Portland's Neighborhood Associations

Part II – How Portland's Neighborhood Program Works Today

The League of Women Voters of Portland Education Fund

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Guide to Acronyms

NA Neighborhood Association
DC District Coalition
ONI Office of Neighborhood Involvement
BDA Business District Association
PITF Public Involvement Task Force
BIP Bureau Innovation Project

Introduction

Members of the League of Women Voters of Portland voted in 2004 to study Portland's 30 year-old Neighborhood Association system in order to educate members about how the system operates and to develop a new advocacy position through a process of discussion and consensus. Part I of the League's study, a history of Portland's neighborhood system, was completed in October, 2005. Two Neighborhood Association surveys were also conducted as part of this study. Part I and the results of these surveys are available on the LWV of Portland website. (www.lwvpdx.org)

This document focuses on Portland's Neighborhood Associations as key components of the city's citizen participation program, how each level of the neighborhood system operates, and ideas for change. The League's intent here is to provide impartial information for those who wish to take part in the city's dialogue on the future of Portland's Neighborhood Association system.

Portland's neighborhood system today

is composed of 95 Neighborhood Associations (NA) which, though uniform in their structure under broad city standards of recognition, vary in character and history. Ninety of these NAs receive technical assistance and services from District Coalition (DC) offices. The remaining five are unaffiliated with any DC. The seven DC offices are funded by the city and are subject to city standards but differ in character and history as well as organizational structure. Five are independent non-profit coalition agencies and two are city offices. Forty Business District Associations (BDAs) are loosely tied to the system as well, with city standards for acknowledgement to facilitate work with NAs and DCs. The entire system is funded and supported through the city's Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI)*, which has evolved over time with the political philosophy of the City Council, as well as the city commissioner in charge.

* except BDAs which receive funding from the Portland Development Commission

Citizen Participation

"…citizens are people who care about where they live. Many local leaders are tapping into that commitment, helping people work together to improve their communities."

— LWV "Citizens Building Communities…" 2005

We may be living in a time when the expectations about our democracy and what is defined as engaged citizenship are changing. In the past, **voting** has been seen as the primary act of participation in a democratic system of government. However, the rate of voting started to decline in the 1960's and is still alarmingly low. Clearly, many citizens do not find the act of voting to hold significance in their lives. The role of government is seen with increasing skepticism, and voting may seem a marginal act if one does not feel connected to or understand the representational bodies of government.

Today citizens lead busy lives and face increased pressures to process information and to choose activities that give meaning to their lives. They have deep attachments to the places where they live. Cities across the country are tapping into this "sense of place" to involve citizens in ways that go beyond the simple act of voting. By giving citizens a voice in how their neighborhood makes decisions and uses resources, cities have been able to draw citizens as volunteers into roles of **advisor, collaborator, and partner**.

Representational democracy is a system where citizens vote and the main work of government is done by those who are elected. **Participatory democracy** creates opportunities for citizens to contribute through decision making and collaboration with other citizens, government, and other community entities. When citizens work with others on projects to improve their communities their level of involvement becomes participatory.

Citizen Involvement through Neighborhoods

In 1974 the Portland City Council adopted an ordinance initiating a system of participatory citizen involvement through Neighborhood Associations. The legislation creating Portland's neighborhood program stated as its 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 extending recognition to Neighborhood Associations and by consulting them on policies, projects, and plans which affect neighborhood livability…"[1]

The Portland Neighborhood Association program has evolved over three decades and in its middle years was cited as one of the most exemplary programs in the nation. Tufts University's 1993 study, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy,* surveyed 900 local governments to find the five best examples of neighborhood programs in the United States and included Portland in this list.[2] In this work, participatory involvement of citizens through a neighborhood program is described as redemptive for democracy in three ways:

- Participation teaches good citizenship by giving people practice at face-to-face dialogue and group decision making,
- Participation builds community by offering meaning in becoming part of something shared among many, and thus greater than individual interests, and
- Participation makes government institutions more responsive to the preferences of citizens.[3]

Moreover, building a participatory role for citizens in government leads to **better decisions** and increased government **legitimacy** and **accountability**, reducing the likelihood of mistakes and the abuse of power.[4]

Portland Examines its Neighborhood Program

Though Portland's neighborhood program was lauded in its early history, in the last decade it has received criticism regarding its value as a citizen participation program. In an era of public dollar shortfalls (the ONI budget is $5.8 million, with the base contract funding for DC offices at $1.4 million annually), critics have demanded greater scrutiny of the program regarding its effectiveness in fulfilling the city's obligation to involve citizens in city government.

Portland State University (PSU) scholar Steve Johnson notes that a startling change took place between 1985 and 1999 in the way neighborhood activism was reported in local newspapers:

> *In 1985, 75% of the news about neighborhood action was positive. Neighborhood Associations were described as saving neighborhoods, hosting block parties, and involved in positive encounters with government through sanctioned planning processes. In the 1999 news, the opposite was true. Two thirds of the news about neighborhood actions was negative.*[5]

What accounts for this shift? Is the work of NAs different today? Is this a perceptual change related to controversy-driven media reporting? Or, are NAs being forced to become adversarial in their fight for neighborhood livability, faced with a lack of city support in a changed political environment?

City Sponsored Re-examinations

Three major efforts since 1994 involving citizen task forces have been initiated by city government to examine the neighborhood program for effectiveness in public involvement.

See **Portland's Neighborhood Associations – Part I History** for a more detailed discussion of these efforts.

1. The **1996 Task Force on Neighborhood Involvement** worked for two years to examine the structure, effectiveness, and funding of Portland's neighborhood system. It endorsed the existing structure of autonomous, participatory NAs and DCs, and outlined improvements with estimated costs for implementation. Because no additional funding was allocated, most of the recommendations were not implemented. The full report can be found at: http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=81718. PSU's Steve Johnson notes the work of this task force in his history of Neighborhood Democracy in Portland:

> *While this selection [of members] might not have represented all interests in the*

community, it did so much more than any civic body from the traditionalist world of the 1950s. The task force allowed for dynamic and sometimes even contentious dialogue, as members and general public participants argued over basic, direct democratic principles. At stake was the autonomy of the existing system.[6]

2. The **Public Involvement Task Force (PITF) (2003-2005)**, according to Julie Odell of PSU, one of its co-chairmen, "was formed in answer to complaints about the lack of consistent citizen participation in the city's public decision making."[7] The efforts of this task force were stalled (some committee members felt due to reluctance of city bureau staff to agree to implement the task force recommendations) and the completion of the process was postponed until after the 2004 Mayoral election. The work of this group was to be the basis of reforms by Mayor Tom Potter in his **Bureau Innovation Project, Goal 9**, "Developing a consistent public involvement process." The full report of the PITF can be found at: http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=43577. The PITF was seen as an important and comprehensive effort in the movement to change the public involvement climate of Portland city government and several key people are working to build political support for its recommendations.[8]

3. In both of the above efforts, citizens worked collaboratively with the city to devise new plans and policies, yet neither received political support for implementation. The city is now in the midst of the **Bureau Innovation Project (BIP),** another major effort going over the same ground. BIP is an early initiative of Mayor Tom Potter, who announced the 20 BIP goals in May, 2005. These goals are directed at improving city functioning and to minimizing the "silo effect" in which city bureaus operate without adequate between-bureau coordination. Work groups have been formed or will be for each of 20 goals identified through a survey of city staff and interviews with bureau directors and key stakeholders in the community. The sixteen goals directed at city processes have work groups comprised mostly of city staff. Four goals involve community processes and work groups are comprised of approximately half city staff and half community members. These are:

Goal 1: Visioning Project: By mid 2007, a holistic 30 year vision of Portland's future is to be developed in collaboration with a community visioning process. This project has included citywide solicitation of citizen ideas for future governance, including the award of grants to community groups for reaching out to include disenfranchised citizens in this dialogue.

Goal 8: Restructure ONI and Neighborhood System: A work group has been formed to look at restructuring Portland's neighborhood system and ONI to better represent a diverse range of perspectives and needs in the community governance process. The thrust seems to be either to expand the current system to include citizen groups other than NAs, or to create an alternative community governance structure. Team 8's time frame has an end date in 2007.

