

Neighborhood Plan Check In

Universal Basic Neighborhood Project



Acknowledgements:

Grant information: This work was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Grant #: 80565).

Report Prepared by: Jecorey Arthur, Simmons College of Kentucky, Lauren Anderson, University of Louisville, and Caison Black, University of Louisville

Project Team at Simmons College of Kentucky

Co-Principal Investigator: Nancy Seay

Study Coordinators: Jecorey Arthur and Patricia Reeves

Research Associates: Camara Douglas, Erin Michalik Klarer, Oleksandra (Sasha) Belinova, Selois Shead, Reginald Dishman, Mykel Walker, Sherelle Gore, Jecorion Johnson, Cameron Maddox, James Moore, William Pennebaker, Vannity Smith, Keisha Deonarine and Deondrai Williams

Project Team at University of Louisville

Co-Principal Investigator: Ted Smith, PhD

Research Manager: Lauren Anderson, MPA, PMP

Data Analysts: Caison Black

Kentucky's Jessie Jackson Center for Racial Justice



Executive Summary

Overview

This analysis evaluates 25 years of civic investment and neighborhood planning in two distinct Louisville neighborhoods. By reviewing neighborhood plans, city budgets, and key outcomes in health, housing, crime, and education, this assessment provides a data-driven evaluation of investment patterns, policy effectiveness, and neighborhood equity. The findings will inform future place-based strategies, ensuring that investments align with health-supportive and equity-focused urban planning.

The objective of this assessment is to understand the impact of civic investments on neighborhood health and stability. The study examines:

- **Neighborhood Planning:** Evaluating twenty neighborhood plans to assess goals, successes, and gaps in implementation.
- **Civic Investment:** Analyzing city budgets, funding allocations, and public/private investments over the past 25 years.
- **Policy & Planning Alignment:** Determining whether investment decisions align with comprehensive planning goals and health equity priorities.
- **Neighborhood Equity Evaluation:** Identifying how funding influences community well-being, environmental resilience, and economic opportunity.

Key Findings

- **Uneven Investment Patterns:** Some neighborhoods received substantial redevelopment funding, while others lacked critical infrastructure and social services.
- **Gaps in Implementation:** Despite well-intentioned neighborhood plans, many recommendations were not implemented, often due to a lack of accountability or funding mechanisms.
- **Health & Environmental Disparities:** Neighborhoods with historic disinvestment experience higher pollution exposure, housing insecurity, and public safety concerns, while others benefit from greater civic engagement and environmental investments.
- **Lack of Budget Transparency:** Limited access to public budget records and a lack of neighborhood-level tracking prevent residents from understanding how funds are allocated.

Recommendations

- Digitizing public budgets for transparency and accessibility.
- Aligning city investments with neighborhood health indicators to ensure comprehensive, equity-focused planning.
- Establishing an implementation office to track neighborhood plan progress and support long-term improvements.
- Integrating Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) health factors into future planning and budget processes.

Conclusion

This assessment highlights the urgent need to reform civic investment strategies to create thriving, resilient neighborhoods. By embedding health equity, community-driven planning, and long-term accountability into decision-making, Louisville can ensure that all neighborhoods receive the resources needed to foster well-being and economic stability. The findings from this study provide a scalable model for other cities looking to strengthen the connection between neighborhood planning and public health outcomes.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Neighborhood Plan Review	6
Neighborhood Recommendations.....	7
Wins and Successes from Neighborhood Plans	8
Russell	8
Crescent Hill	11
Civic Investment and Funding Sources Evaluation	14
History of Investment in Russell and Crescent Hill.....	15
Civic Investment Evaluation Discussion.....	17
Neighborhood Plans and the Universal Basic Neighborhood Framework.....	19
Russell’s UBN Evaluation	19
Crescent Hill’s UBN Evaluation	20
Evaluation and Importance	22
Policy Recommendations.....	23
Supporting Policy Recommendations	26
Conclusion	27

Introduction

Civic investments play a pivotal role in shaping the long-term health, economic stability, and overall well-being of communities. The way funding is allocated—whether through public infrastructure, housing initiatives, economic development programs, or environmental improvements—directly impacts residents' quality of life and their ability to thrive. However, the distribution of these investments has historically been uneven, often reinforcing systemic inequities rather than addressing them. This Civic Investment Review seeks to examine how financial and policy decisions have influenced two distinct Louisville neighborhoods over the past 25 years, with a focus on their respective strengths, challenges, and opportunities for more equitable urban planning.

This analysis evaluates neighborhood plans, city budgets, and key outcomes in housing, health, crime, and education, aiming to uncover the patterns of investment and divestment that have shaped these communities. By reviewing twenty neighborhood plans and tracking funding allocations across multiple agencies, this research identifies which policies and funding strategies have been effective, where gaps remain, and what forces move planning efforts from vision to implementation. Understanding these trends is essential for ensuring that civic investments align with community needs, health equity goals, and long-term sustainability. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of the twenty neighborhood plans reviewed in this analysis, offering insight into the scope, focus areas, and varying approaches taken across different Louisville communities to guide development, civic investment, and policy implementation. Figure 1 presents a map illustrating the geographic distribution of the twenty neighborhood plans reviewed in this analysis, highlighting the spatial patterns of investment, planning priorities, and community development efforts across Louisville.

The findings from this review provide a neighborhood equity evaluation that goes beyond traditional deficit-based models, recognizing the assets and strengths within each community while also highlighting critical areas for improvement. Additionally, this work serves as a template for assessing investments in other cities, helping planners, policymakers, and community leaders develop place-based strategies that drive meaningful change. By integrating the Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) framework, which balances both negative and positive determinants of health, this review offers actionable insights into how future investments can be more equitable, transparent, and health supportive.

In the following sections, we examine the history of investment and divestment in Louisville, the effectiveness of neighborhood planning efforts, and the ways in which funding decisions have shaped key community outcomes. Through this analysis, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cities can better prioritize investments, track their impact, and ensure that all neighborhoods have the resources they need to thrive.

Neighborhood Plan Review

The research team reviewed twenty neighborhood plans developed between 2000 and 2022 to assess the scope of recommendations and their implementation status. A total of 994 recommendations were identified in these plans. These recommendations, also referred to as action items, objectives, or goals, vary significantly in their level of detail and specificity. The level of detail varied significantly by plan, some recommendations clearly specified responsible parties and timelines, while others remained open-ended. Each recommendation was then categorized as: "not started," "started," and "completed." This assessment measured progress towards achievement of proposed actions.

