



HOW WE WORK. HOW WE SERVE. HOW WE SHOW UP.

The Smart Girl Standard.

110 principles for shared progress.

A property has an owner. A project has a team. A neighborhood has a voice. Our work should respect all three.

These original principles guide the way we aim to develop, collaborate and participate in the life of our city. A win-win approach seeks mutual benefit, names the tradeoffs and preserves informed choice.

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CHAPTER 01 / PRINCIPLES 1-10

Respect in every room

Make dignity the starting point, regardless of a person's title, resources or role.

- 001 Lead with dignity.** Treat the owner, tenant, neighbor, public employee and crew member as people whose time and perspective matter.
- 002 Introduce yourself plainly.** Say who you are, whom you represent and why you are there before asking for someone's attention.
- 003 Prepare before you arrive.** Read the agenda, bring the correct documents and know the decision the meeting is meant to address.
- 004 Honor another person's time.** Arrive when agreed, keep your remarks focused and give early notice when plans change.
- 005 Give names proper care.** Ask how a person's name is pronounced and use the form of address they prefer.
- 006 Make room at the table.** Consider access, timing, language and format so people can participate meaningfully.
- 007 Extend equal courtesy.** Offer the same patience to the person answering the phone as to the person making the decision.
- 008 Ask before entering.** Obtain permission before visiting private property, opening a gate or stepping into an occupied space.
- 009 Keep your composure.** Respond to frustration with a steady voice; pause when a useful conversation needs a calmer moment.
- 010 Leave people with clarity.** Close each conversation by stating what was decided, what remains open and who will act next.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Before the next meeting, learn who will be present and what each person needs from the conversation.

CHAPTER 02 / PRINCIPLES 11-20

Listen before proposing

Understand the need before offering a solution.

- 011 Start with their priorities.** Ask what success would mean to the person affected, including what they hope to protect.
- 012 Hear the full thought.** Let people finish before responding, especially when their experience differs from your own.
- 013 Repeat the concern fairly.** Summarize what you heard and invite correction before trying to solve it.
- 014 Make questions welcome.** Explain unfamiliar terms without making anyone feel behind for asking.
- 015 Separate a position from a need.** Explore the concern beneath a request; a different approach may meet the same need.
- 016 Respect a clear no.** Allow people to decline a proposal, introduction, photograph or invitation without pressure.
- 017 Notice the missing voices.** Ask who will be affected but has not yet had a practical opportunity to speak.
- 018 Name uncertainty honestly.** Say what you know, what you believe and what still needs to be checked.
- 019 Protect entrusted information.** Share personal details and private project materials only with permission and for an appropriate purpose.
- 020 Follow the meaning, not the volume.** Give a quiet concern the same consideration as a forcefully expressed one.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Ask an open question, then summarize the answer before presenting your recommendation.

CHAPTER 03 / PRINCIPLES 21-30

Move through the city with integrity

Use relationships to improve understanding while respecting a fair public process.

- 021 Respect the public role.** Recognize that city staff and board members serve responsibilities extending beyond a single project.
- 022 Use the proper channel.** Submit questions and materials through the process designated for the application or decision.
- 023 Learn the agenda.** Understand which body is meeting, what it can decide and how participation is organized.
- 024 Bring complete information.** Label drawings, dates, revisions and supporting facts so reviewers can understand the request.
- 025 Honor the speaking time.** Make the essential point clearly, observe the meeting's participation procedures and allow others their turn.
- 026 Ask for clarity without accusation.** Request the applicable standard or explanation when guidance seems inconsistent or incomplete.
- 027 Respect access without claiming influence.** Use civic relationships to learn and communicate; never imply that knowing someone secures an approval.
- 028 Keep support accurately described.** Distinguish attendance, a conversation, a recommendation and a formal vote when describing public participation.
- 029 Respond to an unfavorable decision thoughtfully.** Read the written record, understand the reasons and discuss appropriate next steps with the project team.
- 030 Thank people without creating obligation.** Express appreciation in a manner that respects public-service boundaries and expects no special treatment.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

For each public application, identify the decision maker, submission requirements and official record.

CHAPTER 04 / PRINCIPLES 31-40

Let evidence lead

Keep attractive ideas connected to reliable information.