Goal 9: Develop a Consistent Public Involvement Process: This effort will look again at the city's public involvement process. It is not clear to what extent the recommendations of the Public Involvement Task Force (2003-2005) have been incorporated into the BIP Goal 9 committee's work.

Goal 20: City Charter Review: The Charter Review Committee is assessing changes to the city's charter in three areas: the city's form of government, the role of the quasi-independent Portland Development Commission, and civil service rules.

Other Recent City-Wide Efforts

The **Guidelines, Review, Empowerment, and Assessment Task Force (GREAT) (2005)** met for four years to revise ONI "Guidelines" in compliance with City Code 3.96 which requires review every 4 years. The first "ONI Guidelines" were adopted in 1987. The current "standards", (changed from guidelines) set forth the roles and responsibilities of city-recognized NAs, DCs, BDAs, and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

The challenge in this revision process is to create standards that are acceptable and applicable to the great variety of entities working within the NA system. The GREAT group worked to address a variety of components of the program in a more specific manner, and their end product became a document of over 50 pages, but mostly because rules for public meetings and records were spelled out for NA use instead of simply referencing NAs to the Oregon public meeting law. Overall, changes were minor. Since the

NAs are voluntary organizations and not city entities, some NAs resent the city's role in creating detailed operational guidelines (which are voluntary but must be followed if NAs wish to be recognized by the city). The new standards were adopted by the Portland City Council on July 13, 2005.

Neighborhood Summits were held in 2001, 2002, and 2003. Coordinated by ONI, these events were attended by NA and DC participants across the city and included a combination of workshops on NA issues and priority setting of action steps to improve the current NA system.[9]

Other Critiques

- A 2003 paper by Margaret Strachan, Ethan Seltzer and Sumner Sharpe, *Imagine a City of Engaged, Articulate Citizens and Neighborhoods,* asserted that the city's early commitment to the neighborhood system was gone. ONI had become an "ineffectual central bureaucracy attempting to herd citizens through top-down devised processes" and neighborhood activists were "increasingly focused on organizational politics," going from "proactive barn-raising" to "reactive wordsmithing." The paper outlined a path to return the NA system to a participatory, community-organizing focus. Ideas included having NAs and BDAs organized through one system, with boundary changes considered to achieve this, and to create 8 to 10 districts each servicing about 12 NAs. Other suggestions were reduced staffing for ONI, increased staffing for DCs, and a mini-grants program of $50,000 to encourage neighborhood organization, capacity, and cohesion.
- *District Coalition group paper on neighborhood system*: Early in 2005 representatives from the District Coalition offices worked together to create a proposal for changes to the NA system. Their statement laments the changes in the neighborhood system in the last decade, including flat funding in the face of increasing expenses, a change in the attitude at City Hall against the neighborhood system, and the shift in focus at ONI from community organizing to service delivery. This group asserts that the NA system could expand to be more inclusive if given the organizational resources. The report states:

  The neighborhood system when authentically invited to participate and not considered an enemy force can provide the city a valuable resource that cannot be duplicated or bought. Without public participation, the City misses a valuable resource in budgeting, planning, and community development.[10]

Portland's Neighborhood System Today

Purpose of System

What is the purpose of this patchwork of citizen involvement that has been in existence for over three decades? The recently revised City Code Title 3.96 states that the neighborhood system provides the people of Portland with a framework to "effectively participate in civic affairs and work to improve the livability and character of their Neighborhoods and City." The system solicits independent citizen involvement within a city framework of operational guidelines. One scholar has seen the system as a power struggle between the city and neighborhood leaders. Do the District Coalition offices serve the city, or the citizens of the neighborhoods?[11] Another long time observer states that although city standards have grown from 2 pages originally to 54 today, in all standards what is missing is a statement of "what is this thing?" Is it a system of grass roots citizen involvement, or part of a city bureaucracy?[12] Over 32 years the neighborhood system has been the stage not only for community building, but also for controversial development decisions. State Planning Goal 1 requires the participation of community organizations in planning decisions, and Portland has chosen to recognize and fund NAs as the way of complying with Goal 1. However, with city leaders controlling the purse strings of the system and making final decisions, neighborhoods have often felt the losers. When the system works, neighborhood activists and developers work together to forge more livable projects and planning compromises. Perhaps the system is best described as a framework for **adversarial democracy.**

Neighborhood Associations Today

The vast majority of the 95 Neighborhood Associations in Portland operate within the standards set forth by the city for recognition which include clearly stated geographic boundaries, open membership, a practice of non-discrimination, by-laws, open meetings with public records, standards for resolution of grievances, no dues, and openness to participation of area business owners.

NAs work on behalf of Portland neighborhoods that vary greatly in population size: from 21 (NW Industrial NA) to 20,587 (Centennial Community Association). Boundaries were established based on varied political and historical groupings. The average attendance at neighborhood meetings recorded in the LWV 2005 survey was 19 persons.[13] Purposes, as seen by neighborhood leaders, are to prioritize and solve problems, advise and advocate for change, participate in and represent the larger community, communicate between neighbors, business, and government, and to educate and inform the community.[14]

(For more detailed information on NA subjects discussed below, refer to Neighborhood Association Survey Results, LWVP, June 2006 [www.lwvpdx.org]).

What is the Work of NAs?

The work of NAs is most often through projects involving public safety, neighborhood livability, environment, land use, and transportation, community enhancement projects and social events. In particular, Portland NAs focus on **land use, transportation** and **crime prevention**. Some see this focus as too narrow. An important outcome of the land use focus has been the neighborhood planning which occurred more frequently in the program's first decades through the Bureau of Planning and the Portland Development Commission, especially in blighted areas of the city, allowing residents to take a proactive role in outlining their future through neighborhood plans and development projects.

Neighborhood focus is mostly on the actions of the city, since funding and organization are from the city. Attention to **social services, schools, and criminal justice** is not as strong, especially after the **1983 adoption of Resolution A** between the county and city, dividing the functions of these two large local governments. It is important to remember that the city retains housing as a focus in this division.

Is the Work of NAs More Internal or External?

It is useful to look at the work of NAs as either internal – work such as block parties and newsletters that strengthen the ties within the community; or external – work that involves bridges to the larger community either to attract resources or to influence actions by "outside" entities that will affect the neighborhood. Today most work of NAs is external. The projects listed by NAs for the League's survey revealed that most work involves contacts with the larger community. The highest attendance at neighborhood meetings seems to occur when there is a proposed action to affect the neighborhood that is seen as a threat to livability. Many NAs do focus on social activities that build community among neighbors, but when NAs are experiencing pressure from increased urbanization, as many are, there is little time for the important internal work.

Is the Work of NAs More Proactive or Reactive?

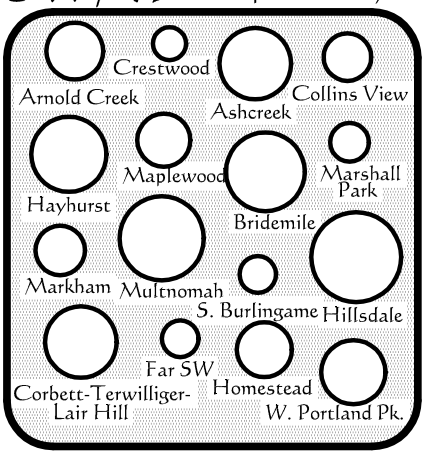
Proactive work was easier in the first two decades of the NA system history, when more resources were available for neighborhoods to engage in planning and local government sought their input. Also, in previous times more effort was made to allow neighborhoods access to the city budget process (Neighborhood Needs statements and Bureau Advisory Committees [BAC]) allowing NAs to contribute ideas and information in the front end of the process. With less funding for planning and the termination of city efforts such as needs requests and BACs, NAs today are left to respond to actions, if they are even informed of their existence, that may already be underway.

How Do NAs Communicate with Their Membership?

