



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This

space will expand as you type in your comments.)

Nashville, Tennessee, is booming, and has become known as the “it city,” but the secret is that that only those who can afford the rising housing costs are benefiting from the prosperity. This series of columns and editorials is about keeping city leaders – especially its mayor – focused on the needs of all residents. The selection includes portions of the yearlong “Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville” series that focused on the growing affordable housing crisis, but also includes pieces that called on former Mayor Megan Barry to resign due to a sex and corruption scandal and called on new Mayor David Briley to stay hyper-focused on the wealth gap and the inclusive prosperity issue. Barry had campaigned on a platform to fix affordable housing, but her follies imperiled her agenda and dashed the hopes and dreams of hundreds of thousands of struggling people in Nashville. That has made the role of The Tennessean even more important to keep citizens engaged on the issue and decision makers accountable for positive outcomes so that Music City does not become just a playground for the rich.

Among the results:

- By championing this issue for Nashville, we gave hope to readers and the community alike and had three sold-out events throughout 2017 focused on solving the affordable housing problem.
- Spurred by the series, a coalition of housing advocates joined in a group called Welcome Home to press the mayor’s office to create metrics for tracking housing progress (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/money/2018/02/26/nashville-affordable-housing-homes-apartments/374731002/>)
- More than 40 op-eds about housing and affordability were written by community leaders and members because of these pieces (<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bR0TvNFn1OM9RBmI56yEsOQXDBjpQQnHfbK8jtxVoz8/edit?usp=sharing>)
- From a digital perspective, these selections drove audience and readership and established The Tennessean and the author as an authority on issues of urban development, housing and growth. (<http://housing.tennessean.com>) These also showed that opinion clearly resonates with readers when it is focused, well researched and relevant.
- Organizations like Brookings, Kettering Foundation and the American Press Institute documented the progress. (<https://www.brookings.edu/podcast-episode/how-cities-are-creating-inclusive-economies-part-i/>) (<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/focused-listening-trust/>)
- Less than a week after the publication of the call for the former mayor to resign, Megan Barry left her post. (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2018/03/06/nashville-mayor-megan-barry-indicted-amid-affair-investigation/366593002/>)

COSTS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE IN NASHVILLE



GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

The Nashville skyline glows at sunset. Nashville is growing by 100 people a day. The new people who move to Nashville and can afford the rising prices of housing can find a place to live in or near downtown, the heart of economic activity and jobs. Those who cannot are being pushed farther away from their jobs, community networks, social services and transit options.

IS NASHVILLE IN AN URBAN CRISIS?

Music City’s prosperity is growing at same time inequality rises



opinion editor
David Plazas
USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee

Editor’s note: This is Part V of the “Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville” series on the affordable housing crisis, which runs on the last Sunday of the month.

The socially and economically advantaged citizens in America’s most vibrant and innovative cities are growing more prosperous while working-class and poorer people are struggling harder.

In other words, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

This duality is the phenomenon that University of Toronto professor, famed urbanist and author Richard Florida tackles in his latest book, “The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class — and What We Can Do About It.”

The book focuses on “winner-take-all” urbanism in which “superstar” cities like New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles are reaping the benefits of knowledge workers, known as the “creative class,” moving into and clustering together in urban centers to spur innovation and economic development.

Meanwhile, their entry into cities has driven up land prices, causing the displacement of less fortunate individuals to outlying areas and leading to increasing socioeconomic segregation.

Sound eerily familiar? Because he did not write a lot about Nashville in the book, I wanted to speak with Florida to explore where Music City falls on the “new urban crisis” scale: Is Nashville in an urban crisis, and if so, what do we do about it?

“If you look at the places that are the most innovative or the most creative economies, they’re also the most unequal,” Florida said in a May 19 telephone conversation. “I’m not that worried about Nashville yet.”

Florida considers Nashville a model midsized city because it is innovative, growth oriented and still affordable to people from bigger cities who are making the choice to move here.

The music, technology and health care industries, among others, are hot, and with the Predators’ historic season, the city could earn its first Stanley Cup, further growing its cachet.

On the “New Urban Crisis” index —

which measures economic segregation, wage inequality, income inequality and housing affordability — the Nashville-Franklin-Murfreesboro metro area comes in at No. 71 among 350-plus metros nationwide.

Yet there are some trouble spots where Nashville makes the top 10 in other metrics.

Nashville ranks No. 7 among large metros in wealth segregation and No. 10 among large metros when it comes to income segregation.

Wealthier people are more prone to live among themselves and poverty is more concentrated. This has implications for public safety, the quality of schools and access to good jobs.

That also has the potential to destroy the middle class, stall economic growth and concentrate poverty further.

The ‘creative class’ benefits while the majority struggles

The old urban crisis involved affluent people fleeing from the urban core to the suburbs, diminishing or outright hollowing the cities. This has often been called “white flight” because it involved white people leaving areas that were increasingly becoming inhabited by minority populations, generally African-Americans, and typically people on a lower socioeconomic scale.

Over the past 20 years there has been a “back-to-the-city” movement driven by members of the creative class who are investing in neighborhoods that are closer to where they work and play.

Creative class sounds like it might refer to artists or musicians, but Florida defines the term as knowledge workers who are employed in areas like technology, health care or finance, who are entrepreneurs, who work in management, etc. — essentially, those who make the type of salaries that allow them to buy into Nashville’s popular and ever more expensive downtown area.

Florida calculates that the creative class in Nashville makes up 32 percent of the population. Meanwhile, the service class makes up 46 percent and the working class makes up 22 percent.

The other two designations are clear cut, and the service workers include people working in jobs at hotels, restaurants and small businesses — the very people who are supporting Nashville’s tourism boom — but also police, firefighters, teachers, and singers or song-



GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

Traffic moves along Nolensville Road.

writers who may be supporting their art by taking on multiple jobs.

Nashville is growing by 100 people a day and that growth has allowed Tennessee’s capital to surpass, as of this last week, Memphis as the largest metropolitan area in the state.

The new people who move to Nashville and can afford the rising prices of housing can find a place to live in or near downtown, the heart of economic activity and jobs.

Those who cannot are being pushed farther away from their jobs, community networks, social services and transit options. They are forced to deal with greater congestion and they spend more money than they can afford on housing and transportation.

Asked if this means that Nashville is in an urban crisis, Florida said: “Nashville has a moderate to potentially severe case of the ‘new urban crisis.’ ”

“As Nashville becomes a quite vibrant knowledge creative and tech hub, it needs to be doubly committed to ensuring that it doesn’t experience this dramatic surge in inequality, this dramatic surge in economic segregation, this dramatic divide that characterizes the leading places,” he added.

Florida’s proposed solutions to create “inclusive prosperity” include urging communities:

- » to embrace mixed-income living and reject sprawl;
- » to invest in transit, schools and neighborhoods;
- » to build more affordable rental housing;
- » to turn low-wage service work into middle-class, family-supporting jobs;

and » to empower cities, suburbs and rural areas to solve their problems without interference from state or federal officials.

Over the course of this column, I will explore some local efforts to address and counter displacement and share excerpts of a Q&A with Florida from our recent conversation.

His writing and ideas, which have been featured on multiple media outlets since his latest book’s publication in April, have generated praise and criticism.

This is a unique opportunity to apply his observations and solutions locally.

Fear of losing flavor of Nolensville Pike

Andrew Vallomthail opened Bridal and Formal by RJS on Nolensville Pike in 1994. He has seen the transformation of the corridor, just a few miles south of downtown, into an area bustling with immigrant-owned businesses.

This is the gateway to Nashville’s New American community.

