

2024 // DEFINING OUR POWER // STANDUPNASHVILLE.ORG



END OF YEAR REPORT

A LETTER

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2024, SUN focused on building people power and creating an alternative vision to the extractive model of capitalism and governance that siphons wealth from our communities and hands our public resources to corporations. We stepped into this work not just to resist but to reimagine—crafting a framework that speaks to what makes us whole and brings us closer to joy.

Through months of research and organizing conversations, we concluded that public land could become the foundation of a reimagined city—a city where neighbors come together to determine what they need and take the lead in building their own sustainable future. This year, we embraced that vision and worked to turn it into action.

Our systems are failing us. We are suffering. The threats ahead are manifold.

But that's not the whole story.

In the trenches of this struggle, we encountered thousands of ordinary Nashvillians doing extraordinary things. They came to us with their frustrations, hopes, dreams, and even their peace. Together, we transformed that energy into something real—something worth standing for.

“We stepped into this work not just to resist but to reimagine”



We made our office a safe space, and our team became keepers of the trust our community placed in us. Staying rooted to our base

was hard work: often unappreciated, always humbling, but ultimately deeply satisfying. This year, we pushed ourselves to step out of the spotlight and back into the grassroots movement where we belong. Because what good is a win or an accolade if you can't share it with the people you love the most?

As you'll see in this report, we did the day-in, day-out work to make tangible improvements in people's lives. We got people into affordable housing. We put people to work. We built a coalition to

secure dedicated funding for transit and developed leaders to serve on boards and commissions, holding elected officials accountable to the needs of the people. These aren't just policy wins—they're building blocks of multiracial power and class solidarity.

When we created SUN, our goal was simple: to stop developers from making decisions that impact how we live our lives. Over time, that mission deepened as we grew more knowledgeable about what it means to authentically serve our communities. We've built a movement not just to address problems, but to foster trust, connection, and joy.

Given the political climate ahead, we're grateful for the deeper bonds we've built with our base and allies. It will take an unprecedented amount of trust and care to win the fights before us. But we are ready. No one is going to fix our problems except ourselves.

This report captures key moments from the year and highlights our Theory of Change model, but it doesn't encompass all of our mission-driven work or impact. There's more we've done and so much more we're poised to do. We invite you to partner with us—through [donations](#), [volunteering](#), or simply standing with us. Know that your contributions, whether of time or resources, will fortify and advance our efforts to create a city that works for everyone.

Thank you for making 2024 a successful year. Let's keep building, dreaming, and standing together.

In Solidarity
J. O. Kelly

J. Odessa Kelly
Founding Member
& Executive Director



OUR GOALS & ACHIEVEMENTS



Build a strong, diverse and engaged base of Nashville residents who are demanding public investment that brings economic justice and equitable development to black, brown and working class people.



Strengthen SUN's internal governance, financial, operations and human resources **systems** that support positive team culture, legal compliance and financial sustainability.



Build a strategic communications strategy and department to support SUN campaigns and programs to amplify the voices of Nashville residents and shape the narrative in Nashville to fight inequity.



Build out and strengthen our political strategy which includes proactive planning, strategic research and building authentic relationships and the capacity to deliver change for our communities.

SUN

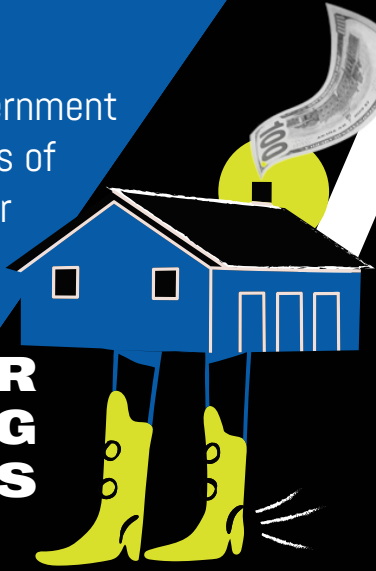
THEORY OF CHANGE

If people are engaged in government, and the government is responsive to the needs of people, we create a better city for everyone.

OUR GROUNDING TRUTHS



- ✓ Public investments should be used to meet local residents' needs.
- ✓ Everyone should have their basic needs met in housing, transit, child care, and health.
- ✓ Residents should have the strongest, most impactful voice in the growth and changes in their communities.



THE REIMAGINED CITY

OUR VISION

We envision a Nashville where the common good is rooted in equity, dignity and the opportunity for all people to enjoy a better quality of life. Where the planning and development of our city reflects the priorities of people of color and the working class.