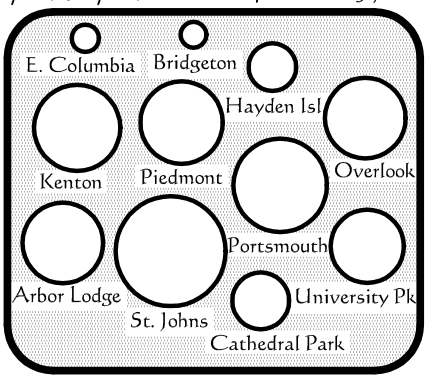
NA volunteers expend great effort in communicating with neighborhood residents. Newsletters, flyers, articles in newspapers and, increasingly, email and websites are used. It is difficult to reach all residents of a neighborhood, but some NAs make efforts to do so using hand delivery coordinated by block captains. Communication is crucial, offering all residents information about the NA and the opportunity to participate. It is the only NA function tied to a city funding allocation; through the DCs, NAs get up to $1000 a year. Printing and mailing costs are rising and this allocation is not sufficient to reach NA residents even once a year in the larger neighborhoods. Little is done

Portland's Neighborhood Associations & District Coalitions

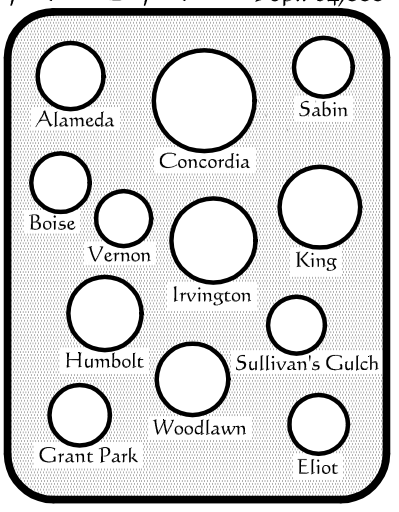
SWNI
Population: 62,000



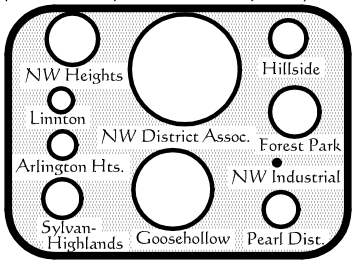
NPNS
Population: 51,000



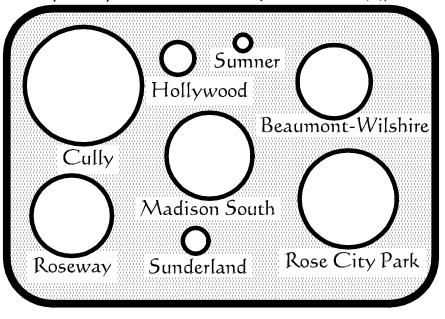
NECN
Pop.: 64,000



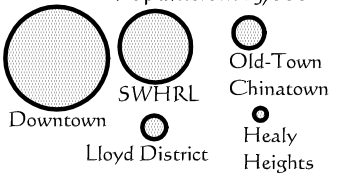
NWNW
Pop.: 26,000



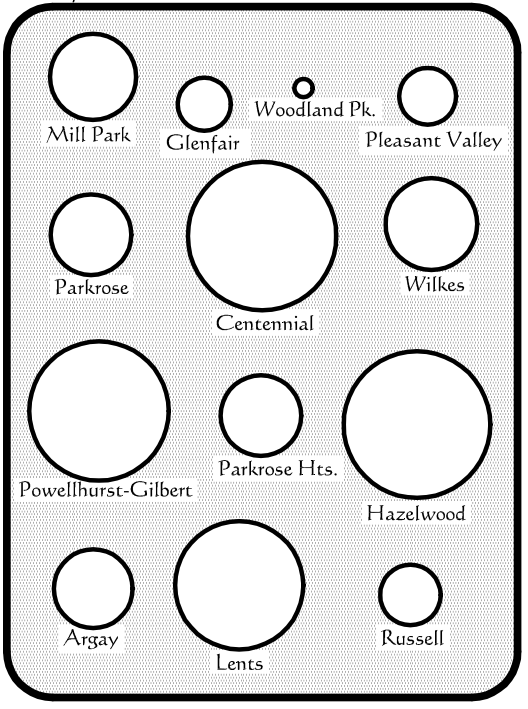
CNN
Population: 44,000



Unaffiliated
Population: 15,000

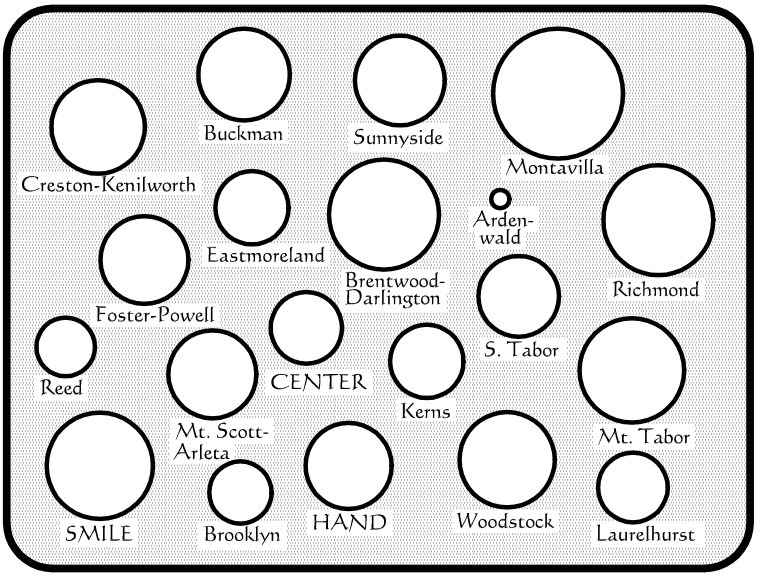


EPNO
Population: 122,000



NOTES:
The size of each circle represents the population of a neighborhood association.
The size of each rectangle represents the population of a district-coalition.
The circles are proportional to circles and rectangles are proportional to rectangles.

SEUL
Population: 145,000



Prepared by Donald MacGillivray for the L.W.V. of Portland, Neighborhood Association Study 2006. Sources: U.S. census information from 2000 & 1996.

to track, document, or evaluate the many strategies used by NAs to share successful communication methods and ideas with others.

How Much Money Do NAs Have to Do Their Work?

Most NAs (76% in the LWV survey) do fundraising in order to accomplish their work. The most common methods are neighborhood clean ups, donations, and ads in newsletters. Others include special events, garage sales, parties, grants, sales, and home tours. Although most NAs do not formally adopt a budget, they go through a process of identifying projects and raising money to accomplish them. The size of NA assets varies widely: from zero to $90,000 in the LWV survey. Seventy-eight percent had assets below $4000.

Do NAs Involve Diverse Populations?

A frequent and persistent criticism of NAs involves their failure to be inclusive; that is to involve members of the diverse populations that live within their boundaries. LWV observers of NA meetings reported diversity of NA meeting attendees in age and gender; there was also some, but less, diversity in race and housing tenure. In League interviews at DC offices, all those interviewed reported efforts to try to involve diverse populations in their work. Barriers included lack of funding to do outreach and a cultural orientation of some groups that does not fit with the meeting format of NAs. Some reported more success at attracting diverse populations to community events and celebrations. Working in partnership with groups that represent minority populations is being pursued in many DCs. Another observation was that diverse populations can be drawn forth for a single issue, but do not continue in their NA involvement. The diversity criticism has been voiced in the NA system for more than a decade, and neighborhood activists appear to be committed, within the confines of their resources, abilities, and program structure to the goal of becoming more inclusive.

Whether this is possible or not within the present program format remains questionable. Some neighborhood activists believe that the NA format is not the best venue to express the needs of minority populations, and that to question the work of NAs on the basis of lack of diversity is disingenuous and/or dismissive of their significant contributions in other areas. These activists said it would be more productive to invite the participation of groups representing diverse populations as their own entity rather than expecting them to fit within the format of NAs.

