

City of Topeka, Neighborhood Relations Stages of Resource Targeting (SORT) Application

Applicant Information

NIA: Tennessee Town NIA Contact: Michael Bell, President

Address: 617 SW Taylor, Apt. 13

City: Topeka State: KS Zip: 66603

Phone: 785-979-7055 E-mail: theanticj@yahoo.com

Application instructions: Provide detailed answers to each of the following questions.

Neighborhood Characteristics

- 1a. Attach color health map showing the specific boundaries and Census Block Groups of your NIA. Indicate any Block Group(s) that should be considered for SORT funding.

See attachment #1 of this application.

- 1b. Do you have a Neighborhood Plan? When was the plan last updated?

Yes. The plan has not been updated.

- 1c. How long has the NIA had a neighborhood plan?

Since 2001.

2. Has your NIA previously been designated as a SORT target area?

Yes, in 2004-2006. Tennessee Town is located within parts of census tracts 1, 3, 4, and 5 (per Tennessee Town Neighborhood Plan, page 9).

3. How is your neighborhood or sub-neighborhood area ranked as a Priority Investment Area in the Neighborhood Element of the City's Comprehensive Plan?

Above Average (Per Sec. 4, Neighborhood Wellness Strategy, May 2012, Neighborhood Element, Topeka Comprehensive Plan 2025, pg 40)

Neighborhood Needs

4. What are the needs of your neighborhood, as identified in your adopted Neighborhood Plan and/or other process you have completed?

- Single- and multi-family housing (new construction and rehabilitation)
- Increasing pool of quality, affordable housing both for homeowners and renters
- Vacant housing, properties (including acquisition, rehabilitation, demolition, and land banking)
- Identifying funds to acquire the building and property of the former Dillon's Store #58 at 1400 SW Huntoon to enable the establishment of another food source there
- Continuing to increase property values
- Infrastructure (including street/sidewalk lighting, new sidewalks, alley resurfacing/replacement/construction)

- Maintaining/expanding existing greenspace (Lane Garden), providing more greenspace in other parts of the neighborhood
 - Identifying and pursuing opportunities for increased activities for youth and families (including youth groups at neighborhood churches; maintaining, expanding number of play areas for children; the International Academy, a pre-K through 3rd grade school that will include a community center and storm shelter)
 - Maintaining current businesses/expanding opportunities for small-business development along neighborhood's periphery
 - Address property crime concerns
 - Neighborhood signage to mark Tennessee Town's entryways and honor its history
 - Working with the property owner to identify funds to rehabilitate the former city ice house in the first 1100 block of SW Buchanan
 - Working with Living the Dream, Inc. to identify funds to rehabilitate the former Colored Women's Club, at 1149 SW Lincoln, which Living the Dream, Inc. has acquired to use as its headquarters
5. Describe the existing positive features of the neighborhood which, if enhanced, would positively impact the neighborhood (include any recent or potential investment/development that SORT efforts could capitalize on).
- Through its many and varied efforts at improving housing, increasing property values and decreasing crime, Tennessee Town had moved from being a completely "Intensive Care" neighborhood to being majority "Outpatient" by 2011. The 2014 neighborhood health update indicates that Tennessee Town had become completely "at risk" due in part to the national economic downturn. There is an opportunity now to move the neighborhood to "Outpatient" and then "Healthy" (per the City of Topeka Planning Department's neighborhood health classifications). Tennessee Town was named the city's most improved neighborhood in 2013
 - New housing construction and rehabilitation activities that started in the first decade of the 2000s with multiple partners including the City of Topeka, the Topeka Housing Authority through the maintenance and expansion of the Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments, Topeka Habitat for Humanity (including the new house to be built in the first 1200 block of SW Buchanan), Topeka City Homes; the TOTO Program through Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.; Cornerstone of Topeka, Inc. (including the new house at 1231 SW Clay); the Asbury-Mt. Olive Apartments (constructed through tax credits)
 - The International Academy, administered by Community First, Inc., which is geared to educating and preparing children pre-K through 3rd grade for academic and life success
 - The creation and maintenance of King's Court, a combination basketball facility and playground for children, at SW Lincoln and Munson Streets funded through successful Consolidated Plan Neighborhood Empowerment Grant applications
 - The decorative lighting along SW Washburn and Lane Streets, from SW 10th Ave. south to SW Huntoon St. funded through the city's Consolidated Plan
 - Strong neighborhood anchors, including WCW Property Management, Penwell-Gabel Midtown Chapel, the Buchanan Center and its nonprofit tenants (Cornerstone of Topeka, Inc.; Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.; and the Tennessee Town NIA), the Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments, the five neighborhood churches (First Church of the Nazarene, Faith Temple COGIC, Asbury-Mt. Olive UMC, Shiloh Baptist Church, and Lane Chapel AME Church); Living the Dream, Inc. (with its headquarters in the former Colored Women's Clubhouse at 1149 SW Lincoln); and strong anchors on its periphery (Stormont-Vail HealthCare, the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, Holy Name and Central Congregational Churches; Lowman Hill Elementary, Robinson Middle and Topeka High Schools)

