

Report on Portland's Neighborhood Association System

Prepared by the
Current System Subcommittee
of Community Connect – September 2006



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Part I What It Is

The Portland neighborhood associations are City sponsored volunteer organizations designed to provide forums and activities related to improving the livability of Portland neighborhoods. Originally, Neighborhood Associations were established geographically to provide residents a forum for responding to land use proposals and/or to participate in community development projects through federal Model Cities programs. Neighborhood Associations give citizens a voice about decisions and actions that occur in their neighborhood. Through this system Portland is able to involve neighborhood residents in roles of advisor, collaborator, and partner with the City and with other local decision making entities. In addition neighborhood associations have a critical role in building community and social capital through organizing summertime block parties, neighborhood clean-ups, street tree plantings, and neighborhood watches to name a few.

How Many Neighborhoods

Portland has 95 Neighborhood Associations (NAs) with bylaws clearly delineating boundaries, open membership, open meetings, non-discrimination rules, public records, and rules for resolution of grievances. Neighborhood Associations may not charge membership dues and must be open at a minimum to participation by all residents, property owners, and business owners within it's boundaries or others as designated through the association's by-laws. The City standards govern the NA system and provide requirements for official recognition. Support for NAs is generally provided through District Coalition Offices.

District Coalitions

Each DC has its own history, distinct character and operational methods. Five of the seven District Coalitions (DC) are non-profits corporations that operate entirely separate from the City and are governed by boards of directors made up of NA representatives. Some District Coalitions provide for members from other community based groups and/or business district associations on their boards. The remaining two DCs are operated by the City. They generally have advisory boards of NA leaders. Their primary funding source is from the City. Distribution of funding has not historically been based on any equitable formula. Each DC has staff that support community participation through providing technical assistance on community organizing basics, information and referral to residents, communications through print and electronic outreach, and leadership and advocacy training of volunteer neighborhood leaders and residents. Crime Prevention Specialists are also located in the DC offices, but are City employees. (See appendix 2)

Structure

The typical NA is similar to other non-profit organizations with a board (elected by the members) of about a dozen people that meet monthly or more to conduct business with other participating neighborhood residents. Boundaries are established by residents from varied geographic, institutional, political and historical factors and are codified as part of their by-laws. Portland neighborhoods vary greatly in population: from 21 residents (NW Industrial NA) to 20,587 (Centennial Community Association). All are

unique in various ways and are often changing periodically in their operational dynamics. Their purpose, as seen by neighborhood leaders, are to prioritize and solve problems, advise and advocate for positive change, participate in the larger community, build community through social activities that bring residents together, communicate between neighbors, businesses, and government, and to educate and inform the community.

The entire system is supported through the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement, which has evolved over time with the philosophy of the City Council, the commissioner in charge, the bureaucracy, the neighborhood associations, and the available resources.

The Work of NAs

NAs are often involved in improving neighborhood livability, public safety, land use, transportation, community enhancement, and social issues. Neighborhood focus is often on City issues since the support is from the City, however NAs often work on issues related to schools, social services, social justice, racism, business revitalization, the environment, open space, parks along with many others. Neighborhood Association members set the agenda based on the needs, values, issues and priorities of the participants. Neighborhood Associations often walk the fine line between balancing private self-interest (often referred to as NIMBY – Not In My Backyard) and public interest (operating for the “Greater Good” of society).

NA Communications and Direct Support

NA volunteers expend great effort in communicating with neighborhood residents via newsletters, flyers, news articles, email, websites, and door-to-door canvassing. Communications are important, as it offers residents information about the NA and the opportunity to participate.

The average annual NA budget ranges from \$500 to \$2,000 distributed by the District Coalition. Most NAs conduct some level of fundraising in order to augment the amount of money that the City provides for communication/newsletter support. Some of the fundraising activities, such as neighborhood clean-ups, generate funds to support their efforts, as well as build capacity and awareness of the organization in the neighborhood. Some neighborhoods have more sophisticated communications methods because of their volunteers' expertise in website design, for instance. Some neighborhoods generate income from advertisements in their NA newsletter. However, NAs have consistently argued that more resources are necessary for communications.

Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI)

The purpose of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) is to facilitate citizen participation and improve communication among citizens, Neighborhood Associations, District/Coalition offices, Business District Associations, City agencies, and other entities. Its mission is to enhance the quality of neighborhoods through community participation.

ONI oversees the NA system by managing the DC contracts and providing various related functions such as the crime prevention program. The ONI operating budget has averaged between \$5 & \$7 million over the last five years. (See appendix 1) Significant modifications to the ONI budget were implemented during the development of the 06/07

ONI budget because of a community-based process that prioritized and re-distributed funds directly to NAs to support outreach and capacity building efforts. Funds were earmarked to provide additional support for communications, operating support for Directors and Officers insurance, and funds for two pilot programs to expand the outreach and leadership development for traditionally under-represented communities and people of color.

All but five of the 95 Neighborhood Associations of Portland receive direct services from seven District/Coalition offices. The DC's are funded by the City and in 2006-07 DC contracts and expenditures were approximately \$1.4 million. (see Appendix 3)

PART II A Brief History Of The Current System

It's Original Purpose And Intention – Why It Was Created

The neighborhood system provides the people of Portland a framework to “effectively participate in civic affairs in order to improve the livability of Portland Neighborhoods.” Since 1974 the neighborhood system has been a stage not only for community building, but also for contesting policy and administrative decisions. State Planning Goal 1 requires the participation of the community in planning decisions, and Portland uses NAs for this purpose. The geographic basis for community coming together to identify problems, respond to proposed new developments and influence the built environment is the underpinning of the NAs in the City of Portland. When the system works best, neighborhood leaders and other interests work together to create solutions that are satisfactory to all. In this way the NA system provides a framework for adversarial and participatory democracy. The system evolved from its roots of responding to land use issues to become a forum for issues that affect livability in the neighborhoods.

Citizen Involvement through Neighborhoods

In 1974 the Portland City Council adopted an ordinance initiating a system of participatory citizen involvement through Neighborhood Associations with the purpose “to broaden channels of communication between the people of Portland and City officials on matters affecting neighborhood livability” and “to improve citizen participation by consulting them on policies, projects, and plans . . .” The participatory involvement of citizens through a neighborhood system assists democratic process in three ways:

- Participation teaches good citizenship by giving people experience with dialogue and group decision making,
- Participation builds community by allowing people to work together around shared goals and interests, and
- Making government institutions more responsive to citizen’s interests, values and priorities.

When It Was Created: The Social, Economic, Cultural, Political Atmosphere

The Portland Neighborhood Association system has evolved and changed with the times. It is often called one of the most exemplary programs in the nation. It has been studied and scrutinized over the years since it was formally adopted as a system. (See companion report, “Previous Reform Efforts”)

Formation and Early Years (Goldschmidt Administration)

Under the leadership of Mayors Schunk and Goldschmidt in the ‘70s, the system of independent, volunteer-run NAs was linked to the City with a fragile system intended for citizen participation and grassroots advocacy. Prior to 1960, Portland was informally governed by traditional civic groups that had a white male, business mindset or they were driven by women’s groups interested in social service or social justice issues. In the sixties many things changed: the Federal War on Poverty, civil rights, the feminist movement and baby boomers generated more power at the grass roots level. The ‘60s laid the groundwork for the rise of citizen advocacy and the neighborhood system in the 1970s.

The late '60s and early '70s were a time of great change in Portland. A few of these changes included: the South Auditorium Urban Renewal Area in SW, the Mt Hood Freeway in SE, I-505 in NW, the Good Samaritan Hospital expansion in NW, Model Cities in NE, the state land-use planning laws, and more. There were both federal and state mandates for citizen participation in local government decision making and funding was coming from Washington D.C. to improve low-income neighborhoods and to help their residents. Portland planning was very active through the downtown plan, the Portland Development Commission, and the state mandated effort to develop a Portland Comprehensive Plan.

