

THE CENTER FOR GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS

**Strategic Plan
2025-2027**

Introduction

The Center for Great Neighborhoods (CGN) has been providing community development support in the city of Covington for nearly 50 years while ensuring the voice of the community is shaping the future of our neighborhoods.

CGN builds capacity and trains community leaders to be able to accomplish everything from arts and creative placemaking projects, to public space improvements, to housing and small business development, by providing expertise, resources, contacts, and support.

CGN hosts community programs and activities, provides support to neighboring organizations and community leaders, and manages real estate projects and a portfolio that provides housing, entrepreneurship support, and creative outlets in Covington.

"CGN is a trusted partner to residents."

CGN is a trusted partner to residents and neighborhood organizations and viewed as an objective stakeholder in community change. Going forward, we want to continue to build the trust that is placed in us by being judicious with our projects and keeping resident driven goals at the forefront of our work. This role is a huge asset and a testament to who we are. It can also be a challenge when we are met with the expectation to step into every issue or situation. Even though that isn't always possible, it's an honor to hold that trust and means it is critical that we choose wisely how to use our resources.

That's why we are looking to the future. We are reimagining our work and role in the community. This strategic plan is intended to help position us for the future and clearly communicate to the community, stakeholders, and supporters on how we plan to do that in the next 3 years. This community, like all communities, is ever-changing and so are we. We intend to use this plan as a guide for our work but will remain nimble enough to be responsive to the community as needs arise. *With the support of our community, partners, board, and staff, we're looking forward to another 50 years of building great neighborhoods.*

Purpose and Process

This strategic plan is designed to establish an agenda that will clearly communicate the organization's focus for the next three years. To accomplish this, CGN wanted first to hear from our partners and stakeholders. In 2024, we conducted listening sessions with 70 residents (May 30th and June 10th) and 25 stakeholders (June 26th) to get input on our strengths and weaknesses. We asked about major accomplishments and challenges. We also wanted to hear from the community what they are hopeful about for Covington in the next three years and what the goals and objectives of our stakeholders are. With this feedback - and an assessment of the activities of the past three years - the Board, Executive Director, and staff gave themselves the time to collaborate on the following strategic plan.

Community Listening Session Comments:

"You are the trusted voice of residents and neighborhoods"

"The Center is a way for the community to band together and advocate for neighborhoods"

"The Center is a place of opportunity"

"The Center understands the value of a positively engaged community"

MISSION AND VISION

With all of the input we received it is clear that our mission statement still resonates: The Center for Great Neighborhoods works with residents to improve their lives as they improve their communities.

The Center for Great Neighborhoods works with residents (including young people), organizations, and stakeholders in Covington, Kentucky to create positive change and platforms that allow everyone in the community to work collaboratively on the future Covington they want to live in.

CGN does this by supporting innovative community initiatives, creative placemaking, housing, economic development, and leadership development. We train and work with community leaders to create programs, events, and initiatives that build community. We incubate these efforts and support the community by managing, funding, and sometimes "owning" these efforts.

We support community needs as they emerge; arts and cultural programming, housing development, small business development, and youth and family support. We are in constant conversation with the City and our neighborhoods on the best ways to address the needs and passions of our residents, all in service to a better, more vibrant Covington.

MISSION

The Center for Great Neighborhoods works with residents to improve their lives as they improve their communities.



ARTS, CULTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

We put a lot of emphasis on using arts and culture to successfully engage residents. Our creative placemaking work brings together artists with community members to break down barriers and elevate the diversity of voices reflected in the community.

The renovation of the Hellmann Creative Center created a home base for artists, doers, and makers that demonstrates the community's commitment to the arts as a way to connect with one another. We support small businesses and introduce the whole community to the contributions and cultures of our residents.

HOUSING AND REAL ESTATE:

CGN develops and renovates housing, partners with the City and other stakeholders to improve property conditions, supports housing markets that directly improve neighborhoods, and the quality of housing people live in. Our housing work runs the spectrum and includes single-family and multi-family, rentals and homes sold to homeowners.

A majority of our housing work is in service to low- or moderate- income residents but we also do projects at market rates. The one constant goal is taking vacant, blighted, or underutilized buildings and spaces and turning them into productive and quality housing or commercial spaces that contribute to the community.

RESIDENT LED INITIATIVES AND LEADERSHIP SUPPORT:

CGN does all this work with residents at the head of the table. We understand that the most important part of our mission is to support resident-led initiatives, and make sure the people who live in Covington get the support they need to create the change they want in their community.

CGN has trained hundreds of community leaders over the past 48 years, who today are leading efforts all over the city to make Covington a vibrant community. Positive civic engagement is the best way to ensure that Covington is an equitable, welcoming community that truly supports everyone, and this happens best when everyone is given the tools necessary to participate.