What would it take to effectively include diverse populations in Portland NAs?

We asked Kristina Smock, author of "Democracy in Action" and community organizing consultant. Suggestions were: a one-on-one outreach effort with creative strategies to reach different populations, leadership development for volunteer NA leaders to effectively involve new participants and strengthen the voice of under-represented populations, and a broader issue focus for the NA to incorporate interests of new participants. For some populations, child care, interpreters, and food will facilitate participation. In an ideal world, one professional community organizer per NA plus training at the DC would be most effective at a cost of $50,000 per NA.[15] (This would cost $4.8 million, over 3 times the cost of the current NA and DC budget.)

Do NAs Practice NIMBYism?

NIMBY (Not in my backyard) is an acronym used to describe resident resistance to a development in their area, without opposing it elsewhere. The work of NAs is to promote livability; projects that are believed to threaten livability will always be resisted. Some feel that NAs are called NIMBY as a political tactic to reduce NA credibility. NA activists say that proposals often have been poorly thought-out with little consideration for the local community. If the proposal comes to the NA early, the resident view can be incorporated into the plan, often improving the proposal. Some notice that unpopular projects bypass the well-connected neighborhoods and are proposed where the local voice is weakest. The strongest negative reaction comes when NAs have not received notice or adequate information about a project and residents fear the worst. Early civic discourse about a well-conceived project presented at NA meetings often reduces concerns.

Business District Associations

Business District Associations (BDAs) became part of the Neighborhood Association program in 1996, following a recommendation of the Neighborhood Involvement Task Force. Though current ONI standards outline requirements for BDAs to become acknowledged, none have applied for formal

acknowledgement. They are, however, included in the ONI Neighborhood Directory. The 06-07 ONI budget includes $100,000 in funding for a staff person to provide organizational development support to BDAs. This position will likely address the relationship between the City and BDAs including compliance with the ONI standards for BDA acknowledgement, which include corporate status, bylaws, a district of at least 75 businesses, a policy for non-discrimination, and general meetings at least once a year. Some BDAs are resistant to this more formal relationship with the city.

NAs and BDAs have similar concerns for healthy communities and have worked together successfully in many areas of the city on such issues as safety and beautification. Potential for conflict exists over business land uses that are incompatible with residential values. The Bureau of Housing and Community Development Target Area Project was very successful at forging working relationships between BDAs and NAs. (This program is currently being phased out.) BDAs are included on many DC boards. The 40 BDAs working in the city have their own umbrella organization, the Alliance of Portland Neighborhood Business Associations (APNBA). The Portland Development Commission provides funding for a small grants program for BDAs which is administered by this group. Nancy Chapin, consultant to APNBA, says NAs and BDAs have very similar goals and that while some conflicts have occurred in the past, today NAs and BDAs are more likely to work well together.

District Coalition Offices

Ninety of the 95 Neighborhood Associations of Portland receive services from seven District Coalition offices which are funded by the City. In the case of the five District Coalitions that are non-profit corporate coalitions of neighborhoods, the funding is handled through a contract between the city and the coalitions. The five coalition offices are currently operating under a five-year contract (July 1, 2002 – June 30, 2007) with annual budgets specified in contract amendments and action plans for each program year. In 2006-07, the five coalition contracts together with the cost of the two city offices total $1.4 million.

The city does not provide funding to the NAs directly. The District Coalitions' staff provides services and technical assistance to NAs and are, in essence, the only professional support for the NAs (besides ONI). The communication allotment to each NA that is a portion of the DC budget is handled differently by each DC. Some use it to publish a district-wide newsletter with news of every NA. Others distribute the funding directly to NAs, or hold it in DC accounts for NA use. See **Table 1** (p. 9) for detail.

The five coalitions were formed for the purpose of support and communication among neighborhoods within their districts and are directed by a board of representatives of NAs in the district as well as other community entities. Even though the five coalitions are separate legal entities, through their contracts with the city, goals and program functions are set forth. The coalitions report back to ONI in quarterly reports that list accomplishments.

The goals of the District Coalitions are outlined in the city contract and include:

- Improve the livability and sense of community in Portland neighborhoods.
- Contribute to the sense of safety and reduction of crime efforts through activities and sound community policing practices that increase and enhance citizen participation.
- Support and enhance awareness of neighborhood mediation, dispute resolution and other peacekeeping alternatives.
- Support the value of human rights and participation of Portland's diverse communities in the NA network and other community-building efforts.

The contract with the city also specifies the types of program functions expected of each District Coalition, as well as responsibilities, and outlines the scope of city services, through ONI to the District Coalition offices. Program expectations for DCs include publicizing all events and meetings, information and referral services, NA technical assistance, assistance with NA newsletters and record keeping of meetings, assistance with crime prevention programs, recruitment of volunteers, fundraising, building partnerships with community groups, acting as the communication link with all levels of government, and promotion of ONI programs.

Despite uniformity of goals and some programs, the seven District Coalition offices vary widely in

TABLE 1: 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	8.0	$174,410	$807,634	$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	2.1	$172,900	$92,800	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	.25	($2,100)	-----	2 of the 5 unaffiliated NAs received funding of $1050/year from the city
TOTAL DC Funding	95	529,000	38.7	$1,317,464	$1,193,087	

character because of different histories of formation, varying types and sizes of neighborhoods and populations, different organizational dynamics, and the patterns of community-building that have occurred in different areas of the city.

What Neighborhood Associations Need from District Coalitions

In the LWV survey, 75% of NAs said what was needed from DCs was technical assistance and support which develops the NAs' leadership and organizational capacity. Fifty percent looked to DCs to build bridges to other NAs. Thirty percent looked to the DC to provide direct services.

What is the Importance of NAs Working Together?

When NAs meet together in DCs they can share common issues and concerns, find joint solutions, and command a greater voice than a NA acting alone. All NAs in Portland have worked with NAs within their DCs; many (53% in the LWV survey) have worked with NAs in other DCs.

Differences in Organizational History and Structure

Each DC has a different history:

- Northeast Coalition of Neighbors (NECN) has its origins in the Model Cities program which began in the early 60's;
- Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program (SEUL) was originally an organization under the Portland Development Commission's urban renewal program;
- Neighbors West/Northwest (NWNW) was preceded by the formation of one of its NAs, Northwest District Association, an initiator of early neighborhood activism in Portland.

These three DCs, along with Central Northeast Neighbors (CNN) and Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. (SWNI) are non-profit corporations with boards of directors made up of representatives of member NAs and other entities.

The remaining two DC's, East Portland Neighborhood Office (EPNO) and North Portland Neighborhood Services (NPNS), are city offices, with city-paid staff. NPNS, which serves an area of independent communities, and EPNO, serving neighborhoods that began to be annexed to the city in the mid 80's, have long histories. Both started as non-profit corporations but dissolved because of conflicts. In both cases the non-profit corporate coalition format was unpopular because it forced NAs to work together and "the coalition agenda" was seen to rob NAs of their independence. The city office format seems to be more acceptable to the neighborhoods in these areas. (See Part I – History at www.lwvpdx.org)

Each District Coalition has its own Character and Issues

Site visits and interviews with DC staff were conducted as part of this study. A different character and working emphasis was observed at each DC. SEUL is the DC serving the most NAs, the greatest share of city population, and has the most active board of directors, pursuing a proactive agenda on issues common in this area. NWNW, on the other hand, rarely takes unified board action because the ten NAs in this district have very different characters and deal with different issues. NPNS has a monthly meeting of NA representatives but, as a city office, this group is not a legal entity and has no by-laws or minutes. EPNO, also a city office, uses a non-profit entity of the 13 NAs to act as the fiscal agent for grant funding. NECN has a long time involvement with the issues of at risk youth and gang violence and administers two large programs to address these issues. SWNI, on the other hand, deals with issues common in suburban areas such as parks and transportation. Each DC reflects the character of the area and has developed a working relationship that functions well for the NAs in that district.