In the original 1972 Task Force the members recommended that the NA be given the right of refusal for actions that occur in their geographic area. This was never implemented. A significant minority of the task force (40%) recommended the formation of an independent citywide organization of NAs to help with communications among NAs while remaining independent of politics. This has been talked about and tried several times without success. These issues led to many opportunities for community organizing that resulted in the creation and strengthening of about thirty neighborhood associations. Lloyd Anderson was the first to recognize the value of the NA voice, and Mayor Shrank organized a task force to figure out if it should be supported and how to organize it. Mayor Neil Goldschmidt saw the wisdom in formalizing these grassroots organizations.

The NAs' Heyday: The 1980's – Early 1990's (McCreedy, Ivancie, & Clark Administrations)

After Mayor Neil Goldschmidt left Portland to become the Secretary of Transportation, the neighborhood system changed. This fledgling system was in the hands of its detractors and the national political climate became much more conservative with the repeal of much of the federal funding for community-building initiatives. In the early '80s a severe recession resulted in cuts to many City programs, including the Office of Neighborhood Associations. Simultaneously, there was the desire to bring more accountability and formality to the neighborhood association system. Even with these conditions neighborhood associations continued to grow and maintain an active, relevant roll in civic life. With the election of Mayor Bud Clark in 1984, a neighborhood and business leader, efforts were again occurring to make the neighborhood system more effective, successful and participatory. During this time budget advisory committees, the neighborhood needs program, and support for immigrants and refugees was in place. Pivotal efforts were underway including expansion of the City into East Multnomah County, the development of the Central City Plan, and the opening of MAX Light Rail (using funding that was re-directed from the proposed Mt. Hood Freeway – a neighborhood success story), and the first of many neighborhood and district plans.

Recent Changes And Decline in Authority and Funding: The Late 90's (Katz Administration)

Even with a booming economy in the 1990s, there were tight City budgets caused by the successful passage of several statewide tax initiatives. This led to the stagnation of funding for NAs and difficult budget struggles just to maintain the status quo. Development interests also gained strength in City affairs. This, coupled with the controversial SW District Plan, the growing advocacy and influence of business interests, and rapidly changing neighborhood demographics due to increases in

immigrant and refugee populations*, migration of people of color from historically African-American neighborhoods to outer neighborhoods, growing migration of younger creative-class adults from other states and the general tensions of gentrification led to more criticism of the Neighborhood Association system. Slowly, what was built up in the '70s and '80s seemed to be quietly dismantled with the end of the neighborhood needs assessment program, neighborhood planning program, budget advisory committees, target area programs, bulky waste removal program as a fundraising tool for associations, and changes within planning and development regulations. As funds for Neighborhood Association support remained flat, the demands for meeting the needs of a larger and more diverse city population became more challenging.

* According to the Urban Institute, Oregon saw a 108% increase in its foreign-born population between 1990-2000. The foreign-born account for 13% of Portland's population, and almost two-thirds of this population have an annual income less than \$25,000.

Part III Explanation and Description of Funding Priorities of the System Over Time

Portland's neighborhoods were becoming more ethnically diverse, with the influx of immigrants and refugees from SE Asia and the Slavik states. Changes to federal funding policies to revitalize blighted communities and an influx of development interests driving the market led to gentrification and conflicts in some neighborhoods. Under increasing pressure to be inclusive and responsive to residents who had been traditionally under-represented in local decision-making, the NA system came under increased scrutiny and criticism. Economic recession, decreases in federal funding and a changing electorate contributed to the current challenges that the NA system is now addressing.

Impacts from Social, Economic, And Political Factors

Poverty and homelessness, new and diverse ethnic and cultural groups, increasing housing costs, declining social services, declining incomes, health care challenges, school closures, gentrification, etc.: neighborhood associations have been increasingly asked to address these difficult issues. Lacking resources often the best NAs can do is choose a few issues and advocate for solutions from local government and business.

Role of Elected Officials

In Portland, the Mayor and the four City Commissioners are the legislative, administrative, and judicial powers of the City combined together in these five City leaders almost equally. Because the power structure for this commission form of government is rare, each commissioner has considerable power. Only three votes are needed at council to enact, adopt and make substantial changes to policy. For NAs, cultivating elected leaders who are friendly to the NA system, community organizing and locally based decision-making is vitally important. Because of the structure of government, a commissioner could have ONI in their portfolio and will be able to unilaterally tweak and change it as they wish. Vital programs have been added or taken away, programs and processes that affect the structure of ONI as a City bureau has had profound effects on the system. NAs have often been opposed to decisions made by the commissioner in charge, but have had little power or authority to affect those administrative decisions that have a profound impact on them.

