

Annual Report 2019-2020

Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area Advisory Board

Bradley Pollitt, Chair
Stephanie Seawright, Vice-Chair
Lane Abraben
Jason Atkins-Tuffs
Kali Blount
Carrie Bush
Linda Dixon
Evelyn Foxx
Armando Grundy-Gomes
Jacob Ihde
Christopher Merritt
Jason Mitchell
Warren Nielsen
Michael Palmer
Jessica Turner-Evans

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What do you understand the mission of your board to be?

- To advise the City Commission in areas/matters of redevelopment.
- Provide advice to City Commission through GCRA for redevelopment or reinvestment in Gainesville's underserved area with partnerships of the community and private investors for a greater economic impact.
- To advise on the expenditure of GCRA funds per the adopted Strategic Plan. To monitor the effectiveness of the GCRA initiatives making recommendations for any course corrections as needed.
- To create a positive change in Gainesville as the CRA transitioned into the GCRA. Along with this, the board also helps to create an equitable experience for all neighbors in Gainesville with the removal of sections (one zone).

What are the three most important things your board has done during calendar years 2019-2020?

- Working toward redevelopment of big projects
- Working to redevelop our urban core
- Working toward redevelopment/reinvestment in East Gainesville
- Housing
- Coalesced as a new committee with new staff
- Completed a Strategic Plan
- Approved initial expenditures and changes to funding programs
- Moved forward with project implementations
- Heard valuable presentations from community stakeholders, GCRA staff, and neighbors
- Navigated meetings during COVID-19

Note: the GCRA Advisory Board was created towards the end of calendar year 2019 as an integral piece of the transition of the former Gainesville Community Redevelopment Area into a City Department. The GCRA Advisory Board's first meeting occurred on October 8, 2019. The three months meetings were cancelled due to COVID.

What are the three most important things your board is working on right now?

- 8th and Waldo
- The Urban Core (narrowly defined)
- Reinvestment/Redevelopment in East Gainesville
- Housing - Heartwood
- Economic Development - Hyatt Place
- Continue to develop committee rapport and building trust
- Identify next priority projects
- Identify performance measures and evaluation criteria for projects
- Affordable housing needs
- The GCRA budget

What could the City Commission do to help your board better serve our neighbors?

- Have clear, concise, direct communication about narrowly tailored goals that will assist the GCRA that are in our purview.
- Focus on projects that are germane to the GCRA and not other City Departments.
- Have a real robust and innovative plan for 8th and Waldo Rd.
- Consider trip of members, for educational purpose, to areas that have successfully reinvested in underserved and/or stagnant areas such as Waldo and NE 8th Ave
- Unite seemingly disparate initiatives that should be part of a larger whole that is laser-focused and strategic - e.g. Downtown Master Plan, cultural facility planning, Countywide Bicycle Master Plan, Infinity Loop, Waldo Rd corridor study, affordable housing planning, etc. Perhaps the Comp Plan update is a vehicle to accomplish this, but the GCRA should have this in mind too. Understandably, many of these planning studies need to be completed before a strategic focus can be determined. But, right now, it feels like we may be "missing the forest for the trees" and failing to recognize the connectivity between these activities.
- Notify our neighbors of our meetings on different platforms.

What else do you need the City Commission to know about your board?

- Over the past year we have had confusion with the office of CAPER who has in effect hijacked and delineated the duties of the GCRA staff and our board. CAPER has not been accountable nor transparent with our board and neither has the City Manager. It is also important to know the City Manager has been reckless in his care and concern for the health and well-being of our board and staff in the height of a pandemic numerous times.
- Utilize GCRA, members of the community, for its intended purpose rather CAPER, staff acting independently?
- This is a very important board with members who are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and invested in the outcomes. There is some sense from several board members that the board is a "rubber stamp" for staff and Commission priorities rather than a valued resource for ideas and priorities. There is a real desire for transformative projects that move the needle on the economics of East Gainesville but actionable project proposals so far seem to be small, piecemeal, and disconnected.
- We are a group of highly motivated and competent individuals.