Some plans outline clear implementation pathways, specifying responsible agencies and timelines, while others present broader, more open-ended goals that are challenging to measure and track over time. Differences in recommendation structure often reflect the unique approaches of the consultants who developed the plans, the level of neighborhood engagement in the planning process, and the year of plan release, illustrating the evolving priorities and methodologies in neighborhood planning. Refer to Table 1 for a detailed breakdown of the number of recommendations included in each neighborhood plan.

Map of Neighborhood Locations

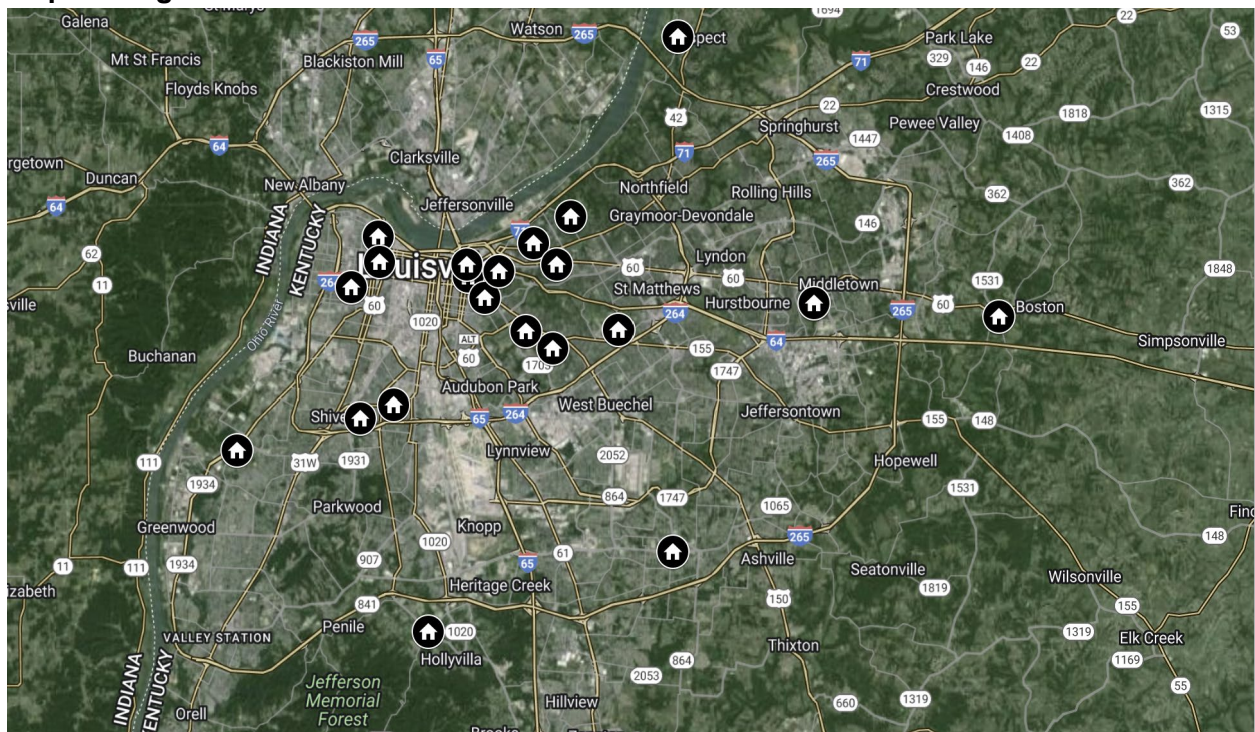


Figure 1: Map of the placements for all twenty of the Neighborhood Plans Reviewed.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for Reviewed Neighborhood Plans

Neighborhood	Year of Plan	# of Recs
Belknap	2000	32
Bowman Area	2020	24
Butchertown, Phoenix Hill, & NuLu	2022	212
Cane Run	2016	23
Clifton Heights	2001	23
Crescent Hill	2002	13
Deer Park	2016	23
Eastwood	2005	39
Fairdale	2006	22
Highlands-Douglass	2006	38
Highview	2015	29
Irish Hill	2017	13
Jacobs	2015	43
Taylor-Jacob School	2020	78
Mockingbird Valley	2006	38
Oakdale	2016	46
Original Highlands	2006	38
Parkland	2017	25
Portland	2008	129
Vision Russell Transformation Plan	2017	106

Neighborhood Recommendations

After reviewing twenty neighborhood plans across Louisville Metro, we analyzed two study neighborhoods, Russell and Crescent Hill. We assessed the implementation status of each plan by searching for evidence of recommendations being completed, started, or not started. Our search included press releases from Metro Government, legislation from Metro Council, news articles, neighborhood social media pages and groups, neighborhood websites, and interviews

with elected officials as well as residents of each neighborhood. Any future maintenance of neighborhood plans should include a dedicated neighborhood and government department group working together to constantly update the plans. The following section will show the percentages of completed, started, or not started recommendations for each neighborhood, examples of completed or started recommendations, and examples of how we documented evidence for recommendations.

Wins and Successes from Neighborhood Plans

Russell

Over the past several years, Russell has seen significant public and private investments aimed at improving housing, economic opportunities, public spaces, and infrastructure. These efforts have been guided by recommendations from the Vision Russell Transformation Plan, which has prioritized equitable development, cultural preservation, and community well-being. The following examples showcase successful projects and funding allocations that have advanced key neighborhood goals, demonstrating progress toward a healthier and more vibrant community. The Vision Russell Transformation Plan was drafted in 2017 and included 106 recommendations. As of December 2024, 25% of those recommendations have been completed, 37% have been started, and 36% of them have not been started. Three major recommendations are highlighted below and Table 2 shares additional recommendations and evidence of progress.

Russell Neighborhood Plan Recommendations

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2023-2024



Figure 2: Assessment of progress made for recommendations in Russell's neighborhood plan.



Figure 3: New Walnut Street Park Rendering. Courtesy of Louisville Metro Government.

Neighborhood Plan Recommendation: Improve Old Walnut Park as a central wellness amenity and expand and upgrade Baxter Community Center.

- Work begins in Russell Neighborhood’s New Walnut Street Park. Bulldozers and heavy construction equipment are now on-site at New Walnut Street Park , completing preliminary work and preparing the grounds for the exciting new amenities at S. 13th Street and W. Muhammad Ali Blvd. [Source](#).
- Mayor Fischer signs ordinance allocating over \$79 million in fourth round of city’s share of American Rescue Plan funds at a press event held at the Main branch of the Louisville Free Public Library. More than \$79 million toward projects that range from expanding the Main library and opening two new branches, to investments in childcare and early learning, as well as in parks, pools, and public health. The fourth-round investments include: \$6 million to preserve and expand the historic Baxter Community Center building, and to create a new park at 13th and Ali. [Source](#).