- Maintained and expanded partnerships (neighborhood partners include the City of Topeka; Community First, Inc., Topeka Housing Authority; Topeka Habitat for Humanity, Cornerstone of Topeka, Inc.; Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.; the five neighborhood churches; Living the Dream, Inc.; Arts Connect Topeka/Topeka Mural Project (and the mural on the south wall of the WCW Property Management building at 1238 SW Lane), Penwell-Gabel, Keep American Beautiful Topeka/Shawnee County, and Safe Streets Topeka/Shawnee County)
- To work to maintain the many historic buildings in Tennessee Town, including but not limited to the city's old ice house and the former Colored Women's Club
- To continue trends that show that Tennessee Town is a diverse neighborhood that still embraces its historical nature as a neighborhood characterized by low- to moderate-income individuals and families

6. Describe any potential limitations to successfully revitalize your neighborhood.

- Overcoming misperceptions held by some about low- to moderate-income individuals and families
- Overcoming misperceptions held by some about revitalizing urban neighborhoods
- Overcoming misperceptions held by some that the progress Tennessee Town has made on a number of fronts since 2000 means it doesn't have any/many challenges left
- The static or decreasing nature of public funds for neighborhood revitalization activities as needs increase
- State laws that slow down the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing housing that might be suitable for rehabilitation

Impact and Benefits

7. Why are you applying for SORT assistance?

The Tennessee Town NIA is applying for SORT assistance for 2017-2019 for many of the same reasons it was designated as a SORT neighborhood in 2004-2006 (also see attachments #2 - #9):

- To revitalize a historically significant neighborhood near the city's center
- To provide quality, affordable housing options through new construction and rehabilitation
- To provide a safe, growing neighborhood for individuals and families
- To enhance the travel, safety of pedestrians through street/sidewalk lighting and new sidewalks
- To enhance access to neighborhood housing through the resurfacing/replacement/construction of alleys
- To grow the only existing neighborhood greenspace at the Lane Garden while providing other greenspace opportunities, including play areas for children
- To put vacant properties back on the tax rolls and to increase overall property values
- To enhance existing neighborhood assets (Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments, Asbury-Mt. Olive Apartments, the Buchanan Center, new and rehabilitated single-family housing, five neighborhood churches, finding a tenant for the former Dillon's and small businesses, among other assets)
- To enhance the International Academy, which will feature a pre-K through 3rd grade curriculum geared to producing academic, life success for children and their families
- To maintain and improve historical buildings in the neighborhood
- To update the Tennessee Town neighborhood plan, which has proved to be an invaluable resource as the neighborhood has identified and pursued revitalization activities
- To build on and assist the efforts of neighborhood stakeholders who are committed to making Tennessee Town a better neighborhood

8. What changes do you want to see take place in your neighborhood? Include general changes as well as any specific changes to public/private areas of your neighborhood.

Through this SORT application, Tennessee Town seeks to continue its efforts to become a completely “Healthy” neighborhood, the occurrence of which would make Tennessee Town the city’s first NIA to go from completely “Intensive Care” to completely “Healthy.” As a result of pursuing the ultimate health rating for Topeka’s neighborhoods and completing the neighborhood’s work, the changes would include:

- More single- and multi-family housing that provides safe, quality, affordable options for Topeka’s working-class individuals and families
- A safer, growing neighborhood
- Provide a more walkable neighborhood with vital greenspaces, better sidewalks and more lighting
- Provide tangible ways to preserve and improve a historically significant Topeka neighborhood
- The achievement of the goals identified in the NIA’s 2001 neighborhood plan and the setting and pursuit of new and/or updated goals that would be included in a neighborhood plan update
- A continuation of neighborhood changes that led the city’s planning department to characterize Tennessee Town as the Topeka neighborhood with “the most significant improvements in Neighborhood Health,” highlighted by “a significant reduction in the number of Part 1 crimes, a complete reduction in boarded houses, and an increase in homeownership throughout the entire NIA since conditions were last recorded in the 2007 Health Map. The poverty rate also decreased in each Block Group from the 2000 Census as well.” (from the planning department’s “Neighborhood Element, Topeka Comprehensive Plan 2025, Section I – The State of Neighborhoods, May 2012,” pages 5-6)

