

OneSTL Pilot Study

Bellefontaine Neighbors, MO

June 3-6, 2013

To: Mark Tranel, City Collector
Aaron Young, AICP, East-West Gateway Council of Governments

From: Timothy Breihan, A.AIA, H3 Studio

Date: Wednesday, June 10, 2013

Re: Pilot Study Code Analysis Summary of Findings of Suggested Next Steps (“Actions”)

STUDY OVERVIEW

The Pilot Study Process is a component of East-West Gateway Council of Governments’ OneSTL Plan (formerly the “Regional Plan for Sustainable Development.”) The Pilot Studies are intended to develop and test recommendations for local communities and governments to facilitate sustainable development within their communities. The Pilot Studies focus on an analysis of zoning codes, subdivision codes, and comprehensive plans to identify existing barriers and gaps to achieving sustainable development goals. Sustainable development codes are identified and prioritized by city staff, elected officials, and residents within each Pilot Study community. The Pilot Study process focuses on an analysis of zoning and subdivision codes in order to clarify or remove regulation that prevents or inhibits communities from addressing their identified goals. Recommendations for code amendments are intended to ensure that, in the future, the community’s identified goals can be addressed by right instead of by variance or special permit.

This Pilot Study was conducted in the City of Bellefontaine Neighbors, MO June 3 to June 6, 2013. The Pilot Study began with a presentation and facilitated open forum for elected officials and city staff on the evening of June 3. This presentation and open forum was attended by eleven (11) local staff and officials. Initial feedback at the meeting demonstrated: 1) a sense of pride and stakeholderhood in the Bellefontaine Neighbors Community; 2) concerns about the declining home values and an increasing number of houses being bought by landlords for rental use; and 3) general concerns about the school district (Riverview Gardens) and the overall regional perception of Bellefontaine Neighbors and North County as a whole. H3 Studio presented a summary of feedback developed through the Community Planning Area (CPA) public engagement, in which Bellefontaine Neighbors-area residents defined a sustainable community as meeting the following the criteria:

- **A community with housing, employment, shopping, and recreation options to meet the needs of a diverse population.**
- **A community free from crime, flooded streets, air pollution, and unclean water.**

- **A community that has transportation options and is connected both locally and to the region.**
- **A community that can withstand economic turns and maintain what residents value.**
- **A community where everyone accepts responsibility for improving or maintaining the quality of the area.**
- **A community committed to cooperation, communication, and engagement.**

Following the presentation, attendees participated in a facilitated open forum in which they presented ideas and concerns regarding issues that the City of Bellefontaine Neighbors is currently facing. Key issues raised include: increasing commercial development, particularly retail stores and restaurants; strengthening existing neighborhoods; enhancing the diversity of housing and community amenities; enforcing and resolving code violations; and successfully marketing the City of Bellefontaine Neighbors to developers, businesses, and residents. This feedback was then ranked by attendees in a keypad-polling exercise in order to identify and prioritize the sustainability topics by which the code analysis would be performed.

IDENTIFIED SUSTAINABILITY TOPICS

Based upon the keypad polling of attendees, the following five (5) sustainability topics were identified:

- 1. Locally-Supportive Commercial & Retail Development**
- 2. Strong Neighborhoods & Quality Housing**
- 3. Safe, Walkable & Bikeable Streets**
- 4. Community Image & Perception**
- 5. Community Cooperation & Governmental Efficiency**

KEY ISSUES

The Pilot Study identified three (3) key issues facing the City of Bellefontaine Neighbors. These issues will likely inhibit the ability of city staff, government officials, citizens, and investors from achieving the sustainability goals listed above.

- 1. Bellefontaine Neighbors lacks key commercial and retail development.** Historically, Bellefontaine Neighbors developed as a residential community, and in some cases took steps to discourage commercial and retail development. As North County has evolved and

population demographics have changed, the City and its residents now recognize the benefit of commercial and retail development, including community service businesses (dry cleaners, hairdressers, professional services, etc.) and restaurants.

