

# **The District Councils:** A snapshot of Saint Paul's community engagement system

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## Introduction

Forty years after Saint Paul created its District Council system, the city faces structural budget challenges and evolving expectations about community engagement—trends that could be at odds. This reality makes it an appropriate time to investigate ideas on how the city can continue dedicating itself to vibrant community involvement—involvement that is more effective and more equitable, not only for a range of city initiatives, but also for a larger portion of the city’s residents.

This report documents the existing District Council system—its activities, its capacity, and some of its impacts. It is a snapshot and a baseline of the most prominent feature of this community engagement system in Saint Paul. This report does not attempt to chronicle the entire range of city engagement. Those efforts include advisory and regulatory boards and commissions; city-led public engagement activities around some high-profile projects; city department staff entirely or partially dedicated to community outreach; and city-initiated projects such as the recent Pop Up Meeting.

Historically and currently, District Council supplement the work that elected officials and city departments conduct but lack the capacity to do as consistently and deeply. And Saint Paul’s District Councils provide impressive bang for the buck.

Financially, the District Councils leverage every \$1 they receive in direct funding from the city to deliver \$3 in services that create stronger communities. In 2017, Saint Paul expects to provide about \$1.1 million directly to the 17 District Councils through their community engagement contracts. Collectively, their annual budgets exceed \$3.25 million. About \$743,000 of the city funding comes from the city’s General Fund; about \$345,000 is through federal Community Development Block Grants. Individual councils receive city funding ranging from \$51,873 to \$109,475, distributed through formulas based on demographics and other factors.

The District Councils employ 33 FTE staff members and directly engage more than 500 volunteers on their boards, committees and specific projects—results that would be nearly impossible to duplicate if efforts were based in City Hall rather than in the neighborhoods themselves.

The truth is, District Councils are woven into the fabric of their neighborhoods and the city at large.

- They are the spark behind community-building work that can be as fleeting as an open-mic night at a local library or as permanent as additional stations along the Green Line light rail transit service.
- They are the backbone of block clubs, crime prevention programs, and fundamental livability initiatives; a wide range of neighborhood environmental and beautification projects; and neighborhood planning that is incorporated into the city’s Comprehensive Plan.
- They take the lead in finding solutions to the impacts of institutions and development on their neighborhoods.

- They provide a hub for partnerships and cooperative efforts with city departments, other organizations in their neighborhoods and, sometimes, citywide initiatives. This report profiles a few of these efforts: partnerships in Dayton’s Bluff promoting economic development, and partnerships in on the East Side around the development of Phalen Boulevard.
- They push issues onto the table for citywide action, such as organized trash collection and organics recycling. This report goes into depth on district council work behind both of these issues.
- On a day-to-day basis, they provide a focal point for constructive neighborhood discussions and recommendations on zoning and licensing issues, whether that be a simple variance or liquor license, or larger-scale policy changes concerning accessory dwelling units, student housing, or tear-downs – which led to the Ward 3 design standards highlighted in this report.
- They play key roles in such positive, annual events as local National Night Out parties, neighborhood festivals, community gardens, Citywide Drop-off days, and the Neighborhood Honor Roll.
- They provide the conversation space and grass-roots energy for rolling out citywide initiatives such as the bicycle plan and Stop for Me pedestrian safety campaign.
- They routinely educate neighborhood residents about city initiatives, compile and communicate city news and outreach opportunities to their networks of neighborhood activists, and host community meetings on city topics.
- They increasingly focus on expanding equity in their organizations and in their neighborhoods. Equity initiatives expand not just who is involved in decision-making, but also which issues become priorities. This report Includes deeper looks at the coalition work several councils did around the Central Corridor, District 1's emphasis on youth engagement and cross-cultural dialogue, and Saint Anthony Park's Equity Committee.

This report gives details and case studies of what District Councils accomplish.

## Background

In 1975, the City of Saint Paul established the district council system to strengthen resident participation in civic affairs. The city’s website describes the system:

*The district council system in Saint Paul is comprised of 17 autonomous 501(c)(3) nonprofit agencies that provide residents in each neighborhood*

*an opportunity to become involved in city planning. The primary focus of most district councils is land use, community development and transportation. Other issues that district councils may focus on include parks and recreation centers, community gardens, environmental action, crime prevention and neighborhood beautification. District councils rely on community building activities and events as the basis for convening residents to become involved in their neighborhood.*

Since their creation, the district councils have evolved significantly to become unique nonprofit organizations representing distinct neighborhoods within Saint Paul.

In 2016, the city indicated that it was evaluating its community engagement needs and the effectiveness of current practices in meeting those needs. To complement that effort, an Innovation Fund grant was awarded to investigate and document 1) how select other cities effectively meet their community engagement needs, and 2) **how the District Councils currently conduct community engagement, and how they view their current capacities and value**. This report focuses on the latter goal, while a companion report addresses the former.

## Methodology

To document how district councils do community engagement, this project's Steering Team used a variety of research tools. Specifically:

1. The team distributed a detailed survey to all district council executive directors. Twelve of 17 district councils completed the survey and those responses form the basis for most quantifiable data in this report.
2. Interviews with executive directors and other staff were conducted at meetings held in July and October 2016.
3. District councils were invited to participate in a board interview, usually held in conjunction with a regular board meeting. The following district council boards participated:
  - a. Macalester Groveland Community Council (D14), July 14, 2016
  - b. District 10 Como Community Council, August 16, 2016
  - c. District 2 Community Council, September 21, 2016
  - d. District 1 Community Council, September 26, 2016
  - e. St. Anthony Park Community Council (D12), October 13, 2016

4. Two open interview sessions were held on September 21 (Rondo Community Outreach Library) and 22 (National Association of Letter Carriers office in D2) for board members from any district council board.
5. Research from district council websites and communication tools

## How District Councils Operate

Each Saint Paul District Council is an autonomous 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency with its own bylaws, structure and financial operations. While all district councils receive foundational financial support from the City of Saint Paul, they also generate additional revenue through grants, donations, earned income and fundraising.

### Staff

Every district council has at least one paid staff member who is responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the organization. In total, District Councils report that they employ over 33 FTE employees across the city. In addition to an executive director, many district councils have hired full- or part-time community organizers or project staff dedicated to executing specific work outlined in their annual work plans or grants.

While the responsibilities and functions of district council staff are extremely broad, they express a common dedication to serving residents as a voice of their community. They describe their organizations as responsive—not stagnant—to their communities' needs. With in-depth knowledge of their communities, staff recognize that they are able to engage them in a way that the City and other organizations cannot. As one staff member stated:

*We can do authentic community engagement  
with residents affected by projects.  
We are in a unique position to do this.  
And we can ask the City to be a partner in it,  
and we can help break down barriers the City has with respect to this.*

Staff generally also consider one of their core functions to be leadership development within the community. This work takes place by empowering neighborhood volunteers to lead committees, providing fiscal sponsorship to neighborhood groups, teaching people to conduct their own organizing, and much more.

## Boards

District Council staff report to a board of directors whose membership is almost entirely drawn from the neighborhood served. The district council boards vary in size and structure. The smallest board has 11 seats while the largest has 35; the average size of a district council board is 20. Over 300 Saint Paul residents volunteer their time to serve on the board of directors for their district council.

The makeup of boards varies across the city. Many include representatives from defined, geographic zones within their district. Boards also frequently designate seats for key constituency groups within their neighborhood such as businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions and partner organizations.

During interviews, board members often expressed deep passion for their work. Many viewed their volunteer role on the district council as an essential form of grass roots democracy. For example, one board member observed that the role is “fundamental to democracy. Being involved in the civic life is part of what should be done.” Unsolicited, they shared eloquent explanations for the importance and value of participation in the life of their neighborhood and city. Another board member stated:

*I think it's evident that one of the great services of the board...  
is providing really thoughtful consideration to where the neighborhood is  
and where it's going. Having people choose to dedicate their time to that  
is more valuable than we often appreciate.  
The work from meeting to meeting may be incremental  
but we're having long-term impacts.*

## Committees

Most district councils have standing committees that help identify organizational priorities and conduct work of the organization. It is common for these committees to include membership beyond the board of directors, which extends the formal community engagement and participation of neighborhood residents. Well over 500 individuals are active participants in district council committees across Saint Paul.

While titles and specific roles and structures of committees vary by organization, there is some consistency in the topics addressed by district council committees. These committees help to identify ongoing priorities of the organizations. (Two district councils do not use a structure that includes formal, standing committees.) Common standing committees include:



Land use and development issues: 15 of 17 district councils

Environmental issues: 9 of 17 district councils

Executive, organizational, and finance issues: 9 of 17 district councils

Transportation and related issues: 8 of 17 district councils

Neighborhood involvement and similar issues: 7 of 17 district councils

Communication and marketing issues: 5 of 17 district councils

Some district councils also have standing committees that are unique to their own neighborhoods. For example, the Summit Hill Association (D16) maintains an “Historic Preservation” committee to support the historic nature of its neighborhood; Dayton’s Bluff Community Council (D4) maintains a “Radio” committee to oversee the operations of its radio station, WEQY; and St. Anthony Park Community Council (D12) has a standing “Equity” committee to help strengthen its organization’s commitment to issues of equity.

In addition to these standing committees, neighborhood volunteers also participate in a variety of district council task forces and work groups. These short-term structures are used to address specific needs and vary significantly from year to year.

## Partnerships

All district councils that participated in surveys reported partnerships with key organizations and nonprofits within their neighborhoods. These partnerships help strengthen the social fabric in our communities and expand outreach and programming for residents. These district councils also reported regular interaction with other neighborhood groups and organizations. Ten out of 12 provide direct support (through fiscal agency, staff or volunteer time, or something else) to other organizations or volunteer groups. Nine of 12 work with other district councils on a regular basis.

District councils also create new partnerships and collaboratives. For example, the West Side Community Organization (D3) was instrumental in the development of *Growing West Side*, a “grassroots collaborative that cultivates opportunities to learn about gardening, to access locally grown food, and to build authentic connections with neighbors to create a vibrant, thriving West Side community.” The collaborative grew out of the West Side Farmers’ market, and now brings over 200 people together each weekend for affordable and fresh food. Through this project, the district council garnered support from the Neighborhood Development Alliance and secured a contract with Blue Cross Blue Shield to successfully address a significant community need.

Many district councils partner with local business associations and chambers of commerce to support special events in the neighborhood. Back to school nights, concerts in local parks, summer parades and block parties, and National Night Out events are just a few of the many partnerships that district councils actively support.

## **Profile: Partnerships in Dayton's Bluff**

Partnerships are so important to the Dayton's Bluff Community Council (D4) that they are core to the organization's mission statement. By partnering with other nonprofits, local businesses, and neighborhood artists, the community council has become an innovator in providing important services that otherwise would not be available in the neighborhood.

The centerpiece of this work is the East Side Enterprise Center. The community council purchased an historic building after partnering with another local nonprofit, the Latino Economic Development Center, that was looking a St. Paul location. Together, the two nonprofits secured the funding and infrastructure to redevelop a dilapidated site and create a new community center.

The Enterprise Center serves multiple roles. During the day, it houses council offices, provides meeting space for community groups, and serves as a hub for outreach and partnerships. In the evening, it hosts business development classes, GED courses, and community gatherings. "Programmatically, it's a way for culturally-specific small businesses to work together to provide economic development resources to the East Side," says Deanna Abbott-Foster, executive director of the community council. "There were no economic development agencies on the East Side prior to this." The Enterprise Center also provides support for local food distribution and a farmers' cooperative, including warehouse and refrigeration space for farmers to keep local produce fresh before distribution.

Another example of a unique partnership in Dayton's Bluff is 7th Street LIVE. The community council surveyed and interviewed local businesses to identify unmet needs, and identified the need to create local business awareness and support. Simply put, many neighbors didn't realize the local assets they had in their own commercial corridor along 7th Street. Leveraging STAR grant funding and partnering with local businesses, the council launched "Night Out on E. 7th Street." Modeled after "National Night Out," the event gave neighbors an opportunity to explore their own neighborhood; more than 1,000 residents came out to reacquaint themselves with the assets of 7th Street. Over time, the event grew and evolved to become 7th Street LIVE, an annual festival that brings people out to celebrate the many cultures of the East Side.

Most recently, the community council was instrumental in partnering with local artists to establish an arts corridor. In addition to supporting artists who live in the neighborhood, the strategy also specifically fosters positive interactions with local young people. The community council rented a separate building—which includes gallery, studio, and event space—and hired a neighborhood arts leader as director. The director has connected multiple cultural groups and helped expand the community council's network and outreach. During the 2017 Saint Paul Art Crawl,

six sites on the East Side showcased works from dozens of local artists. Only Lowertown featured more sites for visitors to explore.

Collaborating with other organizations and community leaders also garners significant benefits for the council. The organization's budget has grown, the council's services have expanded, and the board's membership has become more representative of the district—now comprised of 66% people of color, like its neighborhood.

Abbott-Foster says a more representative board is the result of investing strategically over several years in partnerships that helped make the district council's work more relevant and meaningful to residents. "We went door to door to recruit people. We talked about issues in the neighborhood. We explained that Dayton's Bluff Community Council has an Enterprise Center to provide business development services. We're advocating for jobs and we have the radio station run by and for people of color and youth. We have assets that are valuable to people in our community. These assets made it more meaningful for them to run for a seat on the community council board."

## Finances

As noted earlier, each district council maintains its own finances. While a comprehensive financial overview of the district council system is beyond the scope of this report, it is worth noting that no district council operates solely based on the allocation approved by the City of Saint Paul. All district councils seek additional revenue to successfully achieve their mission and support their work through grants, donations, earned income and fundraising.

Based on federal 990 forms for the most recent year published (either 2014 and 2015 tax years), District councils generate roughly \$3,250,000 in income annually. In 2014, the City of Saint Paul allocated \$1,121,000 in direct support to district councils. Simply put, for each \$1 the City of Saint Paul allocated to district council's in 2014, they received \$3 worth of services in return.

## Issues District Councils Address

District Councils are involved in a host of issues facing the city and their neighborhoods. To gain a deeper understanding of the specific kinds of work they tackle, the Steering Team survey provides quantitative data that helps deepen our understanding of what, exactly, district councils do.

Survey participants were asked to estimate, "what issues dominate the resources (staff and volunteer time/effort) of the entire organization." Averaging the results across all respondents

provides a rough estimate of the amount of resources district councils spend on specific topics across the system:

Issue	Average % of organizational resources
Community Building	24.6%
Land Use	14.4%
Transportation	11.2%
Youth and Family	9.7%
Crime Prevention	8.5%
Parks/Public Space/Placemaking	6.9%
Natural environment/Sustainability	6.8%
Housing	6.7%
Economic development and local business	5.2%
Other issues/Topics	6.0%
TOTAL	100%

While these averages do not reflect the priorities of any single district council, they do provide a perspective as to the depth and breadth of work undertaken across the city. All respondents identified community building, transportation and natural environment/sustainability as issues that use district council resources, and all but one respondent identified land use as an issue requiring their time and effort. (It is worth noting that many of these topics overlap and interact. It is likely that certain issues are defined differently across different district councils, so what one council may refer to as a “housing” issue, may be considered a “land use” issue elsewhere; and, what one organization thinks of as “crime prevention” may be counted as “community building” by another.)

Another way to understand what topics or issues are priorities for district councils is to analyze the projects that dominate their work. When asked to identify “the top 3-5 issues that demanded the attention of your district council between May 2015 and June 2016,” executive directors provided the following list of major topics:

Issue	Category
Engaging community related to the ten-year community planning process	Community Building
Organizing and hosting community events	Community Building
Creating a unique, high quality, successful radio station operated by, with, and as communities of color	Community Building
Executing a Cross Cultural Dialogue project	Community Building
Engaging in equity and inclusivity projects	Community Building
Managing community disputes (related to Hamline University)	Community Building
Addressing impacts on neighborhood quality of life from activities at Como Regional Park and the State Fairgrounds	Community Building
Addressing issues of equity and privilege that rose up in Board and committee deliberations	Community Building

Addressing neighborhood livability issues (student rentals, sober houses, etc.)	Community Building
Conducting neighborhood planning (making future plans for the neighborhood)	Community Building
Dealing with ongoing construction projects in Como Regional Park	Community Building
Organizing the White Bear Avenue parade	Community Building
Assessing community engagement systems	Community Building
Addressing crime and safety concerns	Crime Prevention
Addressing skyway public safety related to the vertical connection	Crime Prevention
Discussing and addressing business concerns	Economic Development
Increasing the impact of the East Side Enterprise Center for local residents and businesses	Economic Development
Addressing the lack of liquor licenses available for restaurants, which was a huge problem leading to the loss of interested investors	Economic Development
Creating an “arts and organizing” model	Internal
Integrating the "South Como" area into the district after being transferred from District 6	Internal
Conducting a bylaw review	Internal
Managing fiscal oversight (fiscal agencies, sponsorships, etc.)	Internal
Increasing our budget	Internal
Solving internal governance and board functioning issues around the expansion of organizational capacity	Internal
Addressing Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)	Land use
Managing issues related to the brownfield site at Reaney & Etna	Land use
Coordinating construction impacts with county, city, state, water, etc.	Land use
Addressing development on Luther Seminary by Ecumen	Land use
Addressing development projects in downtown	Land use
Monitoring and addressing development: site plan applications, variance requests, licenses requests	Land use
Addressing Ford site development, Riverview Corridor project, and Hwy 5 realignment	Land use
Addressing Furness Parkway completion	Land use
Engaging community around housing tear downs/rebuilds/variances	Land use
Engaging community on issues related to the Major League Soccer stadium and associated Midway Center redevelopment	Land use
Managing land use issues	Land use
Monitoring the Snelling Midway redevelopment site	Land use
Addressing tear downs and large rebuilds and additions that change neighborhood character	Land use
Addressing vacant land and property	Land use
Engaging community around Ward 3 design standards	Land use

Addressing zoning issues for 1784 LaCrosse	Land use
Conducting engagement and research around citywide garbage collection and alley maintenance issues	Natural Resources
Managing organized trash collection project	Natural Resources
Addressing sustainability issues	Natural Resources
Managing under-resourcing of parks and public spaces	Parks
Addressing usage of the South St. Anthony Park Recreation Center	Parks
Engaging community around bike lane implementation and associated parking mitigation issues	Transportation
Addressing citywide transportation Issues	Transportation
Participating in the Cleveland bike lane implementation process	Transportation
Dealing with transportation issues, especially non-motorized transportation and public transit	Transportation
Engaging community around local transportation issues	Transportation
Addressing pedestrian safety concerns	Transportation
Addressing traffic, speeding, and pedestrian safety issues	Transportation
Managing transportation and traffic issues	Transportation
Fostering youth in leadership	Youth

These topics can then be tallied by issue area:

Issue	Count of Major Issues
Community Building	13
Land Use	16
Transportation	8
Youth and Family	2
Crime Prevention	2
Parks/Public Space/Placemaking	2
Natural environment/Sustainability	3
Economic development and local business	3
Internal issues	6

Both the analysis of resources invested in topics and the list of major issues addressed highlight the prominence of community building, land use and transportation issues as central to the work of district councils.

While the list of issues provides an understanding of topics district councils address, their community engagement work is defined by *how* they help residents actively participate in the future of their neighborhood.

## How District Councils Engage Their Communities by Issue

### Community Building

Community building is the most common topic that all district councils spend resources addressing. On average, district councils report they spend about 25% of their resources on community building activities. Community building is a broad topic area that includes a variety of goals, including giving neighbors a sense of agency, building connections between residents, and taking steps to improve and celebrate neighborhood livability. Some common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communicating to local neighbors issues, events, and activities affecting the neighborhood
- Hosting events, meetings, and opportunities for community gathering
- Sponsoring committees or work groups that address community needs

One district council board member described their work this way:

*It's always about making the community a better place.  
If there wasn't an organization like the district council,  
the changes would still happen but people might know less about it,  
feel more blindsided, feel disenfranchised.  
In the past few years, maybe starting five years ago,  
we starting posing the question—are we making the community better  
for everybody? We're trying to address the equity question head on,  
so the whole community can benefit from what goes on  
here in the neighborhood. Hopefully we'll get to the point where  
everyone feels they have a place and a stake in the neighborhood.*

Specific projects and examples of community building by district councils abound. Daytons Bluff (D4) and the Frogtown Neighborhood Association (D7) have recently launched radio stations to build community in their neighborhoods. CapitolRiver Council (D17) supports *Music in Mears Park* through their fundraising efforts to build community in Downtown. Most district councils host annual events such as a summer get-together in a neighborhood park, or a garden tour (D9) or house tour (D16). Many district councils serve as the fiscal agent and coordinator for community gardens within their neighborhood. Taken together, these events connect neighbors and significantly strengthen Saint Paul's neighborhoods.

