

# Nashville's Next Mayor Should Lead the Way on Transportation and Housing

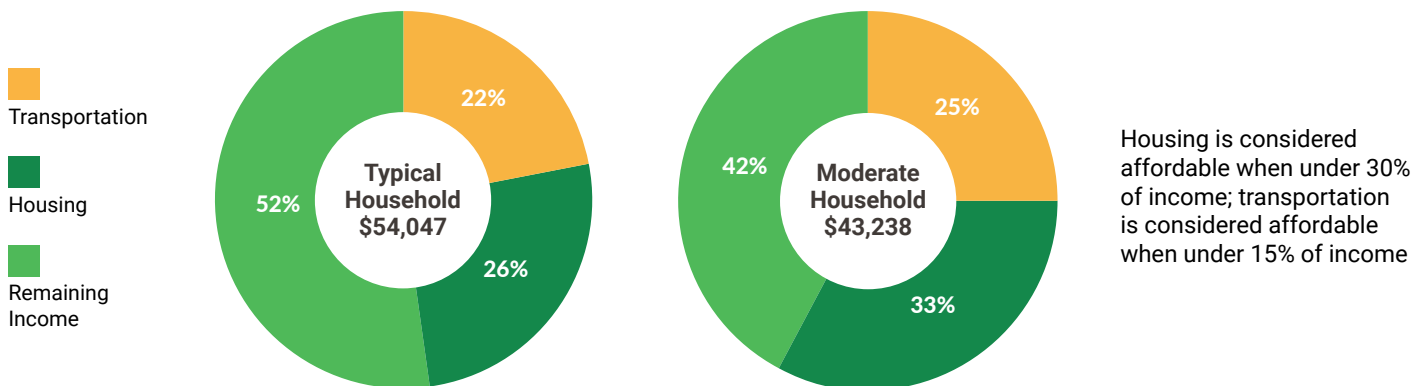
## POLICY ROADMAP

Nashville's next mayor needs a bold vision for an equitable and sustainable Nashville - and the leadership to get us there. A vision for staying the welcoming and inclusive city we are known for, while also doing a better job at managing our growth, investing in our quality of life, and ensuring that all Nashvillians have access to opportunities.

Transportation and housing are two areas in particular where a bolder vision, stronger leadership, and more effective implementation is needed. Nashville's population grew by nearly 20% between 2010 and 2020, but our investments in transit and multimodal transportation are far below our peer cities. As a result, our growth is leading to more congestion, increasing traffic fatalities, and negative health impacts. For the past decade, housing demand has outpaced the supply. This lack of new housing is contributing to our affordability crisis - the median home price increased 62% in the past five years, and average rent increased 71% from 2020 to 2022. Nashville is only producing 25% of the affordable housing needed by 2030.

Nashville also needs a stronger focus on equity. Housing and transportation policies from half a century ago bulldozed entire neighborhoods and left us with segregated communities with lower home values and fewer sidewalks, street trees, and transportation options. We must be intentional about addressing past mistakes and use equity as a guiding principle in our policy and investment decisions and not just in engagement, outreach, and planning.

### Transportation and housing are unaffordable – on average, they represent 58% of a moderate-income family's expenses



Source: Housing & Transit Index for Nashville-Davidson County (October 2022), Center for Neighborhood Technology

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Nashville's next mayor has an opportunity to leverage our growth to improve the quality of life for all Nashvillians. Providing safer, more affordable transportation and housing options will require an all-hands-on-deck approach with a focus on the following three priorities:

- 1. The next mayor must lead and empower a Metro administration that is proactive and effective to successfully implement our existing plans.**
- 2. Nashville's future requires more dedicated funding for housing and transportation.**
- 3. Nashville needs better, more innovative policies that support our housing and transportation goals.**

## Recommendation #1: The next mayor must lead and empower a Metro administration that is proactive and effective to successfully implement our existing plans.