City Office vs. Independent Non-Profit Coalition

Some might speculate that the DCs that are city offices would be most likely to have a city-directed agenda but the committee for this study did not observe this to be true. NPNS has perhaps the "lightest touch" as far as establishing any agenda for NAs to follow. This is because of the desire for independence of the NAs in North Portland. Greater independence of individual NAs is also found in NWNW, although it is a non-profit corporate model. The patterns of relationships between the DCs and the city seem to be set more by the history and character of the area than their legal relationship to the city.

Equity Issues in DC Funding

An examination of population size and DC funding in Table I shows that funding from the city is not based on a per-capita or per-NA formula, although the largest DC (in population and NAs) does receive the most city funding. Budget amounts are determined by other factors, most of which involve historical program size. Staff pay scales vary by whether the DC staff are city-paid or employees of the non-profit coalition, with city-paid staff earning higher salaries for conducting the same work as their counterparts. Some of the lower-paid non-profit coalition positions experience high staff turnover which affects the continuity of the program.

DC Funding

The allocation for operation of the seven DCs in ONI's 2006-07 budget is $1.4 million. It is generally agreed throughout the neighborhood system that the DCs are under-funded. The city funding for this portion of the program has remained flat without building in rising costs such as communication and insurance. DC budgets have traditionally included funds other than ONI money, but some of these sources, such as Bureau of Housing and Community Development, Bureau of Environmental Services, and federal Weed and Seed funding, are being cut back. DCs encounter difficulty maintaining the same quality and quantity of work with an ever-shrinking budget. Neighborhood Associations are volunteer-run organizations that need technical assistance. Several experts interviewed for this study felt that the city undermines the success of the neighborhood program by underfunding the DC level of the system.

Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI)

The purpose of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement is to facilitate citizen participation and improve communication among citizens, Neighborhood Associations, District Coalition offices, Business District

Associations, city agencies, and other entities.[16] Its mission is to enhance the quality of neighborhoods through community participation.

ONI was formed when the city began officially to acknowledge and work with Neighborhood Associations in 1974-75. Under the leadership of the Goldschmidt administration and through the efforts of Mary Pedersen (first ONI director) the system of independent, volunteer-run NAs was linked to the city only through a recognition process, making the system a viable yet fragile vehicle for citizen participation and advocacy. Controversy has always surrounded ONI and criticisms of the NA system drove many attempts at change and improvement. Attempts at reform have been initiated by every city commissioner who has overseen ONI.

The 1987 ONI Guidelines spelled out standards for recognized Neighborhood Associations and were a major step in formalizing the NA system. Crime prevention was originally situated in DC offices, with staff directly overseen by the DC. In a compromise with the Police Bureau under Mayor Vera Katz' administration, crime prevention staff became city employees under ONI, but were out-stationed in DC offices. This change was seen as detrimental to DC effectiveness, but was retained because of the pay reduction that would occur if the action was reversed. The most recent change has been to add neighborhood inspections teams from the Bureau of Development Services (BDS) under the ONI umbrella and to outstation city staff in each DC office. In fiscal year 06-07 building inspections are taken out of ONI and returned to BDS. Each of the neighborhood summits has suggested ONI changes. Suggestions come from NAs as well as from entities outside the system such as other bureaus, business, political leaders, and the public. (See Portland's Neighborhood Associations: Part I – History at www.lwvpdx.org)

ONI has, along with the District Coalitions, straddled the two worlds of the political/bureaucratic/business leaders and grassroots citizenry. What seems like an improvement to some is a threat to others. When the various factions can communicate and come together, the system functions at its best.

ONI's first budget (1974-75) was approximately $275,000. In 2006-07 the total ONI budget request was $5.4 million, or 1.4% of the city general fund budget of $382.5 million, seemingly indicating tremendous growth. However, much of the additional costs are in services either added to ONI or transferred to ONI from other bureaus in recent years, and in accompanying administrative costs. When adjusted for inflation, the original budget is not that different from the current budget of $1.4 million that goes to the District Coalition offices to support the NAs. In 2005-06 the ONI Neighborhood Resource Center budget was reduced and several ONI staff positions were eliminated. In June, 2006 the City Council unanimously approved a $335,000 contract increase for the five non- profit coalition offices to fund a small grants program, increased insurance costs, and increased money for NA communications. In an earlier action, the City Council approved additional funding for ONI to create a training academy for new leaders within the NA system for the purpose of increasing diversity in participation. Together these two allocations represent the first major funding increase to the system in 15 years.

The full ONI budget for fiscal year 2006-07 is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: ONI Program Budget 2006-07

Neighborhood Resource Center	
Neighborhood Resource Ctr. (ONI Support to NA Prog.)	360,568
Coalition Base Contract Funding	1,379,458
Elders in Action	132,353
Disability Project	98,992
New funding for small businesses	100,000
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
ONI/BES Partnership	
Downspout disconnect	153,093
CSO/Clean Rivers Program	264,779
Total NRC	**2,989,243**
Neighborhood Livability	
Liquor Licensing	109,312
Neighborhood Mediation	272,417
Graffiti Abatement	375,122
Total Neighborhood Livability	**756,851**
Crime Prevention	
Crime Prev. Coalition Staff	1,019,252
ACCESS Program	125,623
Total Crime Prevention	**1,144,875**
Information and Referral	**459,254**
Administration (Includes strategic planning)	**401,955**
TOTAL ONI	**5,752,218**

What NAs Want from ONI

In the LWV survey, NAs reported that they want ONI to support NAs and District Coalitions with technical assistance, training, advice, logistical support, and legal advice; provide timely information exchange between government offices and NAs as well as between NAs; and ensure a Neighborhood Association voice in city government and be an advocate with city for the NA system.

One group of neighborhood activists stated that in the last ten years ONI has become the forgotten bureau. This is ironic since it represents citizens, and therefore one might expect it to be the strongest city entity. They thought ONI, at this point in its history, should have outreach "down cold" and should be a master of the flow of information.[17]

City Support of the Neighborhood System

There is general agreement that the NA system does not have the same respect and power within city government it had when the program was initiated in the 70's and through the end of the 80's. Mayor Vera Katz says, "Things are much harder today than they were 20 or 30 years ago….The City Council used to always vote for the interests of the neighborhoods."[18] It may be because money is tighter, communications are better, and the political climate has changed. All of the following processes that helped to enable the NA program in earlier years have been eliminated or diminished:

- ***Neighborhood Needs***: Involvement in the city's budget process was an early achievement of the NA program. NAs were asked to decide as a group on needs within their boundaries and submit these proposals to the city well in advance so that they could be considered for inclusion in budget proposals.
- ***Budget Advisory Committees*** (BAC), initiated by Mayor Neil Goldschmidt in 1974, and formalized by the City Council in 1980, was an effort to involve more citizens at each bureau in an advisory role in formulating budgets. By 1986, 23 BACs existed. Today only ONI, Bureau of Housing and Community Development, and Parks and Recreation have BACs.
- ***Neighborhood Plans***: The city's NA program was initiated at the same time as Oregon's land use planning which required citizen involvement in the planning process. With planning funds available, many NAs worked proactively with city planning staff on neighborhood plans that established a realistic strategy for how neighborhoods should develop. Due to lack of funds for implementation and planning, and mistrust between the city and the NAs, neighborhood plans are rare today.
- ***BHCD Target Areas***: This program operated in several DCs and involved neighborhood-specific low-income economic development organizing between residents and businesses.
- ***Bulky Waste Removal Program***: This program was active at Central Northeast Neighbors as an effective fundraiser for many NAs.

Relationship Between City Bureaus and NAs

Many city bureaus operate under legal requirements to involve the public in some way. Neighborhood activists interviewed for this study agreed that practices varied by bureau and by staff within bureaus in willingness to work with citizens. Some city staff feel the NAs are a detriment, others see them as an asset. Some bureaus contract with coalition offices for public involvement services, as the District Coalitions have the system in place to involve area residents. Other coalitions have noticed that the city is more willing to work with a (paid) public relations consultant, who then contacts the District Coalition to ask for (unpaid) assistance. One expert estimated that the city spends 5 to 6 times the amount of the neighborhood program budget on public involvement activities in other bureaus, such as for transportation and environmental projects.[19] Why doesn't the city work on a regular basis with the NA system for these services? Some feel the reason is a lack of understanding of NAs, but others believe that if the NA system were used regularly for public involvement contracts the real work of NAs would be diluted. Neighborhood activists report that to achieve public input with the city, citizens must be proactive and forge personal relationships with city staff.