When asked to identify **major accomplishments** between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed issues that were about community building. Other district councils shared examples of major community building accomplishments through the course of interviews and surveys. Many of these activities are directly and explicitly related to district councils' efforts to **achieve great equity** and reach broader sets of communities in their work. For example:

- Worked specifically on equity, diversity, and inclusion, studying the demographics in our neighborhoods and their specific needs in order to help meet those needs, and working on a food justice program and ADA accessibility to transit to support low-income communities, disability communities, and communities of color in the neighborhood.
- Formed an Equity Committee committed to learning about the needs of historically underrepresented communities and working to better meet those needs.
- Held cross cultural dialogues with community and city departments.
- Increased meaningful participation from communities of color by focusing intentionally on staff of color and leadership opportunities across cultures.
- Increased representation to close to 60% people of color on our Board of Directors.
- Increased the number of residents that we engage by 100%.
- Updated our communications plan and created new outreach strategies that are working!
- Strengthened our outreach by meeting our goal to build partnerships and be more authentically engaged with other institutions within our district council boundaries and to collaborate with them.
- Advocated for the interests of the East Side of Saint Paul which has long been neglected in funding and completion of plans.
- Participated and completed the *Cross Cultural Dialogue Project*.
- Assumed a leadership role in *Equity in Place*, a diverse group of strategic partners from place-based, housing, and advocacy organizations facilitated by the University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

Other examples of significant accomplishments related to community building include:

- Conducted outreach related to the closure of Boys Totem Town and its future redevelopment.
- Launched WEQY-East Side Community Radio, and developed extensive local music and public affairs programming for 24/7 broadcast and streaming.
- Launched *Creative Frogtown*, which included multiple large events to help spotlight the creative community in our neighborhood.
- Held successful speaker series on numerous issues including citywide trash, recycling, bicycle initiatives, and neighborhood history.
- Moved the staging of the *Back to 50s* auto show off neighborhood streets to address neighborhood concerns.
- Held great community events including our *Spring Festival*, *Pop-Up Shop* and neighborhood garage sale.
- Addressed issues related to the relationship between Hamline University and the



community.

- Sponsored annual events including *Mac-Grove Fest* and the *Home Improvement Fair*.
- Implemented neighborhood programming including an organics drop-off site, business roundtables, alley garden awards, native garden awards, and pedestrian/bike/transit incentive programs.
- Strengthened and created partnerships with community groups that have led to multiple events and programs, including the *Highland Park Photo Contest*, *Music in the Parks*, *Movies in the Parks*, new resident welcome gatherings, and *Tour de Highland* (a bike and eat event that is enjoyed by many).
- Secured and started holding beverage sales fundraisers at *Music in Mears*.
- Balanced interests in the downtown area related to business and economic development; residents' family, youth, livability and housing issue; and the unique complexity of the Skyway as an additional public realm.
- Successfully held our 2016 Annual Meeting without any argument or controversy.
- Advocated and received funding for Tot Lot Mural integration in a larger renovation project.
- Co-sponsored *Heroes and Helpers* Event to provide holiday meals for forty East Side families.
- Co-sponsored the annual *White Bear Avenue Parade*.
- Held the first Annual *7th Street LIVE* community festival with 2000 participants!
- Sponsored 7 houses in the district for the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Home Tour, and organized a vacant home tour that brought over 300 neighbors through vacant homes in our historic district.
- Increased communications through social media and improved branding.
- Created a new Community Building committee.

Community Building Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Publicized (through email, social media, or other means) events or activities in your district	100%
Sponsored an annual fair or event	92%
Hosted a community meeting specifically to discuss or plan community or livability topics	75%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address community building or livability	58%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing community building/livability activities	58%
Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to community building or livability	58%
Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's community building/livability activities	42%

Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses community building/livability strategies	42%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding community building or livability	33%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about community building or livability issues	25%
Financially supported another organization's community building or livability activities	25%
<i>Other community building strategies or tactics not addressed in the list above</i>	25%

## Land Use

Land use issues are central to the work of nearly all district councils. The district councils are formally part of the city's process for many land use instruments and changes. On average, district councils report they spend almost 15% of their resources on land use activities. Land use issues range from building or permit changes affecting one city block to major redevelopment projects that have regional or statewide impact. District councils are the official voice of their neighborhoods and strive to represent their communities effectively as projects large and small are planned. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their land use work include:

- Formally communicating to the City staff and City Council the view of residents impacted by land use changes
- Hosting meetings and developing communications to inform neighbors of proposed land use changes and educate them on City processes
- Meeting with City staff and developers regarding potential and active development projects to ensure that the projects best meet neighborhood needs
- Reaching out proactively to developers to promote projects in their neighborhoods that align with the community vision

Here's how one board member described the work of district councils as it relates to land use:

*When people want to build or expand something, this is where they come to get the neighborhood's perspective. The City Council would be unable to process all the input the district councils receive. We're the steam valve for some issues. Neighbors learn that there are some issues that can be addressed at this level rather than at City Hall and... sometimes we identify issues that a developer hasn't thought about.*

In addition to responding to specific land use and development issues, district councils have also engaged in policy debates regarding issues such as sober houses and student housing. One executive director described the process of their board's engagement in a recent issue:

*We had quite a few neighbors who were activated by other residents. The staff took a lot of phone calls and questions. So, we asked city council to slow down as we felt there was a need for more input and resident participation. We flyered the neighborhood, and the city provided interns to help with that. We hosted some heated meetings.*

*People were calling us as a point organization to be connected to the reports and the information provided by the city. The board wrote a letter to support the community response and concern. The neighborhood wasn't comfortable yet with the change. It wasn't what individual board members believed, but it represented what we were hearing from our neighbors. We made a lot of connections with people in the process. We take the topics where people are stirred up and try to make positive contacts. I say, bring on the times when we take heat!*

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed land use issues. Other district councils shared examples of significant land use activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Completed our community plan.
- Created guidelines to help proactively shape development in our neighborhood and offer a framework for developers who want to work with us to build community with a shared vision.
- Facilitated an incredibly contentious neighborhood conversation about accessory dwelling units, and providing a structure for all residents to be heard and for a resolution to be reached.
- Created an extensive report summarizing issues of community concern related to the major league soccer stadium and Midway Center Redevelopment, which was shared with numerous stakeholders.
- Completed our ten-year long range plan.
- Completed residential design standards for Ward 3 to help address neighborhood concerns about tear downs and new construction.
- Explored the balance between historic preservation and how redevelopment occurs in an already built-out neighborhood when there is more demand for space than there is space available.
- Successfully advocated against land use activities that were potentially biased against people of color.
- Actively participated in the long-range planning process for the Saxon Ford Site.
- Facilitated the rehabilitation and sale of two vacant properties.
- Engaged the neighborhood to gather perspectives and provide education regarding the Victoria Theater redevelopment project.

Land Use Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding land use requests	100%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address land use issues	92%
Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to land use	83%
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about development projects or land use changes in the district	83%
Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific (re) development project in the district	75%
Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) in the district	75%
Distributed information to a targeted neighborhood regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit etc.)	67%
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding land use issues and regulations	67%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses land use strategies	58%
Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to land use	50%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about land use issues	33%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual organization addressing land use issues	33%
<i>Other activities regarding land use not addressed in the list above?</i>	<i>8%</i>

### Profile: Influencing City-wide Policy

District Councils have played a critical role in identifying, cultivating, and advancing policy changes at the city level. Councils can be proving grounds for innovative policy ideas—as well as a sorting grounds for ill-conceived ideas. Through thoughtful engagement processes, strategic partnerships, and broad volunteer bases, District Councils are well-positioned to influence city-wide policy.

#### Organized Trash Collection

Long considered the “third rail” of politics in the City of Saint Paul, organized trash collection has arguably seen more fits and starts than any other public policy

change. Under the long-standing “open” system, each property owner is responsible for contracting with a private hauler—resulting in multiple trucks crisscrossing the City on a daily basis. When the Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) was gathering input for its Long Range Plan in 2013-2014, a frequent comment it heard was: “Please, DO SOMETHING about trash!” Undeterred by the history of failures on this policy issue, D14 successfully sought funding from the MN Pollution Control Agency to work on organized trash collection.

D14 conducted a year-long engagement effort across the City to gather input on the topic from community members, trash haulers, elected officials, public employees, and subject matter experts. Through a partnership with Macalester College, D14 staff and Macalester students produced a comprehensive, thoroughly-researched report replete with recommendations for next steps to achieve organized trash collection. Largely as a result of this work, the City of Saint Paul allocated \$330,000 in its 2016 budget to begin implementation of organized trash collection.

### **Central Corridor Influence**

The District Councils Collaborative—a coalition of more than a dozen Saint Paul district councils and Minneapolis neighborhood organizations—had a profound effect on reshaping policy, results, and investment in neighborhoods adjacent to Metro Transit’s Green Line. Most visibly, the Collaborative led the charge to build light-rail stations at the Corridor’s intersections with Western, Victoria, and Hamline. As a result, station spacing in core neighborhoods of Saint Paul is similar to spacing along other parts of the Green Line, increasing opportunities for nearby residents—many of them living in poverty—to not only benefit more directly from additional transportation options, but also from the economic development that light rail is expected to generate.

Stations were not the only issue of equity the Collaborative raised about the light-rail corridor. It also brought into the public discussion the need to help businesses—many of them owned by minorities or immigrants—to survive revenue losses during light-rail construction. The Collaborative also advocated for preserving affordable housing (especially for low-income residents, seniors and people with disabilities), and for preserving diversity, both among businesses and residents, in the face of the gentrification that light-rail could spur.

Finally, the Collaborative examined and forced changes in the quality of sidewalks, landscaping, and design to make pedestrian travel safer and more pleasant. Its fight against “hostile pedestrian environments” can be seen throughout the corridor and adjacent neighborhoods, including along Snelling Avenue south of Interstate 94. And although the Collaborative has disbanded, its impact will continue to be felt—including in 2018, when the Minnesota Department of Transportation rebuilds the Dale St. bridge over I-94. The design will include pedestrian plazas and other ideas generated by the Collaborative.

### **Ward 3 Design Standards**

For several years, culminating in 2014, there had been increasing concern over new housing construction and significant remodeling throughout the neighborhoods represented by the Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) and Highland District Council (D15), which constitute Ward 3. Although in conformance with City code, there was significant concern that this construction was inconsistent with the scale and character of the existing residential neighborhoods. In August 2014, the City Council passed a resolution, with the support of D14 and D15, initiating a zoning study to review current design standards in Ward 3 as they relate to the construction and remodeling of single-family homes in residential zoning districts.

The Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED) was asked to prepare recommendations to guide future construction toward consistency with the existing character of these residential areas. PED, D14, and D15 actively partnered to gather community input through standing committees, focused events, and outreach. According to PED staffer Mike Richardson, “The District Councils played a key role in gathering constructive input and guiding active residents through the process.” The result was a set of zoning code changes—some specific to Ward 3 and some implemented City-wide—that have led to higher quality, more appropriate development.

## Transportation

District councils also spend significant resources addressing issues related to transportation. On average, district councils report they spend about 11% of their resources on transportation-related activities. Transportation issues often involve responding to public agencies (City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County, Metro Transit, MnDOT, etc.) as changes or investments are made to the transportation infrastructure. Some district councils are actively engaged in advocating for changes for investments to enhance services to their neighborhood. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their transportation work include:

- Hosting events about specific transportation issues
- Advocating for transportation policy that serves community interests (pedestrian safety, Complete Streets, multi-modal transit options, etc.)
- Communicating information to residents and businesses regarding transportation issues
- Engaging with public officials to discuss issues and advocate for the neighborhood

When asked to share examples of the district council’s involvement in transportation issues, staff and board members were frequently able to identify projects that have evolved over many years. For example, a board member from the Payne-Phalen (D5) Planning Council spoke of the long-term commitment the council has had to the redevelopment of Phalen Boulevard. “The district council wrote the Phalen plan before the official planning document. We wrote the corridor plan in 1989

and the road got built 15 years later.” A staff member also spoke of the engagement of multiple district councils in the building of the Green Line LRT. “Our district council was instrumental in getting extra stops on the Green Line. That has been incredibly important for the neighborhood.” District councils remain active participants in long-range transportation issues such as the proposed Riverview Corridor (D9) and the future Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) / Gateway Corridor (D1).

Additionally, district councils are actively involved in relatively routine (but often contentious) transportation issues such as parking, signal changes, re-striping roads and the creation of new bicycle facilities.

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed transportation issues. Other district councils shared examples of significant transportation activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Supported and partnered on several citywide transportation initiatives including *Better Bus Stops*, *Saint Paul Healthy Transportation for All*, and *Stop for Me* campaign.
- Sponsored transportation Initiatives and pedestrian safety events.
- Actively participated in a variety of transit project commissions and advisory groups.
- Co-sponsored the grand opening celebration of Furness Parkway, a 16-block linear park following a former street-car line in our neighborhood.
- Led numerous transportation initiatives including: completed a walkability study of Phalen Village; met with District 5, 6 and 10 to discuss Maryland Avenue transportation issues; met several times with Metro Transit to discuss resident requested increase of service; and participated on the *Healthy Transportation For All* task force.
- Secured a contract for organizing on the entire East Side for the Met Council in relation to Better Bus Stops.
- Advocated for and engaged community on bike lanes on Upper Afton and other CIB projects.
- Promoted a “Drive 25” campaign.

Transportation Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Hosted a community meeting to address a specific transportation issue (bus line change, bike lanes, traffic, etc.)	100%
Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage safety (for pedestrians, bikers, drivers or others)	100%
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding transportation issues and regulations	92%
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting pedestrians and/or bicycles	92%

Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to transportation	83%
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting use of mass transit	83%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding transportation issues or proposals	75%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address transportation	67%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses transportation issues	67%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing transportation issues	58%
Hosted a community meeting to address transportation issues generally (not related to an immediate, specific issue)	50%
Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to transportation	50%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about transportation issues in the district	50%
Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's activities related to transportation	42%
Financially supported another organization's activities related to Transportation	8%
<i>Other activities regarding transportation not addressed in the list above?</i>	25%

### **Profile: Phalen Corridor Project**

The Phalen Corridor Project (Phalen Boulevard) redeveloped 2.5 miles of former rail corridor connecting the East Side of Saint Paul (geographically one-third of the City and one-third of its population) to downtown Saint Paul, winding through the Dayton's Bluff (D4) and Payne-Phalen (D5) neighborhoods and ending in the Greater Eastside (D2). Expectations were high for this community redevelopment plan, which was considered to pose great potential to re-energize neighborhoods challenged with unemployment, retail flight, increasingly-distressed housing, and a general lack of investment.

Work originally began on this project in the 1990s, when a coalition of district councils, business associations, community leaders, City staff and residents began working together to envision a link from the East Side to downtown. The former rail corridor was the perfect passage for this link, but was flanked by urban brownfields and differing—and sometimes competing—visions of what truly could be accomplished by this project. Further hindering progress was a difficulty securing



funds for clean-up and construction of the boulevard itself, and a difficulty securing commitments from developers and new companies to build along the boulevard once construction was complete.

The coalition served as project champions. It assuaged resident and business owner concerns about the need for the project, the uncertainty of future investment in the area, and the corridor plans themselves. Working toward compromises that sometimes took several months to develop, the coalition engaged residents and businesses—sometimes in quite heated meetings—to agree on a plan that would truly benefit the area. Many coalition members also lobbied at the State Capitol for the project, and spent many hours with City staff and Councilmembers to bring the plans to fruition.

At least one book has been written on this process and project, “The Phalen Corridor: Rebuilding the Pride of the East Side,” by Curt Milburn. The author notes that: “On October 15, 2005 Phalen Boulevard was finally completed and open to the public. Rather than a traditional ribbon cutting one might find at the opening of a road, a ribbon-tying activity was organized symbolizing the ways in which Phalen Boulevard has linked East Side residents to businesses, jobs, restored green spaces, and downtown Saint Paul.”

Today, Phalen Boulevard is a critical part of the East Side environment. It has exceeded expectations for use, and continues to bring new development, new businesses, and new jobs to the East Side.

## Youth and Family

Issues directly addressing the needs of youth and family are tightly aligned to the goals that many district councils share of building strong neighborhoods and communities. On average, nearly 10% of district council resources are invested in youth and family issues. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communicating to local neighbors on issues, events and activities affecting youth and family
- Partnering with other organizations and individuals to meet the needs of youth and families

In order to address the needs of youth in their district, the District 1 Community Council has made youth issues a high priority. District 1 has created the *D1 Youth Council* which provides programming for students and the *Youth Task Force*, made up of adults to mentor Youth Council members. These initiatives provide an opportunity to formally engage youth in the work of the community council and their neighborhood. Staff described the project this way:

*We made a decision to move out of crime prevention directly and into youth work. We were doing that by partnering with other small groups*

*and neighborhood volunteer groups. From that, we created police and youth conversations, a voting project with youth, and a monthly open mic night. Now we are formalizing a relationship with local young mentoring group so we will have multi-pronged supports. We have our youth council which will have civic education and our mentors will support the social development of the council. Long term, we want to support kids getting jobs and careers in the neighborhood.*

For other district councils, addressing youth and family issues is focused on the immediate desire to make neighborhoods as livable and welcoming as possible.

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed issues focused on youth and families. Other district councils shared examples of significant youth and family activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

Created a Youth Council.

- Sponsored the annual *Heroes and Helpers Event* with Target providing holiday meals for low income families in district.
- Sponsored Youth Outreach Committee who provide volunteer hours as well as feedback and guidance from youth perspective on district issues.
- Formally engaged youth in the operations of WEQY community radio.
- Created bylaws that require at least three seats on the Board be youth.
- Employed youth to assist with engagement work through the City's Right Track program.
- Advocated for CIB funds for youth soccer fields.
- Served as the fiscal agent for the North End booster club.

Youth and Family Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about youth and family issues in the district	92%
Distributed information/education as requested by local schools regarding youth/school topics	67%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing youth and family issues	50%
Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's youth and family activities	50%

Financially supported another organization's youth and family activities	33%
Hosted a community meeting regarding youth and family issues in the district	25%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address youth or family issues	25%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly identifies the needs of youth and family	25%
Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to youth and family issues	17%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about youth and family issues	17%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding youth and family issues	8%
<i>Other activities regarding youth and family issues in addition to the list above</i>	33%

## Profile: Youth Engagement

The District 1 Community Council looked at the demographic shift occurring in its area and realized two things that led to its dedication of a significant portion of its resources on youth. First, its youth population is a greater portion of its demographic makeup than that of the city as a whole. As a result, if the Community Council was not engaging youth, it would miss a significant portion of its population as it made decisions about the future of the district.

Second, the population of youth represented, in greater proportion, communities of color. That is, the populations of color in the district were growing faster than the white population, simply as a result of more children being born among these groups, in addition to increases arising from families of color moving to the district. Focusing on youth helps D1 meet its commitment to include the traditionally underrepresented voices of those most affected by decisions being made related to social and physical infrastructure. It also helps its organization to grow increasingly representative of the people who live there. As they connect with youth, they also connect with their families, building knowledge of and trust in our organization.

District 1's youth work includes a broad reach to large numbers of youth through the Young Mentors Group (YMG). YMG focuses on the personal and social development of youth, especially African-American and African immigrant youth. YMG is a youth-run program guided by adult volunteers that brings in speakers and connects youth to programming opportunities around the city. Connections to Freedom School, the Natural Leaders environmental program, J-shop (journalism shop), and community service projects have been made. This group has partnerships

with both the local library and a local business, where YMG members have also secured jobs.

The community council also achieves in-depth work with smaller numbers of youth through specific projects. For example, it completed a voter education drive that focused on the importance of voting in local elections—resulting in a video that aired on SPNN for two weeks prior to the 2015 election. It also initiated a community art project that involved working with community members and an artist to create a mural representative of community stories. In addition, it sponsors a Youth Council, which works with the support of an adult Youth Task Force to identify projects it wants to implement on behalf of the community, while developing civic leadership skills and learning about the civic realm.

Through all of these approaches, District 1 staff feels it is helping develop resilient adults who understand the importance of positively engaging with the communities of which they are a part. They are committed to having youth understand their role as valued members of the community who have contributions to make to our shared future.

