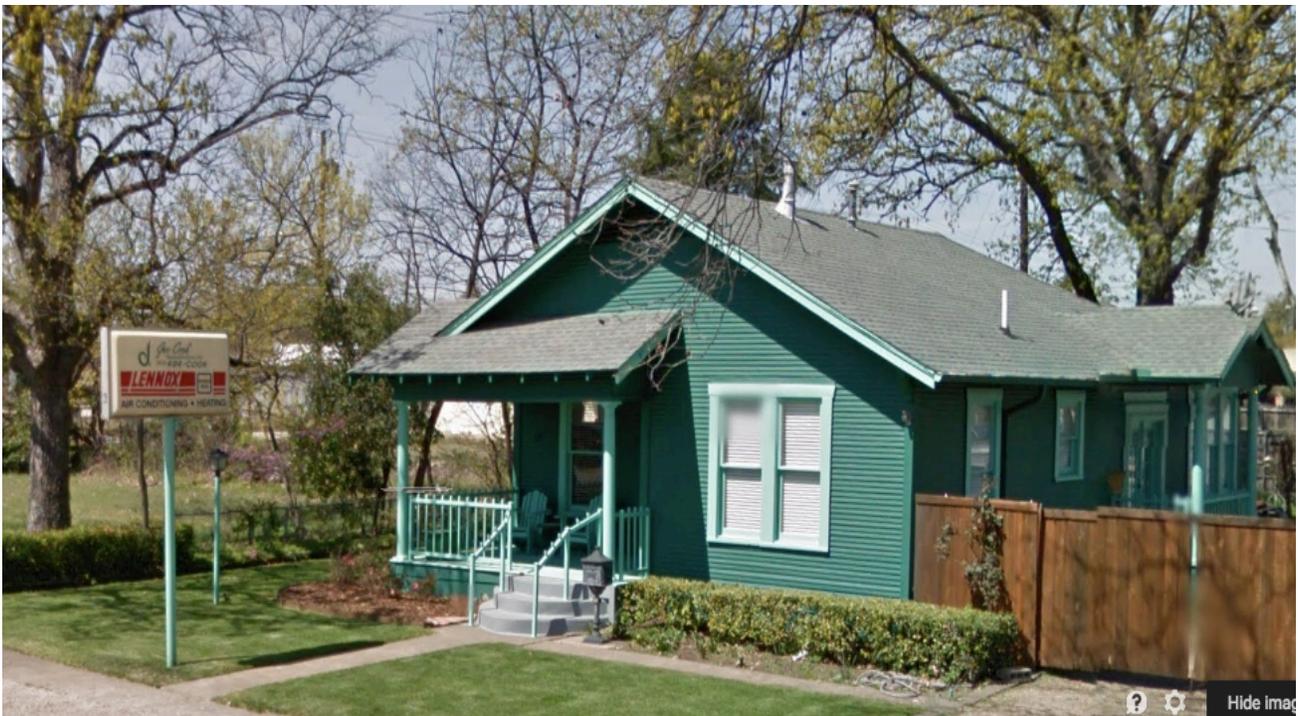


# Building Vibrant, Sustainable, Mixed-Use Neighborhoods-- What does it take?



*Joe Cook Heating and Air Conditioning – located on Avenue A, just off Main Street in the proposed Walkable Main Street neighborhood of Garland Texas*

## Overview – What does it take to build a vibrant sustainable, mixed-use neighborhood?

It takes imagination, hard work, a willingness to discard old molds and rules governing how things should look, and most of all it takes a willingness and dedication of the people who live in the neighborhood to embrace and participate in the change. It also takes the involvement of elected government officials who make rules and design the codes that govern and control how that neighborhood can develop.

A vibrant neighborhood is one that is interesting and one that attracts visitors and people who want to live there. A mixed-use neighborhood is one in which residents share their homes with nearby spaces where commercial businesses are located. A sustainable neighborhood is one in which the people who live, work and visit the area observe environmentally sustainable practices to keep the neighborhood safe and clean.

### 1. Map the borders of the particular neighborhood.

The first step to building a viable sustainable mixed-use neighborhood is to clearly define the borders of the neighborhood that you want to enhance.

To provide an example of a neighborhood transformation project, we are defining a particular neighborhood in Garland located just east of its downtown square. The borders of this neighborhood are as follows:

1. Railroad tracks mark the western border of this neighborhood.
2. First Street marks the eastern border of this neighborhood.
3. Austin Street marks the northern border of this neighborhood.
4. Avenue A marks the southern border of this neighborhood.
5. 0.30 miles of Main Street dissect this neighborhood from east to west. Think of this particular neighborhood as a village and this stretch of Main Street as one would think of any stretch of Main Street running through a small town or community.

## What is a neighborhood?

There are many ways a neighborhood can be defined. Usually it is defined as a geographically localized community within a larger city, town, suburb, or rural area. Neighborhoods come in all sizes from large to small and can be defined according to all types of criteria.

## Elements of the Bold Plan

- Add at least some information to make the plan real and within the realm of achievable to those reviewing the plan. These elements might be the cost of certain materials related to implementing your plan.
- Always present your plan as a document that you expect others to add to, modify and in general collaborate with you to mold into its completed form. Neighborhoods must be collaborative to function well. Besides, don't you like to have a part in planning your life?
- **Emphasize walkable.** If there are no sidewalks, or if they are in bad repair in the area, your plan should include suggestions for making walkable sustainable paths. Most often these days those paths are not asphalt or concrete but rather more sustainable materials such as crushed granite.
- **Emphasize connected.** The sustainable neighborhood is a neighborhood that is connected in many ways.

First of all, of course physically with its various paths and roadways, but it is also connected in the shared interests of those who live and work in the neighborhood.

