

WORKING DRAFT OF GOALS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION



Nashville is at an important moment: the city has grown at an unprecedented rate, bringing with it an influx of corporate headquarters, innovation, new jobs, new residents, and yes, more tourists. At the same time, the growing pains of traffic congestion, skyrocketing housing costs, competition for good jobs, and a straining city infrastructure has led many residents to feel the city is losing some of the ingredients that make Nashville so special. Feeling that the city needs a clear vision to guide it forward with intentionality and a focus on residents, Imagine Nashville was formed in 2023 to create a unified community-driven vision that can harness the resources of government, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, the business community, and residents and guide the city forward over the next decade.

Imagine Nashville is a **collaborative, inclusive, citywide approach** to asking:

- What are our shared **VALUES**?
- What are our shared **PRIORITIES** that align around those values?
- And then what can we work together **TO DO** to create the city we all dream of?

With the help of many partners, the Imagine Nashville Steering Committee — comprised of a diverse group of neighborhood, civic, business, and nonprofit leaders in the Nashville community — spent a year learning the community’s shared values and topmost priorities for Nashville are and then determining how we collectively can best realize the Nashville we all want and need.

In listening to over 10,000 adults and youth across every ZIP code, we learned that Nashvillians have a deep value for the intense sense of belonging, fulfillment, and collaboration that Nashville so uniquely engenders (78% for adults, 61% for youth). We also learned that many Nashvillians feel increasingly left out or excluded from the opportunities and benefits of living here; this is especially true for low-income (57%), LGBTQIA+ (48%), Black/ African-American (31%), and aging Nashvillians (45%), as well as youth (61%). The majority of respondents believe the impact of unmanaged growth is making things worse and negatively impacting quality of life for Nashvillians. Seventy-two percent (72%) feel leaders have invested “too much money in the wrong things,” at the expense of residents, who increasingly feel they are being pushed out; only 29% of adults and 35% of youth feel the growth is making things better. However, 71% agree that growth in Nashville can improve quality of life and provide advantages IF it is more carefully managed.

FIVE KEY PRIORITIES

Community members identified five key priorities that must be addressed in order to maintain the unique character of our city and improve the lives of all who live and work here:



Increasing economic opportunity for Nashvillians through **education and training**.



Addressing mobility and **transit** issues that will enable Nashvillians to safely, easily, and affordably connect to each other and the great amenities of the city.



Increasing and improving **housing options** throughout the city that are attainable and affordable and meet the broad array of resident needs.



Making **neighborhoods** great places to live and ensuring they contain all the necessities and amenities for a thriving life.



Managing the impact of growth in a way that prioritizes the needs and values of all Nashvillians.

Imagine Nashville is all of us. It's every Nashvillian with a passion for this city and an eye toward creating a promising future. This is a vitally important time for Nashville's future, and we believe all of its residents deserve a voice in our city's future. Through unprecedented research and united around shared values, people from across the city offered big ideas for the future of our city. Now, let's go beyond imagination and turn dreams into action for a Nashville where everyone belongs.

1: FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAT PRIORITIZES LIVABILITY AND BELONGING FOR NASHVILLE RESIDENTS.



Middle Tennessee experienced strong job growth in 2023 with the creation of 24,000 new jobs across multiple sectors, placing Nashville among the top five cities in the U.S. for job growth. Additionally, the average household income increased by 10%.¹ Income is not keeping pace with inflation, however, and 47% of Nashvillians make less than a living wage—\$50,000 annually (\$23.84 hourly) for a single adult with no dependents in Nashville.^{2, 3}

2035 Goal: Increase the number of [good and promising jobs](#) and increase the number filled by current residents.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- A. Leverage the city’s higher education/research & development, health care, and technology industries to fuel an [innovation economy](#) and position Nashville as the “innovation hub” of the South.
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- B. Invest in expanding Nashville’s small business footprint and take companion steps to protect local small businesses from displacement. Examples include:
- Create more [business improvement districts](#) (BIDs) to support infrastructure in neighborhood centers.
 - Develop a targeted place-based strategy that strategically supports a handful of [commercial neighborhood corridors](#), with a focus on supporting small businesses.
 - Support and expand the incubation of Black-owned and other marginalized businesses by providing greater access to experienced advisors and access to capital. (e.g. [Corner to Corner](#), [TSU Innovation Center](#))
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- C. Building from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce’s [2020 Workforce Study](#), create an annual scorecard that measures
- The number and percent of jobs in high growth industries
 - The number and percent of good and promising jobs by industry
 - Labor force participation
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- D. Create a permanent [commission](#) that is focused on defining and addressing the wealth gap in Davidson County. The new commission should establish an ambitious, but achievable goal for closing the wealth gap and ensuring all residents earn a living wage. The commission should collect data, align partners, and study particular barriers (e.g. benefits cliffs, impacts of TANF, etc.)
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2: POSITION NASHVILLIANS FOR THE HIGH-WAGE, HIGH-DEMAND JOBS BEING CREATED BY ECONOMIC GROWTH.



