

GAINESVILLE NEIGHBORHOODS UNITED

Advantage Gainesville: Strong neighborhoods

City not a historic walkable village

What is the relationship between infrastructure, density, and green space?

Infrastructure refers to common resources, such as roads, public transportation, utilities, shopping, schools, hospitals and healthcare. Density describes the number of people living in one area, for instance, the number of people per square mile. The closer people live to each other, the less public infrastructure is needed—fewer roads, shorter utility pipes and lines, etc. The shorter distances are to work, school, shopping, worship, and other daily activities, the less gas is needed for transportation. In addition, when more people live on smaller pieces of land, more greenspace, outside the urban core, can be preserved for farmland or forest. Cities in which people can carry out their lives by walking—without need for car or bus—use less fossil fuel and preserve more open space. (This phenomenon is known as a “20 minute city,” where it takes fewer than 20 minutes, or one mile, to walk to one’s destination.) Smaller historic cities, that developed before fossil fuel-based transit, demonstrate this calculus well.

While many agree on this ideal, and some of us have been lucky enough to live in such cities, Gainesville, is not one of them. Like many 20th century American cities, Gainesville grew too large in area, though not in population, to return to the nostalgic development pattern of a 19th century village.

Neighborhoods: Our greatest asset

Instead, we must find a way forward, given where we are today. Those of us committed to Gainesville’s neighborhoods believe the planning unit of the neighborhood, itself, is a critical building block in our particular community.

Gainesville's current situation has many advantages. Our neighborhoods, because of their size and history of supportive relationships, act as a kind of social infrastructure. Our pervasive tree canopy, including our forested neighborhoods and their water-absorbing forest floors, allow Gainesville to retain vital green space within the city, not just around it. Our gardens can produce food, help pollinate flowers, and shelter birds and animals. Our neighborhoods are nestled into our network of creeks, recognizing, if not yet celebrating, our unique terrain. How many cities are shaped by a river that disappears underground within the city limits?

We also have challenges. Our community's "activity centers," including UF, downtown, Butler Plaza, North Florida Regional/The Oaks Mall, are too distant to walk from one to the other. We must think about each as a walkable node and consider the neighborhoods within a mile of each as a distinct district. Our public transportation system is under-developed, and heavily reliant on UF students' fees, which naturally dictate current bus routes. Our school system favors newer, wealthier parts of the city, as do shopping complexes and other shared resources.

Unless we simply abandon large portions of our built fabric, we must work with what we have, to envision a community built on our neighborhoods' unique attributes and strengths, not on an idealized generic no-where-land.

To learn more, visit our [resource](#) page, or suggest additional resources at neighbor@gainesvilleneighborhoodsunitied.org