

Process

Community Engagement and Participation

The City Solutions Center employed a participatory, “bottom-up” approach to developing the plan for the 7th Street corridor. Rather than the design team creating a plan and presenting it to the community for feedback, the process included community participation from the outset and the plan was derived from community input and feedback to insure the participants’ ideas and needs were the foundation of the design. The process was divided into three phases: 1) inventory, 2) analysis, and 3) synthesis.

The inventory phase identified the existing conditions within the study area. The purpose of this step was to gather as much useful information as possible about the study area in a reasonable amount of time. It allowed participants to investigate what “is” and encouraged them to begin imagining what “could be.”

The second phase, analysis, involved an assessment of the existing conditions discovered through the inventory phase to determine the needs and preferences of the community for changing the corridor. This involved a “visioning” process for the future of the area, which included creative problem solving and the proposal of specific features participants would like to see in the corridor.

In the final phase, synthesis, the CSC facilitation team synthesized the information gathered during the first two meetings, developing a draft plan that was presented to the community participants for feedback. This feedback was used to make any necessary adjustments or changes when producing the final corridor plan and recommendations. Thus, the community participants were involved at each stage of the process, collecting data about the existing walkability and land use conditions, engaging in creative problem-solving, and providing feedback on the resulting draft plan, ultimately resulting in the plan recommended in this report.

Community Meetings

The City Solutions Center staff, in partnership with the Triple S Planning Commission, facilitated three community meetings as part of the process. The Triple S Planning Commission invited area property owners, business owners, tenants, residents, government representatives (both city and county), and other stakeholders to attend. The meetings were also announced through local media and were open to the public. All three meetings were held on weekday evenings at the Shelby County Emergency Management Building, located on 7th Street within the study area. There were between 30 and 40 participants in attendance at each of the three workshops.

Meeting #1 – September 9, 2010

The first community meeting served as both an introduction to the project and a study area assessment. The meeting started by introducing the facilitation team and providing an overview of the process, including the purpose and area of study. The remainder of the meeting involved a participatory assessment of existing conditions in the study area. Community participants divided into four groups, each assessing a quadrant of the corridor (Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast). For their respective areas, each group walked the length of their quadrant and completed 1) a walkability survey, 2) a land use and building condition survey, and 3) a photographic record of existing conditions. The walkability survey asked participants to rate aspects of their quadrant that influenced their ability to walk safely and easily along the roadway. The land use and building condition survey asked participants to determine the use of each parcel in their quadrant (commercial, residential, industrial, vacant lot), and the condition of any structures on the property. Each group was also provided with a disposable digital camera to take photos of any points of interest, whether positive or negative, in their respective quadrants. While each group had a member of the facilitation team with them during the exercise to answer questions, the groups were “self-guiding” and facilitation team members did not attempt to influence the results of the surveys. Some photos of existing conditions taken by group members can be found in Appendix A of this report.



Community participants taking photos and notes to document the corridor during the first meeting

Meeting #2 – September 23, 2010

The second community meeting began with a review of the information collected during Meeting #1 on walkability and land use conditions along the study corridor. A visual summary of these results was presented to provide an overview of the existing conditions to help guide participants during the visioning exercise. During the visioning exercise, CSC staff facilitated a question and answer session with participants to determine what the community wanted for the future of the corridor. Community participants answered six questions, the responses to which were written on flip charts by a facilitator:

- How would the new and improved 7th Street Corridor look?
- How would the new and improved corridor sound?



Participants draw their visions on basemaps of the corridor

- How would the new and improved corridor smell?
- How could we “measure” our improvements?
- What are the reasons for the corridor’s current “less than perfect” condition?
- If I could change just one thing in the corridor, it would be...

Following the visioning question and answer session, participants divided into five groups, each group with a map of the study area. During this “design exercise,” each group was asked to record on the map (by writing or drawing) their answers to two questions:

- What would you like to keep the same in the corridor?
- What would you like to see change, and how, in the corridor?

Participants had only one rule to guide their visioning during the design exercise: no one can erase or remove other participants’ ideas from the map. This insured that everyone’s ideas and voice were represented and recorded during the exercise, even if it was a minority opinion within the group. Once the groups finished recording their ideas on the map, a member of each group presented the group’s map to the entire meeting. The group maps from meeting #2 can be found in Appendix B of this report.

Meeting #3 – October 6, 2010

The third meeting provided community participants the opportunity to see a draft proposal of recommendations for the study area. The input gathered during the first two meetings was consolidated and synthesized to develop the draft recommendations, which were then presented to the community for feedback. The purpose of this meeting was to find out if the facilitation team “got it right.” Since developing a plan from recommendations that are sometimes in conflict with one another is a difficult task, it is useful to provide an opportunity for participants to comment on the plan before it is finalized to insure that their ideas were not misunderstood or misrepresented when translated into a design concept. All feedback received during the meeting was carefully recorded by the CSC facilitation team to insure that it informed the final recommendations.