In the example we are building with the project, *Walkable Main*, the businesses share marketing of each other's products and services.

Our model is also connected to the larger community outside the neighborhood through makerspaces in several of the existing businesses. Makerspaces make it possible for people to come and learn new job skills

## 2. Look at the Neighborhood As It Is

Walk through the neighborhood you have designated and record as much information as possible for every single business unit and residence located in the area in addition to information about the people who live and work in this area. Talk to them. Who are they? What do they want? What are their hopes and dreams? Record all the positive and negative aspects of each building in the area (residences and commercial). Observe the physical connectivity of the streets to the various units. Observe how easy it is to walk through this area. Think about what changes might be implemented to improve walkability. A sustainable neighborhood is one in which the people who live and work there also walk around their neighborhood.

Be sure to identify the things that do seem to be working along with those that appear not to be working so well. Aim for a balanced picture of the neighborhood, as it exists. Few places are all bad or all good.

## 3. Identify the heart of the area and begin by creating a bold plan for that area.

Initially free your mind from thinking in terms of strategies and tactical manipulations and *what ifs* and the codes and the political implications, and other limitations before you even start.

Just look at this area as it is and dream how it might look if it better served the people who live and work in this area. Plans that are built from the heart inspire others to want to be part of the vision and make it happen. Inspired plans follow the same nature of optimism expressed by JFK when he proposed and projected the vision that we could land a man on the moon and return him to earth. It is with our words that we prophesize our own future so let's choose them well.

*Note: Walkable Main (the goal of which is to create collection of malleable suggestions for building vibrant, sustainable mixed used neighborhoods) has begun with a walk-through of the 0.30-mile of Main Street that dissects this area. The results of this walk-through have yielded a list of the 27 businesses located on this stretch of Main Street.*

*In another phase of the study we will look at all the businesses and churches within the neighborhood that are located off Main.*

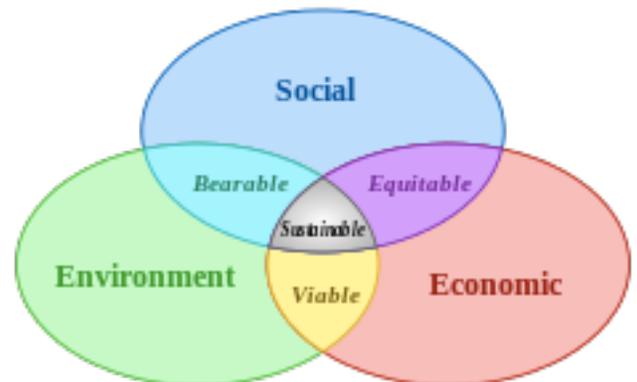
## TERMS

“**Walkable**” is one of these new additions to the vocabulary. Walkable is a measurement of the ability for a person to walk in an area or neighborhood. Walkable is an increasing demand cropping up for all neighborhoods in the USA.

“**Mixed Use**” is another term that goes hand in hand with walkable. More and more people want to be able to walk to a nearby restaurant or a nearby cleaners or neighborhood grocery. We can expect to see more of these cropping up even in existing suburbs.

“**Maker Spaces**” are cropping up in mixed-use neighborhoods. Maker Spaces are one more way to connect a commercial or industrial shop with its nearby neighborhood and also with the community at large. Maker Spaces are areas within an existing business where people can come and use special equipment they might not otherwise have access to for making things.

There are mutual benefits for the owners as well as the people who use the equipment. All types of scenarios can be developed for a Maker Space. For example, someone who is experienced in using the equipment can create an object using the equipment. In return, they can perhaps do work for the owner. Other scenarios might involve makerspaces that give lessons to others in how to use the equipment. Perhaps the owners charge a fee for these classes, etc. Of course, the shop owner is the one who writes the rules defining the maker space in their shop.



SOURCE FOR DIAGRAM: WIKI COMMONS

### “Sustainable”

Sustainability is founded on three pillars of economic,

## 4. Make your plans public.

Get people talking and excited about the possibilities. Human beings are social creatures and most of us love to create things together. An important key to achieving these social acts of creativity is to rebrand the neighborhood with an attention-getting name that also highlights one of the key features of the area. For this project, we have chosen the name “Walkable Main.”

## CONCLUSION

### **Sustainable Mixed Use Neighborhoods are beginning to get serious traction.**

Sustainable mixed-use neighborhoods are the way neighborhoods were designed before World War II. After World War II, Americans stopped walking and began driving automobiles. Our neighborhoods changed and with this change, our zoning laws and codes. We became separated from the place where we work.

Today many of us get in our cars and drive miles to get to work, returning home at night to our isolated fortresses in the suburbs. Many of us don't even know or speak to our neighbors, the people who live right next door to us. We are isolated in our own neighborhoods.

But things are changing. Part of this change is coming on the wings of the aging Baby Boomer generation. Always an adventuresome generation willing to try new things, many Boomers are now exploring new ways of living and new requirements are cropping up in the literature defining residential areas and neighborhoods.

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## After people, the heart of all sustainable neighborhoods is the garden and urban agriculture

*And that is where Loving Garland Green fits into the picture of promoting mixed-use sustainable neighborhoods!*

We would like to see every home in Garland growing at least some of the food their household consumes. We would like to see an uptick in the movement of our local economy toward that of a plant-based economy.

social and environmental. These three pillars are often expressed as nested circles. Both economy and society are and should be constrained by environmental limits.

Ideally, sustainability will improve the quality of life while at the same time supporting eco-systems.

Sustainable is founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace.

There are various metrics and methods to measure and evaluate the sustainability of systems—both man-made mechanical systems as well as natural eco-systems. Thus, appropriate measurements can be applied to evaluate the conditions of any neighborhood and determine its level of sustainability.

# NOTES