Gainsboro

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

ROANOKE
VIRGINIA
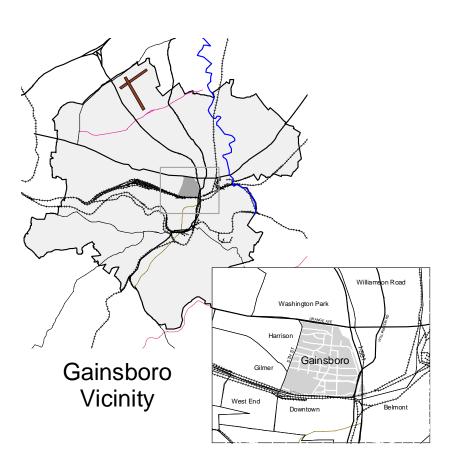
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vision 2001 / 2020

Adopted by City Council March 17, 2003

Planning Building & Development

Introduction

Gainsboro, Roanoke's oldest village, is part of the overall neighborhood fabric of Roanoke. Located in the heart of Roanoke just north of the City Market, Gainsboro is bounded on the north by Orange Avenue, on the west by 5th Street, on the east by I-581 Williamson Road, and on the south by the Norfolk Southern Railway tracks. Because of its central location and access to major arterials, Gainsboro has convenient access to other neighborhoods, downtown, and other parts of the city. The neighborhood provides a variety of opportunities for living, from suburban-style development to more traditional historic areas.

This plan will become an integral part of *Vision 2001-2020,* Roanoke's comprehensive plan. *Vision 2001-2020* recommends that neighborhood organizations, civic groups, and businesses be involved in the development of neighborhood plans. The Roanoke Department of Planning Building and Development, along with Nottingham Associates, worked with neighborhood representatives, residents, property owners, and business owners to prepare this neighborhood plan. Through numerous work sessions, the community's issues, opportunities, and areas of greatest need were discussed. This involvement formed the basis for the plan's recommendations and assured that community interests, as well as the overall concerns of the city, were addressed.

Gainsboro Vicinity

Williamson Road

Washington Park

Harrison

Gilmer

Gainsboro

West End

Downtown

Belmont

ORANGE AVE

4TH ST

WILLIAMSON RD

I-581

A group of interested community representatives consistently attended work sessions. Their historical perspectives, thoughtful input, and direct comments were invaluable to the development of this plan. Discussion was organized around six key neighborhood planning elements:

- Community Design
- Residential Development
- Economic Development
- Infrastructure
- Public Services
- Quality of Life

The Community Design element looks at physical design features and land use patterns. Residential Development addresses existing and new housing opportunities. Economic Development deals with commercial and industrial development in the neighborhood. The Infrastructure element evaluates transportation systems and utility systems such as water, sewer, and storm drainage. The Public Services element assesses fire/EMS, police and other city services. Finally, the Quality of Life element addresses recreational opportunities, environmental issues, education, and community development. Each plan element contains information about current conditions and issues.

Strategic Initiatives

While this plan contains many recommended policies, there are five Strategic Initiatives on which implementation should be focused:

- Housing Development: A comprehensive, community-endorsed housing strategy is required. The strategy should promote rehabilitation, maintenance, well-designed infill development, and increased resident ownership.
- Henry Street Revitalization: Henry Street is important to the neighborhood's overall revitalization because it will provide a nucleus around which the neighborhood can develop.
- Conservation: Zoning changes are needed to establish future land use patterns and architectural design standards that will protect the character of the neighborhood. Eligible residential areas should be nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and Virginia Landmarks Register. Historic designations will promote rehabilitation and high quality infill development.
- Capacity Building: Gainsboro's residents are willing participants in determining the future of their neighborhood. Neighborhood-based organizations will be crucial to initiating and sustaining revitalization efforts. The many groups and individuals working toward Gainsboro's revitalization should collaborate to ensure open communication and awareness of development projects.
- Infrastructure: Gainsboro should have safe, well-designed streets and other infrastructure. Traffic management and street design must be evaluated and improved to ensure compatibility with the neighborhood setting.