- 031 Identify the right property.** Match the address, parcel and project documents before drawing conclusions about the site.
- 032 Keep the source beside the claim.** Record where information came from and when it was obtained so others can review it.
- 033 Distinguish the map from the ground.** Use mapping to frame questions and obtain the professional work needed to confirm site conditions.
- 034 Read the conditions.** Review the limits and obligations attached to an approval rather than relying on its headline.
- 035 Separate concepts from permissions.** Label a design study, application, approval, permit and completed project according to its actual stage.
- 036 Look for contrary evidence.** Investigate facts that challenge the preferred plan before a commitment makes change harder.
- 037 Keep versions in order.** Identify the current drawing set and retain a clear record of what changed.
- 038 Use the right expertise.** Bring legal, surveying, engineering, architectural and other specialist questions to qualified professionals.
- 039 Correct the record promptly.** When an error is found, tell affected people and replace the information they may be relying on.
- 040 Make assumptions visible.** Describe the information still needed before an estimate, timeline or development option can be relied upon.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Mark each major project assumption as confirmed, unresolved or awaiting professional review.

Design with the neighborhood in mind

A property is part of a place that people already use and value.

- 041 Learn what is already there.** Understand the people, uses, histories and daily routines that give a place its character.
- 042 Respect history in its fullness.** Acknowledge Indigenous presence, displacement, labor and community achievement when telling the story of the land.
- 043 Study the edge of the site.** Consider how entrances, height, light, drainage and service areas meet neighboring properties.
- 044 Think from the sidewalk.** Examine the experience of people walking, rolling, waiting for transit and approaching the front door.
- 045 Consider the people living there now.** Discuss occupancy, disruption and transition concerns early when existing homes or businesses may be affected.
- 046 Make maintenance part of design.** Choose details with attention to durability, repair, operating cost and the people who will care for them.
- 047 Give water and landscape attention.** Bring drainage, soil, trees and outdoor-space questions into the plan before they become afterthoughts.
- 048 Test everyday function.** Consider deliveries, waste, parking, emergency access and daily movement alongside the appearance of a proposal.
- 049 Show scale honestly.** Use drawings and images that help people understand the proposal without concealing its size or impacts.
- 050 Explain the change.** Describe what improves, what may be disrupted and which concerns remain unresolved.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Walk the surrounding area and list the everyday relationships the proposal may change.

Build a team people can trust

Good coordination respects both professional expertise and the people doing the work.

- 051 Choose fit over familiarity.** Consider qualifications, relevant experience, capacity and project needs when recommending a professional.
- 052 Describe introductions accurately.** Explain the relationship and avoid presenting an introduction as a guarantee of another firm's work.
- 053 Put responsibilities in writing.** Make deliverables, exclusions, deadlines and decision authority understandable before work begins.
- 054 Respect the craft.** Invite the experience of tradespeople, field staff and suppliers into decisions that affect execution.
- 055 Raise coordination issues early.** Bring conflicting drawings or instructions to the responsible team members before the problem travels downstream.
- 056 Give useful feedback.** Identify the specific issue, its effect and the change needed without attacking the person.
- 057 Credit the contributors.** Name designers, builders, photographers and other collaborators accurately when showing the work.
- 058 Keep site visits orderly.** Arrange access, follow site instructions and stay clear of work you are not authorized or equipped to approach.
- 059 Address changes openly.** Discuss the effect on scope, price and schedule before treating additional work as agreed.
- 060 Close the loop with the team.** Share decisions with everyone responsible for acting on them, including those who were not in the meeting.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Confirm one current scope, a responsible person for each task and a shared way to report changes.

Handle money and commitments clearly

Trust grows when people can understand the terms and the risk.

- 061 Explain what the fee covers.** Describe the service, its limits and the expected next step before asking someone to commit.
- 062 Keep amounts in their proper stage.** Distinguish a proposed fee, a signed agreement, an invoice and a cleared payment in every record.
- 063 Show the working assumptions.** Explain the inputs and exclusions behind a budget, estimate or projected return.
- 064 Speak plainly about risk.** Discuss possible delays, costs and unsuccessful outcomes alongside the opportunity.
- 065 Respect independent advice.** Give owners and partners room to consult their own advisors and reach an informed decision.
- 066 Never use urgency as pressure.** Explain a real deadline accurately without inventing scarcity or rushing a person past important questions.
- 067 Confirm payment instructions directly.** Use a trusted contact channel to verify recipient details and clarify what has actually been received.
- 068 Disclose competing interests.** Make relevant roles, compensation arrangements and potential conflicts clear before they affect a decision.
- 069 Protect a person under pressure.** Respond to financial distress with discretion, realistic options and appropriate professional referrals.
- 070 Honor agreed obligations.** Keep commitments to clients and collaborators, and address a problem early when an obligation may be missed.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Review scope, fees, payment status and open conditions as separate items.

Serve the community with care

Useful service starts with the community's needs and preserves the dignity of the people involved.

