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**TONIGHT TNT WILL ASK THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
TO GIVE NEIGHBORHOODS A PLACE AT THE TABLE**

TUSCALOOSA, April 29— At tonight's Tuscaloosa City Council meeting (6:00 p.m.) Tuscaloosa Neighborhoods Together, Inc. ("TNT") will address the need to improve the procedures by which land use decisions are made in Tuscaloosa. TNT will ask the Council to consider and approve an Early Notification and Public Participation Ordinance that would make face-to-face meetings with affected neighborhoods the first step developers take when asking the City to approve their projects.

Currently, residents of a neighborhood that would be directly affected by a proposed development often learn little about the project until late in the approval process. Instead of being invited to the table early to identify and address concerns about proposed developments, the City's current process forces neighboring residents and businesses into a reactive position at public hearings, which are the only opportunity the public has to register its concerns. By this late stage, the developer is often so financially invested in a detailed design that any changes requested by the public can be perceived as threats to the overall viability of the project. The atmosphere can become divisive and the planning process can bog down.

"Getting developers and local residents together early to discuss a project gives everyone a chance to share information and concerns, and iron out potential problems long before they ever emerge," says Ken King, president of TNT. "It's all about developing consensus. Many other cities already do this, and it really can speed up planning and approval overall."

As drafted, the TNT proposal is easy to understand and would be simple to implement: depending on the size and nature of the proposed land use (residential, commercial, or industrial) and the type of application involved (variance, rezoning, subdivision, etc.), the developer would be required to invite nearby property owners and neighborhood associations to a public presentation and discussion of the proposed development. The developer would provide minutes to the city and meeting attendants, with meeting attendants able to submit final comments in response to the public record.

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“We’re not against development at all—we just want local residents to have a say in what happens to their neighborhoods,” says King. “TNT has been paying close attention to the way land use decisions are made in Tuscaloosa for several years, and we just think this would be an easier, better way for everyone concerned. It would prevent a lot of headaches on all sides, because we wouldn’t end up with these battles you hear about so often.”

Tuscaloosa Neighborhoods Together is a group of concerned citizens and community activists who have teamed up to share ideas and know-how so they can better advocate for local neighborhoods and work with local governments.

For more information about Tuscaloosa Neighborhoods Together, visit the group’s website at www.tuscaloosaneighborhoods.org.

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