



Memphis REALTORS® Help Bring Home “Complete Streets” Policy– November 2013

A community's streets, more than just thoroughfares, are a sign of the times, and symbolic of its welfare and values. In Memphis, Tenn, as in urban areas across the country, things weren't looking so good -- until now.

Since the rise of the motor car, many municipal transportation networks have evolved from a balanced mix of roads, streetcars and passenger trains to an infrastructure that favors the speedy transit of cars and trucks, at the expense or exclusion of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. In Memphis, as in many other American cities, the urban core and older suburban neighborhoods were crisscrossed by high speed multi-lane road networks, facilitating automobile and truck traffic but completely isolating certain areas of the city. The system was contributing to related problems of neighborhood blight, poverty, obesity, and poor air quality.

Late in 2011, Aubrie Kobernus, then Government Affairs Director of the 3000-member Memphis Area Association of REALTORS® (MAAR,) attended a workshop hosted by the Memphis chapter of the Urban Land Institute on laying the groundwork for a *Complete Streets* policy. The *Complete Streets Program* is a national initiative by Smart Growth America that helps to address the community concerns that Memphis was facing, by re-thinking current road systems to develop a thriving and sustainable urban environment for all.

"This is wonderful!" Kobernus thought, and took it right to her Governmental Affairs Committee back at MAAR. The committee saw that MAAR could and should take the lead on the adoption of a *Complete Streets* policy for Memphis, and Kobernus got to work applying for a Smart Growth Action Grant from NAR. MAAR was awarded \$15,000 to contribute to the advocacy efforts of the coalition working to adopt Complete Streets policy in Memphis and Shelby County. Rusty Bloodworth, a MAAR Commercial Council member, is an energetic co-chair of the *Complete Streets Coalition Task Force*, which led the focused pursuit of three strategic activities in an effort to craft a locally unique and relevant *Complete Streets* policy: community outreach/coalition-building, policy development, and education.

A portion of the grant money was used to hire a consultant who made more than 25 presentations on the benefits of *Complete Streets*, meeting with neighborhood associations and other groups, and answering citizens' concerns about property rights and forced action. "It was great for people to have a place to be heard, and have their concerns addressed," says Kobernus, "A lot of local eyes were opened to the clear benefits of Complete Streets." The grant funds were also used to create a compelling video narrated by Memphis Mayor A.C. Wharton, a longtime champion of Smart Growth and sustainability initiatives in Memphis and Shelby County.

In fact, rather than waiting for the legislative process of approval by the City Council, Mayor Wharton took the matter in to his own hands and issued an Executive Order approving a Complete Streets policy for the city of Memphis; Kobernus points out that



this action saved the coalition lots of lobbying dollars. As he signed it, in August of this year, Memphis became the 500th city in the country to adopt a *Complete Streets* policy.

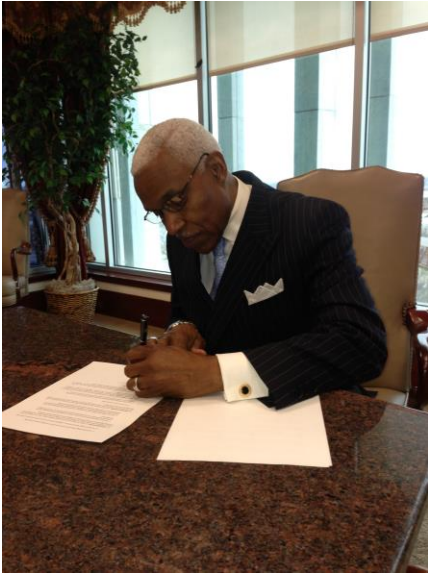
Now that the Executive Order is in place, the creation of a *Complete Streets* design manual for Memphis is underway. Although full implementation is still down the road, so to speak, transportation professionals in the city are already behaving as if it were in place. The success of this early adoption is being felt in certain downtown areas where streets have recently been put on "road diets," slowing the pace of traffic, increasing bike lanes, and making pedestrian activity safer; businesses along these altered roads are reporting higher activity. In addition to the Community Coalition of Greater Memphis, parties seated at the table providing input and guidance are the Mayor's office, through its Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator; and members of the business community, including commercial developers and landscape architects -- and of course, the REALTORS®.

Katie Shotts, MAAR's Communications & Commercial Council Director, says that when Bloodworth presented the project to the MAAR membership at a recent meeting, "Everyone was so excited and proud that we had taken this initiative, and that it was now part of MAAR's legacy within the community." Adds Kobernus, "Although it was and is truly a collaborative effort, it could not have happened without the REALTORS® pushing it forward!"

To learn more about how Memphis REALTORS® are making the city's Complete Streets program a reality, contact Katie Shotts, Communications & Commercial Council Director of the Memphis Area Association of REALTORS®, at katie.shotts@maar.org or 901.818.2435.



The Memphis Complete Streets Program includes new bike lanes and pedestrian crossings at major intersections.



Memphis Mayor A.C. Wharton issues an Executive Order— making Memphis the 500th city to adopt a *Complete Streets* policy.

Rusty Bloodworth, MAAR Commercial Council member, presents the Memphis *Complete Streets* Program at the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in Kansas City