9. Describe the beneficiaries and impact of your future efforts.

- Long-time residents and neighborhood stakeholders already invested in the preservation and betterment of the neighborhood they’ve chosen to call home
- New residents and stakeholders attracted to a safe, thriving, historically significant Topeka neighborhood
- Central Topeka and the city as a whole through a growing, vibrant neighborhood in the city’s core that embraces its historical nature as a home to working-class individuals and families
- The City of Topeka through having more properties with increasing values on the tax rolls
- Pedestrians who both live in or commute through the neighborhood by providing safer and better travel options through installing street/sidewalk lighting and new sidewalks
- Residents having better access to their homes through alley improvements
- Children and families having a neighborhood with more and better options for them

Capacity and Commitment

10. Has the NIA established a SORT committee? List the members of the committee and any positions they hold with the NIA?

Yes. The members are the 3 NIA officers (President Michael Bell, Vice-President Pat DeLapp, Secretary-Treasurer Sandy Lassiter) and CAC member Don Fortin.

(See attachment #9 for a list of supporters of the Tennessee Town NIA’s application to be designated as a SORT neighborhood for 2017-2019)

- 10a. Briefly discuss the revitalization strategies of your Neighborhood Plan and any activities your NIA or others have undertaken to implement recommendations of your plan?

Through the many partnerships the Tennessee Town NIA has established since the late 1990s, all designed to achieve the goals outlined in its adopted neighborhood plan, Tennessee Town has been able to address the following strategies:

Goal Statements (pages 17-18 of the neighborhood plan):

Housing:

“Support the improvement of housing conditions in the neighborhood as the top priority for the revitalization of Tennessee Town” (page 17)

- A. 11 new single-family, owner-occupied houses in the first 1200 block of SW Lincoln (eight houses in partnership with the City of Topeka through multiple in-fill housing RFPs and acquiring and relocating three houses owned by Holy Name Church; three houses in partnership with Topeka Habitat for Humanity). That block was identified in the neighborhood plan as being the worst block in Tennessee Town regarding distressed housing and vacant lots
- B. Three more new single-family, owner-occupied houses, two in the second 1100 block of SW Lane and one in the first 1200 block of SW Buchanan
- C. The creation of 11 units of multi-family, tenant-occupied housing in partnership with Asbury-Mt. Olive Church in the second 1100 block of SW Buchanan and the 1100 block of SW Munson through tax credit financing
- D. Through the Topeka Housing Authority, the expansion of the tenant-occupied Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments in the second 1100 block of SW Lincoln. The Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments was an early NIA success story (and a Topeka Housing Authority success story, too), dating back to 1983, and provides housing for many of our senior neighbors.

Those efforts at establishing new housing enabled the NIA to “promote new housing development primarily for ‘homeownership’ and maintain its affordability” (pg. 17)

In partnership with the City of Topeka and Topeka City Homes, the NIA was able to rehabilitate several single-family housing units throughout Tennessee Town, which enabled the NIA to “maximize the conservation of existing housing, thereby contributing to the historical character of the neighborhood” and to “stimulate rehabilitation of both owner- and renter-occupied housing” (pg. 17). There’s still work to do on this front.

The creation of new housing helped the NIA to “strive to achieve a neighborhood of no abandoned homes and no vacant lots” (page 17). There’s still work to do on this front.

The NIA’s work at creating or rehabilitating housing while maintaining the neighborhood’s historical socioeconomic and architectural character enabled the NIA to “balance the need to develop quality in-fill housing with the need to compliment the economic, social and architectural fabric of the neighborhood” (page 17). This goal will be carried forward.

New and rehabilitated housing activities have spurred homeowners “to participate in housing rehabilitation activities” (page 17), including efforts most notably in the first 1200 block of SW Lincoln and also throughout the neighborhood. Work on this point should continue.

Land Use:

“Increase the amount of usable community greenspace accessible to residents” (page 17). The NIA seeks to meet that goal through this SORT application by expanding the Lane Garden, at SW 12th and Lane Streets, and creating and maintaining at least one other greenspace in the eastern part of the neighborhood.