Nashville has historically welcomed immigrants and refugees, and 12 percent of the population is foreign-born. There are over 120 languages spoken in Metro Nashville Public Schools, where 30 percent of the students are English language learners.

Nolensville Pike includes Ethiopian restaurants, trendy cafes, auto repair shops, Mexican taquerias, a Kurdish mosque and the Nashville Zoo. The

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Businesses prosper along Nolensville Road in Nashville.

GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

Crisis

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Plaza Mariachi community, food, arts and entertainment center recently opened at a former Kroger building to great fanfare.

The area has been affordable for business owners and residents for years.

Median household incomes range from \$31,306 to \$32,227 in three census tracts that stretch from Interstate 440 south on Nolensville almost to Edmondson Pike. The median household income in Nashville is \$52,026, according to 2015 census data.

However, the area is prime for redevelopment. Development pressures because of its historic affordability and rising rents and costs have Vallomthail and other residents worried.

“I-440 is what I like about this location,” he said during the presentation of the Envision Nolensville Pike II study on Tuesday at the Salahadeen Center of Nashville.

“The other thing I like is the diversity,” he added. “There is concern about the displacement where people move away and we lose business.”

Conexión Américas, the nonprofit that works to integrate Hispanic immigrants into Nashville, released the study, which it conducted in partnership with Transportation for America, the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Nashville Civic Design Center.

The study offers a series of recommendations about how the area can adapt to growth and embrace improvements in infrastructure all while retaining the flavor of the neighborhood and helping neighbors gain a place at the table in times of change.

“What if then we have a conversation early on to make sure that the businesses and residents who have made this community what it is today can still remain in this community as those improvements are brought?” said Renata Soto, co-founder and executive director of Conexión Américas.

One of the most important parts of the report is collecting data on the risks for displacement by understanding how much businesses and residents are paying in rent compared with market-rate costs. Another important aspect is ensuring buy-in among multiple stakeholders who live and work in the area.

Metro has identified Nolensville as a future transit corridor, and while that will alleviate the nauseating congestion that plagues the road, transit-oriented development also makes property more valuable and expensive.

If Metro and key stakeholders can work together to build transit, create more density and invest in existing residents and neighborhoods, they can achieve Florida’s vision for “inclusive prosperity,” at least in this corner of Nashville.

The case for mixed-income living and transit

Last Monday Metro government released its long-anticipated housing report showing the need for nearly 31,000 affordable rental units by 2025 to meet the growing demand caused by rising housing costs and stagnant wages for longer-term residents.

The report notes that in Davidson the ratio of households of homeowners to renters is 54 percent to 46 percent.

Renters are far more vulnerable than homeowners. A quarter of homeowners are cost burdened, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. Meanwhile, 44 percent of renters are cost burdened, according to the report.

While mortgages are generally fixed, RentJungle.com notes that the average rent in Nashville rose from \$844 in January 2011 to \$1,387 in April

2017 — a 64 percent jump.

The city’s Housing Nashville report also created the vision for the next 10 years for Nashville that offers solutions from general obligation bonds; building, renovating and preserving affordable properties; and working with the private sector to induce more development for a variety of income levels.

Mixed-income living has been at the heart of Nashville Mayor Megan Barry’s “YIMBY” campaign.

She campaigned for mayor on a platform that emphasized more affordable housing, and YIMBY — or “Yes, In My Backyard” — is an effort to encourage neighbors to embrace living among people of diverse backgrounds.

“Whenever we talk about bringing more affordable housing into neighborhoods, we’re talking a mix of housing,” she said Tuesday after the Envision Nolensville Pike event.

“Making sure that folks, first of all, are educated and understand that people want to live next to teachers and firefighters and police officers,” she added. “They want them in their community. I don’t think they understand that sometimes they’re priced out of the community so we need to figure out ways to do that.

“We also need to be willing to say ‘I want to live next to people who look different than me, who may speak a different language than me, who may make a different income than me.’”

This may be a tough sell in a city with a long history of housing segregation, initially racial and now, more often than not, socioeconomic, but it sends a strong message.

However, there is now a case study in resistance, with neighbors loudly challenging Glenclyff United Methodist Church’s plan in partnership with Open Table Nashville to create a tiny home village on church property for homeless people.

They are saying, “Not In My Backyard!”

Neighbors, including Councilman Mike Freeman, say they felt blindsided, and even though religious freedom right favor the church’s plans, conversations beforehand would have resolved many disagreements and quieted some criticism.

It is a lesson for Barry as she seeks to gain support for a voter referendum in 2018 to use a portion of the local-option sales tax to pay for a comprehensive transit system.

She presented her transportation “action agenda” Wednesday, which also included the announcement of a new municipal division of transportation.

Barry and her allies will have to commit to full transparency if they want the public’s trust — and the majority of the votes.

The rationale for transit is sound. Not only does it create a viable alternative to the automobile, but it connects people to jobs, amenities and services as many get pushed further away from the urban core due to rising prices.

“Transit. Transit. Transit,” Florida said in our telephone conversation. “The only way we’re going to connect our disconnected places in outlying areas, the only way we’re going to spur clustered development, the only way we’re going to have inclusive prosperity is by investing in transit.”

About this series

This is the fifth in a series of monthly columns on growth, housing, displacement and the future of Nashville’s neighborhoods.

Opinion Engagement Editor David Plazas and photographer George Walker IV are telling the stories of the community and individual residents.

We welcome topic ideas and are looking to interview people of diverse perspectives on this issue. Email us at dplazas@tennessean.com or gwalker@tennessean.com.

Q&A with Richard Florida

On March 19 Lipscomb University administrator and professor Kristine LaLonde and I spoke with Richard Florida over the telephone about his latest book, “The New Urban Crisis,” and how it applies to Nashville.

Florida previously wrote books such as “The Rise of the Creative Class” and “The Flight of the Creative Class.” He is a professor and director of cities for the University of Toronto’s Martin Prosperity Institute and also serves as a fellow at New York University and Florida International University.

LaLonde and I are hosting a community book discussion of Florida’s newest book at the Nashville Public Library on Saturday, June 3. To participate, register at <http://discussion.tennessean.com> and please purchase or borrow the book and be prepared to discuss it.

These are excerpts from our telephone conversation with the author:

The model metropolitan area for navigating the urban crisis

“Nashville. You’ve done that by investing in music and seeing music part of your economy. In the entertainment economy, logistics economy, information and health care and medical economy.”

The threat of Nashville losing its creative edge

“I think it’s an issue for the future, but I’m not terrified about it happening yet. I’m not worried that Nashville’s creative edge will be diminished. Nashville is likely to benefit from some of the housing affordability problems in some of the more expensive metros.”

What it means to be a ‘superstar’ city

“You sometimes wish you could be more like London and New York and be a bigger global city and that’s all well and good, but you really don’t want the problems that go along with being a New York or London. And I think that’s really true of Nashville.”

Tennessee lawmakers’ efforts to nullify local ordinances

“The word they use for this is pre-emption. They’re trying to pre-empt local authority and they’re trying to take control and limit cities and metro areas’ ability to do it. We have to engage in the good fight. There is no federal policy that will fix our urban areas.”

The urban-suburban-rural divide

“The only way we’re going to overcome this divide is by respecting our differences. What’s really beautiful about it, it’s really stupid to have an overly powerful state government and an overly powerful federal government because when it goes bad, it goes really bad. The best way to run a country is to have a whole bunch of really empowered localities.”

Gentrification’s impact on local neighborhoods

“We all have this image in our mind of some rich person or some big luxury condo tower coming and pushing out the artists, the bohemians, the low-income people, the minority community.

“That happens. The level of that happening is very rare. Typically, it happens in old industrial areas or it happens in white working-class neighborhoods.