Neighborhood Plan Recommendation: Offer financial incentives to encourage business expansion and physical improvements to existing commercial structures. Incentives can include tax moratoriums, revolving loan funds, use of VAPs, encourage food entrepreneurs “graduating” from Chef Space’s kitchen incubator to their own premises to remain in Russell, providing micro or small business loans to eligible businesses.

- METCO Board approves nine loans totaling about \$1.5 million for seven local businesses from the Department of Economic Development’s Metropolitan Business Development Corporation (METCO), including the city’s first ever Business Accelerator loan approved to a new business locating in the Russell neighborhood. The loans will

leverage a total investment of \$8.71 million and will assist the companies to open, to expand services or to revitalize properties. [Source](#).

Neighborhood Plan Recommendation: Provide incentives and training to existing homeowners and landlords to repair and upgrade their homes. Improvements can include energy efficiency and weatherization retrofits, roof, and siding replacement, etc.

- Home Repair programs with Louisville Metro's Office of Housing are accepting applications for Down Payment Assistance and Home Repair programs which aim to help low- to moderate-income individuals' access and retain homeownership and build generational wealth. In the approved budget, Mayor Greg Fischer allocated \$3 million for the Down Payment Assistance Program, up from \$1 million in fiscal year 2021, and \$7.7 million for the four Home Repair programs – Regular Home Repair, At-Risk, Russell Rental Rehab and Exterior Code Alleviation. [Source](#).

Table 2: Additional recommendations, status, and evidence from the Vision Russell Transformation Plan

Recommendation	Status	Evidence
Increase access to books and encourage reading collaborations with community organizations including early childhood providers, the public library system, physicians' offices, community centers, churches, businesses, and other locations.	Completed	Louisville Western Library branch hosts annual community block party
Ensure Russell's children's' home environment are stable. Refer families at risk of homelessness to LMHA by JCPS for admission preferences and other resources such as JCPS's PTA Clothing Assistance Program (CAP).	Started	Louisville nonprofit examining effects of guaranteed income program for young adults
Design Russell's built environment fosters learning (Wi-Fi, access to playgrounds, informational signage, learning trails, using buses and bus shelters to enhance learning).	Started	\$400,000 grant will fund free outdoor Wi-Fi for Louisville's Russell neighborhood
Improve the quality and effectiveness of instruction at RP. Implement a rigorous staff evaluation and development system, institute comprehensive instruction reform, increase learning time and apply community-oriented school strategies.	Started	JCPS celebrates new Perry Elementary School opening this year in Louisville's west end
Reduce non-academic barriers to academic success, with a focus on peer support, health and wellness, safety and reducing risk behaviors.	Started	Louisville organization looks to increase 'peace watches' to curb violence in several neighborhoods

Crescent Hill

As a historically stable and well-connected community, Crescent Hill has focused on maintaining its unique character while enhancing public amenities, green spaces, and cultural assets. Investments in parks, historic preservation, and civic engagement have played a crucial role in sustaining the neighborhood's high quality of life. The following examples highlight successful projects and funding allocations that have supported Crescent Hill's continued growth and resilience, reinforcing its identity as a thriving and inclusive community. This section features two Crescent Hill plans, one developed in 2002 and the other in 2023.

Crescent Hill Neighborhood Plan Recommendations 2002

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2023-2024



Crescent Hill Neighborhood Plan Recommendations 2023

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2024

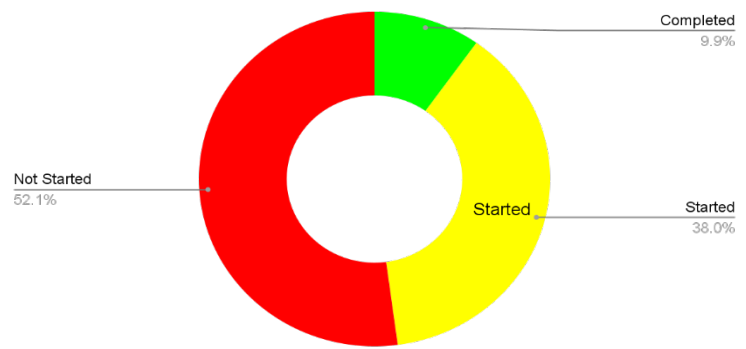


Figure 4: Assessment of progress made for recommendations in Crescent Hill's 2002 and 2023 neighborhood plans.



Figure 5: Crescent Hill Gatehouse. Courtesy of Broken Sidewalk and Brian Moberly Photography.

Neighborhood Plan Recommendation: LU1.4: Maintain, preserve, and restore historic brick streets, alleys, and sidewalks, granite curbs, and other historic features in the public realm.

- The fully restored historic Crescent Hill Gatehouse reopened to the public on May 13, 2024, with more than five hundred visitors passing through the building, after an 18-month restoration project. Except for work after the 1974 tornado, this is the first large-scale restoration of the gatehouse, a Kentucky Historic Site since 2010. [Source](#).

Neighborhood Plan Recommendation: QoL3.1: Maintain and improve Crescent Hill Golf Course, Kennedy Court Park, and Eastover Park in Crescent Hill.

- Louisville Metro Government has reached an agreement with Kentucky Golf Hall of Famer George “Moe” Demling to operate Crescent Hill Golf Course. After months of review and discussion designed to maintain municipal golf without negatively impacting the city budget, the city now has agreements in place for eight of its ten courses, the most recent being Crescent Hill Golf Course, 3110 Brownsboro Road. Demling will operate the 9-hole course. [Source](#).

Neighborhood Plan Recommendation: QoL5.1: Support existing community programming and proactively plan new festivals, special events, and programs for neighborhood youth and elders.

- Council member Owen invites the community to the Crescent Hill 4th of July Festival Louisville for the 38th Annual Crescent Hill 4th of July Festival to help celebrate our country’s independence neighborhood style. The festivities will begin at 10 a.m. and include artist booths, food court, cake wheel, fun zone, pet contest, silent auction, live music, and concludes with a fireworks display. [Source](#).