Youth and Education:

There were four goals stated in the neighborhood plan (page 17):

- A. "Tennessee Town should be 'kid-friendly' and desirous for families to raise children
- B. "Help develop linkages to educational/cultural/recreational assets within the community -- schools, churches, library, etc. -- that will enable youth to enhance their academic and life skills"
- C. "Encourage quality pre-school programs that target children at their most developmental stages."
- D. "Include youth and their families, to the greatest extent possible, in the decision-making processes of the neighborhood."

The nonprofit Community First, Inc., a NIA partner, and its establishment of the International Academy, including a new building to be located at SW 12th and Lincoln Streets, helps the NIA to achieve all four goals

Faith Temple Church, another NIA partner, and its creation of the basketball facility and playground at King's Court, at SW Lincoln and Munson Streets, helped the NIA to achieve goals A and D. The NIA submitted and was approved for new playground equipment matting through the city's Neighborhood Empowerment Grant to keep the play area there viable and safe for children

Both Faith Temple and Asbury-Mt. Olive Churches have ongoing and successful youth programs, which the NIA supports and helps to achieve goals A, B and D

Efforts regarding inviting "youth and their families," as well as others, to participate in the NIA (goal D) continue through mailed meeting notices, a NIA website (<http://tenntownnia.weebly.com>), a NIA Twitter account (@tenntown), a NIA e-mail address (tenntown@yahoo.com), and a Nextdoor page (https://tennesseetown.nextdoor.com/news_feed/)

Through the 2017-2019 SORT process, the NIA seeks to expand opportunities for youths and their families by expanding the Lane Garden, including providing playground equipment; and establishing another greenspace, preferably at the east side of the neighborhood, that will include playground equipment, thereby addressing goal A

Economic Development:

There were four goals stated in the neighborhood plan (pages 17 and 18):

- A. "Develop and maintain active partnerships with the community's businesses and employers"
- B. "Support the retention/expansion of the Dillon's block as the neighborhood's primary retail employer and amenity" (with the closure of the Huntoon Dillon's it is still the NIA's goal to have a food source in the vacated building to not only serve Tennessee Town but all of Central Topeka).
- C. "Utilize loan and incubator programs to stimulate entrepreneurial businesses either within the neighborhood or for residents"
- D. "Work to provide child care and transportation opportunities to enable residents to accomplish employment or educational objectives"

Penwell-Gabel Midtown Chapel, WCW Property Management, Doorstep/Dovetail, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Cornerstone of Topeka, Inc. and Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc. continue to be or are new neighborhood partners, meeting goal A

The former "Dillon's block," bordered by SW 12th, Washburn, Huntoon and Lane Streets, continues to feature the Aaron Douglas Art Park and host the Aaron Douglas Art Fair every September, thereby meeting goal B. The northwest corner of the Dillon's block is undeveloped and may hold future possibilities for business or other development that could be pursued through this SORT application.

Some of the neighborhood's churches, including Faith Temple and Asbury-Mt. Olive, have developed child care programs for youths, thereby meeting goal D.

Tennessee Town is serviced by multiple bus routes, thereby addressing goal D.

Historical Character:

There were six goals stated in the neighborhood plan (page 18):

- A. "Identify, preserve and promote the heritage of Tennessee Town"
- B. "Create a cultural heritage center that documents the neighborhood's history and linkages to Black history in Topeka"
- C. "Apply traditional neighborhood design standards for new development that respects Tennessee Town's scale and character"
- D. "Increase participation and investment of local churches in neighborhood revitalization activities."
- E. "Welcome and support a diversity of peoples"
- F. "Identify neighborhood gateways and work to enhance and beautify their image"

There is a neighborhood history area in the Buchanan Center that features photographs and other memorabilia, thereby addressing goals A and B

The new building for the International Academy will include a community center where the NIA might develop a "cultural heritage center," thereby addressing goals A and B

One of the chief components of the Tennessee Town neighborhood plan was to ensure that new development or rehabilitation activities would "respect Tennessee Town's scale and character," and that has happened through new single- and multi-family housing efforts as well as housing rehabilitation. Goal C will continue to be met as the neighborhood moves forward.

Led by the significant contributions of Faith Temple Church (featuring King's Court, the annual Tennessee Town Basketball Tournament, and the International Academy), Asbury-Mt. Olive Church (the Asbury-Mt. Olive Apartments and the NIA's annual National Night Out celebration); and Shiloh Baptist Church's partnership with the NIA, the City and Topeka Habitat for Humanity to enable the construction of a new home in the first 1200 block of SW Buchanan; as well as youth programs at many of the NIA's churches, the involvement of the neighborhood's five churches has increased, per goal D, and the NIA's churches will remain vital partners as it moves forward.