**It's time to focus on implementation:** Nashville has spent the last decade planning for our growing city - producing six transportation plans (the nMotion Strategic Plan, Vision Zero safety plan, and WalknBike bicycle and pedestrian blueprint, Plan To Play parks and greenways plan, Connect Downtown neighborhood traffic project, and Better Bus strategy) and developing the [Affordable Housing Task Force's Recommendations](#). These plans provide a path forward, but implementing them will require focused leadership, proactive implementation, and empowered staff.



**Nashville needs more transportation and housing champions.** The next mayor needs to empower existing and add additional transportation and housing leaders to champion and prioritize projects and improve collaboration

across departments. These leaders need to, along with the Mayor, find a better balance between being responsive to immediate requests and being proactive in implementing our plans. Existing plans are often not being implemented because too many resources are being used to respond to the short-term needs of individual development projects, council members, and HubNashville requests. Being responsive to immediate requests is not always the same as engaging deeply with the community and doing the long-term work of plan implementation.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Streamlined Permitting Process

The Affordable Housing Task Force recommends that we need to “improve the planning, zoning, and land use policies and processes by working with Metro departments on specific recommendations including... streamlining for middle housing creation and conversion.” If projects meet certain criteria aligned with our long-term goals, then the [permitting process may be streamlined](#) so that one representative in each department is dedicated to shepherding the project through the departmental review process.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Updating NashvilleNext

A best practice from peer cities is to formally review and update policies regularly to adjust for growth and change during their long-range comprehensive planning period. For example, in Seattle, as part of its 2035 comprehensive plan, the city council annually reviews and adopts resolutions to reflect the current needs of communities. Identifying best practices for growing cities will require an in-depth review of existing regulations, zoning, and land use policies. Some existing policies may be preventing or creating barriers to quality projects.



**Nashville needs more empowered Metro staff.** Metro departments are understaffed, particularly the departments responsible for housing and infrastructure. The next mayor will need to think

strategically about the best organizational structure to implement existing plans. More staff are needed that can support engagement efforts, problem-solve to make existing programs more effective, and apply for the federal grant opportunities that will improve Nashville's communities and the built environment.

### Best-Practice Example

#### More Quick-Build Projects

We can immediately improve the safety of our streets by rapidly scaling our quick-build projects across the county. Quick-build projects are a powerful visual signal that we are committed to transforming our streets to be safer for all road users. Many of Nashville's peer cities have a robust quick-build program, like Raleigh, NC, or Tampa, FL. To do this in Nashville, we need engineers and staff dedicated to quick-build projects, more consistent engagement with neighborhood groups, and an inventory of materials that can be quickly deployed to improve safety.

## Recommendation #2: Nashville's future requires more dedicated funding for housing and transportation.



### Dedicated funding for transit:

Nashville needs dedicated funding for transit and the next mayor should prioritize a ballot referendum during their first term. Nashville is one of

the largest metro regions in the country without dedicated funding for transit, which is needed for both short-term and long-term improvements. In the short-term, we must improve our bus service to have longer service hours, more frequent buses, and more crosstown routes. Longer-term, we need to invest in high-capacity corridors that allow for faster and more reliable service and will spur transit-oriented development. Dedicated funding also improves our chances to receive federal funding.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Housing Trust Funds

Housing trust funds across the country use various taxes and fees as dedicated revenue sources, including real estate transfer taxes, document recording fees, demolition taxes, interest on government accounts, or proceeds from the sale of government-owned buildings or land. Places like Fairfax County, VA, Aspen, CO, and Cambridge, MA have established dedicated revenue sources for their affordable housing efforts.



### We need dedicated, reliable funding of our affordable housing program.

Since the inception of the Barnes Housing Trust Fund, over 3,000 housing units have

been produced or preserved in Metro Nashville, leveraging over \$600 million since 2015. In order to maintain or improve this level of production, sustained predictable funding is required. A dedicated revenue stream is needed to allow staff to plan effectively, and to allow our housing partners to maintain a steady pipeline of affordable housing projects.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Transit Success in Austin

In November 2020, voters in Austin approved an increase in property taxes to fund the \$7-billion Project Connect plan. The plan includes bus service improvements, two light rail lines, three bus rapid transit lines, one commuter rail line, and a downtown transit tunnel. The success comes after a transit referendum failed in 2014. It often takes cities more than one attempt to secure dedicated funding.