## Crime Prevention

Historically, crime prevention was an important part of the work district councils provided to the City of Saint Paul to receive financial support. Over time, that expectation has evolved and many district councils view their work addressing community building and youth and family issues as long-term strategies to reduce crime in the neighborhood. Explicit crime prevention strategies remain for some district councils and now account for roughly 8.5% of the time and financial resources of district councils. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their crime prevention work include:

- Working with police and neighbors to address issues related to crime
- Communicate timely information and crime prevention strategies to neighbors

Both National Night Out activities and supporting block clubs are often viewed as key strategies district councils actively support. Both strategies emphasize relationships within neighborhoods and help to create a sense of community and well-being. Many staff also attend meetings with police to monitor crime statistics in their neighborhood. One executive director described their crime prevention strategies as tightly aligned to their community building activities: “We strive to support activities that create a sense of pride and ownership in the neighborhood. This includes youth events, clean ups and block clubs.”

District councils shared examples of significant crime prevention activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Supported a network of block clubs in the neighborhood to build community and support crime prevention by sharing neighborhood watch strategies.
- Worked toward a crime prevention strategy that is not racially charged or divisive in a very diverse community.
- Addressed Crime Prevention through our community building strategies.
- Convened meetings with neighbors and law enforcement to address specific concerns around criminal behavior and safety issues.
- Fostered a Crime Prevention committee to address neighborhood safety issues.

Crime Prevention Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Staff participated in standing police/city meetings to address issues related to crime	75%
Hosted a community meeting specifically to address crime prevention	67%
Convened a meeting with police and/or city official(s) to discuss issues related to crime prevention	67%
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) events and activities in your district explicitly focused on crime prevention	67%
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) crime prevention strategies or tips	58%
Distributed crime statistics from the police/city	50%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing crime prevention activities	33%
Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's crime prevention activities	25%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses crime prevention strategies	17%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding crime prevention	17%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address crime prevention	8%
Financially supported another organization's crime prevention activities	8%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about crime prevention issues	8%
<i>Other crime prevention strategies or tactics not addressed in the list above</i>	33%

## Parks, Public Space, and Placemaking

Parks and public spaces are another key element to making Saint Paul neighborhoods strong and vital. District councils support their parks and public spaces through a variety of strategies. On average, district councils report they spend about 7% of their resources on activities related to parks, public spaces, and placemaking. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communication with neighbors regarding park/public space activities and events
- Hosting events, meetings, and opportunities regarding parks and public spaces

Some district councils have significant park and public realms within their boundaries. For example, District 10 Como Community Council includes all of Como Regional Park, which is a large and unique asset within their district. The CapitolRiver Council appoints the Skyway Governance Advisory Committee as an advisory body to the City of Saint Paul and the City Council on issues and policies overseeing the operations and maintenance of the downtown Saint Paul skyway system. Other district councils have city, regional and even parts of national parks within their boundaries.

Union Park District Council (D13) recently played an instrumental role in the creation of a new park on Griggs Street. The Executive Director described some highlights of that process:

*A long-standing project in our district has been the Park at Griggs, which started with collaboration with Lex-Ham Community Council and other stakeholders including Gordon Parks High School and the resident association of Skyline Tower. Collectively, we succeeded in bringing the mayor up to the top of Skyline Tower to demonstrate the lack of green space along the Green Line. Eventually, this led to the dedication of city funding to purchase vacant parcels for the park through the 8 80 Vitality Fund. Trust for Public Land has also been a crucial partner, and we're working with them now to reach out to the diverse communities in the area and get their input on the vision of the park. When it's developed, the park will have a significant lasting impact on the city.*

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, some executive directors listed issues related to parks, public space and placemaking. Other district councils shared examples of significant activities addressing parks, public spaces and placemaking through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Sponsored several public space initiatives including Midway Murals, Pierce Butler Meadows, Boulevard, Rain Garden Project, and Hamline Park events.
- Influenced infrastructure changes at the Snelling Avenue bridge over I-94 and advanced plans for a pocket park in the area.
- Worked with partners to advance groundbreaking placemaking efforts including the city's first parklet and artistic crosswalk.
- Hosted several park clean ups through the year.
- Collaborated with the City's Parks department for repair of some park amenities.
- Worked with Recreation Center managers and department to increase programming and hold events in the neighborhood.

Parks, Public Space and Placemaking Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about local parks or public spaces	100%
Sponsored or cosponsored an event designed to encourage awareness and use of local parks	83%
Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific issue regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking within the district	75%
Hosted a community meeting regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking generally	75%
Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's activities related to parks or public spaces	75%
Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to park or public space issues	67%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking strategies	67%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing issues related to parks or public spaces	67%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address parks, public spaces or placemaking issues	58%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses parks and public spaces	58%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about parks, public space or placemaking strategies	50%
Financially supported another organization's activities related to parks or public spaces	25%
<i>Other activities regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking not addressed in the list above?</i>	<i>8%</i>

## Natural Environment and Sustainability

Issues related to the natural environment and sustainability are central to the work of many district councils. On average, district councils report they spend almost 7% of their resources on activities related to environmental and sustainability issues. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communication issues and events related to the natural environment or sustainability to their constituents
- Hosting events, meetings, and opportunities regarding the natural environment and sustainability

Examples of engaging with issues of the natural environment are available from many district councils. District councils have, until recently, been significantly involved in the City's efforts to expand recycling. And, the Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) has been instrumental in studying the city's existing decentralized approach to waste collection:

*During 2015, with the support of the MN Pollution Control Agency, the Macalester-Groveland Community Council completed a comprehensive examination of organized trash collection. We researched the issue, interviewed other communities that have organized, talked to trash haulers currently working in Saint Paul, held community conversations with residents city-wide and received 2,000 responses to an online survey. We compiled everything we learned into an easy-to-read report.*

Board members and staff from other district councils reported other topics of interest in their neighborhoods. One board member proudly recalled providing educational resources to neighbors about oil trains. "It was a hot topic during the legislative session. We played an educational role and a facilitator and organizer role." Another staff member in a different district council helped a concerned local neighbor.

*A resident had noticed a chemical company was looking to get a variance on some safety measures for their business. Many committee members were very concerned. We facilitated conversations with the company and neighbors. The difficult part was figuring out what's overreaction and what's important and not hyperbole. Residents got a promise from city council*



*member to look at that part of the city. That hasn't happened yet, but the city has agreed to look at potential traffic and pollution issues.*

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed issues pertaining to the natural environment and sustainability. Other district councils shared examples of significant activities regarding the natural environment and sustainability through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Established a new community garden.
- Opened an organics recycling drop-off site in the neighborhood that will be available 24/7 and will be far more convenient than existing county sites, through an initiative made possible with a grant from the Solid Waste Coordinating Board and the cooperative efforts of Ramsey County, Saint Paul, and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.
- Developed a GIS mapping program of the environmental hazards in the neighborhood overlaid by demographic and socioeconomic data to help us better understand our neighborhood.
- Opened a food waste reduction library with resources available to public for check-out.
- Researched and wrote a citizen-friendly report and advocated for a review of organized trash collection in the City, elevating the topic to the City Council level and resulting in significant dialogue about this issue city-wide.
- Supported local neighbors concerned about a nearby brownfield through meetings and advocacy, including researching the history of the site and speaking to sources to collect information on site.
- Participated in the Urban Oasis sponsored edible streetscape featuring edible plantings along 7th Street.

Natural Environment and Sustainability Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding a specific environmental issue (recycling, city regulations, etc.)	92%
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about environmental issues or changes in the district	92%
Hosted a community meeting focused on natural environment or sustainability issues	58%
Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to environmental issues	58%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address natural	58%

environment or sustainability issues	
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing natural environment or sustainability issues	58%
Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's environmental activities	58%
Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific environmental issue (garbage collection, pollution, recycling, etc.) in the district	50%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses natural environment or sustainability strategies	50%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding environmental issues	50%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about natural environment or sustainability	42%
Financially supported another organization's environmental activities regarding the natural environment or sustainability	17%
<i>Other issues related to the natural environment or sustainability not addressed in the list above?</i>	25%

### **Profile: Organics Recycling – Grassroots Environmental Stewardship**

Saint Paul's District Councils have a long history of environmental activism. In addition to countless grassroots efforts in their own neighborhoods, councils were the driving force behind ground-breaking initiatives that continue to deliver long-term benefits for all of Saint Paul and its residents.

- District councils created the Neighborhood Energy Consortium in 1985. This nonprofit partners with utilities, the city, and others to provide affordable counseling about energy-efficiency improvements for homeowners and renters. For 14 years, NEC also organized the Saint Paul Classic Bike Tour. Now in its 23rd year, the one-day tour is the largest bicycle ride in the state. *(NEC changed its name to Neighborhood Energy Connection in 2005, and intends to merge with the Center for Energy and Environment in 2017.)*
- The Como Community Council pushed the State of Minnesota to create the Capitol Region Watershed District in 1998. The District is charged with protecting water quality in nearly all of Saint Paul – a 40-square-mile watershed that includes Como Lake, Loeb Lake, Crosby Lake, and the Mississippi River.
- Every year, district councils are the lead organizers and main source of volunteers for Saint Paul's Citywide Drop-offs. These one-day events provide

centralized locations so residents can properly and safely dispose of, recycle, and reuse electronics, appliances, power equipment, furniture, mattresses, demolition and construction material, and other bulky items that otherwise might be dumped illegally. Residents can dispose of these items for fees that are far more affordable than at commercial transfer stations.

- Until 2017, district councils were the front line in Saint Paul's curbside recycling program. Councils were the primary source of recycling information in their neighborhoods, and the sole source of the program's ubiquitous blue bins. Each council distributed hundreds of bins each year to residents committed to diverting paper, plastics, glass, and cans from the waste stream.

District councils are now on the cutting edge of the next big push in recycling: organic waste. Kitchen scraps, unused food, and other household organics make up about one-third of the total trash a typical household generates. Eliminating organic material from the waste stream saves money, frees up space in landfills, and reduces the climate-altering methane and carbon dioxide emissions that landfills generate. Community drop-off sites opened by district councils provide an eco-conscious option -- especially for residents who can't maintain their own backyard compost bin, including renters and students. Plus, because the waste is recycled commercially, these community sites can accept items that cannot be composted in backyard bins.

The Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) and Como Community Council (D10) both manage organics recycling drop-off sites that are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week -- all year long. Both sites demonstrate the power of vision, citizen initiative, and partnership. These community sites also have become a model for other jurisdictions. Ramsey County, for example, began recycling household organics at its yard waste sites in April 2014 -- two years after Mac-Groveland opened its site. However, the county sites operate on limited hours, especially during winter. Overall, the convenience of the community sites makes them easier to use and makes organics recycling a viable alternative for more residents.

After a volunteer-led community planning process, Mac-Groveland launched the first community site in 2012, in a parking lot off Grand Ave. It partnered with the City of Saint Paul, Macalester College, and the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board for start-up costs. Initially, hauling fees were covered by an annual user fee. Mac-Groveland staff and volunteers conducted home visits and training workshops, and produced educational material to raise awareness about organics recycling. After the first year of operation, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul picked up the hauling costs; the site is now free for anyone who lives or works in St. Paul. To date, more than 950 households have signed up to use the neighborhood-scale site, which collects more than 34 tons of

organics waste annually. Community Council volunteers continue to maintain it with support from Mac-Groveland staff.

The Como Community Council took the idea further. For more than a year, council volunteers held workshops to teach residents about home composting and organics recycling. In the meantime, the council's environment committee developed plans for a large-scale site, working with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, Saint Paul Public Works, the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board, and Ramsey County, which contracts with a private hauler to service the site.

The site opened in July 2016 on land in Como Regional Park. It has grown to a capacity of over twice the Mac-Groveland site; this past winter, it was the second-busiest organics recycling site in the county. The Como site attracts more than 300 users a week and is on track to divert more than 75 tons of waste annually. As in Mac-Groveland, community volunteers and staff maintain the site.

The City of Saint Paul has plans to add organics to its weekly household recycling program, but the timetable continues being pushed further into the future. District councils are not waiting; they are proving that residents are willing and eager to participate in this next community-wide phase of environmental activism and stewardship.

## Housing

Most district councils report overlap between their work on housing issues and land use issues. On average, district councils report they spend just over 6% of their resources on activities directly related to housing. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their housing work include:

- Communicating to local neighbors on issues, events and activities related to housing
- Provided recommendations to the City of Saint Paul regarding housing changes or requests

Like other land use issues, housing topics range from small changes that impact individual nodes within neighborhoods to major development projects. District councils report collaborating with organizations including NeighborWorks and Habitat for Humanity on housing initiatives, and meeting with developers to advance community interests with respect to housing projects.

They also address specific housing issues including landlord responsibilities to neighborhoods, student housing in residential neighborhoods near higher education institutions, tear-downs and

mixed-use developments that may place new pressures on existing neighborhoods. One board member described their role in addressing these tensions:

*What I have seen the board do is to channel energy and passion productively. Sometimes those passions and energy can be viewed negativity and could be very divisive in the community. But I feel we've helped create positive outcomes. . . . There is so much transformation happening. We have 1500-2000 housing units going in. This neighborhood is transforming. I feel called by the community and the people who helped bring me here to be here for relationships and collaboration so this can be a stronger community, to serve the community, the poor and the over looked.*

Housing Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) to housing in the district	67%
Distributed information to a targeted area regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit etc.) to housing in the district	67%
Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about housing projects or changes in the district	67%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding housing requests	67%
Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to housing	58%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address housing issues	58%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses housing strategies	58%
Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to housing	50%
Hosted a community meeting regarding housing construction (such as a new housing project) in the district	42%
Hosted a community meeting regarding housing issues in the District	42%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy	

recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing housing issues	42%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about housing Issues	25%
<i>Other activities regarding housing not addressed in the list above?</i>	25%

## Economic Development

On average, district councils report they spend about 5% of their resources on issues related to economic development and supporting local businesses. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their housing work include:

- Sponsored events or provided communication materials to support existing local businesses
- Communicated to city staff to address economic development and local business needs

District councils address economic development issues through a variety of tactics. Several councils sponsor or co-sponsor events that help support local businesses. For example, Dayton's Bluff (D4) has a formal partnership with the East Side Area Business Association (ESABA). The district council is directly responsible to support locally owned businesses through informed community review, advocacy and promotion; and chair the Equity and Economic Development Committee of ESABA, promoting business growth on the East Side through strategic partnerships with key business owner and developers (e.g. Flat Earth Brewery, Urban Organics, Dellwood Gardens, etc.), the Saint Paul Port Authority and other public, private and nonprofit partners.

The West Side Community Organization (D3) leveraged their community planning process (a part of the City of Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan) to develop the *West Side Initiative*, a coordinated effort among community and institutional leaders to bring to life the objectives and strategies outlined in the West Side plan. The plan specifically identifies a strategy of "Community Economic Development: Build local resilience through business development, local energy, local food and using the arts as an economic driver."

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, some executive directors listed economic development issues. Other district councils shared examples of significant economic development activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Participated with local business association meetings and chamber meetings, and interacted with other business groups to support our neighborhood businesses.
- Held highly successful community-building events in partnership with the local business association and city parks department.
- Advocated for change to the City's Charter to redefine a restaurant, partnering with the City's Department of Safety and Inspection as well as many other groups to help our neighborhood restaurants be better able to compete with the rest of the City.

- Sponsored loan and grant program and provided organizing in community to connect local residents to job opportunities resulting in a majority of local hires and significant numbers of people of color hires.
- Brought more technical assistance and loans and grants to local minority owned businesses.
- Managed a corridor capital investment STAR fund that improved local businesses on 7th Street, including building acquisition by with minority owners.

Economic Development Activities	
Activity Utilized	Percent of District Councils
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting existing local businesses	75%
Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address economic development	75%
Hosted a community meeting to address issues facing existing local businesses in the district	67%
Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage support of existing local businesses	67%
Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding economic development issues and regulations	67%
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses economic development strategies	67%
Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to economic development	58%
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding economic development issues or proposals	58%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an existing or potential business owner as they interface with city staff/regulations	58%
Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to economic development	50%
Hosted a community meeting to address economic development strategies	42%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about economic development and/or local businesses	42%
Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing economic development issues	42%
<i>Other economic development or local business issues not addressed in the list above?</i>	25%

## Other Community Engagement Themes

In the course of surveying district council staff, meeting with district council boards, and meeting with district council executive directors, many themes emerged regarding the work district councils pursue to engage their neighborhoods.

### Equity

District councils across the city are striving to address issues of equity throughout their work. For some, equity is embedded in their work and central to their mission. These district councils are working to make sure their advocacy work and programming is consistently serving residents who are often absent from other aspects of the public sphere. The District 1 Community Council articulates their beliefs in their mission statement: “The mission of the District 1 Community Council is to share knowledge and power, to organize and to advocate for the people who live and work in our neighborhoods. We build leadership to seize opportunities and work for social and racial justice.” The District 2 Community Council has launched their *Equity Planning Project* which will strive to “ensure equity for all in everything the council does from administrative to programming.”

District councils also make concerted efforts to support and empower traditionally underrepresented communities. Examples include providing fiscal sponsorship to a Somali community group, supporting apartment building managers to activate their tenants and host National Night Out activities, participating in a collaborative project to get Karen refugees into homeownership, supporting the development of a Hmong community garden, and providing technical assistance to minority-owned businesses.

For many district councils, equity work centers on how their own organizations can become more representative of their neighborhoods. Board members, particularly in whiter, wealthier neighborhoods, are quick to recognize that the makeup of many district councils does not match neighborhood demographics—in factors including race, income, home-ownership and age. In response to this, some district councils have established equity committees, endorsed diversity policies, worked to change their volunteer recruitment strategies, and changed their bylaws to allow or require greater diversity among their board and committee memberships.

### Profile: Equitable Community Engagement

St. Anthony Park’s Equity Committee has made great strides in working towards more equitable engagement and access to resources. After a 2015 strategic planning process, its Equity Committee began to explore disparities in the neighborhood by connecting with local residents who had not been traditionally engaged in the Community Council. By beginning to change the paradigm of community outreach (going out and meeting people where they are, not expecting them to come to us on our terms) and genuinely connecting with people around their needs, the



Committee identified a serious deficit in the neighborhood: access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate food.

With the help of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, the Committee gathered qualitative and quantitative data to study this deficit and locate the sources of the problem. Transportation (and access more broadly) and financial difficulties topped the list of reasons that low income and racially diverse communities were not getting the food they needed in St. Anthony Park. The Committee is now implementing discrete action steps to address the disparity. For example, instead of sending produce from a local community garden out of the neighborhood, where local residents could not access it, last summer they sent 1500 pounds of fresh produce to a Section 8 building in the neighborhood. The Committee has also forged a partnership with a local CSA that will begin to provide food at a deeply discounted rate to neighbors in need, and convinced the Wilder Foundation to route its truck to St. Anthony Park to offer produce at cost to low income residents to the neighborhood.

This program has grown to include other efforts at connectivity and access, including work on ADA accessibility for areas in need of better sidewalks to connect Section 8 and other low income residents throughout the neighborhood to amenities and transit sources. The Equity Committee has also served as a sounding board for mediating issues in access and transparency throughout the neighborhood, and has educated and supported other groups on equitable engagement techniques and equitable community process.

The work of the Equity Committee operates internally as well, working to change the culture of the organization itself. The Committee sponsored board member training on diversity and inclusion, in an effort to weave equity into all of the organization's work. And, it created an Equity Framework and Equitable Engagement Process for its ten-year district planning work, required by the City of Saint Paul of all district councils. This process included training the organization's committees on how to incorporate equity into each component of the plan. Now, the groups working on transportation, land use, and the environment must address each of those areas in an equitable way, pulling in diverse voices, and giving power to those not traditionally represented in planning processes like these.

## Relationship to the City of Saint Paul

A common theme throughout the work of district councils is working closely with the City of Saint Paul. District Councils have a unique relationship with the departments and staff of the City. At times they are partners, at other times they are in conflict.

All district councils consistently provide communication and education to residents regarding projects and upcoming decisions by the City that may impact their neighborhoods. As noted throughout the issues above, district councils use a variety of outreach strategies to help keep their neighborhoods informed. City staff often rely upon district councils to help sponsor and facilitate community meetings and forums.