Table 3: Additional recommendations, status, and evidence from the Crescent Hill Neighborhood Plans

Recommendation (Objectives)	Status	Evidence
MI1.3: Create a connected pedestrian network through capital investments including projects that prioritize maintenance, repair, and improvement to existing sidewalks along with projects that complete sidewalk systems by filling in existing gaps.	Started	Why is Louisville paving over an exciting discovery unearthed in Crescent Hill?
MI1.4: Increase public safety by adding lighting in key locations.	Started	Interview
MI1.5: Create protected crosswalks in key locations.	Started	Metro Council member speaking out after close calls at Crescent Hill crosswalk
MI1.6: Explore the feasibility of constructing a multi-use path in the railroad right-of-way.	Started	Frankfort Avenue rightsizing public comments
MI2.1: Create safe routes and spaces for cyclists.	Started	Interview

Neighborhood Plan Implementation Partners

Neighborhood plans, which theoretically guide long-term investments, often include implementation sections that outline goals, objectives, responsible agencies, and suggested timelines. However, there is no cohesive system to ensure that these plans translate from vision to action. The level of detail within implementation plans varies significantly based on the consultant who developed the plan and the level of neighborhood engagement during the planning process. Additionally, while plans identify ideal partners and agencies responsible for implementation, these stakeholders are not always consulted during the planning phase, leading to unclear accountability and a lack of incentive for follow-through. For example, the Clifton-Crescent Hill Neighborhood Plan distinguishes between "Community Partners" and "Responsible Agencies." While non-governmental groups are listed as key partners, Metro Council offices—a function of Metro Government—also appear as responsible entities. By contrast, the Russell plan relies heavily on government agencies, yet excludes active roles for neighborhood associations, despite acknowledging their importance. Some of these associations have since become inactive or dissolved, further complicating efforts to ensure community-driven implementation. Table XX lists Neighborhood Plan Partner Examples by Neighborhood which highlights the range of community partners and responsible agencies identified in different neighborhood plans. Without structured oversight and accountability, many well-intentioned neighborhood plans risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable, limiting their potential to drive meaningful, long-term improvements.

Table 4: Neighborhood Plan Partner Examples by Neighborhood

[Clifton] Crescent Hill Neighborhood Plan	Russell Neighborhood Plan
Community Councils	Urban Strategies
Frankfort Avenue Business Association	Family and Children's Place
Metro Council District 9	Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS)
Bike Louisville	Louisville Metro Housing Authority (LMHA)
Mobility Advocates	Louisville Central Community Center (LCCC)
Louisville Metro Planning	One West
Public Works	Transit Authority of River City (TARC)
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet	Louisville Urban League
Louisville Metro Police Department	Kentucky Center for African American Heritage
Mellwood Arts Center	Kentuckiana Works

Civic Investment and Funding Sources Evaluation

Investments in neighborhoods play a critical role in shaping community health, economic stability, and overall quality of life. Understanding where and how funding has been allocated over time provides valuable insight into the priorities that have driven neighborhood development, as well as the gaps that may have contributed to persistent disparities. This section examines 25 years of civic investments in Louisville to assess how public and private funds have influenced local infrastructure, housing, economic development, and social services. Understanding these funding dynamics is crucial for developing future policy recommendations that ensure resources are distributed in a way that strengthens community resilience and promotes long-term well-being.

Figure 6 shows post city-county merger budgets. Between fiscal years 2004 and 2013, both Russell and Crescent Hill received programmatic funding for neighborhood organizations. In fiscal year 2015, Louisville Metro Government matched a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) planning grant that began a two-year process for redeveloping the Russell Neighborhood, shown in Figure 7. The grant was a part of HUD's Choice Neighborhoods, a program created to 'support locally driven strategies that address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation.' The following fiscal years saw multi-million dollar investments, primarily to redevelop the Louisville Metro Housing Authority's Beecher Terrace, a public housing apartment complex. At the time, Louisville, KY was the only city in the country to receive all four HUD choice grants.

Louisville Metro Government Investment by Neighborhood FY04-FY13

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2024

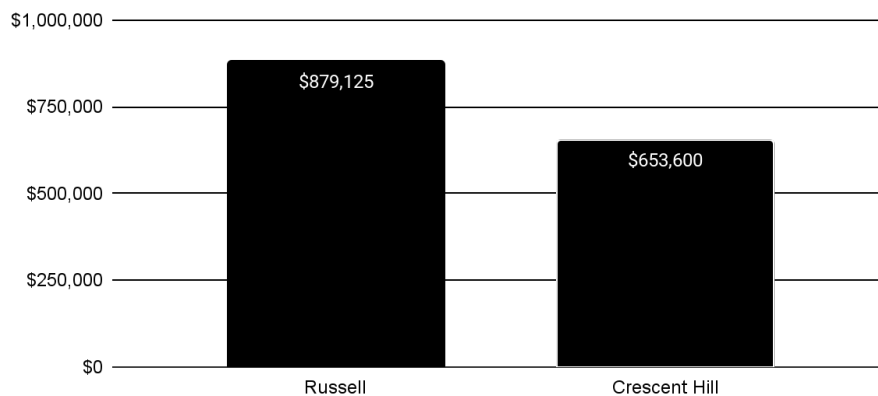


Figure 6: Louisville Metro Government Investment visual- This is a breakdown of investments made by the Metro Government for all neighborhoods in 2024.

Louisville Metro Government Investment by Neighborhood FY14-FY24

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2024

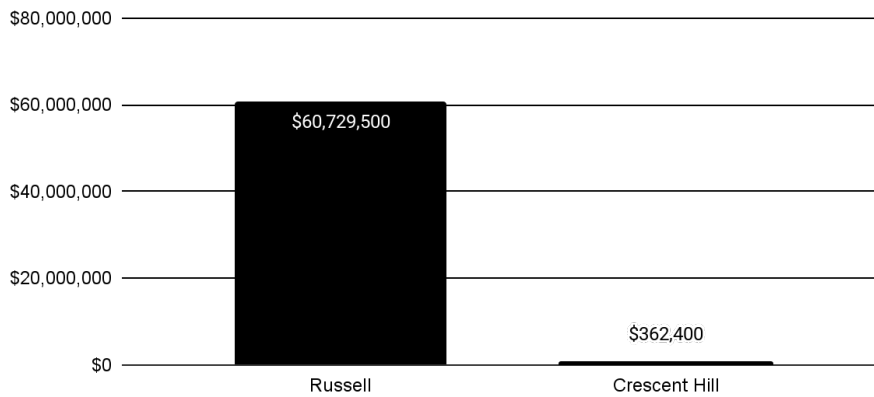


Figure 7: Louisville Metro Government Investment visual- This is a breakdown of investments made by the Metro Government for all neighborhoods in 2024.