Recent City Decisions: Development vs. Livability

Recent City Council decisions are a gauge of the current strength of the NA/citizen voice. Northwest District Association experienced a partial defeat for citizen planning when the city altered its neighborhood

plan, which had been developed through a ten year process of citizen deliberation. Also, during the writing of this study, the Linnton NA submitted a neighborhood plan which was not accepted by the city. The Burnside-Couch couplet planning group involved eight NAs and BDAs over five years in a fruitful process. The group came to the conclusion that the couplet would work well for the area, but in the last 6 months the plan has been stalled because of an influential party's lobbying of city hall. Some neighborhood activists report that citizen involvement is best received when it is in agreement with city decisions or actions. If citizens are vocally against city acts, the claim is often made that these opinions are not representative of the majority, and that the proper outreach was not done to involve everyone.

Citizen / Community Attitudes Toward the NA System

The 1993 study of neighborhood programs by Tufts University found that in cities with strong neighborhood programs the population of the city believed that Neighborhood Associations represented their interest better than any other group. For this reason city administrators took neighborhood concerns seriously.[20]

How does the population of Portland feel about the NA system? No study has been made to answer this question. However, in the course of its research, the study committee found that Portland's NA system is not widely understood. In addition, the restructuring of ONI taking place under the Mayor's Bureau Innovation Project #8 is based on the premise that citizen participation and involvement must be reinvigorated with capacity increases in ways that support diversity, inclusiveness, and community governance.

At a recent City Club of Portland Friday Forum, Adam Davis of Davis, Hibbitts and Midghall, Inc. spoke of the current climate of public opinion, finding it the most pessimistic and uninformed in 30 years of public opinion research. Such a significant portion of the population is uninformed about basic issues that it is difficult for them to meaningfully interact in political life.

Neighborhood Participation: Strengths and Weaknesses

The study committee believes that an overview of strengths and weaknesses of the neighborhood program is best expressed in the words (or a paraphrase) of experts interviewed in the course of this study.

Strengths

Participatory Involvement of Citizens

Hundreds of citizens are active through NAs, volunteering in efforts to increase neighborhood livability and build community.

- *Portland is fortunate to have a formal system of neighborhood associations that covers the whole city. This at least provides a vehicle for every community to gather and identify issues.* – Paul Leistner, Executive Director, Center for Public Participation, Portland State University
- *I'd rather have citizens criticize than say nothing at all.* – Gretchen Kafoury, past Portland City Commissioner
- *NAs aren't about "results," they are about compromise, helping people adjust to change and providing a time and space for civil discourse.* – Gretchen Hollands, Neighborhood Activist

Neighborhood Livability / Better Development

When citizens are involved early in the planning process, the result is better projects.

- *It is common knowledge and practice that if stakeholders are invited in early, if their buy-in to a project is early, this will result in a smoother working project, which is more effective and less costly than a late fight.* – Moshe Lenske, Neighborhood Activist
- *The city has benefited policy-wise – there have been great improvements in the development process as a result of neighborhood involvement.* – Joleen Jensen-Classen, former Interim Assistant Director, ONI; former Director, NWNW

Community Building
Neighborhood Associations increase interaction among neighbors.

- *Citizen participation through Neighborhood Associations creates a strong sense of community – more so than in any other type of participation.* – "The Rebirth of Urban Democracy"
- *The best thing that neighborhoods can do is party. Neighbors knowing each other does more for crime prevention, raising standards of care of homes and yards, and community building in general*. – Moshe Lenske, Neighborhood Activist
- *In considering reforms, some place-based aspect of citizen involvement has got to be retained. People want a sense of community in their lives. Part of that is a sense of connection to the neighborhood where they live – opportunities to know their neighbors and to work together toward common goals.* – Linda Nettekoven, Neighborhood Activist

Generating Citizen Leaders
Many of the city's leaders have been educated through the process of neighborhood activism, and the system will continue to spawn new leaders.

- *Neighborhood programs create participants who gain lots of political experience and become very skilled at face to face dialogue.* – "The Rebirth of Urban Democracy"
- *Neighborhoods have always been breeding grounds for new leaders.* – Elizabeth Kennedy-Wong, Mayor's Office; former Director, SEUL
- *NAs are like the Little Leagues of politics.* – Moshe Lenske, Neighborhood Activist

Citizens Acquire Power at City Hall
Neighborhood Associations are in place to act when a citizen voice is needed; they have given power to Portland citizens.

- *The system has been in place long enough so that the city has a subconscious understanding that NAs exist and citizens can act and react*. – Moshe Lenske, Neighborhood Activist
- *It is no longer appropriate to do public works without public input.* – Joleen Jensen-Classen, former Interim Assistant Director, ONI; former Director, NWNW

Weaknesses

Limited Funding, Limited Time and Capacity of NAs
Volunteers have limited time and capacity. Funding is limited. NAs are primarily focused on land use and do not have time to deal with other issues such as increasing diversity of involvement.

- *We need to think of democratic engagement the same way we think about other public infrastructure systems, such as roads, water, and sewer. They all need constant attention, maintenance and improvement. You can't do it on the cheap….* – Paul Leistner, Executive Director, Center for Public Participation, Portland State University
- *Mayor Potter has a vision of community governance that seems to include more decentralized decision making. But in turning to NAs you are asking a system that currently doesn't have enough wiring to take on a whole new dimension of coordination and communication.* – Linda Nettekoven, Neighborhood Activist
- *Being asked to do outreach with our present lack of staff is like being asked to reach out when you have no arms.* – John Canda, former Director, NECN
- *Criticism of the NA system is like blaming the victim because the NA system has been denied the resources it needs to meet the expectations people place on it.* – Linda Nettekoven, Neighborhood Activist
- *NAs cannot be all things to all people. NAs are a representative of the people, not <u>the</u> representative. NAs are not a good vehicle for the diversity voice. You can't shoe horn it into the NA format.* – Don MacGillivray, Neighborhood Activist
- *You can't fire volunteers.* – Margaret Strachan, former Portland City Commissioner

Logistics of Involving Everyone
It is difficult to reach every resident of the neighborhood and invite participation. Diverse population groups are often not drawn to the Neighborhood Association format.

- *There is a need to help other groups develop who are outside the system. Not everyone is starting in the same place. Not everyone is sitting at the table.* – Tom Griffin-Valade, Director, NPNS

- *At Southeast Uplift all 20 NAs voted to increase outreach and to be inclusive to other members - but, they need support to do this. Not that they don't think it is important - they are inundated with issues from the city and other organizations, they don't have the time and resources to make it happen* – Elizabeth Kennedy-Wong, Mayor's Office; former Director, SEUL
- *There is a huge need for coordination of information.* – Linda Nettekoven, Neighborhood Activist
- *Oregon Action speaks for the underrepresented whose viewpoint goes unspoken. Oregon Action has never been asked to come to a NA meeting.* – Jo Ann Bowman, Associate Director, Oregon Action

Lack of Equity Throughout System

The wealth and resources of neighborhoods are not equal throughout the city; city funding allocations do not take into consideration the variance in neighborhood size, capacity, existing infrastructure, or extent of development pressure and change.

- *The people who show up decide – this skews all efforts, giving more power to those who know how to work in the system and have the time to bother with it.* – Gretchen Hollands, Neighborhood Activist
- *The Southeast Uplift coalition area contains 20 NAs, 9 Business Associations, numerous community organizations and one fourth of the city population! Until SEUL can begin raising a larger proportion of its funds, it must try to inform, support and connect those groups with fewer than 4 full time program staff.* – Linda Nettekoven, Neighborhood Activist
- *[Lack of equitable resources] has been an issue since the system was created. Developing the right criteria for resource distribution is not an easy task.* – Joleen Jensen-Classen, former Interim Assistant Director, ONI; former Director, NWNW

Area-specific focus can result in NIMBYism

Neighborhood Associations act to protect their own livability.