Support for the NAs system is small, being only 0.1% of the City budget, but with anywhere between 1,000 – 7,000 citizen advocates involved with 95 NAs the voice can be significant, but often discordant. NAs have to advocate their positions either to City Council, to the bureau involved, to another local government, and sometimes to private interests. It is also not uncommon for NA meetings to be bypassed by outside interests as being unimportant to their effort to gain Council support. NAs are all volunteers, with success as their primary reward. NAs often find themselves dissatisfied in their dealings with the City.

Dismantling Of Programs and Policy Emphasis Shifting

While it is probably not noticeable to many current neighborhood leaders that don't have a long history with the NA system, there has been a reduction in the ability of NA to be effective. Gone are many of the forums and ways NAs have accessed decision makers

in the past. All of the following programs and activities that helped the NA system to succeed have been eliminated or diminished:

Neighborhood Needs Assessment: NAs were asked to decide on needs within their boundaries and submit these proposals to the City bureaus for possible inclusion in yearly budget proposals. This was discontinued in the mid '90s.

Crime Prevention: Neighborhood Crime Prevention Specialists were centralized within the ONI administration after years of being an important part of the staff at district coalition offices.

Budget/Bureau Advisory Committees (BAC): These committees allowed citizens to be involved in oversight and the budget process in City bureaus. With tighter budgets, citizens were only asked for their decision about what to eliminate from the bureau expenditures. Overtime, most bureaus dismantled this community oversight as part of their process, claiming they were too expensive to support administratively.

Name Change: In 1996 the City changed the name of the Office of Neighborhood Associations to the Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

The Metropolitan Human Rights Commission: This program was begun in the 1980s, went through several iterations and was quietly de-funded and discontinued in the early 2000's.

Neighborhood Planning : Many NAs worked proactively with City planning staff on neighborhood plans that established strategies for improving neighborhoods. Many of these plans are now outdated while others remain undone. This program was eliminated in the mid 90's.

BHCD Target Areas: Funded through Federal Block Grants, this program operated in several DCs and economic development in low-income neighborhoods. Federal funding has decreased over time. The Bureau of Housing and Community Development has shifted funding over the past five years away from this program.

Immigrant and Refugee Program: Initiated as part of the City's response to an influx of SE Asian immigrants and refugees, this program was quietly de-funded in the early 2000's.

Bulky Waste Removal: This was a popular program funded through the Office of Sustainable Development as a means for lower-income neighborhoods to allow residents to remove large appliances and household items that might otherwise end up in illegal dumps. This had been a popular fundraising tool for many neighborhood associations that assisted with promotional outreach for a percentage of donations. Funding was eliminated in 2005.

Backlash from the Community

Increasingly, from the early 1990s when many of the changes to the neighborhood system began, neighborhood leaders have called for improvements and additional resources to improve the ability of NAs to be more effective and to reach out to more neighborhood residents. The response was usually negative. These suggested improvements were formalized in many public processes including: the ONI review task force in 1996, the neighborhood summits of 2000 - 2003, a critique by Seltzer, Sharpe, and Strachan in 2003, the Public Involvement Task Force in 2004, and a call to action by the DC chairs and directors in 2005. Recurring themes are more funding, and decentralization of City and ONI public involvement programs back to the District Coalitions.

The Future

ONI and the neighborhood system can be vastly better than it is. But it will take a widely supported effort by the political leadership, institutional networks, and the community to help volunteers in the NA system become what it can and should be. This support will include an adequately funded infrastructure to support the capacity of the system. These resources must include financial support, an increase in human resources to participate in the system and the political will to prioritize the funding needed. The ideal community engagement system would also be broadly supported through strategic and comprehensive communication and outreach efforts so that it is more fully accessed and utilized, both more broadly and more deeply by the community.

Need to Address the Rapidly Changing/Diversifying Demographics of the City.