According to U.S. census figures, demographically Tennessee Town has went from being primarily an African-American neighborhood to becoming a more diverse neighborhood.

Neighborhood signage, which would help to address goal F, is one of the things Tennessee Town would like to initiate through its 2017-2019 SORT application.

Safety, Infrastructure and Transportation:

There were five goals stated in the neighborhood plan (page 18):

- A. "Strengthen the relationship between police and community residents"
- B. "Increase effectiveness of public and private lighting in order to reduce incidents of crime"
- C. "Create a more 'walkable' community, particularly along major trafficways, which promotes pedestrian safety for all residents; initiate traffic calming techniques where appropriate"
- D. "Reconnect the neighborhood in a more pedestrian-friendly manner to local businesses and institutions"

Through working with the Topeka Police Department's Community Policing unit, the neighborhood has kept strong its relationship with law enforcement, per goal A

As a part of its 2017-2019 SORT application, Tennessee Town seeks to install street/sidewalk lighting along the streets outside the Washburn-Lane corridor to meet goal B (see attachment 6)

As a part of its 2017-2019 SORT application, Tennessee Town seeks to install sidewalks at various places throughout the neighborhood to meet goals C and D (see attachment 6)

- 10b. For NIA's without an existing Neighborhood Plan, what activities have you undertaken or will take to guide the creation of a Neighborhood Plan next year?

The Tennessee Town NIA has a neighborhood plan, adopted in 2001.

11. What past activities has your NIA done to demonstrate your ability to commit to the full three-year commitment?

The accomplishments listed in this application regarding new and rehabilitated housing, as well as the accomplishment of other activities identified in the Tennessee Town neighborhood plan and the partnerships the NIA has created and maintained; provide evidence that Tennessee Town is capable of following through with the activities required of a SORT target area and within the specified timeframe.