District council staff also meet individually with property owners, business owners, developers, and tenants to educate these constituents about how the City operates. District councils are on the front-line of educating their residents about how to work with the City to accomplish shared goals. During interviews, board members consistently point to the role the councils play in helping residents navigate through City staff and offices. One board member described this:

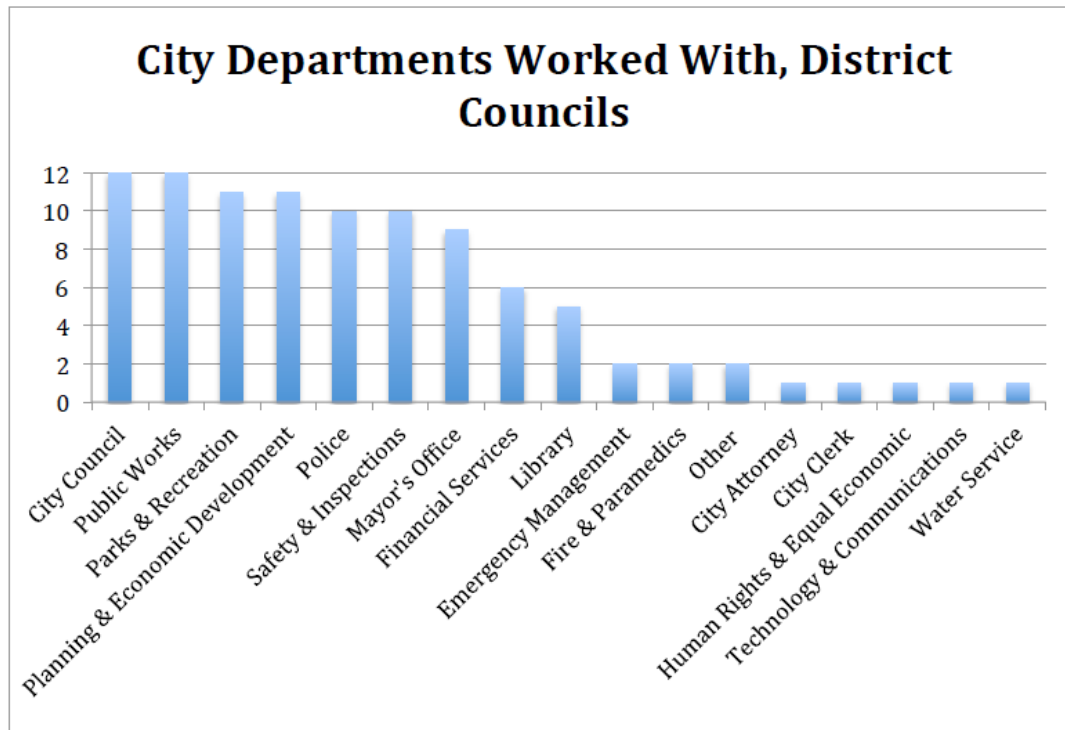
*For me the things that I find valuable are the contacts that I can make. Neighbors come to me and ask who should we contact or how could we influence this. Being able to meet with people who own businesses has meant a lot. I know who's in the space and what their plans are. I am a walker, I walk pretty much everywhere. I contacted the city about a dangerous intersection and now that intersection has a marked crosswalk.*

Conflicts between the district councils and City plans also occur. The desires of the neighborhood may not always align to the City's plans or resources, or the understanding that City staff may have about the desires of a neighborhood. District councils advocate for their neighborhoods even if the local position is in conflict with the decisions or plans of politicians or City staff. At the time, these conflicts can strain the relationship between district councils and the City. But, such conflicts can also have positive outcomes. One executive director described a challenge facing their district:

*The city closed the local rec center that was serving 400+ kids—largely kids of color and immigrants. We identified the demographic change that occurred, and we worked to create a local task force that worked with Parks and Rec and City Council. Those efforts resulted in mobile programming brought to the site. They also identified the fact that more up-front community conversation was necessary.*

*We facilitated conversations with the African-American community and immigrant community, which improved relationships with Parks and Rec.*

Survey data indicates that district councils interact with multiple city offices. All district councils reported that they interact with City Council staff and Public Works. Nearly all district councils also reported working regularly with Parks and Recreation, Planning and Economic Development, the Police, and Safety and Inspections.

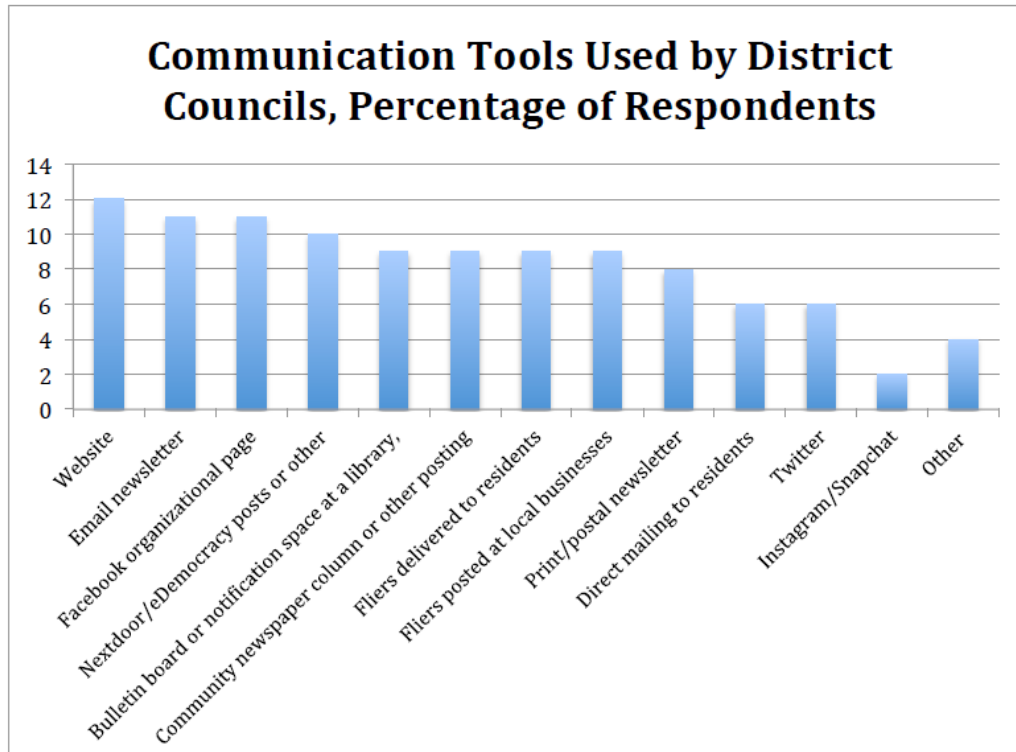


## Community Outreach and Communication

As noted earlier, district councils spend the majority of their time engaged in community building activities. Nearly every issue the district council address from Land Use to Youth and Family programming requires ongoing communication and outreach to neighborhoods.

Like most public and nonprofit organizations, this work has become increasingly complex and multifaceted with the advent of social media and evolution in the ways residents receive critical information about their neighborhood. Posters, fliers, electronic communication, social media, newsletters, neighborhood newspapers and word of mouth are used frequently by district councils to inform their neighborhood of pertinent issues.

District councils employ a number of communication vehicles to meet the needs of their neighbors.



## Reports and Guiding Documents

To support their work, district councils frequently author and commission reports, and write guiding documents that address specific challenges or plans for their neighborhood. One of the cornerstones of district council responsibilities is the development of Neighborhood Plans that eventually become part of the City's Comprehensive Plan. These documents, written about once every ten years, often take significant resources over many months to develop and become key planning documents for both the City and the district councils. One board member described how these large planning documents drive the work of their council: "We adopted a comprehensive neighborhood plan that came from surveys and town hall meetings. Now our committees are working through the projects that are in the plan. We've divvied up the work to each responsible committee."

Other important works address issues of priority to the neighborhood. When asked to identify reports or studies written since May 2015 related to specific topics of interest in the district, staff provided a lengthy list of important guiding documents that help inform their work:

- CURA Organizational Evaluation Study
- Report on Cross Cultural Dialogues
- Kasota Ponds Report (regarding wetlands)
- Transportation study (transportation uses in the neighborhood and areas that need more access)

- Food Justice report (to understand food needs and options to solve them)
- Common Grounds study to report on promoting public transit use at the future soccer stadium
- CURA study on the feasibility of an African Market in Saint Paul
- Youth and Police interactions
- Park and community interactions
- PED and community interactions
- Voting in local elections
- Boys Totem Town redevelopment plan
- Organized Trash Collection report
- Food Waste Reduction report
- Organizational Long Range Plan
- Study of the uses of Historic Highland Pool House
- Survey and design/map of Safe Routes to School with local schools
- Grant submitted to conduct a Historic Survey of the neighborhood
- Visioning Survey report (partnering with the Downtown Alliance)

## Challenges Facing District Councils

For this report, the Steering Team did not explicitly seek out details regarding challenges facing district councils. However, interviews of both staff and board members identified some consistent themes regarding uncertainty and the future. Many of these are inherently a part of small nonprofit organizations. These issues—along with the challenge to achieve more equitable engagement identified above, and other challenges to be identified—will be the focus of a companion Innovation Fund project in 2017.

### Financial Sustainability

Over time, many district councils are receiving smaller contracts from the City of Saint Paul, resulting in a challenging financial picture. As the City continues to evaluate its investment in the district council system, many councils are concerned about the long-term sustainability of their budget. Resources within neighborhoods vary greatly, and some councils are nervous about how they can generate resources to meet their core obligations.

Board members also mentioned that their ability to recruit skilled staff is hampered by limited financial resources. Many district councils have benefited from highly skilled staff members who are mission-driven and deeply committed to the work of their organization. But, board members are not confident that relying on staff “good-will” will continue to be viable long-term. Board members also shared the challenge they face providing benefits such as health insurance and retirement benefits to staff members.

## Institutional Memory

Key volunteers and individual staff members are often the sole sources of institutional memory and historic perspective within district councils. When these individuals leave the organization, a gap is created in continuity and wisdom that can delay or derail organizational priorities. As small, lean organizations, many district councils do not have robust procedures and records to guide them effectively through personnel transitions.

## Healthy Politics

Board members and directors worry about societal rancor impacting the work of district councils. District councils are often at the center of facilitating emotional and heated conversations in neighborhoods. They rely upon residents to hear multiple perspectives and seek common understanding in order to effectively support their neighborhoods. Board members referenced the nation's current political environment, as well as their own experiences, when expressing concerns about how neighbors face controversial plans in the future. As one board member stated, "This board has been collegial. We are all pulling together. But I came from a neighborhood where things are not currently collegial. Neighborhood groups can be the white home owner's association. I saw a lot of that."

## Relationship with the City

How district councils work with the City of Saint Paul is a source of tension for some district councils. They do not always feel their work is appreciated, or that community input in general is valued. Many board members expressed their opinion that City staff and leadership are not doing enough to reach out and listen to neighborhoods.

## Relationship with other District Councils

As autonomous organizations, district councils are charged to work specifically with the issues impacting their defined geographic region. District councils are proud of their own unique culture and distinct priorities. At the same time, staff and board members understand that working with other district councils is often essential to their success. This is particularly pronounced along district council borders, which are often major corridors such as University Avenue or Phalen Boulevard. While executive directors meet regularly as a group to address topics of common interest, participation varies and interest in aligning priorities across district council boundaries is limited. How district councils address their shared interests while maintaining their autonomous priorities is a challenge for the future.

## Appendices

### Survey

*Survey Questions*

### Board interviews

*Board interview guides*

### Executive Director meetings

*Roundtable I Discussion Guide*

*Roundtable II Worksheet*

## INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the breadth and depth of activities that the Saint Paul District Councils are involved in, we are requesting your participation in a survey. This survey is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the issues and activities that district council's support. There is also space at the end of the survey to provide more information about activities or issues not listed here. The survey may take you 20-30 minutes to complete. We greatly appreciate your accurate, thorough responses.

### PART ONE: THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ITS WORK

- 1 Which District Council are you representing?
- 2 How many FTE (Full-time equivalent) staff work for your district council (i.e. 1.0 = 1 full time person, 1.5 = 1 full time and one half time, etc.)
- 3 How many seats are on your board when full?  
How many seats are currently open?
- 4 Please list the names of your standing committees or work groups and your best estimate of the number of active, involved members in that committee/work group since May of 2015. (Example: Neighborhood concerns committee, 8; Land use committee, 10):  
*Describe*
- 5 Please list the names of any short-term or temporary task forces or committees formed since May, 2015 and your best estimate of the number of active, involved members in that group. (Example: Trash removal task force, 12; STAR grant committee, 4):  
*Describe*
- 6 Which of the following communication tools have you used since May, 2015: (check all that apply)
  - ☐ Email newsletter
  - ☐ Facebook organizational page
  - ☐ Print/postal newsletter
  - ☐ Direct mailing to residents
  - ☐ Twitter
  - ☐ Website
  - ☐ Instagram/Snapchat
  - ☐ Nextdoor/eDemocracy posts or other neighborhood groups' facebook pages/groups
  - ☐ Bulletin board or notification space at a library, community center or other public space
  - ☐ Community newspaper column or other posting
  - ☐ Fliers delivered to residents
  - ☐ Fliers posted at local businesses
  - ☐ Other (please describe)
- 8 If you had to take a BEST GUESS at what issues dominate the RESOURCES (staff and volunteer time/effort) OF THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION, what percent of the district council's resources are spent on the following issues. (Your total must add to 100%)
  - x Community Building/Livability
  - x Crime Prevention
  - x Housing
  - x Land Use
  - x Economic development and local business
  - x Natural environment/Sustainability
  - x Parks/Public Space/Placemaking
  - x Transportation
  - x Youth and Family
  - x Other issue/topic: (please describe)

100 MUST ADD TO 100
- 9 Since May, 2015 did your district council sponsor or organize a report or study related to specific topics of interest in the district? (These could be written by consultants, student groups, committees, staff etc.)  
If yes, please describe the study or report(s) you supported
- 10 Since May, 2015 with which city departments has your staff regularly engaged?
  - ☐ City Attorney
  - ☐ City Clerk
  - ☐ City Council
  - ☐ Emergency Management
  - ☐ Financial Services
  - ☐ Fire & Paramedics
  - ☐ Human Resources
  - ☐ Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity
  - ☐ Library
  - ☐ Mayor's Office
  - ☐ Parks & Recreation
  - ☐ Planning & Economic Development
  - ☐ Police
  - ☐ Public Works
  - ☐ Safety & Inspections
  - ☐ Technology & Communications
  - ☐ Water Service
  - ☐ Other:
- 11 Since May, 2015 did your district council provide support (such as fiscal agency, staff time, volunteer time etc.) to another organization or community group in their efforts to strengthen the community?  
*If yes, please describe the project(s) you supported*
- 12 Since May, 2015 what were the top 3-5 accomplishments of your district council?  
*Describe*



- 13 Since May, 2015 what were the top 3-5 issues that demanded the attention of your district council?  
*Describe*
- 14 What other neighborhood organizations/community groups within your district do you regularly interact with (ex. Local business association, independent neighborhood group, school booster group, etc.)  
*Describe*
- 15 Do you regularly partner with other district councils? If so please list:  
*Describe*
- 16 Do you have current guiding documents (such as work plans, strategic plans or community plans) that guide your work in the any of the following areas (check all that apply)
- ☐ Community Building/Livability
  - ☐ Crime Prevention
  - ☐ Housing
  - ☐ Land Use
  - ☐ Economic development and local business
  - ☐ Natural environment/Sustainability
  - ☐ Parks/Public Space/Placemaking
  - ☐ Transportation
  - ☐ Youth and Family
  - ☐ Other guiding topic: (please describe)
- 17 Is there anything about the structure of your district council that you feel makes it unique?  
*Describe*

## PART TWO: THE ISSUES DISTRICT COUNCILS ADDRESS

In this section of the survey, we'd like you to think about some of the common issues that district councils work on. For each question, you will be asked about a series of potential activities that you may be involved with. Please note: while similar, each list is slightly different based on the issue discussed. Please be sure to review each list of activities carefully. For these activities, we are interested in the work of your district council as a whole which includes staff and volunteers.

### Community Building/Livability

Some district councils support their neighborhoods through community building and livability activities. These might include an annual fair/event, promoting neighborhood events or developing plans to strengthen community in your district.

- 18 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to support community building.  
(Check all that apply)
- ☐ Sponsored an annual fair/event
  - ☐ Hosted a community meeting specifically to discuss/plan community or livability topics
  - ☐ Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to community building/livability
  - ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) events or activities in your district
  - ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address community building/livability
  - ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses community building/livability strategies
  - ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding community building/livability
  - ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about community building/livability issues
  - ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing community building/livability activities
  - ☐ Financially supported another organization's community building/livability activities
  - ☐ Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's community building/livability activities
- 19 Are there other community building/livability strategies or tactics your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?  
If so, please describe:

### Crime Prevention

All district council's support their neighborhoods through crime prevention activities. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities

- 20 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to support crime prevention.  
(Check all that apply)
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting specifically to address crime prevention
  - ☐ Staff participated in standing police/city meetings to address issues related to crime
  - ☐ Convened a meeting with police and/or city official(s) to discuss issues related to crime prevention
  - ☐ Distributed crime statistics from the police/city
  - ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) events and activities in your district explicitly focused on crime prevention
  - ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) crime prevention strategies or tips
  - ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address crime prevention
  - ☐ Financially supported another organization's crime prevention activities
  - ☐ Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's crime prevention activities
  - ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses crime prevention strategies
  - ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding crime prevention
  - ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about crime prevention issues
  - ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing crime prevention activities
- 21 Are there other crime prevention strategies or tactics your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?  
If so, please describe

### Housing

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with housing issues.

- 22 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address housing issues.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding housing construction (such as a new housing project) in the district
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) to housing in the district
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding housing issues in the district
- ☐ Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to housing
- ☐ Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to housing
- ☐ Distributed information to a targeted area regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit etc.) to housing in the district
- ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about housing projects or changes in the district
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address housing issues
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses housing strategies
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding housing requests
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about housing issues
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing housing issues

- 23 Are there other activities regarding housing your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

#### Land Use

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with land use issues.

- 22 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address land use issues.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific (re)development project in the district
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) in the district
- ☐ Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to land use
- ☐ Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to land use
- ☐ Distributed information to a targeted neighborhood regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit etc.)
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding land use issues and regulations
- ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about development projects or land use changes in the district
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address land use issues
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses land use strategies
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding land use requests
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about land use issues
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing land use issues

- 23 Are there other activities regarding land use your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

#### Economic Development and Local Businesses

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with economic development or local business issues. These might include publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

- 27 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address economic development or local business issues.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting to address economic development strategies
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting to address issues facing existing local businesses in the district
- ☐ Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage support of existing local businesses
- ☐ Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to economic development
- ☐ Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to economic development
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding economic development issues and regulations
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting existing local businesses
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address economic development
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses economic development strategies
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding economic development issues or proposals
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about economic development and/or local businesses
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing economic development issues
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an existing or potential business owner as they interface with city staff/regulations

- 28 Are there other activities regarding economic development or local businesses your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

- 29 Does your district have a local chamber of commerce or neighborhood businesses association(s) that advocate for economic development and local businesses?

If so, what are the name(s) of the organization(s):

### Natural Environment/Sustainability

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with environmental and sustainability issues. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities. *Please note: this section refers to the natural environment and sustainability issues across the district. In the next section we will specifically address parks and public spaces.*

- 30 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address natural environment or sustainability issues. \*

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific environmental issue (garbage collection, pollution, recycling, etc.) in the district
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting focused on natural environment or sustainability issues
- ☐ Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to environmental issues
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding a specific environmental issue (recycling, city regulations, etc.)
- ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about environmental issues or changes in the district
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address natural environment or sustainability issues
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses natural environment or sustainability strategies
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding environmental issues
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about natural environment or sustainability
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing natural environment or sustainability issues
- ☐ Financially supported another organization's environmental activities
- ☐ Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's environmental activities

- 31 Are there other activities regarding the natural environment or sustainability your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

### Parks/Public Space/Placemaking

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with parks, public space and placemaking. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

- 32 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address park and public space issues.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific issue regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking within the district
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking generally
- ☐ Sponsored or cosponsored an event designed to encourage awareness and use of local parks
- ☐ Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to park or public space issues
- ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about local parks or public spaces
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address parks, public spaces or placemaking issues
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses parks and public spaces
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking strategies
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about parks, public space or placemaking strategies
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing issues related to parks or public spaces
- ☐ Financially supported another organization's activities related to parks or public spaces
- ☐ Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's activities related to parks or public spaces

- 33 Are there other activities regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

### Transportation

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with transportation issues. These might include working directly with the city, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

- 34 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address transportation issues.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting to address a specific transportation issue (bus line change, bike lanes, traffic, etc.)
- ☐ Hosted a community meeting to address transportation issues generally (not related to an immediate, specific issue)
- ☐ Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage safety (for pedestrians, bikers, drivers or others)
- ☐ Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to transportation
- ☐ Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to transportation
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding transportation issues and regulations
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting pedestrians and/or bicycles
- ☐ Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting use of mass transit
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address transportation
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses transportation issues
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding transportation issues or proposals
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about transportation issues in the district
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing transportation issues
- ☐ Financially supported another organization's activities related to transportation
- ☐ Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's activities related to transportation

- 35 Are there other activities regarding transportation your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

#### Youth and Family

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with youth and family issues. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

- 36 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address youth and family issues.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding youth and family issues in the district
- ☐ Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to youth and family issues
- ☐ Distributed information/education as requested by local schools regarding youth/school topics
- ☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about youth and family issues in the district
- ☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address youth or family issues
- ☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly identifies the needs of youth and families
- ☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding youth and family issues
- ☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about youth and family issues
- ☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing youth and family issues
- ☐ Financially supported another organization's youth and family activities
- ☐ Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization's youth and family activities

- 37 Are there other activities regarding youth and family activities your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

- 38 Please describe any other unique topics or issues your district council addresses that are not reflected above.