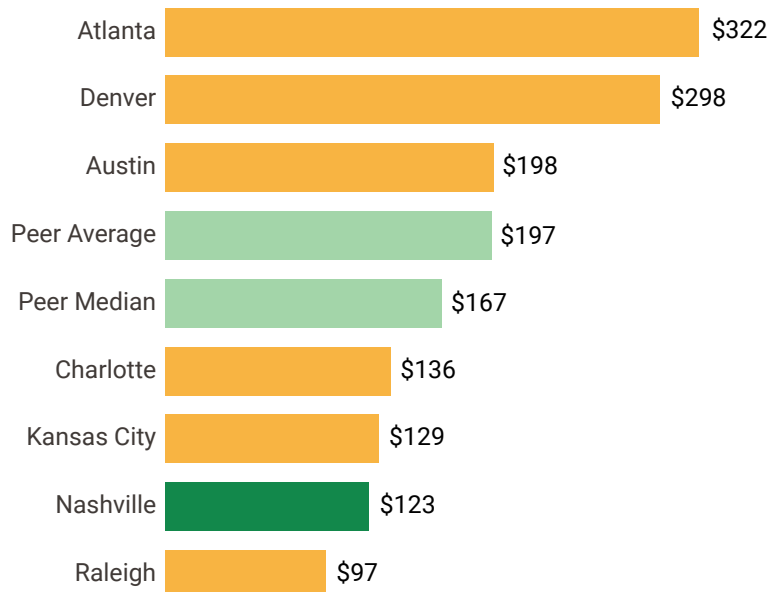


### We need reliable and consistent funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and safer streets.

Nashville's walking and biking mode share is lower than our peer cities because we lack safe and comfortable infrastructure for those modes. We are missing more than 1,900 miles of sidewalks and a connected network of protected bike lanes. Funding for multimodal infrastructure also needs to be consistent. Funding sidewalks at \$30 million one year and \$2 million the next year creates uncertainty for department staff and makes it nearly impossible to keep projects moving forward.

### Nashville spends less than most peer cities on transit

Calculated from local transit agencies



Transit Agencies Profiles, National Transit Database



## Recommendation #3: Nashville needs better, more innovative policies that support our housing and transportation goals.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Connecting Housing and Transportation

Private companies like Amazon and its [Housing Equity Fund](#) are prioritizing the production and preservation of affordable housing near and adjacent to transit in Seattle, Nashville, and Washington, D.C. Over 1,200 housing units are currently underway in predevelopment and/or construction phases.

**Build a policy toolkit:** Given state preemption of inclusionary zoning and impact fees, Nashville is not able to utilize two important policy tools in a city's toolbox for managing growth. It is critical that Nashville's leaders are creative in their approach to building a toolkit that allows for the community's needs to be addressed while creating more options for the development community to help provide solutions.



**Align funding cycles:** The [Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program](#) produces the most affordable housing units in the county. In order to better utilize this program, the timing of funding and capital cycles has to be aligned. For example, [adjusting application cycles](#) would allow developers to apply for multiple funding opportunities at the same time. It would also allow for developers to better coordinate the development process with the various city departments. Projects with government funding could also benefit from a streamlined permitting process.



**Encourage transit-ready development:** We need to encourage more housing along our corridors. Incentivizing (and in some cases, rezoning for) mixed-use, mixed-income housing development along corridors will allow more Nashvillians to choose affordable and convenient housing options, lowering their costs, increasing their

quality of life, and improving their access to opportunities. This also requires reimagining our corridors to accommodate all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. [Transit-ready corridors](#) means reclaiming road and parking spaces for more productive land uses, including eliminating parking requirements, limiting on-street parking spaces, and removing unlimited left turns and curb cuts (driveways).