“The tragic fact is that gentrification has only occurred in 5 to 10 percent of urban neighborhoods across the country. The tragic fact is that there are far more areas that remain desperately disadvantaged and horrifyingly poor.

“Gentrification is a hot-button issue, it’s an emotional issue. Everyone gets vexed about it. Lots of people get guilty: ‘Did I destroy a neighborhood?’

“A much bigger problem is the divides in our society and the segmentation between the less than third of us that are doing well and the 66 percent of Americans that are falling behind as our middle class is being eviscerated.”

What gives you hope?

“Many people are looking at you. Don’t sell yourselves short. Where would we look for an innovative, creative economy that is not terribly unequal you can still afford to live in? Take a look at Nashville.”

The impact of federal budget cuts

“The federal government is going to make drastic cuts. In many ways, it’s an anti-urban program. We have to do this ourselves. There will be no federal program for cities.”

The role of colleges and universities

“Universities have a responsibility to engage in inclusive development, to make sure not just that their faculty, their students and buildings are better, but the neighborhoods they locate in can participate in hospitals, in medical centers, in all of these districts.

“There are so many anchors of these institutions who want to embrace this change because they have to.”

The role of mayors

“The most sensible politicians we have in America are our mayors. When I go to Nashville or Indianapolis or Columbus and I could go on — Louisville, Lexington, San Francisco — I can’t tell if they’re a Democrat or Republican. If they’re leading a city, they all want the same thing.”

Final thoughts

“Americans have lost faith in their federal government, they’ve lost faith in their state governments, but they still have faith in their local governments in their communities.”

Rankings of cities in ‘urban crisis’

The New Urban Crisis index measures economic segregation, wage inequality, income inequality and housing affordability in 350-plus U.S. metropolitan areas. Top-ranked metro areas have the most severe cases of crisis.	Tallahassee, Fla.	8
	Athens-Clark County, Ga.	9
	San Diego	10
	Chicago	12
	Miami	14
	Boston	15
	Philadelphia	18
	Austin	20
	Memphis	21
	Nashville/Franklin/Murfreesboro	71
	Knoxville	104
	Jackson	122
	Chattanooga	161
	Clarksville	270

Source: “The New Urban Crisis,” by Richard Florida

★insight



Mary Robertson, left, talks with Ruby D. Baker in the Bordeaux Hills neighborhood Monday.

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Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville

NASHVILLE'S STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS

Too many residents have given up on their neighbors, but those who haven't are sometimes seeing wins



opinion editor
David Plazas
USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee

Editor's note: This is Part VII of the "Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville" series on the affordable housing crisis, which runs on the last Sunday of the month.

Nashville's dynamic growth has altered the soul, essence and flavor of its neighborhoods. Long held as the foundation of an area's success, Nashville neighborhoods are facing changing demographics, displacement of economically struggling people, new residents flocking to the urban core and a booming tourism economy creeping into residential areas, disconnecting the city from its past.

The number of active neighborhoods has fallen from a high of 600 during Bill Purcell's mayoral administration (1999-2007) to 89, per the Neighborhoods Resource Center's 2017 Neighborhoods Census.

The reasons vary. In some cases, neighborhoods rally around a crisis, but participation falls after the situation becomes resolved for better or for worse.

Some neighborhoods rely on the same leaders perennially, and that makes them ripe for burnout.

Meanwhile, Nashville faces the reality that more than 50 percent of its residents are not from Davidson County, and as the city continues to grow by 100 people a day, the changes will be even more marked in the years to come.

That has become especially evident as higher-income and generally white residents have moved into historically African-American and moderate- or lower-income neighborhoods in the urban core. That has caused friction that has divided some neighborhoods along racial, socio-economic and political lines.

"There is no way we can make our city resilient unless we make our neighborhoods resilient," said Jim Hawk, executive director of the Neighborhoods Resource Center, which provides training and support for neighborhood organizations and leaders.

The good news is that since the 35 district Metro Council members rely on neighborhood support for votes, neighborhood issues still play a powerful role in effecting policies that favor their needs.

The current Metro Council counts among its membership former neighborhood leaders. Mayor Megan Barry served as a leader in the Belmont-Hillsboro Neighborhood Association before entering public service as an at-large Metro Council member.

One of her priorities has been expanding the reach and purview of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods and Community Engagement. However, neighborhoods will not thrive with a top-down approach.

Neighbors need to get to know one another, organize at a grass-roots level and be willing to work through sometimes difficult and contentious issues together.

Then they need to make the effort to grow their membership and groom their future leaders so they can stay together.

Continue reading to learn about

ABOUT THIS SERIES

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The Keep Southeast Nashville Healthy group meets at the home of Heather Hixson in Nashville. The group is working to prevent a gas compression station being built by the Columbia Pipeline Group in the Cane Ridge area.

the evolution of Nashville's neighborhood focus and its threats, interwoven with vignettes about how neighbors in Bordeaux Hills, Cleveland Park, Oak Hill and Cane Ridge have approached threats to their quality of life.

Ruby Baker of Bordeaux Hills: 'We're not going to be pushed out'

Ruby D. Baker bought her house in the Bordeaux Hills neighborhood in North Nashville 17 years ago.

Baker, 57, has seen the ebbs and flows of neighborhood change and challenges over the years.

Crime. The damage of the 2010 Nashville flood. The onset of new development and displacement of residents.

Baker was there when homeowners were too afraid to go to their mailboxes because of gangs and drugs.

She also helped champion an effort to organize a neighborhood

watch, work with the Metro Nashville Police Department and make public safety a priority.

Today she is president of the Bordeaux Hills Residential Association.

"The neighborhood is very resilient," she said. "Just when you think they're going to be divided, they come together."

Now that the neighborhood is considered safe and it is a quick six-mile drive to the popular downtown, she has been receiving a lot of interest in her home.

A 2,000-square-foot home in the neighborhood is appraised for \$129,000, according to the Davidson County Property Assessor's site.

Newly constructed homes of the same size, though, are being listed for \$399,000 on the Zillow real estate website.

"I get a letter every day offering to buy my home," she said.

However, Baker does not want to

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Strong

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leave. She and other neighbors want to age in place.

“We decided we’re going to stay,” she said. “We’re not going to be pushed out.”

Property values have risen in the neighborhood, and Baker worked hard to ensure that elderly neighbors who were eligible knew about tax freeze and abatement programs.

“We knew it was coming,” she said. “We were just trying to brace for it. Gentrification was not something we were worried about, especially if you knew what you could to secure your home.”

How ex-Mayor Bill Purcell made neighborhoods a priority

During his 1999 campaign for Nashville mayor, Bill Purcell famously aired a commercial with his desk sitting on his front yard to show that he would be the champion for the city’s neighborhoods.

He was not the first mayor, city official or activist to care for or advocate for neighborhoods — pioneers like the late Councilwoman Betty Nixon and Gene TeSelle had made it an issue decades before.

However, Purcell made his first act in office the creation of the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhoods.

“I was absolutely convinced and remain convinced that the neighborhoods are the essential building blocks of a successful city,” he said during a recent conversation at his office in the Regions Bank Building downtown.

Purcell had succeeded former mayor and eventual Gov. Phil Bredesen, who became known for the development of big downtown projects like Bridgestone Arena for the Nashville Predators and bringing the Houston Oilers, which eventually became the Tennessee Titans, to Nashville.

Purcell hired Brenda Wynn, now Davidson County clerk, as his first neighborhoods office director.

She had been a neighborhood leader in Madison.

“One of the things I thought was important was to educate people about community engagement,” Wynn said.