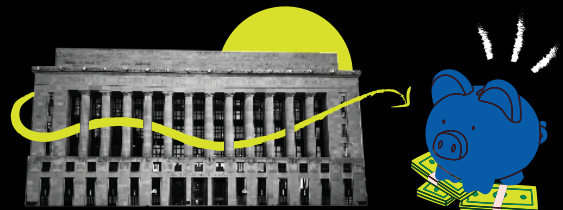
OUR POWER BUILDING STRATEGIES

BASE BUILDING We are on the ground in communities, on job sites, etc, raising awareness, encouraging people to take action, and bringing people into public spaces where the decisions are being made. We unlock Nashvillians natural leadership skills and pair it with the knowledge needed to hold seats of power ourselves.

COALITIONS We're stronger together: the fights that create lasting change take all of us. United by common interests, we stand for transformation.

POLICY The biggest impacts on our daily lives stem from laws and policies. We advocate for policies that improve the quality of life for our residents, and this is why we make our voice heard at city hall and on boards and commissions.

POPULAR EDUCATION Knowledge is at the root of equity and we will inform, breakdown, and fill in the gaps of important matters in a way that can be easily digested. We as activists and organizers will meet people where they are at and lift up their lived experiences.

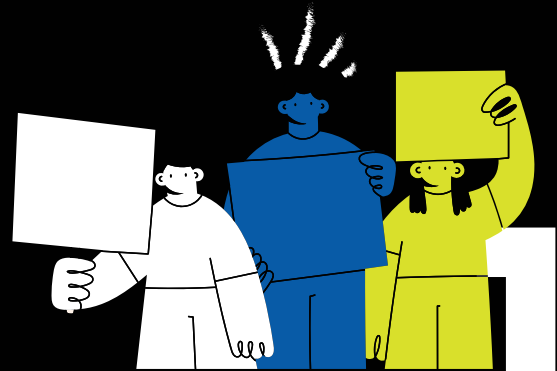


Residents understand how money flows through government.

Government funds are used to meet local residents' needs and their quality of life increases.

We want our home, our city of Nashville, to be held up as a model for how neighborhoods can thrive in racial and economic diversity with shared prosperity for all people.

We strive for transparency in our governments and leaders where the focus is on the people. Where power is in our hands, the people of Nashville, to make sure our city is prioritizing its people and our dignity.



We uplift careers and employers that respect their employees and encourage democracy, like unions.



We hope to inspire a movement of involvement and action in the community that centers the people directly affected.

OUR IMPACT

Growing investments in housing, education, transit, small business, jobs, health care, and culture & arts.

Working class people serve on boards, commissions, and run for office.

Elected officials become accountable to their constituents, not corporations and lobbyists.



Authentic community feedback process is routinely incorporated into city projects.



Community / Labor partnerships become standard components of government agreements.

OUR VALUES



We hold our city leaders accountable for policies and the impacts they have. We encourage openness and honesty, and we invite people to hold SUN accountable, too.



We courageously take on powerful individuals and ideas and ask hard questions. We don't take no for an answer, and we refuse to settle for crumbs.



Locals are actively engaged in making decisions around growth and changes in their communities. We hold the seats of power.



Poverty rates decrease.
Crime rates decrease.
Displacement decreases.

All parts of town have thriving businesses, transit systems, good schools, quality medical care, and vibrant arts and culture.



OUR GROUNDING TRUTHS

These platforms: Housing, Transit, Good Jobs, and Childcare, are the basis of our Quality of Life and the reason for everything we do.

WHAT WE BELIEVE IS SIMPLE

- Public investments should be used to meet local residents' needs.
- Everyone should have their basic needs met in housing, transit, child care, and health.
- Residents should have the strongest, most impactful voice in the growth and changes in their communities.





OUR POWER BUILDING STRATEGIES

BASE BUILDING

Civic Engagement - Our organizers spent countless hours training community members how to phonebank, canvass, conduct one-on-ones, and build relationships.

Advocacy - We taught our base how to use all the tools available to get what they needed. Thank you to all the elected officials who came in to assist by being part of mock debates and engagements.

Public Speaking - Part of our belief in fighting relentlessly is breaking through the barriers that can hold us back. For many people, especially the working class, and especially those of us from marginalized communities, using your own voice to speak your own truth can be intimidating.

BASE BUILDING



Much of the equity we all fight for is actually internal...Art has a way of evoking emotion and relaying urgency where words can often come up short. We teamed up with PowerSwitch Action and A Host of People to put on our first ever theatrical play to highlight the housing crisis we are experiencing, Dot's Home.

We say "the base" when mentioning the people we organize with and for but we know these people intimately and know more than just their predicaments. We know their stories, their families, and the very thin thread that's holding them together. Dot's Home was an opportunity for us to say we see you, we understand the urgency, and thank you for trusting us to carry your truth forward.