- *Lots of times involvement of citizens ends up being or sounding like NIMBY because there is no way to get into the front end of the conversation.* – Linda Nettekoven, Neighborhood Activist
- *The system needs lots of public education. Regional thinking 101 should be part of the training for activists at the neighborhood level* – Steve Johnson, Portland State University, Urban Studies

Conflicts Built into the Program

Neighborhood Associations are independent entities, often acting as adversaries to city policies, yet they look to the city for funding through DCs.

- *Since ONI's inception it has remained unresolved how much citizens shall be granted predominant authority to shape and influence decisions and actions that impact their lives and communities.* – Matthew Witt, "The Portland Edge", pg. 87
- *In all of ONI Standards what is missing is a statement of "what is this thing?" Is it grassroots or part of bureaucracy? If it is grassroots, let it go; if it is city owned, operate it and don't put all the work on volunteers. It all comes down to "how much do you believe in democracy?" Let the NAs take care of themselves.* – Lee Perlman, Neighborhood Writer
- *The key point here is that the attitudes and values of elected officials and bureau directors have a huge impact on the effectiveness of community involvement in local decision-making. Unlike in the 1980s, in the 1990s and early 2000s Portland has had a number of city commissioners and bureau directors who were actively disdainful of public input.* – Paul Leistner, Executive Director, Center for Public Participation, Portland State University
- *There is need for a consistent advocate for neighborhoods on the Council.* – Margaret Strachan, former Portland City Commissioner
- *The ONI office needs to have the most minimal touch that it can.* – Tom Griffin-Valade, Director, NPNS
- *The issues of who pays staff and who controls them are connected.* – Jo Ann Bowman, Associate Director, Oregon Action
- *The system should belong to the community, not to the commissioner in charge of the moment.* – Paul Leistner, Executive Director, Center for Public Participation, Portland State University

Disconnect Between Citizens and Government

The public attitudes today are at an all time high in negativity and disengagement from government. Whether the public understands and uses the NA system determines its success.

- *Citizens consider getting involved in NAs and ask themselves, does the NA have power? More city buy-in to the NA system would create NA power and increase citizen participation in the system. The city needs to be clear about how NAs will be listened to.* – Jo Ann Bowman, Associate Director, Oregon Action
- *A significant portion of the general citizenry is so acutely uninformed about basic issues — such as where their tax dollars go — that they are unable to enter into political life in any meaningful way. The public in Oregon, as in the rest of the county, is decreasing in awareness and knowledge about government, and increasing in cynicism and negativism about politicians and the public sector.* – Adam Davis, Pollster, before City Club of Portland, May 12, 2006

Changing Portland's Neighborhood Association System

Portland is in the midst of a conversation with its citizens about the future of the city through the Mayor's "Visioning Project." Should the neighborhood program be part of that future? A team of citizens and city staff is looking at the program through the Bureau Innovation Project's Team 8 to determine if it can be revitalized or if a new program should be designed to replace it.

This is the task assigned to Team 8 (now called Community Connect):

> *To reinvigorate the city's neighborhood system so that it engages more, and more diverse citizens in improving neighborhood life in Portland. If we could create the ideal neighborhood system today, what would it look like? Who would participate? How would they participate? How do we overcome barriers to participation? What would need to be in place to inspire people to participate? How can we make participating in the neighborhood system relevant to the community? How well does the current structure and programming support the mission of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement: "To enhance the quality of Portland's neighborhoods through community participation". Is that mission still relevant?*[21]

Mayor Potter is promoting the concept of **community governance** in city bureau reforms. The six principles of community governance are:

1. The concern of government extends well beyond the services provided to the overall welfare of the area.
2. Government's role in community governance is justified only if it is close to and empowers communities and their citizens.
3. Government must recognize the contribution of other organizations-- public, private, voluntary -- and see its task as enabling (not controlling) that contribution.
4. Government should ensure that the whole range of resources in a community is used to the full for the good of its area.
5. To make the best use of those resources, there must be ongoing review (learning) as to how needs are best met and a willingness to act in innovative ways.
6. In showing leadership, the government must seek to reconcile, to balance and, in the final resort (when it is the funder), to judge the diversity of views and interests.[22]

Conclusion

The LWV, in this study, has attempted to explore the city's current Neighborhood Association program, and present various points of view about how it is working. Citizens need this understanding in order to enter into the city's conversation about the future of this program.

Important aspects of the program

A system of 95 NAs which are independent entities. . . . See pages 1, 8

The work of Neighborhood Associations and their challenges. . . . See pages 6 – 7, Appendix II

Do NAs involve the diverse populations of the city? . . . See page 7

District Coalitions as a format for technical assistance and support. . . . See pages 8 - 10

The city's role as funding source and coordinator through the ONI. . . . See pages 10 - 12

The program's success is influenced by:

- The cooperation or lack of cooperation of city bureaus. . . . See page 12
- Government support or lack of support for citizens in participatory roles. . . . See pages 1-4, 12, 13
- Funding: Is it adequate to make NAs effective? . . . See pages 9-12
- The political environment in which the program operates. . . . See pages 2-4, 12-13

The work of the Mayor's Office to revise the program. . . . See pages 3, 16

End Notes

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[19] Johnson, Steven, Portland State University Urban Studies, interview, July 28, 2005.
[20] Berry et al, The Rebirth of Urban Democracy, pg. 288.
[21] "Overview of Community Governance and BIP Goals #1, #8 and #9," January 11, 2006: http://www.portlandonline.com/mayor/index.cfm?a=104034&c=39208, July, 2006.
[22] "Community Governance Resource Kit," Christchurch City Council, New Zealand: http://www.ccc.govt.nz/Community/Governance/ResourceKit/ExcutiveSummary.asp, August, 2006.

Appendix I

Following is a list of ideas heard in the course of this study. ***The League of Women Voters does not endorse any of these ideas at this time.*** We are presenting them here for consideration only by both League members and the citizens of Portland who are engaged in the debate over the future of this program. Ideas are presented in three program areas: ***structure***, ***funding***, and ***relationships***.

Program Structure

1. Organize a city-wide coalition of NAs.
The concept of NAs convening their own organization has been raised many times over the history of this program. Most agree that such action could be initiated only by an NA grassroots effort–ONI and the DCs would have little or no role. The agenda, ideas for change, and the future operation of such a group would come from neighborhoods themselves.

2. Build representational roles into the participatory system.
The manner in which board members are selected differs from NA to NA. Some have designated slots for particular demographics: by sub areas within the neighborhood, age, renter/homeowner status, other stakeholder groups, etc. Using a **community assets mapping** model, a community can identify existing resources and mobilize them as a basis for increased community building. A coordinating council type of structure for NAs and DCs has been suggested with boards consisting of representatives of different entities in the area, and programs including community organizing, organizational development, leadership training, and strategic planning to build relationships between all types of community organizations in each area.

3. Increase participation in neighborhood elections.
NAs are participatory and not representative models of democracy. However, many who criticize NAs as closed oligarchies would like to see efforts to open participation to all residents through such measures as formal, neighborhood-wide elections. In areas that are gentrifying, both old and new populations need a place at the table. Some experts in neighborhood organizing suggest that terms of office for neighborhood group leaders should be relatively short to work against stagnation of leadership.

4. Create a system of NAs of approximately the same size and divide the city into more equal districts to bring an effective and efficient scale to the program.
Some organizers have found that the ideal neighborhood size is from 3000 to 5000 residents. In larger neighborhoods it is difficult to build a sense of common identity. More equal neighborhood and district units would give more equity to funding distribution, and make communication with all residents a more attainable standard. In the past boundary issues have been contentious and attempts to create new boundaries could be difficult unless the results are seen by everyone involved as beneficial.

5. Promote organizing at the block level as part of the neighborhood program.
Some NAs in the program have sector or block captains as part of a communication network. Organizing by block has been a fundamental tool in crime prevention efforts, yet has not been used as a basic strategy of neighborhood community building.