- 071 Ask before offering a solution.** Let residents and service organizations describe their priorities rather than arriving with a predetermined answer.
- 072 Show up beyond the photograph.** Contribute preparation, time and follow-through, including the work that receives little public attention.
- 073 Ask permission to share a story.** Let people decide whether their name, image or personal experience becomes part of public communications.
- 074 Support second chances with respect.** See the person beyond a past hardship and support practical paths to participation and opportunity.
- 075 Protect the dignity of receiving help.** Avoid making someone's hardship a marketing device or a condition of assistance.
- 076 Learn from established organizers.** Respect the local knowledge and relationships of people already doing the work.
- 077 Offer what you can sustain.** Choose a realistic contribution and communicate clearly about its duration and limits.
- 078 Make introductions with consent.** Ask both sides before sharing private contact details or bringing a person into a sensitive conversation.
- 079 Listen after the event.** Invite feedback on whether the contribution was useful and what should be done differently.
- 080 Share the spotlight.** Recognize community leadership and collective effort rather than claiming a shared achievement as your own.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Ask the organization what help is useful, agree on the task and return to learn what changed.

Negotiate for shared progress

Seek workable benefits while making tradeoffs, responsibilities and limits visible.

- 081 Define a win with the people involved.** Ask owners, partners and affected neighbors what a worthwhile outcome would mean to them.
- 082 Look beyond the first proposal.** Explore different timing, scope, design or participation arrangements before assuming there is only one workable path.
- 083 Make room for a fair exchange.** Consider what each party contributes, carries and receives when shaping an agreement.
- 084 Name the tradeoffs.** Do not call an outcome a shared success while concealing a cost or burden another person must carry.
- 085 Protect informed choice.** Present the practical options and their limits so people can choose without confusion or intimidation.
- 086 Separate disagreement from disrespect.** Challenge a proposal or assumption while preserving the other person's dignity.
- 087 Know when to pause.** Slow the conversation when key information, authority or understanding is missing.
- 088 Give concerns a path to resolution.** Record the issue, identify who can address it and agree on how an answer will be communicated.
- 089 Write the understanding down.** Confirm the terms and unresolved items rather than relying on different memories of the same conversation.
- 090 Leave room for a respectful exit.** Recognize when a proposal does not fit and close the discussion without retaliation or a misleading promise.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Write down what each party needs, where interests overlap and what still requires agreement.

Use technology with judgment

Let better tools improve the work while people remain responsible for the decisions.

- 091 Choose tools for a useful purpose.** Adopt technology that improves clarity, access, research or coordination rather than novelty alone.
- 092 Check machine-generated answers.** Review AI-assisted work against reliable sources and professional judgment before it informs a project decision.
- 093 Label illustrations truthfully.** Distinguish generated imagery, concept renderings, current photographs and completed work.
- 094 Protect private material.** Confirm authorization and appropriate safeguards before placing client information in a digital tool.
- 095 Keep people in the decision.** Use automation to assist follow-through while retaining human review where context and consequences matter.
- 096 Make information easier to use.** Write clear labels, provide readable layouts and offer a practical alternative when a digital tool is difficult to access.
- 097 Request only what is needed.** Explain why information is collected and avoid gathering private details unrelated to the service.
- 098 Respect communication choices.** Keep an inquiry separate from permission for ongoing marketing and honor a request to stop updates.
- 099 Maintain the record.** Preserve useful sources, revisions and approvals so a future team member can understand how a conclusion was reached.
- 100 Bring learning home responsibly.** Translate ideas from conferences and other cities to Nashville's context instead of assuming every approach transfers unchanged.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Before sharing a digital output, check its source, permissions, accuracy and effect on the people using it.

CHAPTER 11 / PRINCIPLES 101-110

Let follow-through build the reputation

A lasting reputation comes from useful work, honest reflection and care after the moment has passed.

- 101 Promise within your authority.** Commit to the work you control and explain which decisions belong to an owner, professional, lender or public body.
- 102 Keep a next-step record.** Assign a responsible person and an agreed date to each action that needs follow-through.
- 103 Communicate before a deadline slips.** Explain the cause, likely effect and proposed response as soon as a delay becomes apparent.
- 104 Measure what actually happened.** Distinguish activity from progress and a projected result from a documented outcome.
- 105 Own the repair.** Acknowledge your part in a mistake, agree on a remedy and confirm when the corrective work is complete.
- 106 Request honest feedback.** Invite clients and collaborators to describe their experience without pressure for a favorable review.
- 107 Share results with permission.** Obtain appropriate consent, credit contributors and preserve the distinction between your role and the team's work.
- 108 Carry knowledge forward.** Leave an organized record that helps the owner, next professional or future team understand the project.
- 109 Practice hospitality across cities.** Welcome visitors thoughtfully, learn from their experience and return generosity through useful exchange.
- 110 Leave trust stronger than you found it.** Seek progress that people can understand, agreements they can stand behind and relationships worthy of the next conversation.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

End each project stage with a record of decisions, open responsibilities and lessons for the next one.