



# Quality of Life

Safe roads, spacious parks and beautiful architecture can enhance but cannot ensure a good quality of life. Safe neighborhoods, personal financial security, and a sense of place are more intangible but equally important characteristics of a community that enjoys a good quality of life.

- Public safety involves good working relationships with local law enforcement, neighbors willing to “watch the streets,” and coordination with site designers to make sure the spaces they create will not encourage crime.
- A strong financial future for most begins with home ownership, which is becoming more of a challenge to Davidson residents as property values escalate faster than local income. Protecting financial investments such as a home through regular maintenance and sound construction is also key to a sustained quality of life.
- Sense of place means having a strong relationship with the history and people of the local community and having pride in the unique qualities of that place.

The West Davidson Stakeholder Committee discussed current quality of life issues, proposed a number of initial goals, and recommended steps for implementing those goals. Some of these goals will be difficult to implement, since they involve community consensus or financial support. Others, however, require uncomplicated public policy change or individual effort. The Committee believes that the will exists to push for change and that the time for change is now.

## What is Gentrification?

The Brookings Institution Center defines gentrification as the process of neighborhood change that results in the replacement of lower income residents with higher income ones.

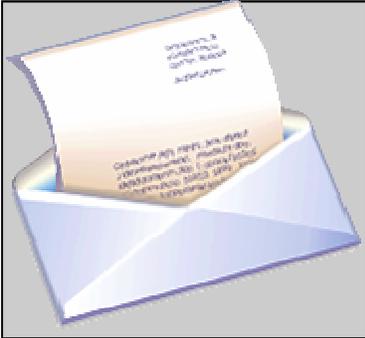
“Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices” (<http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/gentrification/gentrificationexsum.htm>)



Roosevelt Wilson Park

*“[Davidson] is a great walking town... The presence of the college adds many avenues for expanded activities... There still exists a sense of identity and history that makes it more than just a place to live.”*  
*(Loretta Wertheimer, Stakeholder Committee)*

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## **Goal: Improve communications between the Town of Davidson and citizens of West Davidson.**

The Town has previously relied on communications through mediums that are not always available to West Davidson residents. The lack of information exchange has added to a sense of distrust and fear of property condemnation. This goal is central to all other recommendations in this report.

1. Host at the minimum one or two annual meeting(s) in west Davidson (and other neighborhoods within the Town limits) to provide information about town policies and practices that have the potential to impact this part of the community. Specifically, this meeting will update residents on all planning and development projects and answer questions regarding the planning ordinance.
2. Revise ordinances and /or policies to better define when and how the Town will notify the residents of West Davidson about pertinent meetings, charrettes, planning discussions, etc. For example, the Town will work with churches and other community centers to post newsletters or event announcements. Community bulletin boards may be constructed throughout the Town to display hard copies of recent community announcements. Also, the Town will host at least two hours of any public workshop or charrette during evening hours (after 7pm) to allow those who work out of Davidson to participate.
3. Publish a basic brochure that includes general information about planning and development processes. This brochure should focus on the Town's Planning Principles and explain the process for approving developments or providing public improvements (including the use of eminent domain). This brochure shall be distributed by Town staff at public meetings and will be available at various public community centers throughout Town. This brochure should also be part of a "newcomer's packet" describing the unique philosophies of Davidson residents and elected officials.

## **What is the development process in Davidson?**

Projects are initiated by the developer or land owner, and are always subject to staff and board approval. The Town of Davidson Planning Ordinance is the main tool by which planners assess a proposal. The Ordinance has been recognized nationally for being open to public comment and requiring good design. See the Appendix for a more information.

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**Goal: Increase the involvement of West Davidson citizens in the civic activities of the Town.**

Town politics and citizen input has mostly been provided by residents living in the older parts of Davidson along and east of Main Street. As the Town grows and a priority on human diversity gains momentum, West Davidson residents should become more involved in local decision-making.

1. Set a goal for the number of West Davidson residents to sign up for the Civics 101 programs. The Town Board should consider forming an “ambassador’s council” to include past participants in local committees, boards and Civics 101 classes. The Ambassador’s Council would commit to attending board meetings, subscribing to internet communications, and communicating recent announcements to neighbors.
2. Establish and maintain a list of West Davidson residents who are willing to serve on Town committees, task forces, etc.
3. As times are established for Town meetings, task forces, committees, etc., be cognizant of the difficulty for working folks to meet during the day and of the importance of being able to attend church-related events on Wednesday nights for the West Davidson population.