“The only real way to get true change is from the inside out. We can’t impose change on neighborhoods. Neighborhoods evolve.”

Efforts included the Mayor’s Night Out, Night Out Against Crime and working toward improving constituent services.

Purcell said 600 active neighborhood associations were identified during his administration.

“When we were strongest was when Bill Purcell became mayor,” said Hawk, of the Neighborhoods Resource Center.

A report authored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in consultation with Wynn documented numerous community groups dedicated to neighborhood issues, such as the Building Stronger Neighborhood Council, Nashville Neighborhood Alliance, Neighborhoods Resource Center and Tying Nashville Together.

While Purcell’s successor, Mayor Karl Dean (2007-2015), kept the neighborhood’s office, his focus shifted toward downtown redevelopment, with projects like the Music City Center, and responding to crises like the Great Recession and the 2010 Nashville flood. Barry, elected in 2015, appointed former district Metro Councilman Lonnell Matthews as director of the renamed Mayor’s Office of Neighborhoods and Community Engagement.

“Neighborhoods are still a critical piece of what makes Nashville special,” Matthews said. “It makes us attractive as a city.”

Among his office’s most important initiatives will be the launch in August of Hub Nashville, a dedicated constituent service call center, billed as a reboot of 3-1-1.

It will connect residents quickly with key information on how to access Metro services, like filling potholes and getting a permit, for example. Navigating Metro’s 58 departments can be confusing, Matthews explained.

“It will give people a voice in government,” he said.

Barry has made investments in sidewalks, parks and community services a priority, but she also has her eyes on big-picture projects like the potential construction of a multimillion-dollar Major League Soccer stadium and the funding of a comprehensive multi-billion-dollar transit system.

Whether she can be both the neighborhood mayor and the big-project mayor remains to be seen.

Stacy Widelitz of Oak Hill: ‘We want to preserve the way of life that we have’

Four years ago encroaching commercial development galvanized residents of Oak Hill, one of Metropolitan Nashville Davidson County government’s six satellite cities.

The home to the Tennessee governor’s mansion and Radnor Lake State Park had incorporated in the 1950s precisely to preserve its residential character.

“I was very much against any type of commercial development in Oak Hill,” said Stacy Widelitz, 61. “We want to preserve the way of life that we have.

“We are very adamant about maintaining our neighborhood as a green



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The Keep Southeast Nashville Healthy group meets at the home of Heather Hixson on July 18 in Nashville. The group is working to prevent a gas compression station being built by the Columbia Pipeline Group in the Cane Ridge area.



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Oak Hill Vice Mayor Stacy Widelitz

space,” he added. “We don’t want to see in Oak Hill what’s happened in Green Hills where one home is torn down and two or three replace it.”

Widelitz, an award-winning composer and songwriter, moved to Nashville 19 years ago from Los Angeles.

Oak Hill residents united to oppose the change and it drew neighborhoods together and toward deeper grass-roots engagement, he said.

His activism eventually led him to politics, and in 2016 he was elected to Oak Hill’s Board of Commissioners and now serves as vice mayor.

The city, south of Nashville’s downtown, is an affluent area with homes listed on Zillow from a half-million dollars to nearly \$4 million.

The median price for a single-family home in the Nashville area was \$293,753 in June, according to Greater Nashville Realtors data. It’s a figure that has been consistently rising.

Widelitz recognizes the need to address affordable housing shortages across Nashville, especially as prices continue to rise, and working and middle-class workers and professionals get priced out.

“There is a balance that needs to be struck,” he said.

However, he does not agree with the popular notion that Nashville is losing its character.

“A collaborative, creative atmosphere — it’s one of the reasons I moved here,” he said. “I still see that as an essential element of what makes Nashville special.”

Short-term rentals present challenge to neighborhood sustainability

The issue of commercial activity in neighborhoods has long been a point of contention in Nashville and is presently being manifested in the debate over regulating short-term rentals.

In the past the debate has involved whether to allow traditional bed-and-breakfasts and music recording studios, for example.

Since 2015 Metro has regulated STRs and offers three types of permits: for owner-occupied homes, multifamily and non-owner or investor-owned homes.

The latter has filled an important need as the city lacks enough and affordable hotel rooms to serve its growing number of tourists.

However, this type also has created the most controversy, with opponents calling for a ban and phase-out of this type of permit in residential areas.

Metro has clumsily enforced rules, which are easily skirted by bad actors; thousands of listings are advertised without the proper permit.

Listing companies like Airbnb, VRBO and HomeAway have resisted bans and overly strict regulations, and Airbnb’s lobbyists nearly persuaded the Tennessee General Assembly to prevent municipalities from enacting bans.

That legislation has been deferred until 2018.

Meanwhile, a Metro Council ordinance to ban and phase out the investor-owned units has been delayed until the fall while a committee appointed by Vice Mayor David Briley develops recommendations in consultation with the companies.

Purcell sees a need for strong regulations on short-term rentals in residential areas.

“Instead of a residential neighborhood, it’s an entertainment zone where people are coming and going every 24 hours without any interest in the neighborhood’s long-term future,” he said.

Matthews, of the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhoods and Community Engagement, expressed similar sentiments.

“I feel like neighborhoods should be for people who live there first and that’s primary,” he said.

Sam McCullough of Cleveland Park: ‘Nashville has lost Nashville’

Sam McCullough’s great-grandparents came to East Nashville in the 1800s along with many other African-Americans who left plantations to be near the Capitol after the Civil War and the end of slavery.

The lifelong resident said he has seen dramatic transformations over his lifetime, but never so quickly as in recent years.

“It’s changing so fast, so rapidly, it’s surprised me,” remarked McCullough, 60, the president and chair emeritus of the Cleveland Park Neighborhood Association, who said he intends to remain in his neighborhood for the rest of his life.

Property values have doubled or tripled over the last four years.

A home valued at \$85,000 in 2013 in the area is now worth over \$200,000, according to the Davidson County Property Assessor’s site. Zillow has homes listed for between \$200,000 and \$550,000 in the neighborhood.

Higher-income white residents have moved into the area just west of Ellington Parkway and the recently and now properly dedicated Frederick Douglass Park, named after the famed abolitionist, author and activist.

“The people who are living there now barely even speak to us,” McCullough said. “They don’t respect the history of the neighborhood.”

Areas in or near the core have experienced displacement by urban renewal programs of the mid-20th century that destroyed or cut through vibrant neighborhoods due to the construction of roads and highways.

“If urban renewal didn’t get you in the ‘60s, the interstate got you. If the interstate didn’t get you, Ellington Parkway got you. Now, it’s gentrification, housing costs and taxes that will get you,” McCullough said.

Other threats he sees are short-term rental properties — he has four on his block — which he believes are threatening the supply of housing for residents as well as Nashville’s growing tourism boom.

“Nashville has lost Nashville,” he said. “All this madness of the party town — we have lost our city. I don’t think the mayor has a grip on what’s happening. We’ve lost our real identity.

“If we don’t get a grip on it, we’ll become Las Vegas,” he said.

It’s tough work to bring neighborhoods together, even tougher to keep them united

Metro Nashville Davidson County measures 533 square miles, the second-largest land mass in the United States, according to the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.

The county’s neighborhoods span all different types of settings, from dense and urban to suburban to rural.

Problems vary by area and neighborhood, but typically some kind of external threat will bring residents together, like public safety, the quality of schools, a nuisance or land-use issues.

“Neighborhoods are not simple to organize without a threat,” Purcell said. “And once organized, they don’t continue on their own. They require a lot of care and feeding.”

Yet, numerous threats, small and large, stand in the way of neighborhoods’ success, such as poor participation, state legislation that nullifies local

ordinances, or even poorly run meetings.