Watching the people who have rocked with us for years share their stories, testify in public settings, bring their loved ones and friends to a show catered to them was priceless. We are looking forward to hosting again soon!



OUR POWER BUILDING STRATEGIES COALITION

Shift Nashville

In August, we formed the SHIFT Nashville coalition with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition and The Equity Alliance to support the transit referendum and organize our bases so this historic investment benefits working-class communities.

Together, we phoned banked, canvassed, wrote postcards, held community events, educated residents about the transit plan, and threw voting parties to get people to the polls. All of this hard work paid off with the referendum passing emphatically.

We are now beginning to organize around our policy platform to make sure the implementation of this **\$3 billion** infrastructure project centers community needs over corporate greed.

Our priorities include community decision-making, affordable housing at transit hubs, jobs that actually support working-class families, high-quality contracts with safe working conditions, investments in small businesses that provide service and value to the community, and infrastructure that protects our communities in the event of natural disasters.

The state of TN and the city of Nashville have one of the lowest civically engaged populations in the country. Many of the social justice barriers we are tasked with removing are anchored in the reality that our communities are not voting.

This year we committed to connecting the dots between the lack of civic engagement and the hardships we face (in their many manifestations). We held listening sessions, took residents to Metro Council Meetings, board and commission meetings, and brought Department Heads & task force leaders to them.



OUR POWER BUILDING STRATEGIES POLICY

Public Land

For the past eight years we have been tasked with the housing crisis. We have launched campaigns, passed historic CBA's, written legislation, and called upon national spotlights and with all this effort and gained knowledge and experience we can confidently say...housing systems across is broken!

Ever do a thing with all the best intentions and it still not be enough? That's how we feel about the historic CBA we passed in 2018. As we watch with pride Black & brown families move back into a community that has been completely transformed by gentrification, there's still a feeling of dissatisfaction.

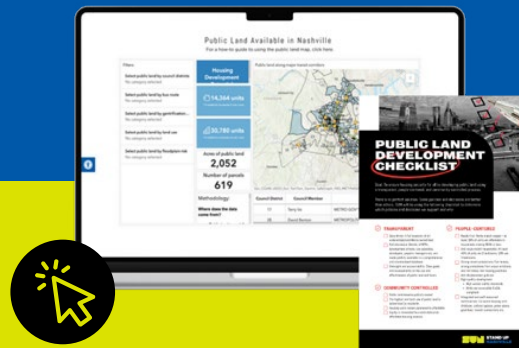
Most of our people can't even afford the supposed affordable units that we have fought for and won. Even when they can make rent, there's the same old discrimination from property managers and paying junk fees just to apply. The problem is that developers and corporate landlords call the shots. There's no community control.

SUN spent much of 2024 holding community meetings, listening sessions, and organizing conversations with our base about this problem. We examined failed campaigns, did extensive research, and even traveled abroad to explore alternative models.

This led us to the conclusion that public land can be the foundation of a reimagined city, where our neighbors can come together to determine what they need and how to become stewards of their own sustainable future.

All this discussion, debate, and passion came together to manifest a new path forward. We created a [public land map and how-to guide](#), articulated [principles](#) to guide community-controlled housing and development, and made a [checklist](#) for people to hold decision makers accountable.

These tools are now being used to train our base to organize their neighbors and leverage public land to meet community needs.



Check out the public land map and checklist we created to hold decision makers accountable.



OUR POWER BUILDING STRATEGIES

POPULAR EDUCATION

Nashville's Budget

The overwhelming majority of need and frustrations we heard directly from the people was the high cost of housing, the lack of affordable quality childcare, and the hours spent in traffic. What was also abundantly clear is that the majority of people experiencing these hardships had no knowledge of what to expect from the city budget and how creating better demands around it would be the most immediate and impactful way to reduce the stress in their daily lives. So we took the time to break down the complexities of the budget in a long-form series accompanied by engaging, digestible social media.