Over half of survey respondents feel the primary goals for K-12 Education in Nashville should be to “lift children out of poverty and level the playing field” and “ensure that they can support themselves as an adult in the world.” College readiness was a top priority for only 15% of respondents.

Work-based learning ranges from career exposure to career experience and helps students explore career pathways while learning critical job skills needed for entry and advancement.⁴ Unfortunately, not all students have equitable access to these valuable opportunities. In a survey conducted by American Student Assistance, 79% of high school students expressed interest in participating in work-based learning experiences, but only 34% were aware of any opportunities,⁵ and only 2% completed an internship during high school.⁶ A Government Accountability Office report on career and technical education (CTE) found that even for students who do have access to these types of opportunities, additional obstacles such as lack of transportation and support services, language barriers, and inflexible scheduling can preclude their participation.⁷ Establishing a high-quality work-based learning program can be complex because it involves the collaboration and commitment of both schools and local industry to develop opportunities that look quite different from traditional schooling.

2035 Goals: Increase the number of K-12 students completing high school with a high-wage, high-demand credential and/or ready for college.

Increase the number of [good and promising jobs](#) and increase the number filled by current residents.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- A. Guarantee all students have equitable access to high-wage, high-demand career pathways and career-based learning opportunities by removing barriers, including:
- Geographic: an array of dual enrollment options available to all students; high growth industry Career Academies in every high school; safe, affordable public transit options (see transit section).
 - Financial: Equitable dual enrollment fees and access to financial aid; paid internships.
 - Awareness: Ensure all students and families know the full array of school options (i.e. Career Academies, AP classes, dual enrollment) available at each school prior to entering high school.
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IDEAS FOR ACTION (Continued)

B. Ensure all unemployed and underemployed adults have knowledge of and easy access to education and workforce training that leads to high-wage jobs.

This should include:

- Scale [Earn and Learn](#) apprenticeship and training programs.
 - Increase wrap-around supports such as childcare and transportation (e.g. [Nashville Reconnect](#)) and debt-free financial aid (e.g. [TN Promise](#), [Nashville GRAD](#)) for working and or caregiving adult students to ensure they are able to complete education and skills training.
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C. Increase the number of affordable high-quality childcare slots in areas of high demand to match the need.

Examples include:

- Work with developers receiving Metro incentives to establish/expand childcare slots near new developments.
 - Explore cost-share (i.e. family, employer, government) agreements to offset the cost of childcare for low-income employees.
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D. Create strategies for improving the pay scale of childcare teachers in order to stabilize the workforce, increase access, and improve quality.

3: DEVELOP AN ACCESSIBLE, RELIABLE MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THAT ENABLES NASHVILLIANS TO MOVE ABOUT THE CITY EFFICIENTLY AND SAFELY.



Nashville’s population grew by nearly 20% between 2010 and 2020, but our investments in transit and multimodal transportation are far below our peer cities, earning us the dubious recognition of the worst commute in the U.S.⁸ As a result, our growth is leading to more congestion, increasing traffic fatalities, and negative health impacts.⁹ Across all zip codes, Nashvillians uniformly agreed that a strong public transit system is a necessity for a city of our size, with 90% of survey respondents advocating for investment to upgrade and expand our system.

2035 Goal: Increase commuting via walking, biking, and public transit to 20%.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

A. Build high-capacity transit corridors that prioritize transit today and prepare Nashville for the future.

This should include:

- A robust frequent bus network, including crosstown routes, that operates 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.
- Exploring public-private partnership to fund light rail, beginning with lines between the airport and downtown or other high-traffic locations.
- Installing multi-modal, mixed use transit centers that facilitate access to services, retail, and other community resources.

B. Ensure public transit is accessible to all Nashvillians.

This should include:

- A free and reduced fare program for seniors, youth, and low-income Nashvillians.
- “Youth Ways” networks (safe, accessible active transportation networks that efficiently enable youth to attend preferred schools and, Career Academies, career-based learning opportunities, postsecondary options, and after-school activities).
- A safe, [last-mile](#) sidewalk and infrastructure program for seniors and people with disabilities.