History of Investment in Russell and Crescent Hill

In addition to post city-count merger budgets, our team analyzed approved city budgets spanning from 1950 through 2003. These budgets are available in hard copy format stored within Records Management & Archives. We highlight below historical investments dating from the mid-eighties through pre-merger in the early 2000s.

Russell Neighborhood Highlights

- 1984-85: \$41 million in Industrial Revenue Bonds issued for revitalizing the enterprise zone, creating 2,870 jobs. Included funding for Park Center Shopping Center at 9th and Broadway (exact allocation not specified).
- 1985-86: \$29,000 in Community Development Funding.
- 1991-92: \$1.5 million allocated for constructing apartments and condominiums as part of a \$7 million affordable housing project.
- 1992-93: \$1.439 million allocated to build two hundred new homes and \$1 million for rehabilitating historic homes in Russell.
- 1993-94: Continued housing development under Project Rebound; one hundred single-family homes planned.
- 1996-97: \$3 million from a U.S. Department of Transportation grant for a Community Development Bank Transportation Center. \$2.2 million for infrastructure improvements.
- 1998-99: \$175,000 for the Empowerment Zone and \$60,000 for planning an African American Heritage Center.
- 2000-01: \$1 million for small-scale redevelopment in Historic Russell, \$500,000 in capital funding for the African American Heritage Center, and \$50,000 for African American archives at Western Branch Library.

- 2002-03: \$300,000 for second mortgages and \$1.5 million for the African American Heritage Center construction plan.

Crescent Hill Highlights

- 1988-89: Library renovations included Crescent Hill (total allocation not specified).
- 1991-92: Golf course improvements included Crescent Hill (specific amount not detailed).
- 1997-98: \$2.9 million refurbishment for Mary T. Meagher Natatorium.
- 1998-99: \$1.5 million for Olmsted Parks, including Cherokee Park. \$100,000 for Mary T. Meagher Natatorium.
- 2001-02: \$200,000 matched by Olmsted Conservancy for Cherokee Park improvements.
- 2001-02: City pledged to match \$1 million raised for Mary T. Meagher Natatorium renovations.

Louisville Metro Government Investment by Neighborhood Per Fiscal Year FY14-FY18

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2024

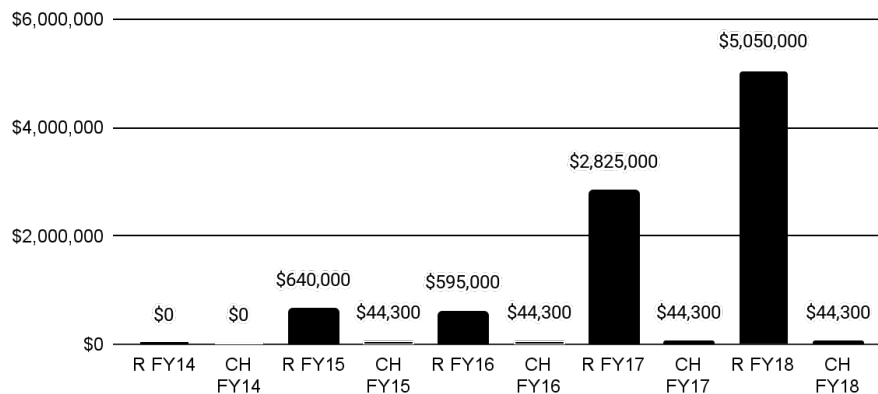


Figure 8: Louisville Metro Government Investment visual- This is a breakdown of investments made by the Metro Government in each neighborhood in between FY2014-FY2018.

Louisville Metro Government Investment by Neighborhood Per Fiscal Year FY19-FY24

Source: Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Analysis 2024
\$24,175,000

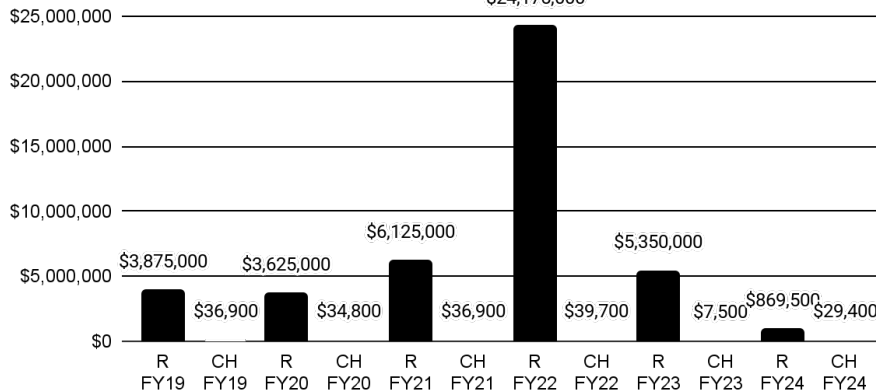


Figure 9: Louisville Metro Government Investment Visual- This is a breakdown of investments made by the Metro Government in each neighborhood in between FY2019-FY2024.

Civic Investment Evaluation Discussion

In general, Russell received consistent support for housing and cultural projects, demonstrating a focus on long-term revitalization while Crescent Hill benefited from recreational and park upgrades, indicating an emphasis on enhancing quality of life for residents.

In Russell, investments focused heavily on housing, community development, and heritage preservation. Key projects included affordable housing initiatives, redevelopment of historic properties, and establishing the African American Heritage Center. Revitalization efforts received over \$10 million in total funding between 1991-2003, with emphasis on housing and community-based infrastructure. The post-merger Russell investments after 2003 continued community development including over \$50 million in public funding for redevelopment and revitalization. It also included consistent funding for social programs. Some programs include ElderServe and the Louisville Central Community Center while capital improvements include redevelopment of Beecher Terrace. The Vision Russell Neighborhood Plan claims that over half a billion dollars of private and public funding was invested in the neighborhood post-merger. We requested sources for these funds but have not received them at the time of this report. One of the most significant examples of sustained investment in Russell was over \$550 million in public and private funding aimed at revitalizing the neighborhood. Collaborative efforts between local government, nonprofits, corporations, small businesses, and community organizations drove this effort. Investments have supported the development of small business incubators, health and wellness facilities, affordable housing, restaurants, street improvements, and public art, reflecting a concerted effort to address economic and social disparities through targeted

funding. While these investments mark progress, continued monitoring and strategic funding allocation remain essential to ensuring that resources equitably support long-term neighborhood resilience and well-being.