With the election of Mayor Potter, there is a possibility to improve the NA system through the results of the Community Connect process. For a community engagement system to be transparent, welcoming, understandable, highly functional and well supported by the community and elected officials, it will take great effort that will include additional resources and a restructuring of the system to accommodate many more people. It will also require the existing political and bureaucratic interests to not only “make room at the table”, but to make the table bigger. If there is the political will, it can be done. If successful, Portland will once again become a national role model for community engagement and empowerment.

Appendix 1: Office of Neighborhood Involvement Adopted Budgets: FY '06/'07 & '05/'06

Neighborhood Resource Center	06/07	05/06
Neighborhood Resource Ctr. (ONI Support to NA Prog.)	360,568	373,693
Coalition Base Contract Funding	1,379,458	1,381,512
Elders in Action	132,353	163,768
Disability Project	98,992	35,043
New funding for small businesses	100,000	0
2006-07 Pilot project		
Direct funding to coalitions (Small grants to NAs)	335,000	
Diversity, Civic Leadership	115,000	
ONI Innovations	36,000	
BIP # 8 support	14,000	20,000
Support for Visioning		250,000
ONI/BES Partnership		
Downspout disconnect	153,093	163,515
CSO/Clean Rivers Program	264,779	246,135
Total NRC	2,989,243	2,633,666
Neighborhood Livability		
Liquor Licensing	109,312	118,066
Neighborhood Mediation	272,417	246,569
Graffiti Abatement	375,122	289,589
Total Neighborhood Livability	756,851	654,224
Crime Prevention		
Crime Prev. Coalition Staff	1,019,252	1,000,053
ACCESS Program	125,623	116,902
Total Crime Prevention	1,144,875	1,116,955
Information and Referral	459,254	428,463
Administration (Includes strategic planning)	401,955	413,055
TOTAL ONI	\$5,752,218	\$5,246,363

Appendix 2: Portland's Neighborhood System District/Coalitions

DISTRICT/COALITION	# of NAs	District Size*	Staff** FTEs	ONI Funding 05-06	Other Funds 05-06	How is communication allocation used?
Central Northeast Neighbors (CNN) Non-Profit Corporation	8	44,000	2.5	\$164,644	\$8,000	Each NA is given \$1000
East Portland Neighborhood Office (EPNO) City Office	13	122,000	1.5	\$170,576	\$37,852	District office produces quarterly district-wide newspaper; district boosts City \$1000 allotment per NA to \$17,000 for direct NA support; 50% evenly divided, 50% allocated by # of households in ea. NA
Northeast Coalition of Neighbors (NECN) Non-Profit Corporation	13	64,000	2.0	\$174,410	N.A. ***	\$400 - \$800 per NA; also used to cover cost of liability insurance for NA block parties
Neighbors West/ Northwest (NWNW) Non-Profit Corporation	10	26,000	2.5	\$164,245	\$7,225	Northwest Examiner includes reports from all NAs; Coalition covers this cost plus gives each NA \$200 worth of printing and postage out of coalition office
North Portland Neighborhood Services (NPNS) City Office	10	51,000	3.3	\$168,445	-----	Of communication allotment from City, \$700 goes to NAs and \$300 kept in district and pooled for insurance. No district-wide newsletter
Southeast Uplift (SEUL) Non-Profit Corporation	20	145,000	8.5	\$299,830	\$195,292	Allocated by number of households in NAs; can be used for wide range of activities. SEUL newsletter every 2 mos.
Southwest Neighbors Inc. (SWNI) Non-Profit Corporation	16	62,000	3.5	\$170,859	\$44,284	District wide newsletter printed monthly, includes reports from each NA; mailed to 10,000 households (by request); City funding pays portion of cost
Unaffiliated Neighborhood Associations	5	15,000	-----	(\$2,100)	-----	2 of the 5 unaffiliated NAs received funding of \$1050/year
TOTAL DC Funding	95	529,000	23.5	\$1,313,009		

* District size measured in population. **Staff FTE is for 2005-06 and does not include crime prevention officers who are ONI employees but stationed at DCs. ***Not available. Source: "How Portland's Neighborhood Program Works Today" – Part II, League of Women Voters of Portland Education Fund, September 18, 2006 Draft

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