

# HOW CAN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVE **CHECKLISTS & IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED**

Here are four activities will help you identify your neighborhood's most **important assets**, isolate **problem areas**, and highlight its greatest **untapped resources**. Each activity can be done with a group or by yourself.

## **#1 THINK ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD BY TAKING PHOTOS**

- nine shots of what is most special
- nine shots of scenes that are most troubling
- nine shots of untapped physical or social resources that could help revitalize the neighborhood

Examples might be the Burbank Theatre on South Bascom Avenue or a historic sign held over from the 1950s.

Next Step: Once you've collected your photos, ask neighbors to do the same and invite them over to discuss why this particular property or that specific street corner is resonating with them.

And Then: Share the group feedback with the planner for your urban village.



Photo: Nick Dawson via Flickr

## GET MORE

### **SAN JOSE URBAN VILLAGE TOOLKIT**

We captured all of the big and little ideas, tips, challenges, and lessons that can help residents shape their neighborhoods—not only in San Jose, but also in neighborhoods around the region.

Topics include:

- The purpose and strategy behind urban villages
- Advice and check lists on getting started
- Proven strategies to get your neighbors involved
- Connecting with people who can help you
- Inspiration and tips on communicating
- Specific resources and contacts in San Jose

### **CONTACT**

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***[greenbelt.org/uvtoolkit](https://greenbelt.org/uvtoolkit)***

# HOW CAN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVE

## CHECKLISTS & IDEAS

### #2 MENTAL MAP

A mental map represents your understanding of a place based on your experiences in that place. What does your neighborhood look like from your point of view? A mental map can help planners understand how communities are perceived and used by its residents. In this exercise, you don't use an actual map, but describe your neighborhood with words, drawings, or other means. A series of mental maps reveal individuals' impressions of a place and can help highlight neighborhood trouble spots, amenities that are treasured, and opportunities for enhancement.

#### Questions to ask:

- What are the routes or buildings you frequent?
- What experiences have you had?
- What images do you recall of your neighborhood?

### #3 PHYSICAL MAPPING

This can be a fun exercise to do with neighbors. Use Google Maps or a printout of your neighborhood. Give people green markers to identify the community's most important assets, red markers to isolate neighborhood problem areas, and purple markers to highlight the area's greatest untapped resources.

#### Look for and highlight:

- Large Employers
- Schools
- Faith Communities
- Farmers' Markets
- Hospitals
- Parks or Community Gathering Areas
- Anything Else of Interest

### #4 WALK OR BIKE AUDIT

This can highlight areas where sidewalks or paths are in need of repair or where facilities do not provide access to the places that people want to travel. Exploring the neighborhood by bike can identify where new bike lanes, bike racks, and signage can benefit cyclists the most. It can also help you identify how likely people are to use these pathways if additional amenities were in place or obstacles were removed.

An audit can also be part of a neighborhood walking tour that gives residents an opportunity to assess the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the neighborhood overall (also known as a SWOT analysis). This can be a great activity to do in advance of the City's first community meeting.

#### Ask yourself:

- Are there historic buildings?
- Are there any street trees?
- Is there a vacant parcel at a key gateway location?
- Where does it feel unsafe to cross the street?