“You have a bad meeting and people aren’t going to come back,” said John Stern, the longtime president of the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance, a grass-roots organization representing neighborhood groups and associations.

Stern said he remembered a time when Metro Council members were anti-neighborhood, but that has changed over the years.

“This is the best group of council that I think we’ve ever had,” he said. “If you want to get elected as one of 35 district council members, you’re going to have to walk the neighborhood.”

People’s ideas of what defines a neighborhood vary, said Hawk of the Neighborhoods Resource Center.

“We have folks who have a very different understanding of what a neighborhood is and what a house is,” Hawk said. “Some people are trying to create a home where they can live at for many years. Others are looking at their homes and neighborhoods as an investment.”

What’s needed, he said, are caretakers, but “a lot of neighborhoods don’t have caretakers.”

Sometimes that is due to burnout among neighborhood leaders, an inability to stay united after a threat is abated or having to contend with difficult people.

“Not everybody has a soft and cuddly neighbor,” Hawk said.

One way for residents to get involved is by attending the NRC’s annual Nashville Neighborhoods Celebration, a free public event to celebrate neighbors.

The next one is from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 30, at Elizabeth Park, 1701 Arthur Ave. in North Nashville.

The NRC also is planning its first Neighborhood Leadership Conference in March.

Learn more by calling (615) 782-8212, emailing info@tnrc.net or visiting the website www.tnrc.net.

Chris Tuley of Cane Ridge: ‘I don’t want my kids to grow up with this a mile away’

Chris Tuley, 32, moved his family to Cane Ridge in 2015.

The affordable, middle-class area of Antioch in Southeast Nashville seemed to be a perfect, safe place to raise a family, which includes two young boys, ages 2½ and 1½.

Recent investments and excitement over Antioch have made it an even more attractive area, especially since Ikea’s May announcement that it would be opening a store there in upcoming years.

However, Tuley said his family, neighbors and the area’s future prosperity face a real threat.

Columbia Pipeline Group intends to build a gas compressor on 90 acres at the corner of Barnes Road and Old Hickory Boulevard.

“We’re one mile from where the proposed compressor station is going to be,” Tuley said. “I don’t want my kids to grow up with this a mile away.”

Tuley learned about the issue on social media and then began to organize residents. Today, he’s president of Keep Southeast Nashville Healthy.

What started as 30 residents grew into 200, and soon they were finding common ground with neighbors in Joelton in northwest Nashville, who are trying to stop a separate gas compression station being built there by Tennessee Pipeline Co.

Their efforts received legislative support from the Metro Council and advocacy from Barry. They see the compressors as a threat to residents’ health, their quality of life and the environment.

Their efforts have received pushback, however.

In February Tennessee Pipeline sued Metro.

In March a state regulatory board rejected a Metro Council effort to add a hurdle to the gas compressor projects.

Tuley said he and his group are fighting back and intend to take their efforts countywide.

Insight


COSTS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE IN NASHVILLE PART XII



Nashville has never been more popular as a tourist destination, new residence or investment opportunity — and never more expensive to live in.
GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: NOT NOW, NOT NEVER

Nashville, the progressive Southern “it” city, charmed the nation in 2017 with a mix of explosive creativity, a hot job market, and booming land and real estate prices. The city has never been more popular as a tourist destination, new residence or investment opportunity — and never more expensive to live in. In the future are a direct flight to London expanding the city’s global reach, a potential Major League Soccer team to broaden its sports footprint, and many unanswered questions about how “old Nashville” can coexist with “new Nashville.”



David Plazas
Columnist
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

About this series

This is the 12th in a 12-part series of monthly columns on growth, housing, displacement and the future of Nashville-area neighborhoods.

Opinion and Engagement Editor David Plazas and photographer George Walker IV have been telling the stories of the community and individual residents in the “Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville” series.

Share your thoughts and perspectives. Email us at dplazas@tennessean.com or walker@tennessean.com. Send your letters to letters@tennessean.com.

Coming Wednesday

Watch the premiere of the short documentary “Costs of Growth and Change” at 6 p.m. on Wednesday. Go to housing.tennessean.com to view it then. There, you can also review past chapters of the 12-part series on affordable housing and quality of life.

- Inside**
- Three-fold challenge for Nashville on affordable housing. **On Page 2H**
 - Where are they now? What’s happened since? A look at the progress since the series started. **On Page 2H**
 - Nashville must talk less, do more on housing. **On Page 4H**

The growth in home prices and rents has outpaced wage increases for longer-term residents, and that is not expected to let up soon, especially as the 10-county region including Nashville grows at a pace of 75 people a day.

My colleague George Walker IV and I began exploring the issues of affordable housing and quality of life in January for our yearlong series called the “Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville.”

Walker, a Nashville native, has worked his entire 24-year career at The Tennessean and has seen firsthand how the changes in the city have affected families. A Bellevue resident, he grew up spending a lot of time in his grandfather’s ranch house in Edgehill near downtown.

In 2014, my husband and I moved from Fort Myers, Fla., to Nashville’s Salmestown neighborhood, a once blighted community in the urban core. Ten years ago a new home went for \$100,000 in the neighborhood. Today listings for new homes range from \$600,000 to \$1 million.

Who is the ‘it’ city for?

Our mission in this series was three-fold:

- Hold a mirror to Nashville: We are the “it” city, but only for those who can afford it.
- Give voice to people who feel ignored: the displaced, the evicted and those seeing radical transformations of their neighborhoods, most acutely affecting working-class African-Americans.
- Provide solutions: It’s easy to poke at the problems, but resolving them is harder.

We looked at issues holistically and profiled people affected by the changes for the better or the worse.

Our goal was to raise community consciousness and keep city and community leaders focused on the worsen-



Kennetha Patterson shares a funny story with her daughter Kalanni 7, as her sisters Myasia and Zynovia finish dinner at their home Feb. 21 in Chapmansboro, Tenn. Patterson, 34, her husband and five children were evicted from their Edgehill apartment complex after it was sold and moved to Chapmansboro.
GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

ing gap between prosperity and inequality.

This is the final installment of the 12-part series and gives us an opportunity to present what we learned.

The valuable lessons include:

- The costs of growth and change are high.
- The current solutions will do little radically to fix the short-term affordable housing crisis.
- There is hope the groundwork being laid to create long-term solutions will make Nashville a city that makes prosperity inclusive.

Nashville’s housing crisis in the midst of rapid growth is mirrored elsewhere in cities across America also plagued with this conundrum.

University of Toronto professor Richard Florida calls it the “new urban crisis.”

The difference is that all eyes are on Nashville — and on Mayor Megan Barry — in hopes that the city can create solutions and be a beacon for other communities.

“You have an opportunity to lead this nation and show us how to solve it,” said Mike Green, co-partner of ScaleUP Partners and a consultant for the National League of Cities.

The league named Nashville one of six cities to receive 2017 Equitable Economic Development Fellowships.

What that means is that the league will provide technical assistance as Metro government officials work to spur manufacturing in historically high-poverty areas known as Promise Zones.

At a meeting of city leaders, the league and Green on Dec. 8 at the Nashville Public Library, I asked the first question, about short-term solutions for the people who need relief now since many residents think progress on this front is not moving fast enough.

A long pause ensued and quizzical expressions fell upon the faces of city leaders and experts before Green weighed in to say, “That’s something we need to be thinking about every day.”

Costs of growth, change are high

Neighborhoods near downtown are radically changing in Nashville.

An influx of higher-wage workers into once lower-rent neighborhoods has revitalized communities, but at a cost.