6. Place the system under the independent Auditor's office to insulate it from political control.

7. Create a City of Portland Public Involvement Advisory Commission.
This is a key recommendation of the Public Involvement Task Force. Such a commission would institutionalize public involvement processes in the formal legal framework of the city. Public involvement principles adopted by the city in 1996 by resolution are not enforceable. A stronger city commitment to consistent public involvement processes would come through appointment and staffing of a commission and adoption of public involvement principles by ordinance.

Program Funding

8. Enhance the current system with adequate financial support.

Although the city has grown in population and land through migration and annexation, financial support from the city has been stagnant. Increased funding is needed to adequately staff District Coalition offices to work with NAs. Funding is needed for training, communication, small grants for special projects, and for greater assistance for NAs undergoing the greatest development pressure or greatest state of change. NAs have a tremendous need for technical assistance, and providing more staff at the District Coalition level is important for effectiveness of NA leaders and volunteers.

9. Provide the means for NAs to be proactive.
The primary means for NAs to be proactive is through planning, including all stakeholders in the process. Resources for neighborhood plans with regular updates are needed to give NAs a positive agenda for action. Neighborhood planning principles of "traditional neighborhood design" and "new urbanism" can link physical characteristics of a neighborhood to the ability of residents to create a cohesive community.

10. Provide funding for a small grants program.
A small allocation for such a program was recently funded by the Portland City Council. The idea of this program is to enable innovative efforts at the neighborhood level. It offers another opportunity for proactive neighborhood action and can draw new participants into the program as well as encourage citizen ownership in the process of identifying problems and formulating solutions.

11. Increase the communication capacity of NAs and DCs.
Funding for communication should be adequate to enable the neighborhood organization to communicate with every household within their boundaries at least twice a year. Although the Internet provides new communication opportunities, not everyone knows how or has access to it, and alternative communication needs to be in place. The cost of translations and translators should be included.

12. Equalize the pay of people within the system who are doing the same work.
This would be achieved by making all salaries equivalent to city pay grades.

13. Consider an independent source of funding, such as a small allocation of tax revenue to NAs.
During the course of this study a group of residents of Southwest Portland began exploring a model of decentralized government with a permanent tax base for district and neighborhood entities.

14. Reinstate the neighborhood needs process.
Reinstate an opportunity for neighborhoods to provide early input into the city's budget process. Neighborhood Needs give NAs real power to allocate specific goods and services and would draw more citizens into the NAs by expanding the meaning and purpose of the organizations.

Program Relationships

15. Increase leadership capacity of citizens.
Educate neighborhood activists through training that encourages an understanding of region-wide issues. Neighborhood volunteers must be assisted to think globally while acting locally. Ongoing training in leadership skills, NA board functioning, and city bureau roles and procedures is also needed. Training could be provided by local colleges, non-profit organizations, or city training centers, and supported by city government. The government role becomes one of assisting NA meetings to foster real civic dialogue**.** In some cities, city staff attend such training with citizen volunteers.

16. Increase city staff capacity to work jointly with community.
Democratic governance involves a change in role for city staff. Roles as facilitators, enablers, and resource people become a bigger part of the job. City staff must be working for the success of the citizen participation program and not to retain their own power in city decision making. Training can help to facilitate this change, but leadership from the City Council is essential. Community engagement should be listed within job descriptions and performance reviews for city staff, and especially for bureau directors.

17. Improve the flow of information between all entities in the system.
Build early and consistent notification into bureau operations. A city-wide document or system could be developed instead of bureau-by-bureau notices. Information such as budgets should be accessible and understandable.

18. Expand the role of ONI and the DCs.
Allow ONI and the DCs to work with and assist the broad range of community organizations in order to bring diverse groups together for common purposes. Through training and group processes, representatives from various groups would build positive working relationships directed toward systemic societal improvements.

19. Utilize NA system for public involvement.
Many city bureaus have public involvement requirements that they fulfill bypassing the NAs. The city's investment in the NA system could be better utilized to fulfill these requirements, for fiscal reasons as well as to reinforce the role of the NA.

20. When citizen task forces are formed, a city commissioner should work with this entity.
Through this partnership the task force can frame their work within what is politically feasible and city commissioners can gain greater understanding of the task force subject and the perspective of citizens, bringing this understanding to the City Council.

21. Build NA relationships with other government entities such as county government and schools.
The participation of the citizenry is needed not just by city government, but by schools and county and regional government as well as other entities. The importance of the Neighborhood Associations is reinforced if they are established as a vehicle for citizen involvement for all governmental entities in the area.

Appendix II: The Work of Neighborhood Associations

The following list provides a sampling of the work of Neighborhood Associations by listing accomplishments of two NAs from each of the seven District Coalitions. It is taken from Neighborhood Association Survey Results, LWV of Portland Education Fund, June 2006 (See www.lwvpdx.org) For the complete list of projects listed by the 37 NAs participating in this survey, see the complete document on the website, pages 5 – 7.

CENTRAL NORTHEAST NEIGHBORS

Cully Association of Neighbors: Creation of Cully Neighborhood Plan; Closing the Columbia Blvd. composting plant; Spirit of Portland Award winner; Successfully lobbying to build Hush House; Neighborhood cleanup with 55 tons collected

Sumner Assoc. of Neighbors: Benefit for the Military –"Heart of Elvis" show; Toy and food drive; Kid-safe Halloween Party; Fire station grand opening; Neighborhood clean up

EAST PORTLAND NEIGHBORHOOD OFFICE

Hazelwood: Drive through at the Post Office; Gateway Urban Renewal committee; Design of Midland Library**;** Establishment of Jane's Park, skate park; Off-leash area at Holladay Park; Gateway parking garage and Oregon Clinic

Woodland Park: Gateway Urban Renewal process; Revising layout of 911 system; Surviving as smallest neighborhood; Elimination of methadone house; Reconnecting with other NAs

NEIGHBORS WEST / NORTHWEST

Arlington Heights NA: Establishment of Fire Station 16; Washington Park improvement configurations; Decision declaring zoo parking as open space; Preservation of open reservoirs; Resolution of Holocaust Memorial controversy

Pearl District: River District Design Standards; Pearl District Vision Plan; Implementation of good neighbor agreements; "Polish the Pearl" neighborhood clean-up; Fostering sense of cohesive community

NORTHEAST COALITION OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Boise NA: Creation of Unthank Park; Revitalization of Mississippi Street; National Night Out -12 yrs; Home ownership programs; Awareness of gentrification; Home improvement in target area

Woodlawn NA: Helped police to drive out gangs

from park; Woodlawn Plan; Developed Woodlawn Park with city; Symphony in Park summer 2005

NORTH PORTLAND NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

Overlook NA: Operation of Overlook House; Farmers' Markets in co-op. with Kaiser; Worked with Adidas; Impacted MAX service to area; Reopening of I-5 pedestrian bridge; Overlook Views newsletter

Piedmont NA: Rosemont Building on Dekum; Reduction of crime in our park; Creation of OLCC impact zones; Good neighbor agreements

SOUTHEAST UPLIFT NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM

Buckman NA: John Perry Community Plan; Buckman neighborhood rezoning; Oak Street row houses; Saving Buckman School from closure; Founding of Reach CDC; Buckman Neighborhood Plan; Eastside Esplanade; Burnside Couch couplet; Lone Fir Cemetery land transfer to Metro

Mount Tabor NA: Neighborhood Traffic Plan; Funding of children's play equipment; Mobilization of 100's of neighbors for issues; Reservoir cover issue; Development of Mt. Tabor Community Center Mt. Tabor gateway monument

SOUTHWEST NEIGHBORHOODS INC.

Bridlemile NA: 2.5 acre mini park; Stream and watershed awareness; Historical notations; Transportation awareness/safety improvements; Setting neighborhood boundaries; Tree preservation awareness

Arnold Creek NA: SW Community Plan; Jackson crosswalks; Arnold Street speed limit; NET team developed; Neighbors Night Out picnics

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