C. Increase safety for those using public and active transportation.

Examples include:

- Enhance and promote safety measures on public transportation, stops, and transit centers.
 - Implement a robust [quick-build](#) program that rapidly implements projects at dangerous crossings and roadways.
 - Identify and prioritize funding for short-term on-street connections to better connect the existing 100-miles of greenways.
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IDEAS FOR ACTION (Continued)

D. Promote and incentivize the use of public transit and active transportation.

Examples include:

- Strengthen [Transportation Demand Management](#) (TDM) ordinance to shift commuters to more sustainable transportation modes and reduce congestion.
 - Grow [Open Streets](#) programming throughout the city.
 - Work with the business community to increase participation in [transit benefit programs](#) such as [Parking Cash-Out](#) and the [WeGo Ride](#) program.
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4: EXPAND ATTAINABLE HOUSING OPTIONS TO MATCH DEMAND AND ENSURE HOUSEHOLDS ARE NOT COST BURDENED.



For the past decade, housing demand has outpaced the supply. This lack of new housing is contributing to an affordability crisis - the median home price increased 62% in the past five years, and average rent increased 71% from 2020 to 2022 - creating an undo cost burden for 22% of homeowners and 52% of renters.¹⁰ Nashville is currently producing 25% of the projected affordable housing needed by 2030.¹¹ Regardless of age, income, or race/ethnicity, Nashvillians feel a variety of housing options and price points are needed throughout the city.

2035 Goal: Decrease the number of Nashville residents that are housing cost burdened.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- A. Identify under-represented housing types (rental, homeownership, gentle-density housing) and set clear neighborhood-by-neighborhood affordable and/or attainable housing targets. Housing options for older adults, individuals/families experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities should be considered.
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- B. Launch a citywide public campaign to educate employers, neighborhood groups and others on the importance of housing diversity throughout the city and build a broad network of champions to meet the broad spectrum of household incomes, ages, and needs.
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- C. Identify public and private property that can be utilized to increase housing stock.
Examples include:
- [Partner with institutions](#) (i.e., academic, health, and faith-based) to use land and other resources for affordable housing development.
 - Give WeGo additional authority to purchase and sell land to maximize affordable housing near and adjacent to transit.
 - Launch a public/private partnership whereby leading businesses, private philanthropy, and community partners pledge funding, land, or incentives to expand the city's attainable housing inventory.
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- D. Maximize all sources of revenue/funding for development of attainable housing.
Examples include:
- Explore additional housing finance options (i.e. [affordable housing bonds](#) from the city, special purpose finance products from financial institutions, and/or program-related investments from philanthropic organizations) to support developers in building more owner and renter housing options.
 - Maximize state and federal funding opportunities, such as [Transit-Oriented Development](#) grants.
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IDEAS FOR ACTION (Continued)

E. Streamline zoning, land use, and permitting process to incentivize and expedite development of [attainable](#) housing options.

Examples include:

- Improve online resources (map of parcels where ADUs are eligible) and facilitate permitting process for individuals seeking to build Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on their property.
 - Establish expectations for developers via [zoning incentives](#), [community benefits agreements](#), and Memorandum of Understanding to accelerate progress in closing housing affordability gaps in key neighborhoods.
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F. Expand homebuyer and rental assistance as well as home repair/modification and property tax relief programming to support people getting into housing and staying there.

5: MAKE SURE THE NECESSITIES OF A GOOD LIFE ARE AVAILABLE IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD.



As Nashville has grown, residents increasingly feel connected to their neighborhoods. Over half of survey respondents feel the number one priority for Nashville over the next decade should be cultivating the unique character of each neighborhood while also ensuring each neighborhood has all the key necessities and amenities residents need, including grocery stores, attainable housing, good schools, green spaces, and sidewalks. Critical to this is equipping neighborhoods with the resources and skills to identify and advocate for the needs of its residents.