*Describe*

- 39 Is there anything else you'd like to share about your district council?

*Describe*

**THANKS FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!**

## Board Members Focus Group

### Discussion Guide (20-30 min)

Thank you for your time this evening. We are exploring how district councils across the city support civic engagement and go about their work. I will be taking notes and we may use one of your quotes in our final report. I will work with the executive director in case we need to follow up with anyone for more detail.

1. For this first question, I'd like to hear from everyone here. Could you take a moment and introduce yourself and how you got involved in the district council?  
Now for the remainder of these questions we will have more of a discussion, so please feel free to participate as you wish.
2. When you share with your neighbors or friends that you are involved in the district council, what do you tell them? In other words, how do you explain what district council's do?
3. What do you think we **SHOULD BE DOING**?
4. Why do you participate?
5. If this was the universe of activities board are involved with, how do you think your current organization is prioritizing its work?
6. How do you think things **SHOULD** be prioritized.

## District Council Staff Focus Group Discussion Guide

July 14, 2016

### 1. Background

- a. As you know, the City of Saint Paul is evaluating its community engagement needs and the effectiveness of the District Council system to meet those needs. To complement that effort, a group of district councils were awarded an Innovation Project grant to investigate and document 1) how the District Councils currently do community engagement, and how they view their current capacities and value, and 2) how other cities effectively meet their community engagement needs. We wanted to talk with you today specifically around the first topic.

Recently you completed a rather lengthy survey which was designed to help us understand the depth and breadth of the activities that district councils are involved with. This provided some very helpful data around the many different topics that our district councils address throughout the city.

For our conversation today, we want to try to get more detail about some of the information you shared. We want to hear about the context and the stories behind your answers.

Before we begin, here are a few ground rules:

- i. We will be recording today's session and taking notes, however, we will not identify you or quote you directly without asking your permission. We want to be as open and honest as possible during this conversation.
  - ii. So that we are all on the same page, we should consider our conversation in this room confidential. Please do not repeat or share information you hear today outside of this room.
  - iii. Our goal is to learn more about *what* district councils are actually doing. We are not making recommendations or suggesting changes to the city.
  - iv. We have a limited amount of time today. I may need to cut you off simply to stay on schedule. Please do not be upset if I need to move our conversation along.
- b. Any questions before we begin?

### 2. Introductions

- a. I'd like us to begin by introducing ourselves. Please share your name, the geographic area of your district council and something you're really proud that your district council has done.

### 3. Resource Allocation

- a. Now I want to share with you some of the information you submitted in the survey. You might remember a question where we asked you to give your BEST GUESS at what issues dominate the RESOURCES (staff and volunteer time/effort) OF THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION. This is a very difficult question to answer and we would really like to hear more from you about your answers. Take just a minute to reacquaint yourself with the data you submitted. In a minute, I'm going to ask you to describe what, specifically,

you were thinking of when you answered this questions. What specific tasks or projects came to mind as you thought about how much time you spent on these areas. We'll record those on the easel paper. For example, if you said you spent 25% of your time on land use issues . . . what, exactly did you mean?

- i. *Go around the room*
  - ii. *Record tasks/projects on easel paper*
  - iii. *IF large group, break into groups of three and then report out.*
- b. Okay, so now we have a little deeper understanding of what you believe you are spending a lot of your time on. Thank you for that. For the next part of our conversation, I'd like you to continue looking at this same question seven, but just think about the top three areas—the three topics where you spend the most time. Why do you think these are the areas that dominate your work?

*Questions to probe:*

- i. *Are these topics more important or more time consuming?*
- ii. *How well do these topics align to your mission?*
- iii. *Do these topics have a strong impact on strengthening your neighborhood?*

#### **4. Key Topics/Issues**

- a. Thank you so much for that conversation! Next I'd like you to take a look at the answers you gave to another difficult question—specifically question 13 where we asked you to identify the “top 3-5 issues that demanded the attention of your district council?” The question I'd like each of you to address is similar to what we just talked about. Specifically, I'd like to hear why did these issues dominate your work last year? Was this mission-driven? Based on your strategic plan? Reactive based on changes in your neighborhood? Why did these things surface to the top? You may also need to tell us very briefly what the specific issue is so we can understand a bit more about what you are referring to.
- i. *Go around the room*
  - ii. *Record tasks/projects on easel paper*
  - iii. *IF large group, break into groups of three and then report out.*

#### **5. Equity/outreach**

- a. Finally, before going leaving today, We'd like to hear a bit more from each of you about how you are reaching out to the breadth of constituencies that make up your district council. You all serve diverse populations and we'd like to hear what you are doing to help reach out to populations that may be hard to connect with. This could include different ethnic or racial groups, it might include specific constituencies like business owners or a targeted group of residents such as renters. What are you doing to help engage all constituents of your district?

## District Council Executive Director Roundtable

October 13, 2016

District Council: \_\_\_\_\_

1. An example of when you have brought an issue or issues to the city's attention and helped resolved them
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. An example of ways in which you have taken the heat for city issues preemptively
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. An example of a successful partnership with another organization or group
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. One way that you have influenced change / had a lasting impact on your neighborhood or the city
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Other ways you impact relationships and livability
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Ways in which you've leveraged the city's investment through foundation support



# **Community Engagement Systems in Three Cities:** A comparative analysis focused on achieving effective equitable engagement

April 2017

## Acknowledgements

This project was made possible by a grant from the City of Saint Paul's Innovation Fund. The research to prepare this report was conducted by Michael Kuchta (District 10 Como Community Council), Liz Boyer (Macalester-Groveland Community Council), Julie Reiter (Union Park District Council), Samantha Henningson (City of Saint Paul), and Joe Mendyka (City of Saint Paul).

This report was written by Julie Reiter, Liz Boyer and Michael Kuchta, with guidance and support from Eric Molho and Michael Jon Olson (Hamline-Midway Coalition). The Steering Committee for this project included the report authors and Lisa Theis (District 2 Community Council).

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## Executive Summary

This report is an overview of the community engagement systems in Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington. It combines on-the-ground observations with findings based on face-to-face conversations with dozens of city staff members, paid staff members of local neighborhood organizations, elected volunteer members of local neighborhood organizations, and others connected to community engagement efforts in the three cities.

The differences in community engagement in Boston, Seattle, and Portland stand out far more than their similarities; and each city has lessons for Saint Paul's consideration in its efforts to achieve more effective and equitable community engagement. This report focuses on the current state of community engagement in these cities, and highlights the innovative efforts being implemented to complement traditional geographical-based engagement and to engage traditionally under-represented communities.

Portland's system is the most robust—with solid and increasing investment, conscious efforts to maximize both geographic and culturally-based outreach, and a philosophy and structure that favor community-level engagement over initiatives driven from City Hall.

Portland contracts with—and provides substantial city support to—seven independent District Coalitions. Up to a dozen geographically-based neighborhood associations fall under the umbrellas of each coalition. Coalition staff provide training, communications, logistical, technical, and advocacy support for residents and their neighborhood associations.

The city itself has a full-time Neighborhood Program Coordinator who works directly with the coalitions; more than a dozen other employees in a central office dedicated to community engagement; an advisory council with work groups devoted to public involvement; and staff assigned to outreach with immigrants and refugees, youth, residents with disabilities, and other traditionally under-engaged groups. Portland also directly fosters civic leadership development, especially among under-represented communities; provides small grants for grassroots neighborhood projects; and uniquely addresses the needs of East Portland, an area of the city with high concentrations of poverty and people of color.

Seattle, in contrast, is a system in flux. For nearly 30 years, Seattle had a system of 13 district councils that received some funding and direct staff support from the city's Department of Neighborhoods. However, over several years, Seattle withdrew funding, support, and access from its district councils. In 2016, the Mayor cut ties with the councils entirely. The city argued the district councils failed to provide equitable representation

of city residents; many neighborhood activists believe there are other reasons behind the decision, including political payback. In addition, they argue that the city's failure to provide adequate funding, support, and influence made it all but impossible for the councils' volunteer members to achieve that goal.

Seattle has no replacement system in the wings, but is experimenting with project-based engagement tactics outside the traditional council system. These include a civic development training program similar to Portland's; an expanding team of part-time liaisons selected for their multi-lingual and multi-cultural skills; and a pilot program in participatory budgeting.

Boston takes a more laissez-faire approach that has yielded a patchwork of results. The city has never organized a deliberate city-wide system of community engagement, nor does it provide direct financial support to any neighborhood organizations. The result is an uneven system that relies almost entirely on the commitment of dedicated, savvy, civic-minded, but often aging and over-stretched volunteers. Active organizations tend to operate on minimal budgets, a decision they believe gives them integrity and independence, but also hampers their ability to bring in new volunteers or effectively reach under-represented sectors of their communities.

In an effort to bring consistency to engagement efforts around land use decisions, City Hall employs 19 neighborhood liaisons who work out of the Mayor's cabinet-level Office of Neighborhood Services. Each liaison is responsible for a designated geographic area of the city; some also serve culturally-defined populations, such as specific immigrant groups or the city's LGBTB community. Staff continuity is a challenge, however, as burnout and turnover is common. Recently, City Hall instituted additional procedural steps for certain land use issues, intended to provide a minimal opportunity for residents to give input. But many residents see these steps as a way of undermining traditional neighborhood practices.

The City of Boston does fund a network of neighborhood Main Street associations, which play specific roles in developing and maintaining vibrant neighborhood business districts. And philanthropic support has created an intentional coalition of residents, social-service agencies, faith communities, businesses and others to address seven well-defined areas of need in part of the City.

Although the differences between the three cities are stark, common themes emerged. The successes—and failures—of community engagement efforts can be attributed to the following ten factors.

### **Effective, equitable community engagement:**

1. Is well-resourced with consistently reliable funding.
2. Includes intentional cooperation and communication among neighborhood organizations and city departments.
3. Combines geographic engagement with culturally-based outreach that crosses geographic lines to reach traditionally under-represented populations.
4. Combines project-based engagement from city departments with grassroots, resident-based engagement supported by independent neighborhood organizations.
5. Seeks partnerships among city staff, neighborhood organizations and institutions, residents and businesses, foundations, and others.
6. Supports long-term community building in neighborhoods, not simply reaction to one-time projects driven by city departments.
7. Is deliberate, intentional, legitimate, and visibly credible, not just a required box on a checklist.
8. Looks for opportunities to innovate.
9. Makes expectations and realities clear to all involved, early in the process.
10. Honors the commitment, expertise, and sincerity of resident volunteers.

### **Introduction**

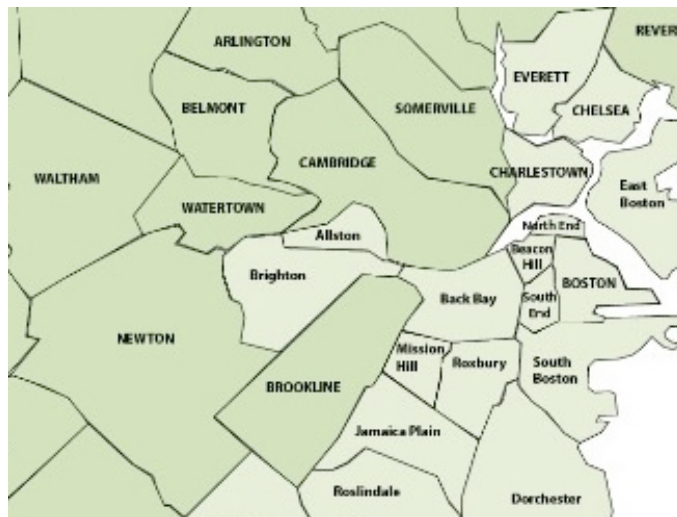
This report is intended as an overview of the community engagement systems in Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington. It combines on-the-ground observations with findings based on face-to-face conversations with dozens of city staff members, paid staff members of local neighborhood organizations, elected volunteer members of local neighborhood organizations, and others connected to community engagement efforts in the three cities.

This report focuses on the current state of community engagement in these cities; how the cities got to where they are today; the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the approaches the cities are taking; and some of the innovative efforts being used in cities to complement traditional geographical-based engagement or engage traditionally under-represented communities. It is our hope as authors that those involved directly in community engagement in Saint Paul can learn from the successes and failures in other cities as we strive to make our District Council system as vital and representative as possible.

## Boston, Massachusetts

### General Overview

The City of Boston proper has 23 officially-designated neighborhoods, including some of the oldest urban neighborhoods in the country. But much of the area commonly thought of as Boston—including communities such as Brookline, Cambridge, and Newton (shaded darker on the map below)—actually comprises distinct municipalities with separate processes.



*City of Boston neighborhoods and surrounding municipalities*

Like its cobblestone-laden historic districts, Boston's community engagement practices have developed in an uneven patchwork over time. They are fragmented, with occasional but obvious gaps. The process has ebbed and flowed as various approaches were created (or arose) to meet the needs and goals of residents, nonprofits, and City Hall.

Some neighborhoods are served by neighborhood *councils* that were created by the city decades ago, but now operate independently. The geographic areas of these councils often contain multiple, smaller, hyper-local neighborhood *associations*. The majority of these associations are very small; however, a few are extremely well-funded and organized. In practice, they can be even more robust than the neighborhood council. On the other hand, there are areas of the city that are completely unrepresented by a formal neighborhood group altogether.

Much of the community engagement driven by the city itself is around land use—specifically zoning and development. City Hall carries out direct



project-based engagement through city staff designated as neighborhood *liaisons*, who are appointed by the mayor.

Mixed into this patchwork are active collaborations of social service organizations, foundations, faith communities, and business associations—some of which receive city financial support. Even institutions, especially the area’s most prominent colleges and universities, sometimes serve community engagement and organizing needs throughout the city.

This complex, layered, neighborhood-driven system has achieved countless examples of positive, citizen-led change in Boston’s individual neighborhoods. But it has not achieved equitable opportunities for engagement across the City, nor does it strive to. Recently, however, the mayor has spearheaded deliberate efforts to establish a more widespread, minimum level of community engagement, at least on a narrow range of issues. But given the city’s long history of a detached approach, change will be slow and hard-earned.

## Current Community Engagement Practices

### Office of Neighborhood Services

The city-led community engagement work extends from the Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS), a cabinet-level department under the Mayor.

The most prominent roles in the department are performed by the 19 full-time staff members who serve as neighborhood liaisons (formerly known as neighborhood coordinators). Each of the city’s 23 officially-designated neighborhoods is assigned a liaison. In addition to their geographic neighborhood assignments, some liaisons also serve cultural communities, including specific immigrant groups and Boston’s LGTB community.

Neighborhood liaisons perform a wide range of activities. They describe themselves as the Mayor’s “eyes and ears” in the neighborhood, as “providing direct access” to the Mayor’s office, or as “providing pathways into City Hall that have never been there before.” The Mayor tells city staffers that if a neighborhood liaison calls, “think of it as if I am calling.”

Neighborhood liaisons have weekly phone calls and monthly one-on-one meetings with the Mayor, and the positions often serve as stepping stones to other city jobs. Although liaisons enjoy a high degree of autonomy and access, burnout and turnover is high in these positions. A primary reason appears to be the large range of duties assigned to these positions. Attending a couple dozen night meetings a month, plus community festivals, is routine. As one liaison described it: “I don’t have a life. I’m on call all the time. We are paid to work 9-5 here, but my day starts at 5 p.m.”

Additionally, the liaisons typically interact with neighborhood organizations that are run by volunteers with day jobs, which brings its own set of challenges. “We’re dealing entirely with volunteers,” one liaison remarked. “I try to be very respectful of their time, and meet them when it’s convenient for them. We have kitchen-table meet-ups if we need to. I hold their time and commitment to our city and their neighborhood sacred.” The liaisons also say they consciously avoid interfering in neighborhood council governance or elections. On city issues, one liaison said, “I try to have a dialogue rather than a top-down agenda.”

Liaisons are the point people for any city activity in their assigned neighborhoods, including:

- **Land use applications:** Liaisons manage the entire process for applications of zoning relief that require Zoning Board of Appeals approval. (These are similar to variances in Saint Paul.) The liaison ensures that the application is complete, identifies any impacted parties, conducts an “abutter’s meeting,” and coordinates the public review process at a neighborhood council or association, if one exists for the area. The liaison makes a recommendation on behalf of the Mayor and delivers this recommendation in person at the hearing.
- **Engagement aspects of projects from city departments:** When other departments have projects located in a liaison’s neighborhood, such as road reconstruction, the liaison will assist with the community engagement aspects of the project.
- **Emergency response services:** Liaisons are on call 24 hours a day, and must respond immediately to emergencies in their neighborhoods, such as house fires. Liaisons coordinate communications with other city agencies and departments to ensure that victims are safe and stabilized.
- **Dispute resolution:** Liaisons are also called upon to mitigate disputes between neighbors or small groups of residents including noise complaints, house parties and similar conflict issues.

The heavy list of responsibilities and high turnover makes continuity and systemic engagement a difficult task for most neighborhood liaisons to achieve. Though they can provide a reliable, direct connection to City Hall, their role is clearly one of communication, reporting, and crisis management rather than sustained equitable engagement.

The Office of Neighborhood Services' annual budget of about \$2.7 million supports a variety of activities beyond direct engagement through the neighborhood liaisons, including:

- **A 24-hour call center:** The 311 service provides information to residents on non-emergency city services. The center manages a 24-hour hotline and online request system for services such as pothole repair, street cleaning, missed trash pick-ups, and streetlight outages.
- **City Hall To Go:** This recent initiative is designed to improve the experience of interacting with City Hall. Using a “food-truck inspired mobile truck,” City staffers provide services to residents in neighborhoods on a daily rotating schedule. Services include parking permits, dog licenses, and a notary.
- **Neighborhood Hub:** To expand the City Hall To Go initiative, ONS also offers information and services in community recreation centers during winter months. In addition to providing neighborhood access for City services, this initiative also seeks to increase use of these centers.

### Neighborhood Organizations

In the mid-1980s, Mayor Raymond Flynn officially created 10 neighborhood councils to serve as “advisory bodies” to the city. All still exist, but their core characteristics have changed significantly over the past three decades.

Initially, the Mayor appointed members to these councils and the city provided staff to support them. Today, nearly all have become independent organizations, some with 501(c)(3) non-profit status, which determine their own memberships and elect their own boards. They do collaborate—often closely—with the city’s assigned neighborhood liaisons. But the city does not provide any form of staffing, technical assistance, or importantly, financial support. Instead, most neighborhood organizations, both councils and self-styled associations, are volunteer led.

Though current neighborhood councils technically have their formal roots in a mayoral initiative, many of these neighborhoods (most of which are traditionally working-class) have much longer histories of neighborhood activism. This activism often was (and often still is) in response to large transportation projects or large-scale development pressure that could (and sometimes did) substantially alter neighborhood character or function. Other active and well-organized neighborhood organizations were spurred into existence to protect or sustain what have become

historic districts. Three issues—development, transportation and preservation—continue to drive much neighborhood activism.

There is actually no consolidated list of reliably active neighborhood councils in Boston, and how many there are depends partially on how you define them. The number of active neighborhood associations is even less clear. By one count, the neighborhood of Dorchester, for example, contains not only the Codman Square neighborhood council, but more than 30 neighborhood associations, plus business associations, friends of parks organizations, and other civic groups within its borders. Some of these groups exist mainly to organize specific event(s) throughout the year, while others have ongoing meetings or programs.

### **The Volunteer Dilemma**

The majority of Boston's neighborhood organizations have a very minimal budget, and seem to prefer it that way. "We've never received money from the city or from grants," one longtime board member of a council says. "It would be nice to get staff help, but it also means we are not beholden." "We won't accept donations," says an officer of another council. "Money doesn't influence people's opinions because there is no money."

Although members prize the perceived independence it provides, this lack of resources leaves neighborhood organizations dependent on the individual dedication, time, connections, and skills of volunteers. "The most active neighborhood councils rely on volunteers and their resources," one board member said.

On one hand, this level of reliance on dedicated volunteers means organizations can develop an impressive level of localized expertise. "A lot of our members have been around a while. They're very savvy; they're not afraid to give it right back," one council board member said of its work with developers. Another organization member noted that "the board is very experienced. You typically have to work your way up through our committees to get on the board." Indeed, volunteer-led committees tend to be very knowledgeable and active components of these local organizations; one council typically attracts 30-40 residents to its monthly meeting, which typically acts as a de facto zoning committee meeting. Some able volunteers have applied their experience and knowledge to serve as official representatives to the city's architectural and licensing commissions, which have formal regulatory authority, and to city-sponsored community advisory committees.