In Crescent Hill, investments prioritized recreational facilities and park improvements. The Mary T. Meagher Natatorium saw significant funding, with over \$3 million allocated from 1997-2003. Cherokee Park improvements also received notable attention, supported by matching funds from the Olmsted Conservancy. The post-merger Crescent Hill investments after 2003 include consistent funding to the Crescent Hill Community Ministries. Two limitations are that local governments typically do not track investments by neighborhood and have not digitized historic budgets.

Although significant efforts to analyze funding allocations, the assessment of civic investments faced key limitations. Notably, these figures exclude American Rescue Plan funds, focusing instead on sustained investments over the past 25 years. Louisville Metro Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and other various external agencies have delivers most of the funding for neighborhood development. However, a comprehensive evaluation of historical investments was complicated by a lack of digitized records prior to the 2003 city-county merger, requiring manual review of archived hard copies, which limited the depth of analysis for pre-merger budgets.

Despite these substantial investments, Louisville Metro Government has limited record maintenance of funding via public resources and even more restricted tracking of private investments. Additionally, Metro Government lacks a centralized, strategic oversight mechanism for evaluating how investments impact comprehensive goals for neighborhoods or the city. Without clear accountability structures, assessing the true impact of funding and drawing meaningful connections between investments and neighborhood outcomes remains a challenge. Furthermore, with limited overall budget resources, funding allocations tend to be spread thin across multiple initiatives, reducing their potential to create widespread, transformative change beyond benefiting a select few participants in social programs.

Neighborhood Plans and the Universal Basic Neighborhood Framework

Neighborhood plans serve as guiding documents that outline a community's vision, priorities, and strategies for growth and development. However, these plans vary in scope, specificity, and their consideration of factors that influence health and well-being. For this assessment, neighborhood plans for Russell and Crescent Hill were evaluated to determine the extent to which they address key place-based factors identified in the Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) Framework. These factors—spanning environmental quality, housing security, transportation access, and social cohesion—have been demonstrated to play a significant role in shaping health outcomes.

This analysis is essential because neighborhood plans influence policy, investment, and development decisions that can either mitigate or reinforce existing health disparities. By examining how these plans incorporate (or omit) critical determinants of health, we can identify gaps in planning efforts and opportunities to integrate health-supportive strategies into future neighborhood development. This assessment not only highlights disparities between neighborhood priorities but also provides insight into how planning processes can evolve to create more equitable, thriving communities where all residents have access to the resources they need to live healthy lives.

Russell's UBN Evaluation

Russell demonstrates cultural vibrancy, strong transit networks, and a strong environmental foundation. The analysis reveals challenges as well. Barriers like inadequate healthcare infrastructure and limited vehicle availability exacerbate existing inequities. Russell should prioritize policies that expand mixed-income housing, enforce anti-displacement measures, and strengthen advocacy for environmental improvements in tree canopy and urban heat islands. Investments in green infrastructure, including tree planting and urban greenways, are crucial for environmental equity. Economic empowerment initiatives, such as vocational training and business incubators, can further bolster the neighborhood's resilience and opportunity.

The Russell Neighborhood Plan provides a clear blueprint for addressing historical inequities and fostering community resilience through strategic interventions. While the plan acknowledges and seeks to improve critical challenges—such as housing insecurity, environmental deficits, and economic disparities—it also recognizes the strengths that already exist, including strong transit infrastructure, cultural vibrancy, and high school graduation rates. However, notable gaps remain, particularly in areas like environmental health, economic mobility, and healthcare accessibility, which require greater investment and policy support to meet health-supportive thresholds.

Moving forward, aligning planning efforts with health-based benchmarks can ensure that Russell's redevelopment initiatives create a sustainable and equitable foundation for all

residents. This includes expanding green infrastructure, increasing access to healthcare and social services, and developing targeted workforce programs to drive economic empowerment. The continued monitoring of both assets and areas for improvement will be crucial in ensuring that Russell's transformation is both inclusive and enduring, fostering a healthier, more resilient community in the years to come.

Crescent Hill's UBN Evaluation

Clifton-Crescent Hill, on the other hand, emphasizes maintaining and enhancing its livability, reflecting a focus on environmental sustainability and inclusivity. While the neighborhood excels in areas such as park access, alternative transportation usage, and advanced education levels, challenges persist. Rising housing costs threaten affordability, and sustaining its environmental resources amid urban growth requires targeted efforts. Civic participation, while strong, would benefit from expanded initiatives to increase voter engagement and minority representation. To address these challenges, Clifton-Crescent Hill should develop policies that incentivize affordable housing and preserve economic diversity. Expanding green infrastructure and implementing environmental policies to reduce pollution are critical to maintaining sustainability. Strengthening local businesses through grants and support programs can enhance economic resilience. Finally, enriching cultural and social opportunities through heritage trails and arts funding can further solidify the neighborhood's identity and cohesion.

The Clifton-Crescent Hill Neighborhood Plan highlights a strong commitment to livability, environmental sustainability, and community inclusivity while acknowledging areas that require further attention. The neighborhood excels in park access, alternative transportation, and economic stability, demonstrating a well-established foundation for health and resilience. However, affordability concerns, limited diversity, and environmental risks pose ongoing challenges that must be addressed through targeted policies and investments.

To sustain progress, the neighborhood should prioritize affordable housing strategies, expand civic engagement initiatives, and implement environmental protections to mitigate long-term risks. By continuing to leverage existing assets while addressing identified gaps, Clifton-Crescent Hill can further enhance its social cohesion, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability, ensuring a healthy and equitable future for all residents.