READ THE SERIES ONLINE:

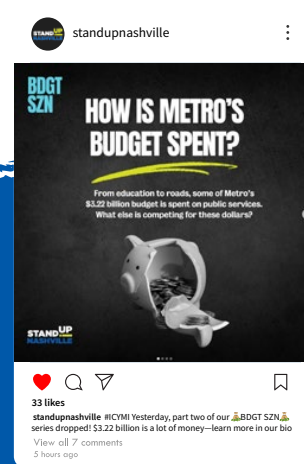
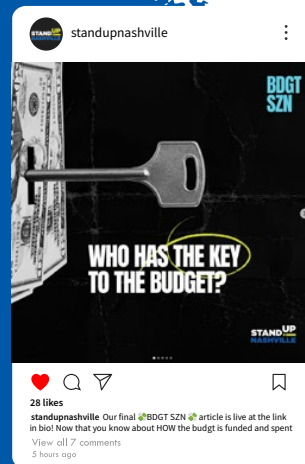
[\[PART 1\] BUDGET SZN 101](#)

[\[PART 2\] B-B-B-BILLION](#)

[\[PART 3\] TALK CHARTER TO ME](#)

[\[PART 4\] RA!\\$!NG TAXES?!](#)

[\[PART 5\] PROPERTY TAXES](#)





OUR CORE VALUES

At the heart of everything we do are the values that guide our mission and shape our vision for a better future. These principles reflect our commitment to building a just and equitable Nashville:

- Dignity in the Workplace: Everyone deserves respect, fair treatment, and a safe environment to thrive.
- Transparency and Accountability: We are open in our actions and hold ourselves and others responsible for the impact of our decisions.
- Fight Relentlessly: We are unwavering in our pursuit of justice, no matter how challenging the path.
- Engagement: True progress happens when people come together, building power and creating change collectively.

These values fueled our work this year and will continue to inspire our efforts in the years to come.



“We speak with authenticity, we organize with empathy, and never compromise our moral compass to be grounded in the truth regardless of the consequences.”



17

job fairs organized for Soccer Stadium
First Source Hiring Program

3K

Black, Brown, and working-class students
and underpaid workers were engaged to
build relationships and explore better
career paths.

OUR IMPACT

Good Jobs Nashville

We build pathways out of poverty so our most marginalized communities have a chance to thrive and build wealth. We run workforce programs that connect residents in need of good jobs with highroad employers and push for policies that support worker safety, fair wages, and career opportunities as part of our Good Jobs Nashville Initiative.

Our First Source Hiring Program gives people from high-poverty areas of the city priority in the hiring process for jobs at the MLS soccer stadium, as part of the community benefits agreement we won in 2018. This year we held 17 job fairs and made 90 referrals to put people to work at the stadium.

SUN's also a core partner of Music City Construction Careers (MC3) — an apprenticeship readiness program that prepares

underrepresented residents to enter 15 union apprenticeship programs in the skilled construction trades. In 2024, MC3 graduated 90 students from the community program and 18 seniors from the inaugural school-based program at Maplewood High School.

We are currently working on initiatives to help secure federal investments for equitable workforce development, expand MC3's school-based program to a second high school, incubate minority union contractors, and ensure the 60,000 jobs that will be created by the Transit Improvement Program we helped pass are good union and public sector jobs.



OUR IMPACT

BY THE NUMBERS

This year alone we've reached more than **46K** people through our work.



19

public meetings



88

phone banks



24

canvass



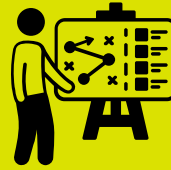
800+

MC3 applicants



90

MC3 graduates



10

advocacy trainings



36

community leaders
developed



2

pieces of bad
legislation blocked



3

policy wins

SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

Stadium opponents now steward East Bank vision.

[Read more here.](#)

CNN'S VAN JONES REPORTS IN "WHAT HAPPENED TO TENNESSEE? THE BATTLE OF BLUE AND RED" FOR THE WHOLE STORY WITH ANDERSON COOPER

[Continued online here.](#)

WHY CITY'S THREE LEADING VOICES IN RACIAL JUSTICE FORMED TRANSIT COALITION SHIFT NASHVILLE

[Continued online here.](#)

Nashville, Milwaukee each have community benefits agreements. What can Chattanooga learn?

[Read more here.](#)

Volunteers hit the streets in support of Nashville's "Choose How You Move" Plan"

[Continued online here.](#)

'IT'S BECOME UNATTAINABLE': NONPROFIT LOOKS AT HOW CITY LEADERS ARE WORKING TO IMPROVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN NASHVILLE

[Read more here.](#)

'A dream deferred': Home prices are higher than ever, rent not much better as nonprofit looks for solutions

[Read more here.](#)

Can Housing Remain Affordable?

[Read more here.](#)

Short-term rentals change landscape of neighborhood for permanent residents

[Read more here.](#)

Nashvillians demand a public transit system that lets them live and work in the city [Read more here.](#)



Get Involved with SUN

While this report captures key moments from the year, it does not fully encompass all of our mission-driven work or impact. There's more to what we've done and what we're positioned to do. We invite you to partner with us through [donations](#) and [volunteering](#). Know that your financial contributions and time will position us to fortify and advance our efforts beyond what we've already accomplished.

[DONATE HERE](#)

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