Average monthly rents in Nashville, per RentJungle.com, have soared from

See PLAZAS, Page 3H



Tennessean opinion editor David Plazas, center, leads a roundtable discussion on housing issues with Mayor Megan Barry and Nashville residents Howard Allen, Heather Hixson, Kennetha Paterson and Omid Yamini on Nov. 27 in Nashville. GEORGE WALKER IV / TENNESSEAN.COM

Plazas

Continued from Page 1H

\$897 in 2011 to \$1,372 in 2016 — a 53 percent increase.

Meanwhile, median household income in Nashville Davidson County, according to U.S. Census figures, have increased from \$46,141 to \$49,891 in the same period — an 8 percent increase.

A recent GoBankingRates article estimated it takes a salary of \$70,000 annually to live comfortably in the urban core.

That means most Nashville residents cannot afford to live in the area that provides the greatest economic opportunities.

Sallie Dowell and Kennetha Patterson revisited

Octogenarian Sallie Dowell and millennial Kennetha Patterson were voices in the first two parts of the series with two very different stories. We visited with them again in December.

Dowell, 81, famously enamored readers in January by defiantly refusing to sell her Edgehill home of 43 years, in spite of pressure from real estate agents and developers.

“I’m not leaving until God comes get me,” she said — a quote that inspired a country song by teenage singer-songwriter Molly Jeanne Freer.

Dowell has a killer view of downtown from her home.

She worked hard doing domestic work for families to buy her red-brick ranch house for \$19,600 in 1974 during the era of “white flight,” when many Caucasian families fled to the suburbs because of rising crime and desegregation of schools.

She raised her four children and has enjoyed many celebrations with her 10 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren at her home.

What used to be an African-American neighborhood is quickly being replaced by three-story “tall and skinny” homes.

Many are homes to higher-income white residents, while some are short-term rentals capitalizing on the proximity to downtown.

Dowell’s home today is assessed at \$400,000 — which would price her out of the market today — and one of her longtime neighbors sold her ranch house earlier this year for \$640,000 to be razed for a new development.

Her affordable housing solution is to stay put, and after a year, she hasn’t budged.

“Where am I going to go?” she asked.

Some residents who rent do not have the option of staying in their homes.

Patterson, 34, her husband and five children were evicted from their Edgehill apartment complex after it was sold.

They moved to rural Chapmansboro in Cheatham County, where she has grown fond of the safety, seclusion and the schools.

Still, she is bothered by the growing affordability crisis, which is why she became a community organizer for Homes 4 All Nashville. Her husband works in construction.

“We’re the people that make the construction happen — the people that are building the city and making the city run,” she said.

“We’re the people that help it to continue to go and grow, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with growth at all — it’s just take care of the people that are taking care of the city and making it happen.”



Sallie Dowell stands on her porch at her Southside Avenue house. She has put a sign on her house reading “This house is not for sale” to keep real estate investors off her property. GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

Mayor is ‘laser focused’

In 2015, then at-large Metro Council member Megan Barry campaigned on four promises in the mayoral race.

One of them was to resolve the city’s affordable housing crisis — the No. 1 concern identified by residents in the 25-year NashvilleNext community plan.

When Barry entered office, there was already an affordable housing deficit and looming crisis. She has laid groundwork that, if successful, will create more housing opportunities for people of all incomes, in the long term.

Despite frustration at the pace of progress, activists acknowledge that Barry has invested more in affordable housing than any other past city executive.

The mayor has committed to spend \$45 million in the Barnes Affordable Housing Trust Fund — named after the late affordable housing champion the Rev. Bill Barnes — by the end of her term to help leverage \$75 million in private dollars.

Barry has promised \$25 million in general obligation bonds to preserve, restore and rehabilitate the existing affordable housing stock.

She has committed millions to the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency Envision projects that will transform public housing complexes across Nashville into mixed-income communities.

Cayce Homes built its first new building in 20 years earlier this year, for Section 8 disabled, senior and single residents. On Nov. 29, a groundbreaking was held for Cayce’s first mixed-income community.

And, after pressure from the interfaith Nashville Organized for Action and Hope, she formed a task force led by former Mayor Bill Purcell and Davidson County Clerk Brenda Wynn to incorporate an affordable housing strategy into her \$5.4 billion transit plan, which is expected to go before voters May 1.

Moreover, she has created the city’s first Office of Housing and Office of Resilience, garnering attention from national organizations such as the National League of Cities and the Brookings Institution.

All of that will help as long-term solutions, but they do not fix the short-term needs.

The housing report released by her office in May showed 31,000 affordable rental units are needed by 2025. Barnes Fund money so far has paid to restore, preserve, rehabilitate or build over 1,300

“We’re the people that make the construction happen — the people that are building the city and making the city run. ... I don’t think there’s anything wrong with growth at all — it’s just take care of the people that are taking care of the city and making it happen.”

Kennetha Patterson
who had to move her family to Cheatham County

units.

On Nov. 27 the mayor and I discussed her progress on affordable housing and she told me: “We have absolutely been laser focused on housing.”

These are some excerpts from that discussion:

Do you regret campaigning on affordable housing given the growing crisis?

“No, not at all. It’s key to our growth. It’s key to making sure that people can continue to live here. ...

“If you think about what we’ve actually accomplished in just two years — remember, this is a problem that didn’t start in 2015 — this is a problem that has been growing since Nashville started growing.”

What about long-term residents who want to stay in place?

“We want our neighborhoods to evolve and change but also recognize the folks that want to stay there, that need to stay there to have the opportunity to do so.”

What can we do for displaced residents like Kennetha Patterson?

“I get it, it doesn’t solve Kennetha’s problem today of getting a house so what we try to think of is what are the systems and tools we can be putting for now, the short term, long term and ultimately for the betterment of Nashville.”

Does she agree with the late Rev. Barnes’ contention that we are losing the affordable housing fight?

“We are — we are losing because we are losing units. ... That’s part of the downside of growth. When you have a strong economic influx of new folks and

new opportunities.”

On her advocacy for mixed-income living, aka “Yes In My Backyard” (YIMBY-ism):

“We know that that the health of the city is absolutely dependent on the fact that you have all of those folks who live within your city. ...

“I think Nashvillians want to be about yes. A lot of this has to do about education. When I say education, I mean understanding that there’s value to living with people who look different than you, sound different than you, make different money than you. That’s what makes you stronger.”

Hope in breaking the cycle of segregation

In his book “The New Urban Crisis,” Richard Florida wrote that Nashville was among the top 10 most income segregated cities in the nation.

That has its roots in racial segregation, discriminatory lending practices and zoning, and continuing decisions today by buyers and builders that keep people segregated by class.

While YIMBY-ism is a noble campaign, my observation is that many people in Nashville are fine with it as long as it is not in their backyard.

This evoked the memory of our interview with Barnes at his home in January.

Barnes was deeply concerned about the growing concentration of poverty, especially how it affects the development of children.

“We still don’t want to be in a neighborhood with people not like us,” he said. “That’s the whole history. Do we accept the fact that the homogenization of neighborhoods economically and racially is a terrible penalty for kids? If we accept that, do we care about that and what do we do about it?”

“Leave it to the free market, it’s flunking,” he said. “The free market is failing in preparing low-income kids for life.”

In spite of his worries, he still held out hope — for “signs and wonders for a more just city.”

He died on Aug. 21, the day of the total solar eclipse.

There is hope for the future, and that resides on Nashville keeping its focus on affordable housing.

The solution is not just for government to create, however.