2. The City's housing stock is aging and does not meet current market needs.

Bellefontaine Neighbors contains primarily two-bedroom homes on fairly large lots. In today's housing market, this housing stock is generally considered to be starter homes and does not meet the needs of family with kids. Conversely, many of these homes (and their lots) are too large for elderly residents to continue to maintain. This lack of marketability has resulted in declining home values and an increasing turn-over to renter-occupied homes.

3. North County is generally perceived within the region as unsafe. Bellefontaine Neighbors suffers from negative perceptions of safety that plague North County. These perceptions are reinforced by uneven enforcement and resolution of building code violations, public safety violations, and nuisance behaviors. The City's code of ordinances can be improved to give Bellefontaine Neighbors greater authority to combat these detrimental trends.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The following recommended actions are options that the community can consider to address the issues identified in the Pilot Study process. These actions are not requirements and it is completely up to the City of Bellefontaine Neighbors to determine the viability of each recommendation.

1. Locally-Supportive Commercial & Retail Development. The City of Bellefontaine Neighbors would like to attract new commercial and retail development, including a supermarket and big-box retail, community services, and restaurants. This development should be focused on existing commercial areas and large tracts along the Highway 367 corridor.

- Though economic development goals have historically focused on residential development, Bellefontaine Neighbors should also develop a strategy for attracting or growing commercial and/or industrial businesses. This strategy can be developed as part of the future Comprehensive Plan Update. Having good paying jobs located within the community will support further housing development and retail growth; therefore, it is critical that the comprehensive plan is updated and includes a detailed economic development element.
- Since Bellefontaine Neighbors is a B Community ("pool community"), it should consider developing a regional retail development strategy with neighboring communities since all communities would benefit from improved retail amenities and increased sales tax revenues. This regional strategy could also address the redevelopment of existing

commercial retail sites in disrepair such as Riverview Plaza at Riverview Drive and Bellefontaine Road.

- A regional retail strategy should include a survey of all local businesses to determine their needs and potential gaps in goods and services provided. Form partnerships and leverage the resources at the Greater North County Chamber of Commerce and North County Inc. Regional Development Association, where possible.
- Conduct a retail survey and analysis through the future Comprehensive Plan Update to determine gaps in the goods and services available in Bellefontaine Neighbors and surrounding communities and use this analysis to: 1) retain and support existing businesses and 2) target and attract new businesses. This analysis can also be used to identify revenue leakage as a result of Bellefontaine Neighbors residents shopping in point-of-sale communities versus pool communities.
- Increasing economic activity along Highway 367 should be a major objective of the future Comprehensive Plan Updates. The vast majority of the vacant and underutilized land in the City lies along this corridor, and the City is in need of retail and restaurants to support the local community. As the population of the City continues to age and mobility of the residents diminishes, it is critical to have nearby and accessible retail amenities.
- Liquor licenses and proximity to schools and churches (Municipal Code, Sec. 3-29): this section specifies that liquor licenses shall not be issued to restaurants or bars that are within 300 feet of a school or church. With the promulgation of churches in commercial zoning districts, this limits the development of new restaurants. The code should be revised so that the minimum distance is 100 feet, which is the minimum specified in the Missouri Revised Statutes, Sec. 311.080.1. Furthermore, the code should state that this limitation may be waived at the discretion of the Board of Alderman, as specified in the Missouri Revised Statutes, Sec. 311.080.2.
- Utilize the Comprehensive Plan Update and/or Board of Alderman to re-zone transitioning areas to facilitate ongoing and future redevelopment and reinvestment. This should only be pursued in areas where current zoning restricts or inhibits transitioning uses and redevelopment.
- Consider using Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Community Improvement District (CID), Transit Development District (TDD), and 353 tax abatement to concentrate, incentivize, and catalyze future development (as recommended in the Comprehensive Plan). If Bellefontaine Neighbors pursues a TIF district, it is important to note that since the city is a B Community; all generated sales taxes in the district would go towards the sales tax pool after the TIF expires. Therefore, it is crucial that any future development includes residential to ensure that future property taxes will benefit Bellefontaine Neighbors and to increase the overall tax pool allocation with increased population. There may be an opportunity for higher-density, mixed-use development, especially in the Highway 367 and Interstate 270

corridors given the access they provide to job/commercial centers, transportation hubs, and recreational amenities throughout the region.