However, neighborhood volunteers point out the challenges of keeping up with what can be a crush of emails and notifications that must be read, researched, and shared—especially on more complicated zoning matters.

In high-demand neighborhoods, there can be a dozen land-use applications per month that the neighborhood organization must review, which is a heavy administrative burden on a volunteer. “It’s a lot of work,” one longtime council leader says. “The administrative work—no one has time to do it. I put in 20-30 hours a month. I go to the supermarket, and people have complaints. It’s hard to escape.”

The high expectations and heavy workload put on community volunteers means that those with discretionary time and individual capacities are more likely to serve. A few council representatives point out that their councils are fortunate to have professionals in key roles who have the flexibility to handle some day-to-day logistics of council business as part of what they do for a living—or even as pro bono work through their employers.

The fact that councils often are run by volunteers who have discretionary time and professional capacities related to the work—lawyers, architects, engineers, and the like—also can mean councils are not necessarily representative of their neighborhoods as a whole. One neighborhood council, for example, was described “as primarily white men over 60.”

Veteran volunteers also say it seems to be getting harder to find residents who are able—or willing—to commit to regular attendance and duties. “Younger people are not stepping forward,” one council board member says. “They engage online, but they don’t turn out.” While one council member reported some success in engaging new residents, she acknowledges that that also takes a lot of volunteer resources: “People need to understand it just doesn’t get done on its own. So we try to nurture people to play a bigger role.”

More commonly, the lack of staff—combined with a few volunteers doing too much work—makes it an uphill battle to carry out the kinds of ongoing neighborhood outreach that could effectively get more residents involved. “The council has, at times, had an outreach committee to do community building,” said one board member. “But it never got much off the ground.”

Despite these challenges, the general sentiment among neighborhood organizations is that independence in decision-making is best demonstrated by financial independence—even if it results in a lack of capacity to carry out deeper community building within neighborhoods, and results in uneven community engagement across the city.

In conversations about their work, neighborhood organization representatives rarely mention the historic and intrinsic inequities in community engagement practices among neighborhoods. “I suppose that the current system isn’t always fair,” one neighborhood council board

member said when pressed, “but it’s up to other neighborhoods to do what we do, if they want to.” The lack of a deliberate, city-wide strategy to achieve equitable community engagement over time has certainly influenced this common viewpoint.

In City Hall, Mayor Martin Walsh has started what he calls the “civic academy.” A series of citywide summits, organized by theme, are intended (in part) to make more residents more aware of volunteer opportunities. The Mayor’s office says it is also committed to strengthening its online and social media infrastructure as a means of outreach. Whatever their long-term potential, neither seems to have made an immediate impact on neighborhood councils.

Nonetheless, recent initiatives by City Hall suggest that unequal access does receive some consideration, though clearly not at the same public level as in other cities. The fact that every area of the city is assigned a neighborhood liaison, that some liaisons are required to connect with cultural constituencies as well as geographic constituencies, and that liaisons are required to oversee initiatives such as abutters meetings (see below) shows that Boston is making some attempts to provide access to residents who do not connect with their local neighborhood organization—or do not have a functioning neighborhood organization to begin with.

### **City Efforts: Engagement on Land Use Decisions**

#### **Zoning**

The primary official role of Boston’s neighborhood councils, where they exist, is to make advisory recommendations to the city’s Zoning Board of Appeals. This is especially true of the smaller neighborhood associations, which sometimes serve no other visible role beyond weighing in on zoning matters. These recommendations can be on anything from large-scale development projects to individual property owners who need a zoning variance.

The city’s designated neighborhood liaisons consider it one of their key responsibilities to keep councils and associations informed of zoning issues in their jurisdictions, and council volunteers uniformly seem to take that responsibility seriously. Some council zoning committees meet twice a month, or more often if necessary, to meet deadlines. “We don’t let the City tell us what to do. If something is reasonable, we try to get it done,” one council officer says. “If something is unreasonable, there will be a lot of heat.”

A few neighborhood councils (including Jamaica Plain, Bay Village, Charlestown, and Roxbury) actually are named in city zoning codes as

advising the city on zoning matters. Despite this, a state court ruling in 2013 said neighborhood councils are not government bodies that have the ability to stop projects or impose modifications. Councils have a “right” to review projects, the court said, but not a “duty” to review them.

Nonetheless, many organization members feel effective in their land use work. One council officer said: “We are meant to be part of the process. They feel it is essential to listen to us on every major issue.” The result, he said, is “better projects, because developers must go through a local process and must address issues.” Usually, he said, there is a version of a development proposal that a neighborhood can get behind.

*“Most of the time, we can achieve consensus on difficult decisions. Whatever the process, the goal is to build consensus on the local level. We try to do the hard work elected officials would prefer not to do.”*

Despite widespread recognition of the role neighborhood organizations play in land use decisions, longtime neighborhood volunteers see encroachment of this role as the city establishes additional processes, such as Abutters Meetings and Impact Advisory Groups. Some fear these are becoming top-down alternatives to working through the long-standing, grassroots neighborhood process. From the city’s perspective, however, they are an attempt to bring uniformity and equality to community engagement throughout the city.

### Abutters Meetings

Mayor Martin Walsh, elected in 2014, is visibly working to create a more consistent process for community engagement around certain issues throughout the city. One of his first changes, enacted through ONS, creates a new requirement for property owners seeking zoning relief: the Abutters Meeting. As one neighborhood council board member described it: “This is literally a sidewalk meeting for property owners within a 300-foot radius of a proposed development or zoning action.”

The city’s neighborhood liaisons are responsible for organizing and convening the meetings. The meetings usually take place on weekday evenings on the sidewalk in front of the property in question. The neighborhood liaison creates a flier describing the proposed action in easily understandable language, and the city requires the applicant or developer to hand-deliver the flier to residents within 300 or 500 feet (depending on any historic district designation). The number of attendees at this city-hosted meeting can vary widely, depending on the type of project and its location.

According to one neighborhood liaison, these meetings are “great, because they take away the excuse of having to go to City Hall to participate.”



Indeed, holding these meetings on the sidewalk can be a powerful tool. Often, people walking by will stop to hear about the project who likely would not have gone out of their way to attend a community meeting held at a central location. Since an Abutters Meeting centers only on one specific zoning application, it is brief and focused.

Neighborhood liaisons say the Abutters Meetings provide a consistent opportunity to provide input for those adjacent to (abutting) a proposed project. If there is an active neighborhood organization, they likely provided this function in the past. But because there is not complete coverage across the City, residents without a council or association did not always have the same opportunity for neighborhood input. With the Abutters Meetings, Mayor Walsh is working to ensure that all voices are heard, one liaison said. “We want to hear from the neighborhood groups about a project, too, but we have to be sure that abutters can provide input if there isn’t an association to convene a separate meeting.”

Long-standing neighborhood organizations are skeptical of the new requirement. At best, they say, it’s a parallel process—the Abutters Meeting doesn’t preclude or replace a meeting of the council or association zoning committee. Others say it actually undercuts the traditional neighborhood process, and doesn’t give the entire community a chance to weigh in. “Some people use the Abutters Meeting to avoid the community meeting. I think it’s better when everyone has to be at the same meeting,” one neighborhood volunteer says.

### IAG (Impact Advisory Groups)

Another recent innovation in Boston is the use of IAGs—Impact Advisory Groups. These groups, typically used for major development projects, are open only to members appointed by the Mayor and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Like the abutters meetings, IAGs are intended to provide a uniform process for community engagement around large-scale projects. In some parts of Boston—most notably, where high-functioning neighborhood councils effectively filled this role in the past—community members are skeptical.

Specifically, neighborhood representatives are concerned that IAGs will provide a way for developers to circumvent meaningful engagement with existing neighborhood organizations. To a large degree, IAGs eliminate the ability for neighborhood organizations to negotiate directly with large developers and institutions for contributions to offset the impact of the project on the affected neighborhood.

“Neighborhoods used to negotiate their own deals and get money directly from developers,” said one neighborhood council official. “If it’s going to create an impact, how can you offset that?” Given the exceedingly high



development pressure currently present throughout Boston, developers seem willing to comply with requests for neighborhood benefits.

In some cases, the benefit negotiated by the community had nothing to do with the direct impact of the project, but provided a smaller tangible benefit, such as new uniforms for local youth sports teams or a new scoreboard for a playing field.

But in Charlestown, savvy neighborhood council members negotiated a \$1.2 million mitigation fund in the 1990s with the developers of a large construction project. Using the fund, they established a decade-long grant program under council oversight. Extensive criteria and a rigorous review process accompanied funds granted through the program. According to one longtime Charlestown community member, running the grant program “was a very fulfilling process as a Board member, because it showed you all the great work that everyone was doing. We invested in community groups and taught grant-writing skills.” According to him, the IAG process would make negotiating such a neighborhood-focused fund very unlikely today.

Similarly, the Allston Civic Association successfully negotiated construction of a new community center when a nearby university built a medical research center. “Institutions can only expand into the residential or commercial parts of neighborhood, which requires going to city for change in zoning” said an official with the Allston Civic Association. “This provides an opportunity for tradeoffs—what does the neighborhood need in return? Political pressure is our biggest weapon,” he explained. “Now, the IAGs affect that.”

City officials point out, however, that while some deserving neighborhoods accrued great benefits as a result of the traditional neighborhood negotiation process, the opportunity to leverage these benefits as the result of development is not equitable across the city. They stress that neighborhood councils and associations, if they exist, generally are invited to participate in an IAG process. If there is *not* a neighborhood council in place, however, the IAG will ensure that community benefits are negotiated, they say.

A board member from another neighborhood organization said IAGs, because they focus on an individual project, often don’t factor in the cumulative, big-picture impact of multiple projects. “That’s what neighborhood associations can do.” “We represent residents’ interests,” another neighborhood official said.

*“We want to be seen as a partner with city, but we have a difficult relationship with city.”*

The city-led Abutters Meetings and IAGs are two vivid examples of the efforts of City Hall to achieve more uniform community engagement opportunities, at least on certain issues, across the city in a haphazardly-created, inequitable system. Unfortunately, these efforts seem to be exacerbating the long-running tensions between the oversight of City Hall and the influence of individual neighborhoods, and their effectiveness is yet to be determined.

## Alternative and Emerging Models of Community Engagement

In contrast to the volunteer-focused system that dominates in Boston's neighborhoods, some organizations are trying different models to provide more resources—including staff—to serve more neighborhood needs. These include a few well-funded neighborhood associations; Mattapan United, a foundation-driven umbrella organization that operates in a neighborhood that lacks a neighborhood council; and the city's 20 Main Street organizations, which focus on neighborhood business vitality.

### Well-funded Neighborhood Associations

Neighborhood associations, whose histories are completely separate from the mayor's 1980s initiative, tend to be small and limited in scope. A few, however, are highly sophisticated. The Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay and the Beacon Hill Association are prominent examples of organizations in Boston that deliberately choose not to operate on a financial shoestring or exclusively on the goodwill of resident volunteers.

These associations operate in vibrant, picturesque historical districts and oversee areas that are much smaller geographically than a typical neighborhood council. But these associations have developed solid fundraising strategies—including membership dues and gala events—and therefore are better-resourced than most neighborhood councils elsewhere in Boston.

Having resources sets these two associations apart in notable ways from typical Boston neighborhood organizations. Both have offices. Both have paid staff. Both provide substantial administrative support to their boards and committees. Both have communication efforts that go far beyond email lists, a basic website, or an occasional article in a neighborhood newspaper or blog. And both are much more active in deeper community-building than organizations in other parts of the city.

Back Bay organizes nearly two dozen "friends and neighbors" groups that get residents together for topical activities such as book clubs, bridge nights, or wine-tasting. It also holds quarterly forums on a current issue of prominence. Beacon Hill organizes more than a half-dozen events a year,

including forums, lectures, a neighborhood block party, fund-raising social events, clean-up days—and a beloved, elaborate decorating tradition for the Christmas season.

Despite their relative advantages, these organizations wrestle with some of the same issues their peer organizations face—affordable housing among them. “The neighborhood is losing its middle class,” one Back Bay officer says. “There’s lots of international money coming into the neighborhood,” the officer says. “They’re buying up old brownstones, and converting them from multi-unit condos into single-family residences.”

It is the upscale status of these neighborhoods, however, that enables them to effectively leverage the wealth, skills, and resources of their residents. Both of them charge significant dues and solicit donations, with benefactor levels up to \$5000. Back Bay holds successful fundraisers (most notably Taste of Back Bay) that double its revenue. Beacon Hill owns a former police station (which it purchased for \$1) and rents out space to other nonprofits. On top of that, there are many nonfinancial assets to draw upon in these communities: “We have lots of professionals in neighborhood,” one member says. “Lots of talent.”

While this model works well for these particular neighborhoods, it is not scalable city-wide, and results in obvious inequities across the city.

### **Mattapan United**

Mattapan is a Boston neighborhood that is 95% non-white, including large immigrant populations from the Caribbean. It has no neighborhood council. Instead, it has Mattapan United, a convening organization that serves an even broader role for carrying out long-range goals and specific projects in the neighborhood.

Mattapan United serves as a “circle around Mattapan—it keeps everything attached,” a staff member says.

Mattapan United was formed in 2011 after a community development corporation ceased operation. It connects and coordinates a coalition of residents, businesses, faith communities, elected officials, educational institutions, social service agencies, and the half-dozen or so neighborhood associations in Mattapan.

**Mattapan United** is a joint initiative of:

- Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), a poverty-focused, nonprofit social service agency
- Social Capital Inc., a nonprofit based in the Boston area
- “Resilient Community / Resilient Families” program of the Boston Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)

LISC is affiliated with a New York-based funder with roots in the Ford Foundation. The Boston funders committed for a minimum of five years, and Mattapan is one of the three Boston neighborhoods in which LISC’s resiliency initiative is active.

Mattapan United has seven well-defined areas of focus: community fabric, business development, affordable housing, public safety, green spaces, jobs, and health. Action Groups oversee each of these focus areas.

Day-to-day operations run out of the offices of Action for Boston Community Development, a nonprofit. Governance is handled by a Steering Committee of 13-15 representatives of the neighborhood, local organizations, and institutions. Steering Committee members are drawn from the Community Assembly, which is open to the entire community, but is typically attended by 20 core activists, staff say. As part of its role as a neighborhood hub, Mattapan United maintains a community website, publishes a weekly email newsletter, and even live-streams the monthly Community Assembly meeting on Facebook.

Mattapan United works on a model that focuses on community assets, not community deficits, staff say. Though Mattapan typically is seen as under-resourced, the neighborhood has the highest concentration of faith communities in Boston, and a higher percentage of home ownership than the city as a whole. Like in many traditionally working-class neighborhoods, however, gentrification is a growing threat to affordable housing. The community also needs economic investment and stronger transportation connections, staff say, as more than 90 percent of residents work elsewhere in metropolitan area.

The neighborhood associations in Mattapan are among the community groups Mattapan United tries to keep in its network. Mattapan United staff or other representatives typically attend neighborhood association meetings, and some neighborhood association representatives are part of the monthly Community Assembly, though rarely part of the Steering Committee, staff say. The small associations “are very engaged in their areas of interest,” Mattapan United staff say, “but siloed.” Mattapan United also works regularly with the two Neighborhood Liaisons assigned to Mattapan: one is the geographic representative, the other is City Hall’s liaison to the Haitian community.

In short, Mattapan United is an example of an organization that is effectively engaging—and serving the interests of—its diverse and historically underrepresented community through nonprofit and foundation resources.

### **Boston Main Streets**

The City itself supports its neighborhoods in one other, very visible way: 20 neighborhood Main Street associations funded primarily through the City’s Department of Neighborhood Development. Main Street associations focus exclusively on the vitality of neighborhood commercial

districts. Combined, the associations oversee 4,000 neighborhood businesses. Not every neighborhood business district has a Main Street association, but they are scattered throughout the city, including in some lower-income, minority and immigrant communities.

Although each association is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, they started through a competitive process launched by the City Council in 1995. Each association currently receives \$75,000 per year from the City and gets additional financial and technical support from the Boston Main Streets Foundation. It also is not uncommon for associations to receive research support from MIT and other local colleges and universities. The Boston Main Streets program is affiliated with Main Streets America, a national program through the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center.

Each Main Street faces challenges that are distinct to its neighborhood, but they all focus on the same core functions: organizing local businesses, promoting local business (including design support and other branding tactics), and ensuring that the business district has a stable economic structure. Associations research and track such data as business and property ownership, rents, property values, transportation, workforce, and the mix of chains and local businesses. "We're looking for a healthy mix," one Main Street staff member said.

If a business district lacks the desired mix, the association actively seeks to adjust it. "It means attracting what we need, including anchor businesses that attract customers from outside the neighborhood," the staff member said. "People see us as business support, which is crucial. We do provide support and link businesses to resources. But I like to call us a business and nonprofit development organization. We are a mini urban-planning organization."

By design, Main Street associations have one paid staff member and are run by volunteer boards drawn from their neighborhoods. "Our board self-recruits among institutions, business owners, nonprofits, and residents," the staff member said. Boards deliberately seek a range and balance of skills among members, including fundraising, finance, networking, and governance.

Main Street associations also have clear limits that forbid them from advocating directly on behalf of individual businesses on licensing, permitting, or zoning issues before a neighborhood council or the Zoning Board of Appeals. "Instead, we guide businesses through the process," the staff member says.

How well and how closely Main Street associations work with other community organizations—including neighborhood associations and local chambers of commerce—seems to depend on the neighborhood. In some neighborhoods, “there is a network of overlapping volunteers and institutional support,” one neighborhood council board member said. In other neighborhoods, it’s more of a cordial but arms-length relationship, with minimal if any overlap in active leadership.

Nonetheless, Main Street associations are a way that Boston invests—somewhat equitably—in neighborhoods. They are effective at engaging and advocating for local businesses because of their well-defined roles within the city’s structure and stable financial support.

## Conclusion

Boston, even more so than Saint Paul, is a collection of neighborhoods. The Townies in Charlestown have a neighborhood pride rivaled only by the pride felt in every other neighborhood in Boston. In the not-too-distant past, community engagement was achieved independently and uniquely in each neighborhood—where volunteer capacity existed. However, development pressure, increasing diversity, and changing demographics are challenging the City’s traditional neighborhood-based style of engagement and activism.

The current administration in Boston’s City Hall is working to augment the historically-established patchwork system through incremental improvements and additions to required processes. However, at times these efforts seem to duplicate resources and exacerbate tense relationships between residents and city decision makers. Although there are myriad examples of inspiring community volunteerism and civic duty throughout the City of Boston, there appears to be increasing recognition that the current system of community engagement does not achieve equitable results across the City in the way that a sustained, deliberate, adequately resourced strategy might.

# Seattle, Washington

## General Overview

The City of Seattle was divided into 13 districts in 1988. Each geographic district has a district council, which is essentially a volunteer board comprised of representatives from community councils, nonprofit organizations, and business groups. Originally created to guide neighborhood planning processes, district councils serve to promote and support citizen participation at the neighborhood level.

In Seattle's system, city staff members called Neighborhood District Coordinators (NDCs) provided support for each district council board. Originally, each district council received its own full-time NDC, who worked out of the city's Department of Neighborhoods and in a local neighborhood service center in each district. The city also provided each district council with funding to hold community events and conduct resident outreach.

Working on behalf of the district councils, Neighborhood District Coordinators:

- organized meetings
- connected residents with resources
- oversaw communications efforts
- advised on local issues
- kept communities apprised of city projects
- informed on grant opportunities
- supported community-building events
- nurtured new community groups
- assisted in advocacy
- managed organizational logistics

Many district councils say the NDCs were highly valued in their communities and by their organizations. As city staff, they were very knowledgeable about city processes, adept at "navigating bureaucracy," and well-connected to city experts and policy makers. Often living within the local communities they served, they cultivated local relationships and were "integral in making connections ... pushing conversations ... and meeting the needs of residents and businesses." Additionally, they coordinated the work of community councils and other community groups, aligning them on issues and allowing them to share efforts and resources.

One of the primary roles the district councils played in the city was to review and rank project proposals submitted to the Neighborhood Matching Fund. This process allocated over \$3 million annually to community-initiated projects such as park improvements, public art, community gardens, cultural festivals, and community organizing, through both larger grants (up to \$100,000 each) and "Small Sparks" funds (up to \$1,000 each). The Funds are matched by community funds, other

resources, and volunteer time. Traditionally, 60-70 percent of the projects were funded. The process was a key way to build community, allow for self-determination within neighborhoods, and empower the district councils. Volunteers say the “process was extraordinary” and that serving on the citywide project review team was one of the “best experiences of my life.”