**People-focused neighborhoods:** All neighborhoods in the urban core need a variety of housing options (rental and homeownership units), transportation options (transit, sidewalks, and bike lanes), and high-quality amenities (childcare, grocery stores, pharmacies, and retail options) to create [15-minute neighborhoods](#). Having greater

intentionality on creating these neighborhoods promotes thoughtful growth along our major corridors and in neighborhood centers, while also prioritizing areas where there has been substantial growth over the past decade, such as Antioch and Bordeaux.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Role for Institutions in Advancing Housing

In partnership with the Amazon Housing Equity Fund, ThinkTennessee is partnering with the Urban Institute to produce a report to identify land owned by institutions in Nashville that could be used for affordable housing efforts. Various types of institutions are partnering with developers to produce and preserve housing across the country.

### Best-Practice Example

#### Energy efficient homes are healthy homes

[The World Economic Forum](#) suggests that a majority (up to 85% of single-family homes) were built before 2000, which was before residential building energy standards were adopted and accepted by the development community. This means that homes built before 2000 are prone to poor insulation, air sealing, and inefficient heating and cooling systems to withstand the current extreme heat and weather conditions.



**Resilient and sustainable infrastructure:** Nashville has seen its fair share of natural disasters and many Nashvillians have been affected by them. Nashville's leaders and

developers must explore sustainable strategies that improve our disaster recovery and resiliency efforts related to housing and infrastructure to prepare for the future. To ensure Nashvillians are living in safe and sustainable housing and are taking care of our infrastructure, it is critical for partners and stakeholders to have the resources to invest in energy efficiency, solar, disaster recovery strategies, climate-friendly options, and [green infrastructure](#).

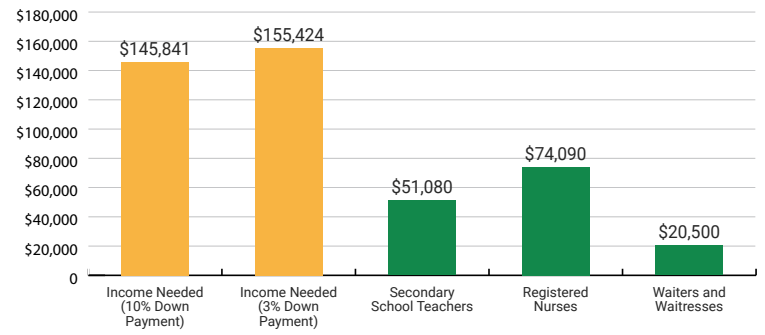


**Enable more public-private partnerships:** These priorities are not just a public sector issue, it requires a multisector approach - the partnership of quasi-public, private, philanthropic entities,

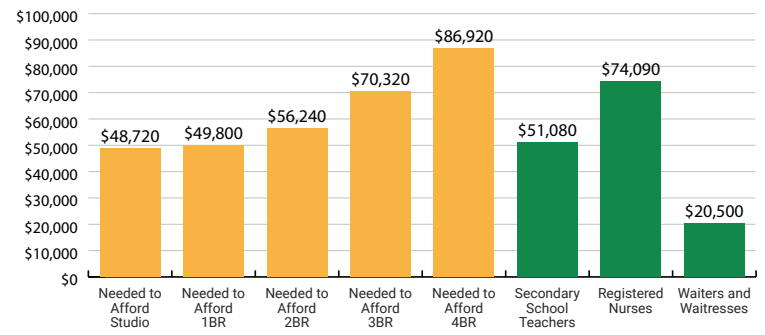
and most importantly, communities. Partners that can invest, develop, and advocate for expanded housing affordability and mobility options for employees, teachers, first responders, and so many others that are affected by the increased growth. There must be greater opportunities for various types of stakeholders to sit around a table to outline and take action on potential strategies.

## Nashville's housing is unaffordable for our most critical workers

Homeownership Market: Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN



Rental Market: Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN



On average, a nurse earns half of what is needed to purchase a home in Nashville, and the average waiter or waitress earns less than half of what is needed to afford a studio apartment.

[National Housing Conference, Paycheck to Paycheck](#)



## THINKTENNESSEE

ThinkTennessee is a nonpartisan, results-oriented think tank that uses research and advocacy to build a state where all Tennesseans are civically engaged and economically secure.

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