**Goal: Provide assistance for minor home repair and renovation.**

Some Davidson residents or property owners do not qualify for financial assistance to renovate their homes, but their incomes are too low to keep up with needed repairs. Committee members discussed the need for a program to help financially with maintenance for this mid-level group.

Appropriate a small sum for seed money annually to this fund, while efforts are made to identify and seek larger grant funds for this purpose. Work with HAMMERS or other volunteer organizations to provide the labor for these repairs and renovations. The intent of this fund is to provide minor repairs and renovations that are required for the continued livability to homeowners that need financial assistance but don’t qualify for the HAMMERS program.

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**Goal: Establish a help center to respond to citizen's concerns about real estate issues.**

Developers approach residents in West Davidson on a frequent and individual basis. However, many residents feel that they do not know enough about real estate and land value trends to make an informed decision when an offer is made to purchase their property.

1. This volunteer-based and run organization should be located at the Ada Jenkins Center. The organization should periodically publish and distribute a flyer or brochure that explains its mission and work, indicating the hours that a volunteer is available to assist neighbors, and establishing a procedure that a citizen can use to set up an appointment.

2. The Town will organize the help center initially. Once it is established, it will be maintained by the volunteer realtors. The organization may be housed or staffed by another existing non-profit such as the Davidson Housing Coalition or members of the local faith community.



**Goal: Set up a job fair for commercial buildings and hotels in West Davidson.**

Most of Davidson's current residents commute to other towns or cities in the region for work because there are few local jobs matching their qualifications. Several new retail and service businesses will be ready to hire within one year in the Exit 30 area, many with positions appropriate to local residents' qualifications.

The Town could help schedule a job fair date and location where tenants and business owners would be available to interview Davidson residents for upcoming positions. Hopefully, this job fair can be set up by early 2008 and also include employers from Downtown Davidson. The importance of this goal reaches far beyond local employment. Jobs are needed to keep and encourage more young minority residents to live in Davidson. Otherwise the current aging trend will continue, and the traditionally strong African American community will disappear.

*"Our seniors want to stay in their homes, but may be financially unstable and need help with taxes." (Dorothy Mills, Stakeholder Committee)*

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## **OTHER TOPICS NEEDING ADDITIONAL STUDY BEFORE RECOMMENDATIONS CAN BE OFFERED**

**Topic 1:** What is meant by affordable housing? Is the definition that is used in the Town ordinance appropriate for the needs that are being experienced in West Davidson?

While there are numerous issues identified as a part of the affordable housing discussion, two or three kept coming up in every discussion. What can be done to provide housing for those whose income falls below 50% of the Area Median Income? How can appropriate housing be provided to the senior citizens of West Davidson, when in many cases their only income is from Social Security? Who will provide the affordable housing?



**Topic 2:** Some of the participants in the stakeholders' group questioned how designated affordable housing providers are selected by the Town. The ordinance leaves the door open to additional providers but may need to explain the qualifications of such organizations.

The stakeholders also had a difficult time understanding what affordable housing (according to the local ordinance) looks like and how it is enforced, probably because there are few built examples. Some residents see that their neighborhoods have received a disproportionate amount of affordable housing, and may be better informed if the Town were to identify future sites for affordable units as part of a master plan and a public information campaign.

Beyond the provision of and qualification for housing units, what relationship should affordable housing agencies have with local neighborhoods? Can they assist in community organization or should West Davidson neighborhoods coordinate independent neighborhood associations?

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**Topic 3:** Job creation. It is difficult to determine how many people need jobs, what kind of jobs they need, where those jobs might be found in Davidson and surrounding areas, and, if those jobs are not now available, how might they be created. The opportunity for finding employment in the Exit 30 area is certainly greater than anything we have seen in Davidson for some years. However, at this time, the type and quantity of jobs is not known. Perhaps, as the development comes on line in the Exit 30 area, the need that might exist for additional jobs for people living in West Davidson would be met.



**Topic 4:** An issue that is of significant importance to a few of the stakeholder's is the impact of having Davidson College students living in rental units in neighborhoods like Watson Street and Delburg Street. This issue also surfaces in other parts of town where there are student rental units. The general policy of the College is to have all of its students live on campus. Until this policy is realized discussions need to be had with Davidson College to discuss ways to minimize the impact that rentals to students may have on the neighborhoods.



**Topic 5:** How do we protect historic homes and sites? The Town has begun a process that hopefully will lead to protection of historic sites and homes. The stakeholders probably need an explanation of what this is and the time frame of the process. Preserving historic structures and landscapes must be paired with efforts to sustain the human and cultural traditions and the history of the African American community.