Respectfully Submitted

Signature _____ Date November 21, 2016

Name Michael Bell

Title Tennessee Town NIA President

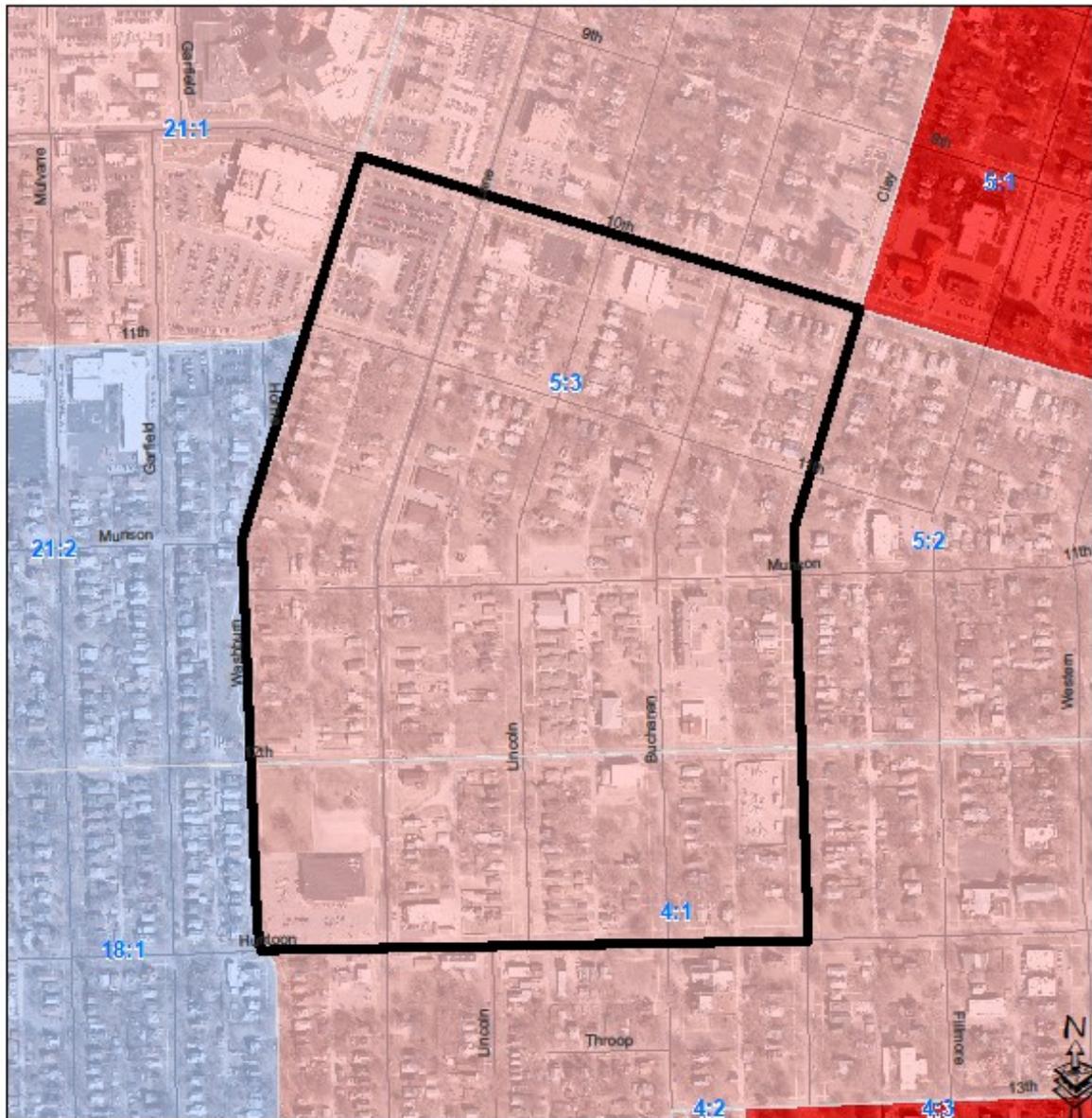
Attachment #1

2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application

2014 City of Topeka Neighborhood Health Map

November 21, 2016

2014 Tennessee Town Neighborhood Health



Legend

- Healthy
- Out Patient
- At Risk
- Intensive Care

"Vital Signs" Which Determine Neighborhood Health Include:

- 1) % of Persons Below Poverty Level
- 2) Part 1 Crimes Per Capita
- 3) Average Residential Property Values
- 4) % of Owner Occupied Homes
- 5) Number of Boarded Houses

