



## **CAN's letter in response to the restructuring of the COA Boards and Commissions**

While acknowledging that improvements in efficiency can and likely need to be made, the Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods (CAN) believes that our current Boards and Commissions advisory system is the best example of participatory democracy in this city. No matter how inefficient it may feel to Council, substantial efforts must be taken to listen to the citizens and incorporate their feedback.

We believe that this extreme and unwarranted attempt at dismantling this worthwhile system represents an existential challenge to Asheville's most participatory layer of government. We also believe that if implemented, this will result in a less inclusive, less transparent, top-down/tier management form of governance which is not in the best public interest.

While we agree that there should be a comprehensive assessment of which Boards are currently fulfilling their charge and those that are not. We believe that reducing 20 Advisory Boards, manned by 200+ citizen volunteers, down to some undetermined number will only further suppress citizen knowledge and participation in our City's governance. Also, this does not address a shared Board and Council concern over communication, inconsistent staff support and Council liaison attendance at some Advisory Board meetings. Further, it is this lack of communication between Council and some Boards and the inconsistent staff participation that contributes to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of certain Boards.

We know that our current Boards and Commissions represent an amazing and powerful assemblage of smart, active citizens who care about Asheville and are committed to transparent and inclusive governance. We question what will happen to the institutional knowledge, the collaborative and combined experiences and the continuity of their work if a Board or Commission is dissolved by Council.

Finally, we commend the COA for creating the Restructure Working Group and for inviting citizens to participate in the scheduled Advisory Board Restructure Pilot Workshops in May and June. We plan to do our part, as the CAN Board members who represent 16 established neighborhoods, in addition to some newly formed neighborhood organizations, by participating in the Restructure Working Groups.

Based on these beliefs and the overwhelming opposition to the proposal that we are hearing from the community, we believe that this restructuring proposal should be examined and challenged, thoroughly and transparently by our community and not just accept what is mandated from Council and City Staff. For these reasons, we ask that more substantial efforts be taken to listen to our community, incorporate their feedback and reevaluate this plan before making any changes to the current system.

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***The Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods has been representing Asheville communities for nearly 30 years.***

### **VISION**

**Vibrant neighborhoods united in purpose, strong in voice, dedicated to equality and justice**