A few thoughts:

- ▣ There has to be the community’s public will to embrace the fact that we benefit when we work, play and live together as a city.
- ▣ We need policies that will encourage more builders to build houses for all income levels.
- ▣ We need to protect the ability of our working-class professionals like teachers, police and firefighters to be able to live here.
- ▣ Neighbors can join their neighborhood associations to advocate for their quality of life.
- ▣ They should get to know their Metro Council members and be informed and be assured that zoning changes will benefit their areas.
- ▣ City, state and federal lawmakers and officials need to align their housing policies to create inclusive prosperity.

Progress will happen through tough, but needed, conversations about the future of the city.

A big cost of growth and change has been to drive us farther apart from each other.

It does not have to be that way. Nashville can be a city for all of us.

It will take investment, it will take hard decisions, but we have to build the future of Nashville together.

Insight

OUR VIEW



Nashville Mayor Megan Barry speaks to the media at the Metro Courthouse on Wednesday in Nashville. GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN

Megan Barry betrayed Nashville

Megan Barry has debased her leadership position, acting selfishly and deceitfully for nearly two years in a secret affair with her head of security.

She shocked and angered the community. She tore apart two families.

This would not be any of our business if she were an ordinary citizen. And, to be clear, the relationship between Barry and former Metro Nashville Police Sgt. Robert Forrest Jr. was consensual. It was not sexual harassment.

The Tennessean endorsed her in 2015. We commended Barry, a Democrat and former corporate ethics and compliance executive, for her empathy, her inclusion and her accessibility.

In pursuing this affair, she had no empathy for her family or that of Forrest. She demonstrated disregard to those who believed in her and to Nashville. She was duplicitous.

The mayor we trusted and supported did not suffer from a momentary lapse of judgment. She instead displayed an utter lack of judgment that calls into question her decision making, her values, and how she used her energy and time to conceal her betrayal.

Yes, she admitted to the affair and vowed to work with investigators examining travel expenses and overtime for Forrest. That is something she must do.

In her public statement, she incredibly claimed Forrest did not work for her.

The city organization chart is quite clear, and so is common sense.

Forrest worked for the police chief, who reports to the mayor. That means Forrest worked for the mayor. Every business executive in this city understands that, and the inappropriateness of workplace relationships with subordinates.

Barry has imperiled her ambitious agenda. That is disdainful because she has accomplished quite a bit, including:

- Contributing more to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund than any Nashville mayor in history and planting the seeds for inclusive prosperity.
- Creating the Opportunity NOW youth employment program to offer 10,000 paid private- and public-sector internships and jobs for young people.
- Supporting a business-friendly environment open to opportunities like Ikea in Antioch, a Major League Soccer

What do you think?

Join a Facebook Live discussion at 10 a.m. Monday with Opinion and Engagement Editor David Plazas about this editorial and readers' reaction. Ask your questions or share your comments at tennessean.com.

Share your views on how you feel about Mayor Megan Barry, her leadership and her future. Send your letters of 250 words or less to letters@tennessean.com. Include your full name, address and phone number for verification. A selection of letters will appear in the Sunday Insight section Feb. 11.

team, a direct flight to London and consideration by Amazon for its second headquarters.

Championing nearly three years of work on transit, leading to the proposed vote on May 1 that would radically transform Nashville as an international city.

She also inspired countless Nashvillians, especially women and girls. She built bridges across the political aisle, and convinced insiders and outsiders alike that anything was possible in Nashville.

When Barry was introduced after MLS announced it picked Nashville as an expansion city, the crowd cheered wildly for her. That welcome wasn't unusual, and illustrates why this proud city is in shock.

We know people are not perfect, and we know no one is without sin.

We know the city's progress, dreams and hopes transcend any one mayor.

We know Nashville's projects and prosperity must continue.

But we also know Nashville must demand better from Megan Barry.

Opinion and Engagement Editor David Plazas wrote this editorial on behalf of and in collaboration with The Tennessean Editorial Board, which also includes Editor Michael A. Anastasi and Executive Editor Maria De Varenne. Former editorial board member Laura Hollingsworth contributed to this piece. Call Plazas at 615-259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at [@davidplazas](https://twitter.com/davidplazas).

Opinion

▣ **OUR PURPOSE:** To actively influence and impact a better quality of life in Middle Tennessee.

▣ **OUR MISSION:** We stand for the First Amendment and freedom of information. We stand for civility. We fight for the voiceless. We welcome a diversity of opinions.

EDITORIAL

Megan Barry must resign for the sake of Nashville

A leader must put the interests and the needs of the people she serves above her own.

We thought Nashville Mayor Megan Barry was doing just that.

However, it has become abundantly clear in recent weeks that this is not the case after the revelation of her affair with her subordinate and former head of security, retired Metro Nashville Police Department Sgt. Rob Forrest.

This is a confounding and disappointing situation:

▣ How he could rack up more than \$170,000 in overtime pay over three years, which included extended domestic and overseas trips with her alone and overtime charges in Nashville for hours after the mayor’s calendar showed official events of the day had ended.

▣ How her Chief Operating Officer Rich Riebeling let the Mayor’s Office approve and pay for security detail travel requests – and how those trips grew from one with just Barry and Forrest alone to nine more after Chief of Staff Debby Dale Mason started supervising those requests.

▣ How despite promises of cooperation with authorities and transparency with the public, Barry and her administrative team have only done so when forced to. Several public records requests are still unfulfilled with the mayor’s office citing a “deliberative process” exemption.

On Feb. 4, the Sunday after Barry confessed to her affair publicly, the Tennessean Editorial Board chose to rebuke her in an editorial titled “Megan Barry betrayed Nashville.”

We did not ask for her resignation then because there were still so many questions.

Her behavior and actions of the past four weeks, however, painfully demonstrate that her priority lies in her own political survival.

Four investigations have started at the state and local level to determine if she misused her position and broke any laws.

Since the revelation, the Tennessee



Nashville Mayor Megan Barry has admitted to having an affair with the head of her security detail. USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Bureau of Investigation, the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, a special Metro Council committee in cooperation with Metro’s internal auditor, and the council’s Board of Ethical Conduct are scrutinizing her, Forrest and possible misuse of taxpayer funds.

The details that continue to emerge from the affair only enhance the perception that she willfully and continuously showed poor judgment during the two-year affair with Forrest.

The former police officer benefited financially from their relationship because of the overtime he earned.

These are not the actions of a leader who puts public service over personal interests.

As a former ethics and compliance officer, Barry, a Democrat, knows better.

When we endorsed her in the 2015 mayoral election, she convinced us that we were getting someone with sound judgment, high ethical standards and a commitment to unmitigated transparency.

In fact, she signed Executive Order 5 on Feb. 24, 2016, which prohibited or called on employees, including herself,

to avoid:

- ▣ using a public office for private gain;
- ▣ giving preferential treatment to any person;
- ▣ impeding government efficiency or economy;
- ▣ losing complete independence or impartiality;
- ▣ making a Metropolitan Government decision outside of official channels; or
- ▣ affecting adversely the confidence of the public in the integrity of the Metropolitan Government.

In a private business, one or more violations would have resulted in disciplinary action or dismissal. Barry has arguably violated all of them.

The last of these – “affecting adversely the confidence of the public in the integrity of the Metropolitan Government” – speaks to the damage to trust in the Mayor’s Office for her future and past decisions.

While the investigations must continue, the affair and the consequences of it will become a distraction for the next 18 months of Barry’s term and po-

tentially mar the rest of her agenda, including the May 1 referendum on a \$5.4 billion transit plan – the largest infrastructure investment in Metro’s history.

We expected better from Barry.

Sadly, the social media reaction toward the affair has been cruel with sexist and disgusting memes, comments and tweets leveled against the mayor. These comments do not reflect the values of civility.

Barry should be judged for her performance as a leader. Period.

On that measure, she has failed and she must step down for the good of the city.