2. Strong Neighborhoods & Quality Housing. The City of Bellefontaine Neighbors is known as a premier residential community in St. Louis County. The City would like to continue to support its neighborhoods by enhancing safety, increasing the quality and diversity of housing, and resolving outstanding code violations.

- As part of the future Comprehensive Plan Update, develop strategies for attracting younger households. As the community continues to age, it will be dependent on new households to purchase and maintain the housing stock. Any broader strategy should address the issues and needs with the local school district to ensure that it is on a path to accreditation
- Given the access Interstate 270 provides to major employers including Boeing, Express Scripts, and Lambert International Airport, Bellefontaine Neighbors could pursue the development of higher-quality housing and target market these housing products to employees that work in and around the airport.
- Schools, parks, playgrounds, etc. (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-96): this section does not speak to the location or quality of open space and public space in a development. It is recommended that the language should be modified to require or at a minimum, encourage, the positioning of open space to front on public streets wherever possible and the orientation of homes toward the open space. These two parameters would improve safety for the open space by making it less isolated and more visible to passers-by.
- Area Not Included within a Zone (Sec. 29-18): currently states that areas not within a zoning designation are automatically R-1. A revised regulation should state that an area not included within a district should be R-3 instead of R-1 to increase inherent density of land to be developed.
- Required Off-Street Parking Spaces (Sec.29-88): requires that multi-family developments provide off-street parking at a rate of 2.5 spaces per dwelling unit, while single-family developments only require 1 space per dwelling unit. To decrease the parking burden on higher-density developments and to encourage transit usage, multi-family dwellings should have a parking rate of 1 to 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit.
- Increase requirements for providing trees in new subdivisions (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-97): this section states that subdividers shall provide a minimum of one tree per lot, regardless of lot size. The code should be revised to require a minimum of one tree per 3,500 square feet of lot area. In addition, the code should be revised to state that, when sidewalks are required, street trees must be provided in addition to trees required by lot area requirements. Street trees should be a minimum of six feet tall at time of planting and located a minimum of 50-feet apart, measured on center.

- Consider a rental property inspection program as an addition to the existing municipal code (Zoning Code, Article XX; Property Maintenance Code, Sec. 112.) The program can require that all properties be inspected prior to move in by new tenants. Also consider a licensing and/or registration program for landlords who lease properties in the city to ensure proper upkeep of rental properties. For example, some rental enforcement programs require that if a property is not properly maintained, the landlord’s license is suspended or revoked until the violations are addressed.
- Consider developing a crime-free housing ordinance. This ordinance should provide the Bellefontaine Neighbors with greater recourse and resources to address issues related to unsafe and/or nuisance rental properties, absentee landlords, and rental property tenants who are engaged in illegal activities and behaviors. Examples of strategies include requiring absentee landlords to employ a local property manager and point-of-contact and a “three strikes” policy for offenders. This ordinance should also strengthen enforcement of building codes through the occupancy permitting process.
- Establish requirements dictating the procedure for purchasing a house to ensure all items are recorded properly (Zoning Code, Article XX; Property Maintenance Code, Sec. 112.) Require that applicants for occupancy permits provide proof that property ownership has been correctly recorded with the St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds.

3. Safe, Walkable & Bikeable Streets. The City of Bellefontaine Neighbors would like to increase connectivity, access, and safety throughout the community for all age groups and all modes of transportation—vehicles, transit riders, pedestrians, and bikes.

- Traffic Barriers or Obstructions Prohibited (Subdivision Code, Sec. 23-18): this section should be revised to allow for the installation of traffic calming treatments with the intention of managing traffic flows and speeds on City streets. As currently written, barriers or impediments to traffic flows are prohibited.
- Streets and Alleys Arrangement (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-83): while this section states that new streets shall provide for the continuation of existing streets in adjoining areas, it should be taken one step further. This section should specify a maximum length between street stubs along subdivision edges that will be connected to streets in future adjacent subdivisions. A maximum length of 600’ to 1,500’ has been used in other municipalities to ensure adequate connections between neighboring subdivisions.
- Cul-de-Sacs (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-85): discourage cul-de-sacs and dead ends wherever possible. The subdivision code should include a statement that limits cul-de-sacs except in cases where the streets are designed to connect with future streets on abutting land. Limiting cul-de-sacs and dead ends makes neighborhoods easier to navigate and increases connectivity.