Each district council was represented on the City Neighborhood Council, a citizen-led advisory group that met monthly. As originally sanctioned, its purpose was to provide city-wide coordination for the Neighborhood Matching Fund process, Neighborhood Budget Prioritization, and Neighborhood Planning programs. As a collection of community council representatives, each district council board provided an efficient way for city staff to reach out to a broad spectrum of the community on projects and issues.

### Seattle's Recent Shift in Community Engagement

In July 2016, Mayor Ed Murray signed an Executive Order terminating the city's official ties to each of the 13 district councils, citing a “significant need for more equitable and accessible community engagement processes.” The move to disempower the district councils was seemingly grounded in a 2009 report by the City Auditor that advocated for a “renewal” of the system, and a 2013 demographic snapshot of district council attendees that showed they tend to be over-40 Caucasian homeowners.

A high-level Department of Neighborhoods staff member acknowledged that the district councils engaged committed volunteers, but said they were the same 200 or 300 people—“nothing beyond that”—doing “little outreach to renters and underserved communities.” He characterized Seattle's district councils as “advocacy groups for single family homeowners,” and expressed frustration over suspicion and mistrust of plans for city-wide growth and density he observed within the district councils. He also said it was difficult to find people to be involved in the City Neighborhood Council, and that many community councils were “exclusive” and difficult to access for outsiders.

The Executive Order did not “disband” the district councils. Instead, according to the Mayor's Office, they are allowed to “continue to participate/advocate/inform as they do now even if not formally supported by the city.” The Order redirected resources that previously supported the district councils to city departments, directed those departments to develop community involvement plans, and required the



Department of Neighborhoods to come up with a new, more equitable citywide framework and strategic plan for community engagement.

At this point, there is no new system to replace the old, and there are few action steps anyone could point to that the city is using to build a more equitable system citywide. City staff spoke generally about how the Department of Neighborhood will hold “convenings” where different groups will meet to listen to each other; think beyond geography when addressing housing, transportation and other issues; and provide tools and resources for all groups—“tools that will be for everyone.” (Seattle has been investing in some interesting project-based tactics intended to engage traditionally under-represented communities, as discussed below.)

The city’s own Frequently Asked Questions on the Executive Order asks, “How will equity be achieved?”

The given answer:  
“When everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to achieve their full potential, and improve their quality of life. A focus on equity in any community involvement process is essential to improve outcomes for all communities, especially under-represented and under-served communities.”

The shift mandates that the Department of Neighborhoods is charged with advising on engagement for all city departments and their projects, and essentially will manage all of the city’s engagement needs—identifying when and why a community meeting is necessary, what types of questions will be used to engage community, and coordinating among departments to get the engagement done. Accordingly, the city will continue to employ Neighborhood District Coordinators, but they will become citywide planning and development specialists, with specific topical areas of focus, working on outreach and capacity-building in communities impacted by city projects.

To help the city with this task, the Department of Neighborhoods has a Policy Advisor whose role is to maintain a database for city staff that tracks hot topics, current issues, and useful contacts in each community. She will also manage an internal calendar that captures outreach activities initiated by city departments throughout the city, in an effort to better coordinate them.

The subsequently approved budget also terminates the city’s relationship with the City Neighborhood Council (which was representative of the district councils) and instead created a Community Involvement Commission. Half of these members will be appointed by the Mayor and half appointed by City Council. This new Commission was created to help

“advise and guide the city departments to assess, improve, and develop authentic and thorough outreach and engagement to all residents.” The city plans to convene the Commission four times a year. The development of the Commission is still in progress.

Perhaps in response to the changes, City Council members recently received an increase in their office budgets (with an average of four and half FTE positions per Council office). Many of the Council Members have chosen to hire someone focused on community outreach and communications. Also, the mayor hosts “Find It, Fix It” walks in the communities to identify small-scale neighborhood needs.

### Factors that Led to the Shift

Extensive interviewing with both city staff and district council representatives identified factors that led to the disempowerment and defunding of Seattle’s district council system.

#### The Councils were Under-Resourced

One primary theme that emerged was that the district councils had been severely under-resourced. Over the course of numerous years, the city repeatedly decreased the amount of funding it provided until, in 2016, each organization was allotted only \$550 per year. “It’s impossible to do formal engagement on \$550 a year,” one district council representative said. Numerous district council members stressed they had been “asking for support from the city for years” to be able to complete outreach and engagement, but such requests fell on deaf ears. Even a high-level Department of Neighborhoods manager acknowledged that the city “could give them money and they could do more outreach.” However, he admitted a lack of understanding as to exactly what they would do with funding. He cited an example of some district councils in Los Angeles that do not even use the \$40,000 a year they are allotted, stating that “when they are not using the money, that seems like a problem right there.”

The lack of funds severely limited the Councils’ ability to do their work. Significantly, many people argued that **“the lack of resources itself is what led to inequities.”** For example, one District described committed volunteer efforts to reach out to an immigrant community, but with no resources for interpretation or translation, they were not effective. In another instance, a district council spent \$900 on outreach and meeting materials related to project planning for an urban village. The funds came from one of their member organizations—a business association with the resources to provide such funds. Along with dedicated volunteers who leafleted and organized the meeting, these resources allowed the district council to effectively reach previously unengaged renters who would be

affected by the project. Other district councils without independent resources did not have the capacity to conduct such outreach.

Similarly, over the course of several years, the primary staff resource for the district councils eroded. While the city originally provided each Council with its own Neighborhood District Coordinator, many of those positions were eliminated, requiring NDCs to split their time between multiple councils and giving them less time and “less ability to engage authentically” with residents. Moreover, they were now required to work within neighborhoods they were not familiar with, which reduced their “integral value in connecting people” within the communities. District council representatives expressed frustration about changing and sharing NDCs—not knowing “who’s our person” and who they can turn to for support.

Equally as significant was the shift in NDC responsibilities that many district councils observed. Six years ago, the NDCs experienced a noticeable change in their roles—away from direct support to the neighborhoods, with more responsibilities back in their city offices. Many Council representative characterized the shift more harshly, observing that over time the NDCs “became a tool of the Mayor’s office,” are now “in the Mayor’s lap,” and serve as a “mouthpiece for the city, convincing the neighborhood to fall in line with the city.” One Council volunteer lamented the change in the NDCs’ role from “assisting and empowering the community ... to serving downtown and getting the Mayor’s message out.” There was also great inconsistency between the approaches and performance of each NDC, with some “going the extra mile” within their communities, while others were “city bureaucrats, sitting in their offices.”

Like the reduction of funds, the erosion of staff resources also appears to have exacerbated inequities. NDCs entrenched full-time in their communities had the time to develop relationships, mentor, and build capacity within underrepresented communities such as homeless youth and immigrant groups. They often effectively helped new community groups get organized and be represented. Over the past six years, this ability has been severely limited.

Finally, many District representatives named other resources they lacked. For example, as community volunteers with little staff support, they sought training on everything from leadership, outreach, websites and email lists, social media, parliamentary procedure, conflict resolution, cultural competency, and more. This lack of training again led to inequity, because those organizations with inherent member capacity were able to better perform in a variety of ways, from volunteer-created websites to more effective advocacy for their causes. They lamented the inability for district councils to access city resources, such as the Public Outreach and

Engagement Liaisons (described below), which would better allow them to conduct outreach in underrepresented groups. Staff support for their collective City Neighborhood Council was eliminated in 2012, yet could have helped mediate struggles with strong personalities and divisive issues.

All of this under-resourcing rendered the district councils ineffective, especially in engaging traditionally under-engaged communities—which is the justification given for cutting ties with them. In short, as one district council volunteer observed, the city “keeps pulling things away from us, and then says that we’re not doing enough.” A Neighborhood District Coordinator echoed the sentiment, observing that the city “failed the district councils ... they asked for help, and we didn’t provide them with the tools.” The city “under-resourced them, put the blame on them, and then cut ties with them.”

### **The Councils Lacked Influence**

Along with the reduction of resources, by 2016 the district councils had very little influence or authority within the city, which further justified the Executive Order cutting ties with them.

Many councils recognized that they had “no power beyond grant approval” through the Neighborhood Matching Fund process. And, even that had eroded over time—both through the amount of funds available and the complexity and opacity of the process. To the extent that the City Neighborhood Council empowered district council representatives to allocate city funding, the city’s official messaging states that “these responsibilities have become less of a priority over the years.”

The district councils also had a limited role in making policy recommendations. One volunteer stated that the council still wrote letters to the Mayor and City Council, but recognized that “three or four years ago we felt like they were read, but now I don’t know if it would make a difference.” The high-level Department of Neighborhoods manager emphasized that the district councils are not official bodies or commissions within the city, and that their resolutions were not binding. So if district councils “started making policy statements,” City Council would “wave the letter around if it supported the City Council’s view, but if not, they would shred it.”

The lack of a formal role within the city created apathy among some district council volunteers, who acknowledged that it was difficult to attract people to volunteer without a “job” to do or relevant issues to address. By 2016, one district council had only a few members showing up to meetings. Another member characterized the district councils as primarily a vehicle for communication between the city and

neighborhoods, and now that technology has increased the ability to communicate, the “intermediary of communication isn’t necessary, and the importance of the district council has decreased.”

### **The Political Climate Played a Factor**

Many district council representatives feel that the city’s justification for dissolving the city’s ties with the system was disingenuous. In response to the city’s argument that the district councils “have become groups of single family homeowners that are white and middle aged,” they brought up numerous examples of district councils whose representation more closely matched their communities—multiple councils where board representation of renters was over 50%, councils where culturally and racially based organizations had a seat at the table, councils where the board President was a person of color. They told numerous stories of efforts they made to reach out to immigrant communities in an effort to be more inclusive.

District councils also pointed to city-run engagement efforts that fell flat in engaging underrepresented groups. One example was a Housing Authority engagement effort organized by the Department of Neighborhoods, which was characterized as a “typical, white, bureaucratic” effort with traditional meeting times and locations, no childcare, and very high attrition rates of any diverse representation.

The very change being made in the engagement system also was criticized: “If you want to build a system that represents underrepresented folks, and they aren’t engaging any community members around that, what does that say?” More broadly, there was unanimous questioning around dismantling the system before anything new was established, and questioning whether equity was really the goal when no gaps have been identified or addressed.

Instead, some point to an erosion in relations between the district councils, the Mayor’s office, and the City Council as the primary reason for the Executive Order. The Director of the Department of Neighborhoods and her key staff member came from the Mayor’s Office and City Council, and there is a feeling among district councils that they are motivated to serve a mayoral agenda that was being threatened by the district councils. In fact, last summer the Mayor was supporting a Housing Authority proposal for upzoning for greater density in the city. One neighborhood association appealed the legislation—a direct affront to the Mayor’s agenda—shortly before he issued the Executive Order cutting ties with the councils. Although the Mayor has denied any connection between the two, some district council representatives feel that the Mayor abolished the system because of the challenge.

## Lessons Learned from Seattle's Experience

Across the board, district councils were upset and offended by the Executive Order. Severing ties with the system was a strong statement to them that the Mayor did not value their volunteer time and efforts. They felt that the City had unnecessarily “alienated all of these involved community volunteers...so many grassroots activists.” The Neighborhood District Coordinators expressed regret as city staff at the decision and the way it was presented: “Be respectful of people, they have volunteered for years and years—be gracious about it. The system represents 30 years of people volunteering. Honor that.” Even those who felt that the district council system needed to change did not agree with the way the change was handled—by a unilateral announcement without any engagement around the decision.

There are many concerns moving forward. There is a concern that deep knowledge will be lost through the rejection and disempowerment of community volunteers who have a lot of experience with relevant issues and city decision-making. There is a concern that removing the NDCs from communities “will be a crushing blow for sourcing of information” and guidance necessary to plug into the city, especially for those who are not already or otherwise connected. There is a concern about losing the “neighborhood feel” and connections established through the neighborhood association and district council system. This is expressed even by city staff members who traditionally have worked with community.

There are also concerns around the fact that the city has no plan for an engagement system moving forward. A culturally-based community organization director observed: “We won’t know if it’s good or bad until we know what they’re going to do.” There’s much skepticism around the city’s ability to effectively take on all community engagement efforts, since the city’s traditional means of gathering public comment is “after a three-hour meeting in the middle of the day, when you have two minutes and there’s a camera in there.” There’s also much skepticism around the new Community Involvement Commission, which is “being built covertly” with Mayoral and City Council appointments, will meet only four times a year, and purportedly will “run the city’s entire engagement program.”

There are further concerns about the future of the district councils; with no support, there will be little ability to draw new voices into the fold, and only the loudest voices will remain. Some say it will be difficult to keep their organizations going with no staff support, and others are reconsidering their roles. On the other hand, some councils are optimistic

that they will feel more empowered to advocate more freely now that they are not tied to the city. One observed: “It’s up to us now—the question is not how the city is going to engage with us, it’s how we engage with the city. They’re not looking to us, so we set our own agenda and decide what we want from the city.”

District council representatives and many city staff members agree that adding resources to the previous system would have been more desirable. NDCs had hoped that the city would have built on the existing structure of volunteerism in communities. District councils had hoped the city would restore the 13 NDCs, provide support and training to them, and incorporate another layer of outreach – applying best practices for doing engagement in underserved communities. At the very least, they feel the city should have included them in a discussion to work together in creating a successful transition to a defined new system, which could involve NDCs and other groups doing outreach across the city. Many district councils acknowledge that the system needed to be better equipped to do engagement in a more inclusive way; they say they would have been willing partners in working toward equity goals.

### Equity within Seattle’s Engagement System

Despite the turmoil within its district council system, Seattle has implemented some strong programs seeking to engage its communities more broadly.

#### **PACE: People’s Academy for Community Engagement**

This civic leadership development course is dedicated to teaching hands-on engagement and empowerment skills to emerging leaders in a multicultural environment. The class is offered three times a year for 25-30 participants seeking to acquire additional skills to be more effective in civic leadership.

The program’s vision is “a city government of *all* people, by *all* people, and for *all* people.” It was established specifically for people who are newly engaged in the community—it is “not for people who have been involved in the district councils for 30 years.” Originally, it was established as an effort to diversify district councils, with the goal that graduates would become involved in the district council system. Indeed, there are examples of PACE graduates who have become district council board members, and in one case, even the chairperson.

Participants build skills in two primary areas. First, there is a focus on community organizing strategies and leadership development. Participants collaborate on a community project together as part of this process.



Second, there is a focus on demystifying the experience of working with the city, giving people skills and “insider tips” on accessing government so they have avenues to engage with local government beyond the general city email address. Specifically, the program provides opportunities to:

- Identify resources and avenues to empower communities.
- Learn how to advocate effectively on behalf of community groups they work with.
- Cultivate a deeper appreciation of cultural competency and inclusive civic engagement.
- Learn from key community and civic leaders and build new relationships.

Each session is co-taught by city staff and facilitators from community organizations with expertise in the topic and in facilitating group discussion. City staff members provide valuable information and connections, and have included councilmembers, Mayor’s office staff, and representatives from the budget office. The community facilitators provide a valuable outside perspective and are compensated for their time.

City staff identified numerous reasons for the success of this program:

1. It is highly flexible. Meetings are scheduled at times that work best for people, and each course has a different type of schedule to accommodate different community needs. For example, the winter session is a five-week course meeting on Saturdays for four hours, while the fall session is a ten-week, ten-class evening program.

2. Meetings are scheduled at community centers and local organizations that are convenient for participants, not at City Hall.

3. It follows an interactive adult learning model, where in-person participation (as opposed to speakerphone or web-based instruction) is emphasized.

4. A significant discretionary budget and dedicated staff time are committed to the program. Food and child care are provided. The staff member coordinates the program and does targeted recruiting in historically underserved communities.

PACE session topics include:

- Approaches to Leadership
- Accessing Government
- Community Organizing
- Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement
- Meeting Facilitation
- Public Speaking
- Conflict Resolution
- Sustaining Involvement
- City Budget 101



5. Tuition is low—\$100—and 75% of participants receive need-based tuition assistance (although a minimum contribution of \$25 is required).

6. Organizations are encouraged to sponsor participants. For example, Real Change, a group of people experiencing homelessness who sell newspapers, has sent people to PACE. Other city agencies, including the Youth Commission, send their participants through PACE, providing committed participants.

Moving forward, Seattle is considering a “Popup PACE”—a mobile arm of the program. The intent would be to bring one-time, four-hour workshops to dense low-income communities around the city where residents face barriers to getting to other meeting locations.

### **POEL: Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons**

Seattle’s Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons perform part-time outreach to underrepresented communities in Seattle’s neighborhoods. The city currently contracts with 62 POELs, who were selected because they are connected to their respective cultures, are bi-cultural and bi-lingual, and have experience organizing and facilitating community meetings. They serve over 40 immigrant and refugee groups, African Americans, Native Americans, the homeless, LGBTQ, people living with disabilities, seniors, and youth.

Based on the trusted advocate model, these “bridge builders” assist City departments in their outreach and engagement needs, ensuring that the City provides information to all community members, forges connections, fosters relationships, and receives rich, diverse, and meaningful civic participation. Their work is conducted in a culturally-specific manner, allowing participants some comfort and familiarity while navigating the City's processes.

Last year, POELs worked on 60 projects calling for interpretation and translation. POELs meet with individuals, organizations, small businesses, and others based on the needs of the community and each City department's outreach goals. They share information, connect groups with services, respond when issues arise, and provide technical assistance. They serve on commissions and committees to participate on behalf of the

The main tasks of a POEL are to provide:

- Quality translations
- Fair and equitable facilitation (in native language) to culturally specific community groups
- Simultaneous interpretation.
- Constituent support at City-hosted events
- Feedback and expertise on cultural concerns and barriers
- Accurate records and reports of participant feedback and concerns
- Planning and execution of community workshops and events that parallel larger City-hosted meetings

communities they represent, and provide input on behalf of residents who cannot attend traditional meetings.

For example, the city recently planned to improve a park frequented largely by Native American and homeless individuals. The Parks Department held a 5 p.m. meeting and expected interested constituents to participate, but the meeting was “mobbed by Amazon folks who just wanted the park cleaned up.” So, POELs for the homeless and Native communities were sent in to reach constituents where they were, and prepared a report outlining the input they received, allowing for a final project that reflected the needs of multiple segments of the population.

Along with supporting more traditional engagement, POELs participate in a community clinic model, going into a community to hear from residents about their issues while providing a suite of city resources and services at the same time. For example, city staff and POELs have gone to ESL teaching centers and cultural festivals to gather input on city projects, while also providing information on the programs, resources, and opportunities the city has to offer: free preschool options, subsidized bus passes, free legal services, utility discount programs, free summer camps, affordable housing options, and so on. These clinics and resource fairs are organized by Department of Neighborhoods staff, who bring relevant POELs, and provide a meal for the group. The idea is that “you give us feedback and then we give back to you.” POELs are empowered to come back to a team of staff at the city to deal with the issues identified during the outreach.

All the outreach and engagement work of the POELs is coordinated through the City’s Department of Neighborhoods. City departments need to pay the Department of Neighborhoods to receive POEL services, and the POELs are paid \$50/hour. The Mayor issued an executive order to departments about POEL use, and departmental projects need Department of Neighborhoods approval before they can proceed, to ensure that POELs have been utilized adequately. In fact, there are four Department of Neighborhoods staff people who attend city meetings specifically to confirm that the POELs sharing input from the community are listened to.

The POELs participate in a Community Liaisons Institute, a training opportunity that supports their work. And, they receive an orientation on issues before addressing them so they can do facilitation that is meaningful. Although they are independent contractors, the city covers their insurance, and provides them training on how to run a small business, prepare invoicing, pay taxes, and so on. The program is growing; city staff project that, within a year, they will have 130 POELs. Also, POELs are shifting toward more proactive work, collaborating with departments more

directly and working with Department of Neighborhoods staff to identify priority projects.

### **Neighborhood Matching Fund**

The Neighborhood Matching Fund, with its Community Partnership Fund (with grants up to \$100,000) and Small Sparks program (with grants up to \$1,000) has been an effective way for the city to dedicate resources to traditionally underrepresented groups. Since 1988, the Fund has awarded more than \$49 million to more than 5,000 groups and generated an additional \$72 million in community matches. The city employs five project managers, a program supervisor, and a contracts administrator to run the program.

As mentioned above, authority for funding decisions was removed from the district councils' purview. Instead, city staff will evaluate and rate projects based on their ability to build community partnership and their readiness. In the past, applicants with larger projects (over \$25,000) were required to be geographically based; as part of the shift in the program, nongeographic communities (including youth, seniors, refugee, immigrants, race, culture, and LGBTQ groups) also will be eligible to submit for larger projects. Another change to the program increases the Small Sparks grants to \$5,000 and increases the frequency of application deadlines—there are now three opportunities per year to apply.