Table 5: Neighborhood Plan and Universal Basic Neighborhood Factor Assessment

UBN Metric (n =35)	In Russell Plan? (y/n)	Score (positive, neutral, negative)	In Crescent Hill Plan? (y/n)	Score (positive, neutral, negative)
Average maximum warm season temperature	no	negative	no	neutral
Average 24-hour exposure to noise pollution	no	negative	yes	positive

Average 24-hour particulate matter (PM2.5) concentration	no	neutral	no	neutral
Toxic emission hazards	no	negative	no	positive
Traffic Proximity Index	no	negative	no	positive
Deteriorated Lead Paint Index	yes	negative	yes	positive
Point Sources	no	neutral	no	neutral
Park access	yes	positive	yes	positive
Park area per capita	yes	negative	no	negative
Tree canopy coverage	yes	negative	yes	neutral
Affordable Housing	yes	negative	yes	neutral
Housing Security	yes	negative	yes	positive
Public housing available	yes	positive	no	negative
Secure tenure	no	neutral	no	neutral
Subsidized housing rate	yes	positive	no	negative
Utility Security	no	negative	no	positive
Access to internet	yes	negative	no	positive
Adequate childcare	yes	positive	no	neutral
Area cleanliness	yes	negative	yes	positive
Grocery access	yes	positive	yes	neutral
Proximity to jobs (commute length)	yes	positive	yes	positive
Proximity to acute care hospitals	yes	negative	no	positive
Accessible public transport network	yes	positive	yes	neutral
Alternative transportation usage	yes	positive	yes	positive
Vehicle availability	yes	negative	no	positive
Traffic fatalities and serious injury per capita	yes	negative	yes	positive
Cultural Outlets per capita	yes	positive	yes	neutral
Social Service Centers	yes	positive	yes	neutral
Diversity Index	yes	negative	yes	negative
Social Connection	yes	negative	yes	positive
Social Support	yes	negative	no	positive

Low prevalence of crime (violent and hate)	yes	negative	no	neutral
Gini Index	no	negative	no	negative
Low Poverty Index	yes	negative	yes	positive
Voter Registration	yes	neutral	yes	positive

Evaluation and Importance

The research underscores the importance of strategic, context-specific interventions for both neighborhoods. For Russell, the focus should be on addressing systemic barriers to create a stable foundation for its residents. This includes advancing community health through mobile clinics, addressing food insecurity with community gardens, and reducing environmental disparities through air quality monitoring. Economic development can be accelerated by fostering partnerships with local industries and establishing apprenticeship programs. For Clifton-Crescent Hill, sustaining affordability and inclusivity remains paramount. This can be achieved through expanded public transit, improved cycling infrastructure, and targeted rental assistance programs. Promoting cultural engagement and environmental sustainability will ensure that the neighborhood remains a vibrant and welcoming community.

Both neighborhoods, while distinct in their challenges and strengths, share the goal of providing equitable, thriving communities for their residents. Russell and Clifton-Crescent Hill exemplify the power of tailored urban planning to address unique needs while setting aspirational goals for the future. By implementing actionable strategies and fostering collaborative efforts, these neighborhoods can continue to evolve into models of resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability. This research not only highlights their individual journeys but also offers a framework for effective neighborhood planning that other communities can adapt and apply.

Policy Recommendations

While the neighborhood plans for Russell and Clifton-Crescent Hill outline specific recommendations for improving conditions within each community, broader policy-level changes are necessary to ensure long-term, equitable investment across all neighborhoods. This section presents policy recommendations focused on civic investment, planning processes, and government structures—rather than individual neighborhood interventions. These recommendations address systemic barriers in how public funds are allocated, how neighborhood plans are implemented, and how government agencies track and evaluate investments over time. By strengthening planning frameworks, governance structures, and accountability measures, these policies aim to create a more effective, transparent, and equitable approach to neighborhood development throughout Louisville.

Make public budgets more accessible to the public.

- Why? Over 80% of Louisville Metro Government's budget comes from local taxes, both occupational and property. The public should be able to access, read, and understand where their money is going and has gone. Budgets between 1828 when the city was chartered and 1949 are not documented. Budgets between 1950 and 2002 are not available online, only as hard copies in Archives. The budgets from 2003 and on are not accessible based on Flesch-Kincaid assessment, showing a college graduate level readability. The United States Department of Education reports over half of American adults read at a sixth-grade level or below. Without accessible public budgets, citizens are at the mercy of elected and government officials and/or journalists to translate proposed budgets.
- How? All documented and approved budgets in the Metro Archives should be digitized. This can be done by a one-time budget allocation to a local academic institution or seasonal government contractor from elsewhere. Budgets should also be available in summaries per department, and available in various formats including Portable Document Format (PDF), and spreadsheets, and thoroughly reviewed using the Flesch-Kincaid assessment to ensure readability at a sixth-grade level or below.

Amend Louisville Metro Code of Ordinances Chapter 30, the budget equity review ordinance, to include health impact.

- Why? The budget is a political document, where funds are allocated based on political priorities of current elected officials instead of what is most healthy for citizens.
- How?
 - The Center for Health Equity already does health impact reporting and can create a streamlined process for budgeting.
 - A Metro Council Member can sponsor this ordinance and assign it to the Budget or Health committee.
 - A coalition of health professionals will need to work together to raise public awareness and political support.

Create a dedicated neighborhood plan implementation department or division within the Office of Planning.

- Why? Once a neighborhood plan is approved by Metro Council, there is no dedicated body that tracks progress. The responsibility is vaguely shared between residents of neighborhoods, political representatives at various levels, and private businesses/organizations.
- How?
 - The mayor can create a new department and/or division within the Executive Branch of Louisville Metro Government. If funding is needed it will need to be approved via Metro Council during the city budget process.
 - There will need to be a clear understanding of how this division is different from the past neighborhoods department and local nonprofits such as the Center for Neighborhoods.
 - This division will need to collaborate with neighborhood associations both formal and informal, government agencies at various levels, political representatives, and private businesses/organizations.

Require neighborhood plans to have estimated budgets.

- Why? Neighborhood plans are functionally wish lists of wants and needs. Like wish lists at stores, neighbors should understand how much items cost. This will help with advocacy and prioritizing. It will also help with long term planning for government agencies.
- How?
 - Most recommendations can be quantified with dollar amounts based on similar programs, infrastructure, or staffing paid for elsewhere. If a neighborhood plan calls for a new park, pricing can be estimated based on comparable new parks built in other neighborhoods. If a plan calls for a program, programs can be estimated based on how much they cost elsewhere.
 - Estimates should be baselines from other examples and will need to be adjusted at implementation to be more accurate.
 - Most neighborhood plans have recommendation sections. These sections vary in detail but having cost estimates for implementation would help make them more comprehensive.

Fund neighborhood associations for community organizer training to support and sustain plan implementation.

- Why? Neighborhoods vary in civic engagement, including voter turnout, voter registration, attendance at public government meetings, government surveys, volunteering, and more. Impoverished neighborhoods are less likely to be civically engaged, perpetuating inequities in civic engagement. When neighbors come together to work on common goals, they are the most important advocates their neighborhood can have. Often, political representatives, government agency officials, and private business/organizational staff do not live in neighborhoods they are serving. Residents themselves will have more urgency to address issues impacting their wellbeing in place.