History

Gainsboro's history and character make it one of the city's strongest and most distinctive neighborhoods. The name Gainesborough (later shortened to Gainsboro) formerly referred to an area that was centered on the present intersection of Orange Avenue and Williamson Road. Developer William Rowland laid out the area and it was named after its founder and financier, Major Kemp Gaines. The Town of Gainesborough was incorporated in 1835. When the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad arrived in 1852, it passed to the south of Gainesborough. Commerce and population began to move south toward the railroad in the area of downtown and the present-day Gainsboro neighborhood. This new settlement was called Big Lick and the older areas were referred to as Old Lick. Old Lick became a predominantly African American community. Old Lick and Big Lick eventually became Roanoke in 1882.

Most of the development in what is now the Gainsboro neighborhood occurred between 1890 and 1940. Beginning in the 1920s, the Gainsboro neighborhood transformed from a predominantly white residential neighborhood to a predominantly African American community, with its own institutions, businesses, and leaders. Gainsboro is noted for its development between 1900 and 1920, when Henry Street became the cultural and commercial center of the African American community. Gainsboro in the 1930s was the center for Roanoke's minority businesses, public facilities, housing and services.

Saint Andrews Catholic Church

Residents included teachers, doctors, ministers, nurses, small business operators, and artisans. The area is notable as one of the few places in the South where the African American community developed self-sufficient institutions and services such as a library, hospital, school, newspaper, and hotel .

The area of Wells, Gilmer, and Patton Avenues and Henry Street played a key role in the growth and development of Roanoke. The area was home to one of the major railway systems in the United States and was selected as the site for the Hotel Roanoke. In the late 1800s, several major religious denominations built their first churches in the area.

Today, Gainsboro has numerous landmark buildings that provide a link to Roanoke's past. Buildings on the National Register of Historic Places include St. Andrews Catholic Church, Hotel Roanoke, the Gainsboro Library, and the Norfolk & Western Railway buildings (now the Higher Education Center and Eight Jefferson Place). Portions of the residential areas of the neighborhood have been identified as eligible for listing on the National Register.

In addition to important landmark buildings, the neighborhood was home to several African Americans whose life achievements had an impact on our nation. The home of Oliver W. Hill, a renowned civil rights lawyer, is located on Gilmer Avenue. Judge Edward R. Dudley, the first black United States ambassador, also lived on Gilmer Avenue in Gainsboro. Dr. J.H. Roberts, Dr. J.B. Claytor, Dr. S.F. Williman and Dr. L.C. Downing, all were residents of the Gainsboro community and all were founders of the Burrell Memorial Hospital. Originally located on Henry Street, the hospital was chartered in 1915, and was one of the first to serve the African American community of the Roanoke Valley.

Like many inner-city neighborhoods in America, the Gainsboro community continues to deal with the consequences of the urban renewal programs of the 1960s and 70s that displaced many families and businesses. The general sentiment today in America, and in Gainsboro, is that urban renewal was something done to the community instead of with the community. One of the main purposes of this plan is to ensure that the community is involved in determining its own future and that the community's goals and interests are reflected in future development, ultimately leading to a better and more vibrant Gainsboro.

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[1] Baratta, Erin, *Gainsboro Historic Context*, 1992, Roanoke Regional Preservation Office (Virginia Department of Historic Resources)

Community Values

Through the workshops and input from residents, the following general values were agreed upon:

- Encourage increased homeownership levels in the neighborhood.
- Protect the architectural character of the neighborhood. New buildings should respect the existing neighborhood character with respect to scale and design. Existing residential areas should be protected from encroachment by commercial uses.
- Encourage continuing personal development through educational, cultural and historical resources.
- Ensure that all residents and owners responsibly maintain their properties.
- Promote a safe, crime-free environment for those who live, work, and play in the neighborhood.
- Welcome diverse nationalities, races, ages, and income levels.

Historic Gainsboro Library