Stakeholder Insights

In three community and stakeholder input sessions where almost 100 people shared their thoughts, people were supportive of CGN and feel committed and invested in our long-term success. Residents and partners want CGN to be successful – they need us. They see CGN as a critical partner in community engagement and planning, and in working with the City to bring a resident voice to planning community improvements.

Jack of All Trades

Partners and residents see CGN as a “jack of all trades”. When someone has an idea, or a problem, or something needs to be done we are often seen as the “go to” partner in a wide range of activities and issues. In part, this is because we have stepped up in all kinds of ways in the past. We currently own the Farmer’s Market, the Covington Sparks program, arts initiatives, free tax preparation services, Covington Leads, Keep Covington Beautiful, the Hellmann Creative Center and its related activities, and support resident-led groups and their initiatives. One of the important objectives of this strategic plan is to better communicate our mission and what kinds of activities align with that mission, and which don’t.

“Residents and stakeholders see CGN as a convener and a leader in finding opportunities to have cross cultural experiences and help diverse groups connect with each other and engage in productive conversations that benefit the community as a whole.”

Two Big Issues

Residents, the City, and other partners currently see two big issues facing the community. The first is a need to make sure housing in the community is adequate for existing residents and attractive to new residents. This is a complex issue, and stakeholders are looking to us to be part of the solution. The second issue is improving educational and enrichment opportunities for youth. Our role in this issue is less clear to people, but they see CGN as an important part of the conversation. It’s our job to figure out ways to play a role that is within our mission and programmatic capacity.

Covington has been changing over the past decade. Mostly people feel that the community is more vibrant and are positive about the changes they see. As Covington grows and attracts new investments, housing, and commercial development, there are also growing pains. People are worried about the rising cost of housing and residents worry about being priced out of their own neighborhoods. There is also a growing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity that can bring cultural collisions. There is a general acknowledgement that change is good, but it can bring fear from long term residents that their history and the community they know will be erased, and a fear from new residents over whether they’ll be accepted and acknowledged by their neighbors. Residents and stakeholders see CGN as a convener and a leader in finding opportunities to have cross cultural experiences and help diverse groups connect with each other and engage in productive conversations that benefit the community as a whole.

A Trusted Voice

The Center for Great Neighborhoods is a trusted voice of residents and neighborhoods; people see this as an important role CGN plays and understand that moving forward it's a critical role and a critical piece of our mission. The City sees this in terms of help and support vetting or refining opportunities. Neighbors feel it's important to represent their views and concerns on a whole host of topics. The leadership development and the asset-based lens CGN brings to all we do is part of what makes us so impactful in this role. While residents don't always use these terms, they see and value the support and the approach.

Partners understand the value of a positively engaged community. Public spaces, in person and on social media, can become confrontational and negative. Residents express dismay over this state of affairs. It makes them less likely to engage and less satisfied when they do. Preserving opportunities for engagement, positive social interactions, working together to combat negative forces, and finding opportunities to collaborate on collective community improvement projects are critical roles for CGN to play.

"Community members appreciate the opportunity to connect with people in a positive environment and look to CGN to provide and protect those places."

The City also expressed interest in working with CGN on several issues: redevelopment, Eastern Neighborhoods initiatives, placemaking, and responding to other community issues as they arise.

This feedback has been very valuable to the Board and staff as they think about their priorities moving forward. CGN serves this community and understanding where their stakeholders are is an important part of making appropriate choices.



The Center for Great Neighborhoods Strategic Plan 2025-2027

In 2025 through 2027 - CGN plans to focus on three priority areas:

Programming & Placemaking



- Maintain and strengthen the following programs:
 - Covington Farmers' Market
 - Arts and culture initiatives
 - Covington Leads
 - Keep Covington Beautiful
 - Covington Sparks (youth/family enrichment)
 - Free Tax Prep
 - Support for resident-led groups including providing fiscal agency
 - Continue strategic focus on Eastern Neighborhoods, and the Our Town project with the old St. Elizabeth hospital
- Conduct analysis of current programs to determine operational sustainability, criteria for success, and detailed future plans
- Establish criteria for new program development
- Support community conversations around creation and growth of sustainability and climate resiliency initiatives

Real Estate & Housing Development



- Develop detailed plans for existing underutilized assets and maintenance strategy for all assets
- Continue efforts to support small business development
- Identify opportunities to support existing low-income homeowners to improve their properties
- Engage with City of Covington to support local housing strategy
- Develop criteria and strategy for new projects / assets
- Continue to grow capacity through board members, partnerships, and staff development

Organizational Sustainability



- Develop 3 year expense projections that plan for increasing costs:
 - Increasing staff by one position
 - Giving appropriate pay increase
 - Incorporating property inventory improvement program
- Develop 3 year revenue projections with identified goals and strategies to increase revenue
 - Programmatic income
 - Rental property income
 - Sponsorships and Individual Giving
- Develop communication strategy to clearly articulate the mission and programs of CGN, and our community impact