2035 Goal: All neighborhoods are implementing neighborhood improvement plans that were co-created with residents.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- A. Work with neighborhood groups to develop robust neighborhood development plans based on the results of the Quality of Life/ Neighborhood Livability Index. Plans should take into account the unique personality and characteristics of each neighborhood and also clearly prioritize and address amenity gaps and community priorities.
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- B. Identify 4-5 neighborhoods to pilot “complete neighborhood” concepts, such as mixed-use transit centers, [co-locating early childhood and aging adult programs](#), and developing [neighborhood commercial corridors](#).
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- C. Create and promote clean, safe, “[third-places](#)” (fun places outside of school and home) for youth ages 12-18 that are accessible on evenings and weekends.
Examples include:
- Free and accessible soccer fields and basketball courts, especially pools, splash pads, etc.
 - “Up-size playgrounds” for middle school and high-school students, such as obstacle courses, climbing walls, splash pads.
 - Children’s parks similar to [Presidio Tunnel Tops](#) and [Tom Lee Park](#) in Memphis.
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- D. Encourage community-building efforts such as block parties, community gatherings, festivals, etc., by streamlining and simplifying the permitting process.
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- E. Identify and allocate funding for community and neighborhood groups to ensure more equitable resources are available to every neighborhood.
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IDEAS FOR ACTION (Continued)

F. Better equip neighborhood groups with the knowledge and resources they need to interface with Metro departments and private developers.

Examples include:

- Provide comprehensive, engaging [training](#) for neighborhood groups to effectively engage in neighborhood and city planning.
 - Develop and adopt a neighborhood ambassadors program to enhance education of the zoning, land use, and development processes.
 - Develop leadership & mentorship programs for leaders of neighborhood groups.
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G. Increase [neighborhood access](#) to additional funding and resources.

[Examples](#) include:

- Increasing [Community Development Corporations](#) (CDCs) and [Community Development Funding Institutions](#) (CDFIs)
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6: ENSURE THAT CONTINUED CITY GROWTH PRIORITIZES THE NEEDS OF NASHVILLIANS.



The majority of respondents believe the impact of unmanaged growth is making things worse and negatively impacting quality of life for Nashvillians. Seventy-two percent (72%) feel leaders have invested “too much money in the wrong things,” at the expense of residents, who increasingly feel they are being pushed out; only 29% of adults and 35% of youth feel the growth is making things better. However, 71% agree that growth in Nashville can improve quality of life and provide advantages IF it is more carefully managed.

Giving back and paying it forward are part of our shared values that has long helped define the culture of Nashville. At the same time, the demand for nonprofit services, like all others, is increasing in pace with our growing population. Yet our philanthropic giving per capita is not keeping pace with sister cities. To preserve our values and culture as well as increase our social service capacity, we must intentionally share them with corporations and individuals new to the area.

2035 Goal: Adults and youth feel growth in Nashville is responsive to residents and making quality of life better.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- A. Ensure the development code is appropriately requiring developers to contribute to a high-quality built environment and much needed infrastructure.

- B. Convene technical assistance panels on key aspects of the development code (e.g., parking requirements, sidewalk requirements, facade treatments, etc.) to build buy-in across sectors.

- C. Increase coordination of government services involved in large-scale development and/or capital project delivery in order to minimize negative impacts on residents.

- D. Regularly report and broadly communicate progress on each Imagination Nashville goal.

ENDNOTES

- 1:** ¹ “Nashville’s economy beat expectations in 2023. What will 2024 bring?” Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, 2024. <https://www.nashvillechamber.com/blog/nashvilles-economy-beat-expectations-in-2023-what-will-2024-bring/>
- ² U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S1901, Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-adjusted Dollars). <https://data.census.gov/table?q=income%20nashville%20tn>
- ³ Living Wage Calculation for Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin, TN, Living Wage Calculator, MIT, February 2024. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/34980>
- 2:** ⁴ Work-based Learning Framework, Jobs for the Future, 2018. <https://www.jff.org/idea/work-based-learning-framework/>
- ⁵ American Student Assistance, “High School Work-based Learning: Best Practices Designed to Improve Career Readiness Outcomes for Today’s Youth” (Boston: 2022), https://asa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ASA_WBLPlaybook_Final.pdf
- ⁶ “Spotlight on High School Internships.” American Student Assistance, 2020. <https://www.asa.org/research-study/spotlight-on-high-school-internships/>
- ⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Career and Technical Education: Perspectives on Program Strategies and Challenges” (Washington: 2022), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104544.pdf>
- 3:** ⁸ Durani, Anna. “The Hardest Commutes In The U.S., Ranked.” Edited by Samantha Allen. Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/home-improvement/moving-services/hardest-commutes-in-us/>
- ⁹ ThinkTN, Nashville’s Next Mayor Should Lead the Way on Transportation and Housing: <https://www.thinktennessee.org/research/housing/>
- 4:** ¹⁰ US Census, American Community Survey, 2022, https://dashboards.nashville.gov/t/Metro/views/AH-DashboardFinalDashboard_1?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y
- ¹¹ ThinkTN, Nashville’s Next Mayor Should Lead the Way on Transportation and Housing: <https://www.thinktennessee.org/research/housing/>