These residents need training and education on which decision makers they should work with on implementing their plan and how government systems work. Otherwise plans will remain words on paper without direction until a non-resident (i.e., government officials) decide to act on them.

- How? There are dozens of local and regional nonprofits offering community organizer training. The dedicated neighborhood plan division should coordinate training to ensure residents are equipped to help implement their plans, not simply there to give input then watch to see what happens or does not happen. The organizer training to help implement the plan should be prioritized as much as consultants to create the plan itself.

Publish neighborhood plan implementation and user-friendly budget dashboards with neighborhood level investments.

- Why? Neighborhood plans are static documents. When recommendations are implemented, residents should see updated plans. Otherwise, community organizing can be goalless or misdirected. Competition of recommendations can serve as progress reports not only for the community but also the government. The progress can help with prioritizing investment and policy. This work must be measured based on neighborhoods. Currently, investment and policy are tracked based on geographic requirements from grantors. The data is collected based on zip codes, census tracts, council districts, and other numerical assigned titles that hold no cultural values of actual neighborhoods.
- How? City planners should create a Geographic Information System (GIS) map to overlay official neighborhood boundaries with zip codes, census tracts, and council districts to determine where investment and policy has an impact.

Amend Louisville Metro Code of Ordinances Chapter 161 (Neighborhood Development Plans) to require current optional sections related to health outcomes to better align with C.H.A.S.E. principals and encourage recommendations that are health centered.

- Why? Plan 2040, Louisville Metro Government's comprehensive plan uses C.H.A.S.E. principals: Connected, Healthy, Authentic, Sustainable, and Equitable. However, the ordinance that regulates the neighborhood planning process does not require key sections that would help implement C.H.A.S.E. principals including but not limited to:
 - Environmental Resources; Community Facilities and Services; Parks, Open Space, and Recreation; Urban Design or Special District; Safety; Youth Engagement; Welcoming Community; Aging in Place; and Education.
- How? A member of the Louisville Metro Council can sponsor an ordinance to amend the regulations for neighborhoods plans, changing these health-related sections from optional to mandatory.

Amend Louisville Metro Code of Ordinances Chapter 161 (Neighborhood Development Plans) and/or change department policy to include Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) health factors.

- Why? Evaluated Neighborhood Plans did not mention health-supportive factors. See Table 5 for details.

- How? While some factors may be excluded because they are not problems or concerns of residents, it is important to approach neighborhood planning with assets as much as we do deficits. Neighborhoods and policy makers need to know what they are doing 'right' before they can provide solutions on what's 'wrong.' A balanced approach using assets and deficits from a public health perspective will help with prioritize policy.

UBN Action Plan

The Action Plan deliverable is a strategic document outlining concrete steps for integrating Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) health factors into Louisville's neighborhood planning and policy framework. It provides a roadmap for policymakers, planners, and community stakeholders to ensure that future investments and development decisions prioritize health, equity, and sustainability. Currently, Russell and Crescent Hill neighborhood plans do not comprehensively address key environmental, housing, and economic indicators that influence community health, such as noise pollution, exposure to toxic emissions, utility insecurity, and educational attainment disparities. By amending Louisville Metro Code of Ordinances Chapter 161 or updating department policies, policymakers can ensure that future neighborhood plans systematically incorporate health-supportive criteria. The Action Plan serves as a practical guide for embedding these factors into decision-making, moving beyond traditional deficit-based models to recognize both community assets and challenges. This shift will help prioritize investments, create more resilient and equitable neighborhoods, and align local planning efforts with comprehensive public health goals. Access this complimentary document here: https://louisville.edu/envirome/healthyairwaterandsoil/UBNActionPlan_FINAL.pdf.

Supporting Policy Recommendations

Some of the key findings from this analysis align with recommendations previously outlined by the University of Louisville Planning Capstone Studio in 2021. Their report, *A Process for the People*, provides a framework for advancing equitable neighborhood planning by shifting from top-down decision-making to a community-driven approach. This shift requires dedicating resources to capacity building, ensuring that residents—not just external planners—have a meaningful voice in shaping their neighborhoods. Additionally, the report emphasizes the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of neighborhood plans, with regular updates to reflect evolving community needs and priorities.

Another critical recommendation is to broaden representation on key decision-making bodies, including the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustment, and Neighborhood Plan Advisory Groups, by incorporating voices beyond real estate developers to include community members and advocates. Strengthening connections between Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) and neighborhood planning efforts is also highlighted as a key strategy to support long-term neighborhood stability and investment in education. Finally, the report underscores the importance of using equity-focused tools to guide planning decisions, ensuring that racial and economic disparities are actively addressed in policy development.

Conclusion

This Civic Investment and Neighborhood Planning Analysis provides a comprehensive assessment of how planning, funding, and policy decisions have shaped neighborhood development and health equity in Louisville over the past 25 years. By reviewing neighborhood plans, evaluating civic investments, and identifying gaps in the integration of health-supportive factors, this report highlights both successes and areas for improvement in the city's approach to equitable urban development. The findings emphasize the importance of place-based strategies, demonstrating how targeted investments can strengthen communities, improve infrastructure, and foster long-term resilience.

The comparison of Russell and Crescent Hill illustrates the diverse challenges and assets that different neighborhoods bring to the planning process. While Russell has seen significant public and private investment, ongoing disparities in housing security, environmental quality, and economic opportunity persist. Meanwhile, Crescent Hill's strengths in environmental sustainability and civic engagement must be balanced with strategies to maintain affordability and inclusivity. This analysis underscores the need for planning processes that go beyond aspirational goals, ensuring that clear implementation pathways and accountability mechanisms drive meaningful change at the neighborhood level.

A key takeaway from this work is the necessity of aligning neighborhood planning with the Universal Basic Neighborhood (UBN) framework, which provides a balanced approach to assessing both community assets and challenges. The lack of UBN health factors in existing neighborhood plans highlights the need for policy changes that require comprehensive health-based considerations in planning processes. Additionally, greater transparency in public budgets, strengthened neighborhood plan implementation efforts, and community-driven decision-making structures are critical for ensuring that investments serve all residents equitably.

Moving forward, this report provides a template for evaluating neighborhood equity, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers, planners, and community advocates. By embedding health-supportive elements into planning policies, leveraging community strengths, and implementing systemic reforms to the planning and budgeting process, Louisville can create neighborhoods where all residents can thrive. The next step is turning these insights into concrete policy actions, ensuring that neighborhoods are not just planned but truly supported through equitable, data-informed, and community-centered investments.