panel will hold its first meeting in early September following the August 26<sup>th</sup> Open House event.

## **MARCH HISTORY EVENT OPEN HOUSE**

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The Cherry Avenue Small Area Plan held its first public open house on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 from 2-5 PM at the Buford Middle School cafeteria. This first meeting was branded as an informal kickoff to the planning process, serving to bring long-term residents of the Fifeville community together to share their stories and memories of the neighborhood's past. The main objectives accomplished with this meeting include:

1. The official start for neighborhood involvement in the small area planning process; and,
2. Provide forum for the community to answer important questions like:
  - Where has the community been in the past?
  - What characteristics (both tangible & intangible) of the community should be preserved?
  - What defining characteristics of the neighborhood have been lost over time?
  - Could those lost characteristics be brought back?
  - How can what was lost be honored?

As attendees arrived, they were asked to sign in and then directed to the visual timeline, which depicted historical aerial imagery maps (1927, 1966, 1970, 1974, 1990, 1996, 2015) printed at large-scale. This interactive station served as a catalyst for discussion on the evolution of the Fifeville neighborhood. Around 2:15, Carmelita Woods, the Fifeville Neighborhood Association President welcomed the attendees and provided a brief introduction to the purpose of the meeting, and then turned it over to Will Cockrell of the TJPDC. He provided background information on the planning process and reiterated the points Carmelita made in her introduction. The groups were then separated into two small groups where discussions were facilitated by staff members and recorded via voice recorders to be saved and transcribed at a later date.

Throughout the course of the day, it was estimated that roughly 35 attendees participated in the open house event. Several of those in attendance had lived in the Fifeville neighborhood for over 35 years, with one having lived in the community for over 50. On the opposite end of the tenure spectrum, there were several in attendance who had just moved to the community and were interested in learning more about the history of the neighborhood they now call home. Staff was not expecting high volumes of attendance due to the intended nature of this event serving more as an informal forum for discussion and sharing from long-time residents of the community.

## **FOCUS GROPS**

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The Focus Groups were designed with the intent of soliciting specific feedback from stakeholder groups that were identified by the Think Tank. This would provide the project team with more in-depth information and feedback from these stakeholder groups. Beginning in December of 2017, staff facilitated discussions with the Think Tank to develop its preferred list of focus group topics and participants. Focus group discussions began in June of 2018, with highlights outlined below:

- June 6<sup>th</sup>: **Transportation**

The transportation focus group consisted of MPO staff, Think Tank Members, and staff from CAT, JAUNT, and Neighborhood Development Services. Discussion focused on addressing safety concerns at the intersection of 7 ½ St and Cherry Ave, how the neighborhood could have better bus stop infrastructure, addressing speeding concerns on Cherry Ave, CAT ridership numbers, JAUNT service in Fifeville, and future traffic projections

- June 13<sup>th</sup>: **Education**

The education focus group consisted of the principals from Charlottesville High School, Jackson-Via, Johnson Elementary, and several Think Tank members. Discussion focused on challenges students face (such as a lack of structured after school care options), how schools work with the community beyond the classroom, and how the community could partner with the schools to create positive change.

- Late June: **Business Owners**

In late June, staff visited every business along the Cherry Avenue commercial corridor to gain insight into the needs and desires of the business community. One business owner pointed to the concern over the homeless population and increased vagrancy along Cherry Ave. Speaking with the businesses along Cherry was done individually, as many business owners expressed concerns over finding a time to meet as a group due to the need to be on-site to run their businesses.

- July 11<sup>th</sup>: **Youth in the Community**

Staff met with a group of 25 rising 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, & 8<sup>th</sup> graders from Abundant Life Ministries. The majority of these students live in the Prospect area of Fifeville. The group provided insight on challenges they face, such as not being able to safely bike to Tonsler Park, the desire for more open play fields at Tonsler and Forest Hills parks, safer pedestrian crossings along Cherry Ave, and the need to fix the often-broken water fountain at Forest Hills Park.

- Pending: **Housing**

- Pending: **Religious Institutions**

## **FRONT PORCH DISCUSSIONS**

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The front porch discussion idea came about during the May 24<sup>th</sup> Think Tank meeting. One of the Think Tank members shared that many of her neighbors had lived in the area for 30 + years and wondered if she scheduled a small get together with them, if staff would be able to facilitate a discussion with them to better understand the needs of the community. This initial, informal meeting suggestion would grow as other Think Tank members began scheduling front porch discussions of their own. Staff has found that these informal meetings, after typical business hours and literally on people's front porches has been one of the greatest sources of honest dialogue with the community thus far. Residents seem to be more open to providing their honest opinions/concerns/hopes for the future. Many of these front porch discussions have been with residents who are normally absent from the typical planning processes of the past. Staff

believes that the front porch discussions can serve as a format for future engagement efforts. Front porch discussion highlights can be found below:

- **June 6<sup>th</sup>: 1109 Forest Hills Ave**  
Several neighbors attended the first front porch discussion, many of whom had lived in Fifeville for over 30 years. Several concerns of their revolved around the lack of parking due to UVA Health System employees taking spots from residents, speeding through neighborhood streets, and a rise in AirBNB rentals. Attendees also shared why they moved to the neighborhood in the first place, citing affordability, proximity to schools, and the neighborhood feel.
- **July 5<sup>th</sup>: 341 6 ½ St.**  
Residents shared that the neighborhood used to be affordable, but was under siege from house flippers and the development community looking to make a quick buck. Other concerns included encroachment from UVA and the developments along West Main. One suggestion to come out of this meeting was the need for additional indoor community space that could accommodate larger groups of people.
- **August 2<sup>nd</sup>: 221 5<sup>th</sup> St.**  
Neighbors shared why they moved to the neighborhood in the first place, again citing affordability at first but then diving down into the neighborhoods walkability and accessibility. They were also able to provide insight on how the neighborhood has changed over the years, such as the rise of drug activity several decades ago to the present state of young families moving in and being somewhat cold to the residents who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time. One quote that stood out was “there are not too many me-s left in the neighborhood” referencing long-term, minority residents.
- **August 15<sup>th</sup>: Greenstone Resident Meeting**  
Staff was able to coordinate with the resident coordinator for the Greenstone on 5<sup>th</sup> community, which serves many low-income, immigrant, and minority families to participate in a back to school event already scheduled. This meeting did not follow the typical, small front porch format that had been used in previous meetings. Staff had an informational tri-fold board and pamphlets on the planning process, but the main goal of the event was to engage directly with residents to better understand their needs. Several attendees noted the need for safer access to the parks and additional affordable housing options.
- **August 25<sup>th</sup>: 780 Prospect Ave**  
Staff will meet with members of the Abundant Life Ministries program at their location on Prospect Ave on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup>.
- **September 9<sup>th</sup>: 600 Dice St.**  
Staff will meet with Dice Street neighbors on the evening on Sunday September 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **August 26<sup>th</sup> Open House Event**

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Staff will host an open house event on Sunday August 26<sup>th</sup> from 2-4 PM at the Buford Middle School cafeteria. This will be an opportunity for residents to see how the planning process has progressed, learn about zoning tradeoffs, and provide their feedback. This will be structured as an open house, with interactive exercises for residents to participate in. No formal presentation will be given at the event.