- Street Lighting (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-87(b)): improve lighting standards to an average horizontal foot-candle value of five-tenths on traffic-used pavements between curb lines regardless to traffic volume. Improved lighting will help encourage pedestrian travel even after dark because it increases the sense of safety for the pedestrian.
- Street Surfacing (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-89): add width maximums, 30' for minor streets, and 36' for collectors. While the minimum street widths are appropriate, a maximum value should be added to force developers to create more compact neighborhood designs.
- Increase minimum sidewalks widths (Subdivision Code, Sec. 24-90): while the code requires sidewalks on both sides of the street, the minimum sidewalk width is set at four (4) feet. The minimum width should be increased to five (5) feet in order to enhance pedestrian comfort and accessibility. Sidewalks should be required on both sides of the street, regardless of density, to help increase connectivity for pedestrians and to encourage more pedestrian activity.
- Parking Driveway Width (Zoning Code, Sec. 29-88(d)(3)): gives a maximum width of driveways at the curb line at 50'. An updated regulation should reduce the driveway width at curb line to 35' to reduce the distance a pedestrian must cross vehicle traffic.
- Intersections (Subdivision Code, Article V): this section does not address design standards for intersections. The code should specific a minimum turning radius of 15 feet and a maximum turning radius of 20 feet to encourage slower turning speeds. The ordinance should include a statement that requires bump-outs at intersections where the roadway has a dedicated parking lane and where the roadway width exceeds the minimum standard. Bump-outs reduce crossing distances and increase pedestrian safety by making them more visible to motorists.
- Amend the Subdivision Code to implement a connectivity index. This index is a simple calculation of the number of links (roadway segments between nodes) divided by the number of nodes (intersections, cul-de-sacs or sharp turns in streets). The purpose of this index is to designate more walkable environments that would make trips within and between subdivisions more direct, thereby reducing vehicle-miles of travel. A minimum acceptable connectivity index score of 1.6 should be established, which represents a fairly well-connected subdivision.
- Amend the Subdivision Code to increase pedestrian connections: the subdivision code does not currently speak to the creation of pedestrian connections between blocks or dead end streets, which would create more walkable neighborhoods. Case studies have suggested that dead-end streets or cul-de-sacs longer than 400 feet should include a pedestrian walkway at the end and any block longer than 400' should include a pedestrian walkway that cuts through the block near its midpoint.

- The City should consider creating and adopting a Complete Streets policy that ensures that streets are designed for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities.
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4. Community Image & Perception. The City of Bellefontaine Neighbors would like to enhance its image and the perception of North County as a whole and market itself as a premier residential destination.

- In addition to a coordinated economic development strategy (above), surrounding communities need to develop a beautification and place-based investment strategy to improve the overall image of the region.
- Enhanced marketing and attraction efforts needed to target younger families/households. These efforts should demonstrate the high quality of life and affordability in Bellefontaine Neighbors in addition to the city's efficient access to major job and retail centers, transportation hubs, and recreational amenities throughout the region.
- Invest in multi-use trails. The City has a plan from Trailnet that lays out recommendations for a connected trail system within the City and makes connections to nearby planned projects. Linking the south part of the City to the North Riverfront Trail should be the first priority and further linkages to the west via the Maline Greenway connecting with UMSL and Lambert Airport should ultimately be pursued. Enhanced bike and pedestrian facilities are needed along Bellefontaine Rd., especially between St. Cyr Rd. and Chambers Rd.
- Perform a transportation facilities assessment and a parks and recreation master plan: these actions show that the City has reached out to the community and has a structured plan in place to improve transportation and park facilities. When applying for funding from county, state or federal sources, these plans demonstrate a commitment to the project and increase the likelihood of receiving grants.
- Establish a no loitering ordinance and associated penalties to improve actual and perceived safety in the City of Bellefontaine Neighbors.
- Create strong transit linkages to Downtown St. Louis and Boeing/Lambert Airport: commute trips between the City and these areas are sizable, so strong transit connections are vital to increasing multi-modal transportation usage. There is already a good connection to Downtown on the 36X bus line. Similar services should be considered to Boeing and Lambert Airport. Currently there is not a direct transit connection between Bellefontaine Neighbors and these major employers – at least one bus transfer or a transfer to MetroLink is required.
- Utilize the future Comprehensive Plan Update to develop a Social Media and Public Outreach Plan to make public information and public officials more accessible to citizens

through designated outreach events and mediums and to market Bellefontaine Neighbors' attributes throughout the St. Louis Region.