Block Groups

Attachment #2

2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application

In-Fill Housing, Housing Rehabilitation Opportunity Areas

November 21, 2016

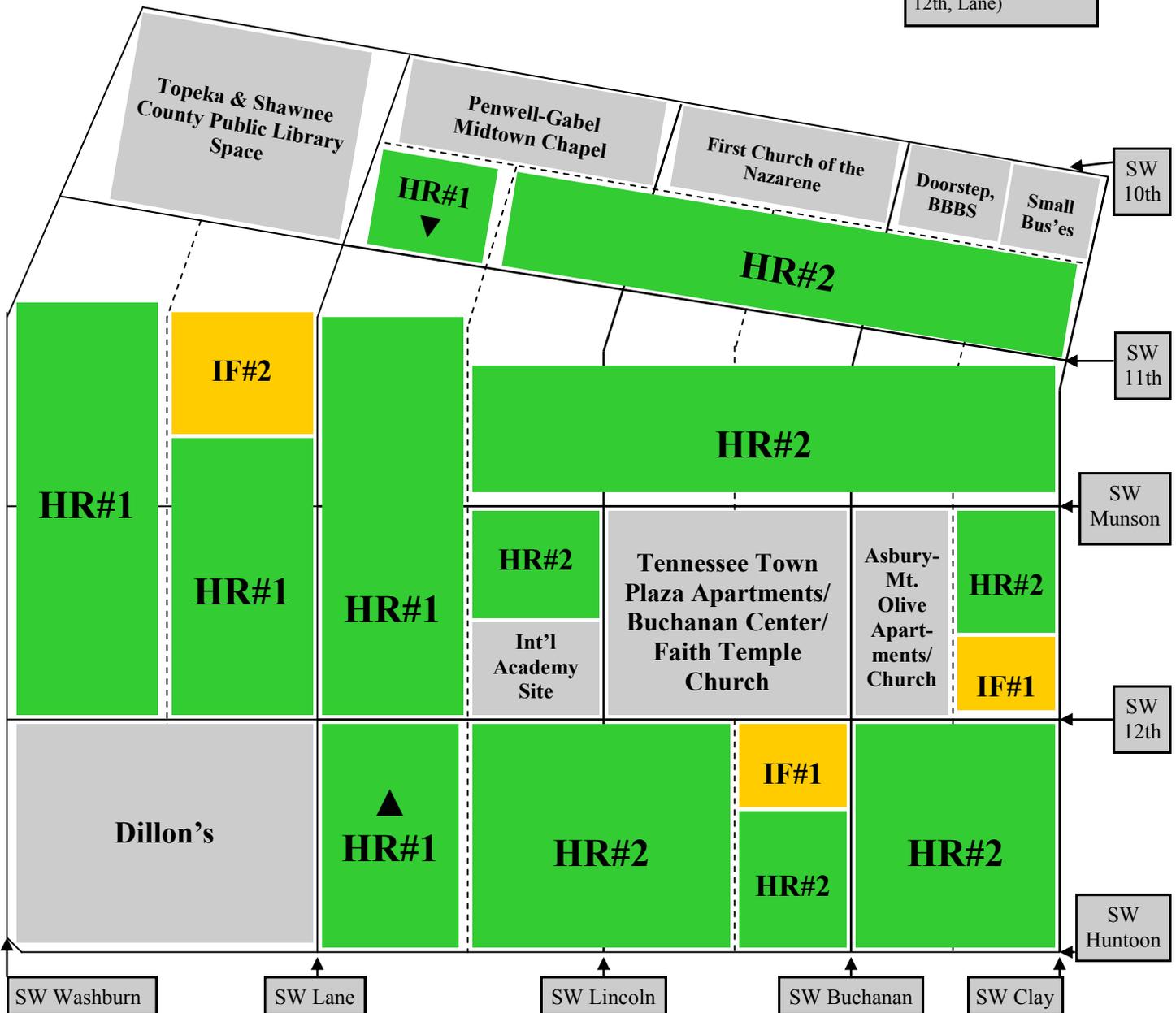


Key:
 - - - - Alley
 [Green Box] Housing Rehab
 [Yellow Box] In-Fill Housing

Key:
 HR#1: Housing Rehab Priority Area #1, Tennessee Town West (10th, Washburn, Huntoon, east side of Lane)

Key:
 HR#2: Housing Rehab Priority Area #2, Tennessee Town East (10th, west side of Lincoln, Huntoon, west side of Clay)

Key:
 IF#1: In-Fill Housing Priority Area #1, Tennessee Town East (10th, Lane, Huntoon, Clay)
 IF#2: In-Fill Housing Priority Area #2, Washburn-Lane Pkwy (11th, Washburn, 12th, Lane)



Attachment #3

2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application

Street/Sidewalk Lighting, Sidewalk Installation, Lane Garden Expansion Areas

November 21, 2016



Key:

- Alley
- New Sidewalk (to replace bricks)
- Mid-block lighting



Attachment #4
2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application
In-Fill Housing Examples
November 21, 2016



▲ Single-family in-fill housing in the first 1200 block of SW Lincoln ▲



▲ Single-family in-fill housing in the first 1200 block of SW Buchanan ▲

Attachment #4
2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application
In-Fill Housing Examples
November 21, 2016