It is time for Mayor Megan Barry to resign.

Opinion and Engagement Editor David Plazas wrote this editorial on behalf of The Tennessean Editorial Board and in collaboration with fellow editorial board members Vice President and Editor Michael A. Anastasi and Executive Editor Maria De Varenne. Call him at (615) 259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at @davidplazas.

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Don’t place more responsibility on teachers

Arming teachers is one of the proposed remedies to school shootings. Once again, we are trying to solve the problems of our society by placing more responsibility on our already overburdened teachers.

Why? Because other people are failing to do their jobs: government officials and legislators, mental health professionals, child protective services representatives, law enforcement officers, parents, community leaders and many more.

Shame on everyone who wants to place this additional burden on our children’s teachers. Shame on everyone who wonders why teachers feel overwhelmed, underpaid and unappreciated. Shame on everyone who criticizes teachers but doesn’t step up to lend them a hand.

Enough is enough.
Peggy Hickman, Old Hickory 37138

Let teachers teach, officers protect

The failure of a deputy sheriff to confront the shooter in the recent massacre of students and adults has promoted a lot of criticism of that officer and his duty to protect.

In addition, the alleged failure of officials to act on information about the shooter has resulted in a flood of knee-jerk reactions, including arming teachers, which, while well meaning, is not very smart. Turning a classroom into an O.K. Corral simply means a child has the



chance of being shot by friendly as well as hostile fire.

A point of discussion should involve school resource officers training to include being a “friend” of students as well as protector. I have read reports that point out how popular a particular SRO is. That person is usually connected to and respected by students and faculty.

That SRO, through personal observa-

tion and with tips from trusting students and faculty, should be able to provide a “watch list” of potential problem people. I would rather have my child educated in a school district that has well-trained school resource officers than armed teachers.

Richard J. Baines, Murfreesboro 37130

Put God back in schools

I had to smile as I read the headline in the Sunday paper: “Lawmakers urge stronger teacher discipline policies.”

I thought finally lawmakers will take on the discipline problems in our schools for our good students, so teachers can teach in a safe, healthy environment.

My smile quickly went away when I realized the article was about discipline for our teachers, not for our students. Oh well.

As I hear about another school shooting, I hear the same old debates about guns, mental illness, better schools, politics and more law enforcement, etc. It breaks my heart that we hear nothing from the churches about having the Bible back in schools and having prayer.

It was men and judges who removed them in the 1960s, and it is God, along with millions of Christian Americans, who can help make those changes again today, like it was for 150 years. Today’s kids need to know they are loved.

I am just a simple, back-porch preacher, but I believe this is the only chance we have, my friends, to keep children safe in the future. We need to stop being politically correct and stop worrying about hurting someone’s feelings all the time.

For the greater good of all our children in our schools I say bring back the Bible and prayer. And I wish more Christians, pastors and churches around the country would wake up and stop sitting on their hands in silence.

Rick Hunt, Mt. Juliet 37122

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Insight

Can Mayor Briley bridge Nashville’s wealth gap?



Nashville Mayor David Briley is the first native Nashvillian to become mayor since Bill Boner served from 1987 to 1991. LARRY MCCORMACK / THE TENNESSEAN



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The abrupt change from one mayor to another has not halted the growing prosperity and inequality facing Nashville.

Far from it. Rapid population growth, booming businesses, rising housing prices and the increasing cost of living are on track to continue regardless of who heads Metro Government.

Nevertheless, the Mayor’s Office can serve as a countermeasure, a champion and a voice for citizens who are struggling, living in poverty or homeless.

The mayor is someone who can invest money in helping create a more economically inclusive city.

That was a campaign promise of former Mayor Megan Barry, who invested millions more than past mayors in affordable housing, who created job opportunities for youth, and who gave citizens hope that she could balance anti-poverty measures with strong economic development.

Now that she has pleaded guilty to felony theft and resigned from office, can her successor, David Briley, take on the mantle and follow through on that promise?

This is a daunting challenge in a city where:
✎ Average monthly rents grew from \$897 in 2011 to \$1,400 in 2017 – a 56 percent increase (RentJungle).

✎ Median earnings grew from \$52,348 in 2010 to \$58,385 in 2016 – a 12 percent increase (U.S. Census).

✎ Nearly a fifth of Metro Nashville’s 684,000 residents lives in poverty while about a third of children do (Census).

The issue of affordable housing and quality of life was the focus of a yearlong series of columns I wrote in 2017 for The Tennessean: “Costs of Growth and Change in Nashville.”

Longtime and native Nashvillians feel left behind as many newcomers enjoy the benefits and wonders of “it” city.

Briley, grandson of Metro Nashville’s first mayor, Beverly Briley, is the first native Nashvillian to become mayor since Bill Boner served from 1987 to 1991.

The new mayor is well aware of the costs of growth.

“It is hard to see neighborhoods being torn down, communities being negatively affected, destroyed by the changing environment. I feel a lot of pain for those communities.”

Mayor David Briley

Last fall, he spoke at the groundbreaking of micro-homes for ailing homeless people at Glenclyff United Methodist Church. I included those words in the series chapter on homelessness.

“I’m here to ask for forgiveness,” then Vice Mayor Briley said on Oct. 4. “We have designed a place and accepted a place where there’s too much violence and poverty. We have designed a place where people don’t have housing.”

This issue is not going away, and the new affordable housing coalition Welcome Home — comprising labor, nonprofit and religious organizations — is demanding greater focus and better results from Metro.

One of the coalition groups, Nashville Organized for Action and Hope, organized a forum Thursday evening called “Transit and Affordable Housing: Voting Your Priorities” at Lee Chapel A.M.E. Church in North Nashville.

Since Briley supports the \$5.4 billion transit plan referendum on May 1, it would benefit him to listen and work with these groups to show how these priorities are not mutually exclusive.

Creating inclusive economy amid growth

Briley came to visit with The Tennessean on Thursday – his second full day on the job – and we talked about the wealth gap, compassion and advocating for the underdog in an interview, which was originally broadcast live on Facebook.

Here are some excerpts from Briley’s remarks:

“It is hard to see neighborhoods being torn down, communities being negatively affected, destroyed by the changing environment. I feel a lot of pain for those communities.

“It’s not clear exactly how much the mayor

can do to stop that. People sell their houses voluntarily. That’s a reality of the circumstances.

“What I believe we have to do is to make sure that everybody has access to the piece of the pie, to make sure that people have access to financial capital, to make sure that people have access to educational capital, that they get the opportunity to learn, to make sure the playing field is fair and level.

“That’s really the place where the mayor can do the most.”

Showing compassion and listening

“As mayor, I am primarily a person that is responsible for the laws that are adopted in our community. The laws are the budget and our zoning code and all those different things.

“Fundamentally, I believe that we need laws to protect the poor, we need laws to protect the vulnerable, we need laws that protect the powerless.

“Each and every day, that will inform me and influence me as I decide what we’re meant to do as a city. ... I’m truly committed to hearing from every perspective.”

Nashville not ‘parochial place it once was’

Briley has lived in San Francisco, Latin America and the East Coast, but his Nashville roots give him a unique view that recent mayors might not have shared.

“I hope it gives me a good perspective about what’s good about Nashville and will focus me on trying to maintain it – our neighborhoods, the accessibility to community here, the religious community,” he said. “All those things are what make Nashville pretty special.”

However, he added this caveat: “Nashville is not the parochial place it once was. As we save what’s important here, we also have to be focused on what’s good in other places and try to bring it here.”

Briley has made clear he has a heart for the “least among us.”

Voters will decide in an upcoming special election whether they think he deserves more time to make a mark.

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