- Utilize the future Comprehensive Plan Update to establish a media representative to interface with local news media regarding both positive and negative news and media coverage. This representative can be a city staff member, elected official, or designed city resident.
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5. Community Cooperation & Governmental Efficiency. The City of Bellefontaine Neighbors would like to enhance cooperation with surrounding communities and the region as a whole to decrease the cost and improve the quality of government services.

- Increase minimum and maximum penalties for code violations (Municipal Code and Property Maintenance Code) to increase efficiency in resolving non-compliance. For second violations, double the penalty amounts from first violations. Moreover, include a provision that states court continuations are absolutely prohibited for violations beyond the first violation.
- Actively engage the community as part of the future Comprehensive Plan Update process. The comprehensive plan should consider collaborative elements with the surrounding communities; therefore, public meetings should be open to all residents in the region. Utilize social media to reach a broader audience. If planned properly, growth should be seen as a way to enhance the current way of life in Bellefontaine Neighbors as opposed to changing or replacing it.
- Conduct an outreach campaign to all schools, churches, chambers of commerce, and other community groups to build motivation and enthusiasm for more community involvement in various initiatives in the city and region.
- Pursue cooperative purchasing agreements with neighboring communities and municipalities. These agreements can be restricted to specific items or bids (road repair, road salt, etc.) and can help small communities negotiate lower prices on subcontracted and purchased products and services.
- Work with St. Louis County to implement a comprehensive GIS system to facilitate effective management of municipal and regional assets in cooperation with neighboring communities.

TIMEFRAME FOR ACCOMPLISHING ACTIONS

The City's first step in making regulatory changes is to determine which recommended actions the City would like to pursue and whether to process the code revisions individually or simultaneously. These two approaches serve different priorities. Because many of the code changes identified in the workshop will require discrete changes to the current zoning regulations rather than a rewrite of the entire code, they could be drafted and reviewed simultaneously depending upon the availability of staff. This allows a concentrated focus on the current code with minimal redundant research for editing purposes. However, the city anticipates that some type of educational process might be helpful with long-term implementation. In that case it may be beneficial to take the code edits forward individually and spend the necessary time helping the community understand the importance of each change. Individual edits could be organized to move into public discussion and adoption as fast as the City deems appropriate. This might range from one revision per month in a rolling process where review may overlap depending on the length of public conversation, to one proposed edit every two to three months following the adoption of each previous section.

As a grouped set of edits, the city could likely have code amendments for **Locally-Supportive Commercial & Retail Development; Strong Neighborhoods & Quality Housing;** and **Safe, Walkable & Bikeable Streets** drafted in a nine (9) to twelve (12) month timeframe for review and discussion by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Issues related to a Complete Streets ordinance or policy and zoning district changes will be perceived as the biggest change in the community and will likely require the most public review and comment. It may take eighteen (18) to twenty-four (24) months to prepare, review, and adopt these zoning code amendments.

The broader recommendations for **Locally-Supportive Commercial & Retail Development; Community Image & Perception;** and **Community Cooperation & Governmental Efficiency** generally involve strategic planning initiatives that require a broad-based, public outreach and planning process. These items would be best served by being included in the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update process.

IMPLEMENTATION COORDINATION

One approach that the City could employ to more effectively coordinate input from these groups in the creation of a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for proposed code revisions and amendments. The TAC would meet to work with City staff to review preliminary drafts of the updated regulations and comment on how they will work in practice and how they may be received by the community. Additionally, TAC members may be able to provide the City with access to resources from their areas of expertise, such as economic development, street improvements, and community development. Based on TAC feedback, the city would edit the code revisions and amendments before submitting them to the Planning Commission for public review. Ideally, the TAC should remain in place for ongoing engagement and review for the duration of the code revision process.