▲ Asbury-Mt. Olive Apartments, in the second 1100 block of SW Buchanan ▲

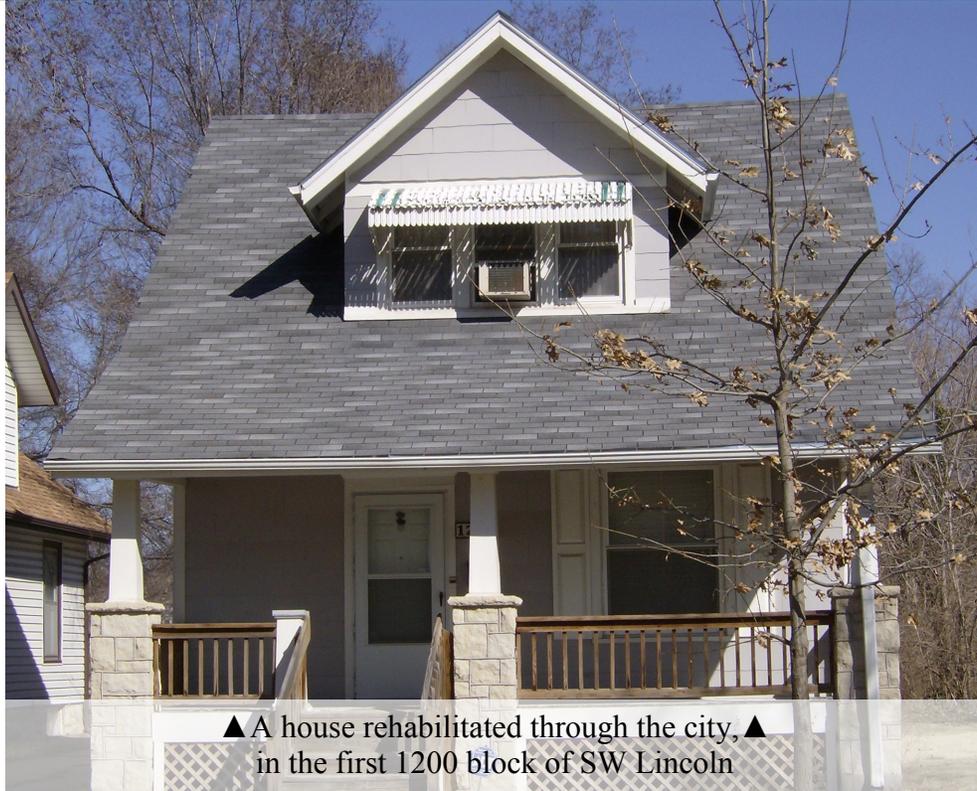


▲ Tennessee Town Plaza Apartments, these units in the second 1100 block of SW Lincoln ▲

Attachment #4
2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application
In-Fill Housing, Housing Rehabilitation Examples
November 21, 2016

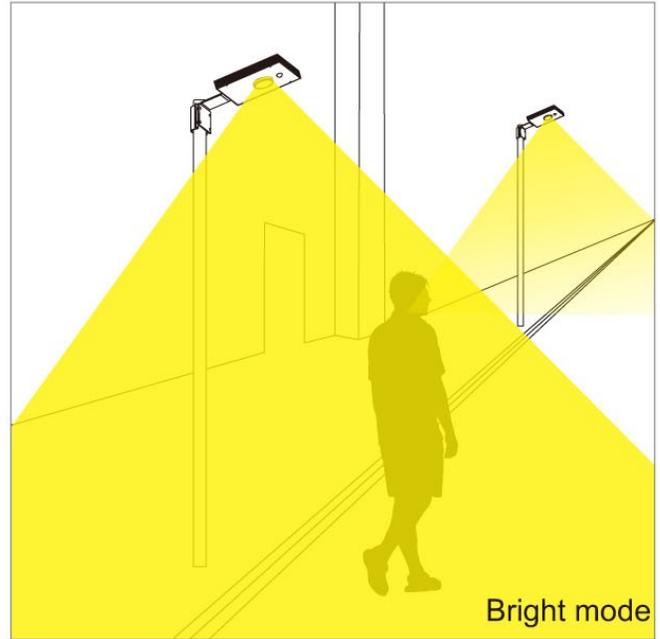
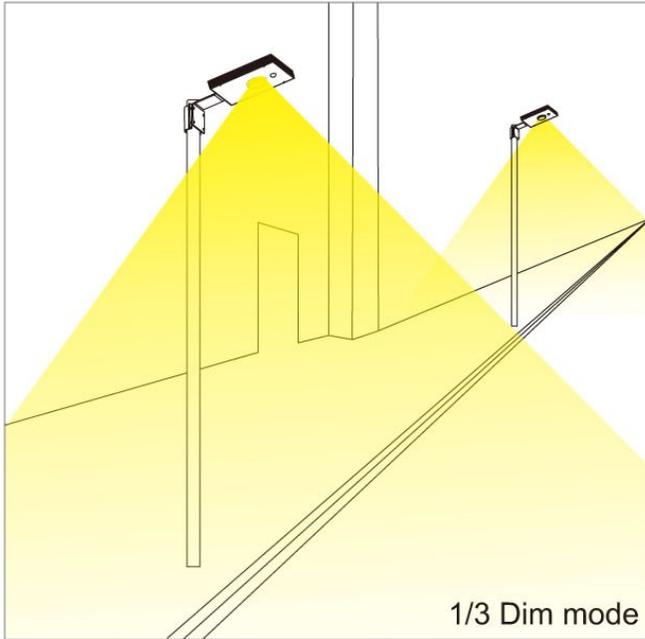


▲ An example of row housing as in-fill housing ▲



▲ A house rehabilitated through the city, ▲
in the first 1200 block of SW Lincoln

Attachment #5
2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application
Street/Sidewalk Lighting Examples
November 21, 2016



▲ An example of street/sidewalk lighting ▲



▲ An example of street/sidewalk lighting ▲

Attachment #6
2017-2019 Tennessee Town NIA SORT Application
Lane Garden and Expansion Example
November 21, 2016



▲ Lane Garden, at SW 12th and Lane Streets. To the left is 1194 SW Lane, which has been acquired by the ▲ NIA. The house there is to be demolished and the vacant property annexed to Lane Garden



▲ An example of a pocket park with amenities ▲