A project of the Vietnamese Friendship Association is an example of a successful project of the Fund. It received a large grant to undergo a large-scale community research project identifying needs in the Vietnamese community. The grant paid to train and compensate youth for community organizing work, funded a project coordinator, supplied venues and food, and so on. After significant engagement in the community, seven priorities emerged, creating the foundation for a community action plan. One of the top concerns identified was of parents whose children are losing their native language and culture, with a simultaneous need to address the education gap their students face. To meet this need, the Association created a dual-language preschool—a community-driven solution based on authentic community relations.

### **Participatory Budgeting**

In 2016, Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods engaged in a pilot Participatory Budgeting process, empowering community members to directly decide how to spend \$700,000 from the city's general fund. For the pilot year, they chose to focus on youth, with a project called *Youth Voice, Youth Choice*.

The goals of the project were to:

- Fund projects that **create equity** in the city, addressing the deepest needs and ensuring that city resources go where they will have the greatest impact
- Forge a more **inclusive democracy**, aiming to engage those who are typically excluded from decision-making and building bridges among diverse communities
- Build **youth skills** and knowledge to create new leaders
- Give youth a **meaningful and lasting voice** in city government

The process started with city staff engaging in an intensive idea-collection phase, asking youth for ideas for public projects they would like to see in their communities, then collecting input through online surveys, social media, idea assemblies in different neighborhoods, and mobile seminars in spaces where youth already were gathering or meeting. This outreach was done in collaboration with schools and youth service providers. Project ideas were eligible if they benefitted the public, were one-time expenditures that could be completed within the year, and cost between \$25,000 and \$300,000.

The city's extensive outreach process produced two things. First, 534 ideas were collected. Second, 70 geographically and racially diverse youth volunteered—and 20 were ultimately selected—to serve as budget delegates and work through the process. With guidance from Department of Neighborhoods staff, this group of delegates collaborated with city

The seven winning *Youth Voice, Youth Choice* projects were:

- **Safe Routes to Schools** - \$45,500  
*Improve crosswalks in areas near schools.*
- **Park Bathroom Upgrades** - \$205,000  
*Create a map of public bathrooms and improve bathrooms in parks in most need of repair.*
- **Wi-Fi Hotspot Checkout** - \$165,000  
*Expand Seattle Public Library's system to include more Wi-Fi hotspots.*
- **Homeless Children and Youth Liaison Services** - \$70,400  
*Expand school liaison services connecting youth experiencing homelessness to resources.*
- **Youth Homeless Shelter Improvements** - \$42,000  
*Physical improvements for a youth homeless shelter, such as installing lockers, washer and dryers, and new paint.*
- **Job Readiness Workshops for Homeless Youth** - \$43,600  
*Expand existing services for youth experiencing homelessness focused on job readiness.*
- **Houses for People Experiencing Homelessness** - \$128,500  
*Youth collaborate with carpenters to build 10 tiny homes for people experiencing homelessness.*

departments to determine eligibility, cluster similar ideas together, sort ideas by jurisdiction, and prioritize ideas based on feasibility. The group arrived at 19 final proposals, which were presented on a ballot. City staff walked around schools with mobile ballots, reached youth through social media, and met youth where they were in the community. In the end, over 3,000 youth ages 11-25 voted for their favorite projects.

The city received a lot of positive feedback on the program from youth and youth service providers. However, city staff reflected that the program demanded too much of the volunteers, who participated in weekly meetings for 10 weeks, without financial compensation, and with a lot of responsibility to manage. City staff suggested chunking out the work, so some delegates would work on vetting the projects, while others had other roles in the process. The project also put a lot of pressure on city departments participating in the preparation of cost estimates and the vetting of projects.

Nonetheless, the city is now embarking upon a broader participatory budgeting program, *Your Voice, Your Choice*, which is not limited to youth. In 2017, the program is focused on allotting \$2 million of the city's budget on parks and streets projects. The program's framework is geographic, to ensure equitable distribution of funds. With a dedicated staff person and a sustained funding source, they anticipate offering the program every year.

## Conclusion

Seattle is making strides in effectively engaging its residents—especially members of traditionally underrepresented groups—through its People's Academy for Community Engagement, Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons, neighborhood matching fund, and participatory budgeting pilot. These programs might well be emulated in other cities.

The story of Seattle's recent system changes, however, is a cautionary tale with at least three morals: cities should be intentional and transparent in implementing well-planned systems change, they should honor the commitment and draw on the expertise of resident volunteers, and they should insure that engagement efforts are well-resourced to avoid exacerbating inequities.

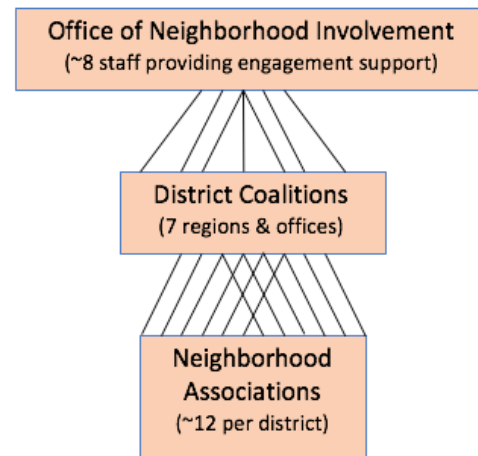
# Portland, Oregon

## General Overview

Portland has a long-standing commitment to meaningful community engagement. One of the primary elements of Portland's system is its seven District Coalitions, supported by the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

A typical Coalition is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with full-time staff members who provide support for about 12 volunteer-led neighborhood associations. Each neighborhood association has a volunteer-run board and committees, and has a representative on the Coalition's board.

The primary focus of Coalition work is building capacity for civic engagement throughout the city. This is achieved largely by Coalition staff providing a variety of resources to support the grassroots advocacy work of the volunteers who lead the neighborhood associations. A single Coalition may have as many as six full-time staff members, many of whom serve as liaisons to neighborhood associations while fulfilling other roles. Some primary functions coalitions provide:



- **Forging connections:** connecting residents with relevant city staff, and establishing partnerships between neighborhood associations, community groups, and residents.
- **Training community members:** educating residents about city processes and how to work effectively with city decision makers; providing meeting facilitation skills; advising on grant writing; and teaching effective organizing and communications.
- **Advising on neighborhood issues:** helping residents advocate for themselves on specific projects, especially land use, transportation and parks projects; sharing information on current city issues; clarifying questions on process.
- **Creating communications and events:** producing monthly newspapers or newsletters that report widely on neighborhood association projects; hosting community-building events.

- **Providing technical support to neighborhood associations:** facilitating meetings; assisting with external communications and branding; providing fiscal agency; managing elections; orienting new board members; informing and educating about bylaws and financial policies; providing equipment and video production; and resolving internal grievances and organizational issues.

While the neighborhood associations enjoy a lot of support from the Coalition offices, they are largely independent, are empowered to advocate on local issues, and have standing to pass resolutions providing input directly to the city. The level of participation of Coalition staff within neighborhood association work varies greatly: Some organizations need more guidance, especially when there are newer board members or chairs, while others are very independent. Coalitions do not interfere in the democratic process of the neighborhood associations; they will consult and facilitate discussions but will not dictate decisions. Coalitions and neighborhood associations can also bring in a third-party facilitation/mediation group through a city contract when needed.

The level of issue-based activity at the Coalition level also varies: some have only one committee (usually related to land use), while others have 10 functional committees. At a typical Coalition board meeting, each neighborhood association representative reports on the primary issues it is addressing. Opportunities for collaboration are identified. The Coalition and its committees will take on identified issues that cross neighborhood association boundaries or are beyond the capacity of an individual Association to address. For example, one Coalition coordinated a group of neighborhood association chairs on an issue related to propane storage at a harbor, helped acquire the necessary information from various parties, and hosted strategy sessions. Coalition committees also may be a source of important volunteer support, taking on Coalition-wide communications work, event planning, and so on.

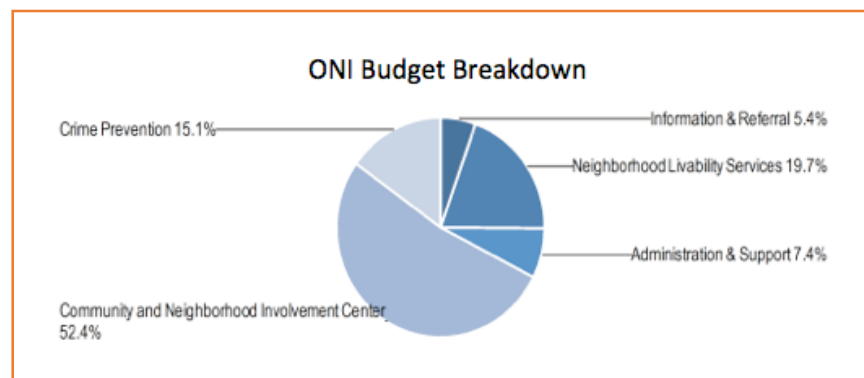
Coalition boards may take advocacy positions on major issues, but they tend to function under unanimous consent, meaning every neighborhood association representative must agree before a resolution can be sent directly from the Coalition. At times, the Coalition will take on an issue for a particular neighborhood, to give the recommendation more force. For example, in a trail-building project, the Coalition advocated for a better facility than the city was proposing, and even than the neighborhood was promoting, and succeeded.

Coalitions also collaborate on cross-Coalition work. The chairs and executive directors meet regularly to share best practices and collaborate on issues. When they recognized that the county was poorly managing



outreach to homeless residents, the Coalitions united and persuaded the city to put together a budget package for outreach. That led to creating a new position for outreach to the city's homeless population. Other examples of collaboration include co-hosting candidate forums and engaging in crime prevention work.

The City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI), which has 12 full-time staff members, promotes a culture of civic engagement by "connecting and supporting all Portlanders working together and with government to build inclusive, safe, and livable neighborhoods and communities."



ONI includes crime prevention, information and referral services, and neighborhood livability (liquor licensing, graffiti abatement, marijuana policy, etc.) along with the arm that supports community engagement: the Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center. A full-time Neighborhood Program Coordinator within the Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center supports the seven district coalitions.

The Program Coordinator views the Coalitions and neighborhood associations as his clients, and provides a range of support. The Program Coordinator also staffs the ONI Advisory Committee, which advises the agency on budget, policy, and strategy issues. The Committee consists of ONI management and staff, Coalition staff and board representatives, neighborhood representatives, diversity and civic leadership participants, community partners, and general community members.

The city invites the Coalitions to push back on city decision-making and policy, and appears to treasure the independent nature of the Coalition system. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator said: "We survive because of the decentralized model, built on a foundation of community pride and involvement. They would not be successful if they were city-run programs."



### Accountability

Each Coalition has a five-year contract with the city that sets out the functions the city expects them to fulfill, but not how to execute those functions. The city also requires annual work plans from each Coalition. As primary clients of the Coalitions, the neighborhood associations also set expectations for the Coalitions and hold them accountable.

ONI's Neighborhood Program Coordinator meets regularly with Coalition board chairs and executive directors, and receives more formal quarterly reports from each Coalition. ONI staff hear all the Coalition problems, collaborate on issues, and stay in close touch with each Coalition. Through the nature of this support work, the city observes compliance with the contract requirements. "The best way to ensure accountability is personal involvement by ONI staff," the Neighborhood Program Coordinator says.

The city also collects quantitative measures (attendance at meetings, number of communications sent out, volunteer hours committed, etc.). However, there is a general acknowledgement that this measure of activity is not meaningful, and that community engagement work is very relational and difficult to evaluate. Individual Coalitions are developing their own metrics, focusing more on outcomes than activities. These often take narrative form, addressing what actions were taken to draw people to an event, how underserved communities were involved, what types of communications were sent, whether board members feel satisfied, etc. Coalition staff say it is important to take a long-term view and that concrete successes—like empowering a resident to get a crosswalk installed—take a lot of time but have significant community impacts.

The city also has a lengthy document that sets forth standards for neighborhood associations, District Coalitions, and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (universally called the "ONI standards"). It lists the roles and requirements of these entities, and provides a grievance and appeal process for procedural violations of an organization's bylaws or the ONI standards. An individual or organization can file a grievance, which will start at the neighborhood level, with a committee appointed to evaluate it. Appeals go to the Coalition, then to ONI. There's a general appreciation that Coalition staff do not work for the city or for the neighborhood association boards. They can play the role of a neutral third-party overseeing adherence to the ONI standards and assisting with neighborhood association issues.

A common theme heard among Coalition staff is that there is a high level of motivation to do good work. The Coalition jobs pay well, and "there is a joy in the doing the work—autonomy, respect, and the ability to bust

through the bureaucracy. The city wants me to be responsive to what the community wants, and I get to decide what that means.”

## Portland's Focus on Community Engagement

The City of Portland recently adopted a new Comprehensive Plan, which includes a robust section on Community Engagement. The Office of Neighborhood Involvement, the main department charged with engagement, has three primary goals: increasing the number and diversity of people who are involved and volunteer in their communities; building neighborhood capacity to build skills and partnerships; and increasing community impact on public decisions. Its Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center has **12 full-time employees** who work at the city level to advance these goals.

The City allocates over \$2 million directly to the seven District Coalition offices. With substantial budgets, each Coalition also successfully retains a number of long-term quality staff; some Coalitions have up to six staff members, and many executive directors have been with their organizations at least 10 years. While some Coalitions engage in outside fundraising (through mechanisms such as watershed project grants, advertisements in their newspapers, and selling pedestrian-safety focused yard signs), the funds they receive from the City largely support their annual budgets.

### Public Involvement Best Practices staff

Portland employs a full-time staff member titled the Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator. Her role is to provide strategic advice and consulting to departments in the “conceptualization, development, evaluation, and improvement of public involvement processes, policies, and practices.” Her role is built upon the principles of participatory democracy and self-determination, that “those most impacted by something should be at the table shaping decisions about it.” In her words, she “helps each department work through decision making at all decision-making points.”

One of her primary responsibilities is to shape citywide policy around community engagement and best practice development. For example, she has developed specific engagement tools for departments to use. Because her program is committed to the inclusion of communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities in public policy conversations and processes, she currently is working on a 20-page racial equity assessment tool for departments to use to assess their projects.

She also provides department-specific community-engagement consultation and training. She helps establish advisory councils, assists in planning outreach for engagement events, brings in good facilitators, imparts good facilitation skills, and consults on the city's racial equity standards. She encourages "bringing residents into big decisions early" and promotes co-decision-making between city staff and residents, saying, "Those who consume the services should be part of it."

The Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator also supports the city's District planner liaisons, who are assigned to the District Coalitions. A similar District liaison program for transportation agency staff recently was adopted as well.

The coordinator consistently pushes city staff members to ask: "What value do you think the community can bring to your work?" Each city department also has a community engagement coordinator, and the public involvement coordinator provides support to them. They have traditionally had emergent requests – for example, identifying reactively that they need to involve the Native community in a particular project – and she helps them understand that building deep and sustainable relationships with communities will save city staff time and pay off in the long run. She encourages them to proactively and systematically engage community organizations, not just when there is an immediate need to do outreach.

Her performance measures are based on her activities – how many policy changes she's helped effect, how many documents she has co-produced, how many department consultations she's done. Her real goal is shifting the city's culture towards prioritizing deep engagement, but that is more difficult to measure without surveying changes in perception over time. That evaluation will take more resources than the city currently has available.

The Public Involvement Best Practices Coordinator encourages staff to recognize the value of engagement through different frames:

- **It is the right thing to do morally:** There is value in sharing power, there are vulnerable people that need to be reached, and community ownership leads to sustainability.
- **It is economical:** Resources are wasted when bridges have been burned and need to be rebuilt – staff resources as well as expenses for project delays.
- **It is required legally:** National, state and local policy and civil rights law require equity, and meaningful engagement is required to avoid disparate impacts and outcomes.
- **And, it feels good when people like you!**

### **Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC)**

In 2008, the City Council created the Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC), Portland's first standing, formal committee that addresses how the City conducts public involvement. PIAC is an example of government and community working on shared goals, because its membership is half City staff (representing 14 departments) and half community members (representing 18 diverse community organizations). Membership is appointed by and reports to City Council. The advisory council is charged with creating recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of the City's public involvement. The Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator staffs PIAC.

PIAC allows City staff to connect with each other, and with representatives of the community, on engagement issues: identifying best practices, promoting training programs, evaluating engagement efforts, developing long-term strategies for the city and each department. To avoid burnout of community leaders, PIAC holds only six meetings a year. When the full group meets, it is action- and outcome-oriented. The group will conduct working sessions advising a department on a project, citywide policy, or best practice.

PIAC's work groups do a lot of the actual work. For example, there is a work group conducting a citywide review of notification requirements, determining who is required to be notified of city action under city and state code, and what types of notifications are required. The work group also completed a community survey on how current notification systems are working. Their goal is to create a report to the City Council setting out the purpose for notification, the current notification system, problems with the current system, and recommendations for change.

Another work group project addresses digital engagement. There's a recognition that a town-hall-style meeting is not equitable, and the group is seeking to maximize public engagement by evaluating what the city current does to engage, what has worked well, and what products could be used to better bring communities of color into the conversation. They currently are undergoing a pilot project with a product called Bang the Table.

Perhaps most significantly, PIAC created the city's Public Involvement Principles (see Attachment A), which were adopted by City Council, and now works to ensure that they are implemented. The Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator uses these Principles as a framework for her work, and the city's auditor ensures that particular projects are done according to the principles.

## Equity within Portland's Coalition System

Beyond the efforts of PIAC and the work of the Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator, Portland's system has other built-in mechanisms to engage more diverse, typically underrepresented groups.

First, the Coalition structure allows resource-sharing among neighborhoods. Some neighborhood associations have high levels of volunteer capacity, with educated, engaged, influential members. These groups need little from the Coalition. Other neighborhood associations need much more organizing and informational support. Because Coalitions have a diverse mix of neighborhood associations—sometimes with the wealthiest and poorest neighborhoods within the same Coalition boundaries—the Coalition can consciously triage support based on inequities between organizations and allocate more resources and staff time to the communities that need it the most.

Second, the heavily resourced Coalitions have the capacity to provide training to neighborhood associations' volunteers on issues of equitable community engagement. Recognizing that the formal neighborhood association structure may not be welcoming to traditionally underrepresented populations, Coalition staff have developed training programs for volunteers on how to be more inclusive and welcoming, by addressing racial discrimination issues, by promoting alternative meeting structures and mentorship programs, and so on.

Some Coalitions have committees that address these issues as well. For example, one has an Equity and Inclusion Committee that is working on rewriting the organization's mission statement, bylaws and action plans to include an equity lens. The executive director said: "Our mission is engaging neighbors to improve livability in southwest Portland. If our work is defined only by a part of our community, and not representative of the whole, then we are not meeting our mission. We are also losing out on the trust and involvement of many people within our community."

Third, and more importantly, other community organizations that serve residents in a District may also have seats on the Coalition board. Recognizing that geographically-based neighborhood associations are not the only – or often most effective – way that people organize, almost every Coalition board has active representatives of cultural groups, business associations, and other community organizations. This is an important, formalized way to give non-geographically based groups a seat at the table and Coalition support. This has led to concrete outcomes for culturally-based groups. For example, neighborhood associations are allowed to host

two free events in city parks each year; one Coalition successfully advocated for other groups to enjoy the same benefits.

Coalition work with non-geographic communities extends beyond board representation. There is a general acknowledgment that the Coalition is charged with reaching the entire community, so must be open to sharing its resources and support with organizations beyond the neighborhood associations. The staff of many Coalitions are making focused efforts to identify other community groups and organizations within their communities and empower them to greater advocacy. Their fiscal agency service is one way this can be accomplished, but there are other, more creative projects in the works. For example, one Coalition has partnered with immigrant groups to provide support, while another is engaged in a renters' pilot project, working with groups on advocacy around renting.

The City has embraced the expansion of Coalition services, and provides additional funding—\$6,500 for each Coalition office—to encourage collaboration between neighborhood groups and non-geographic communities. A recent example of this initiative is one Coalition's work with the Native American Youth and Family Center on a community dialogue among Native elders, youth, and neighborhood leaders.

### Portland's Direct Support of Underrepresented Communities

Although the District Coalition system has some mechanisms to achieve broader community engagement, the City has significantly enhanced its District Coalition system in other ways to meaningfully engage its residents more equitably.

#### The Diversity and Civic Leadership Program

Along with providing funding to the District Coalitions, Portland contracts directly with six organizations through its Diversity and Civic Leadership (DCL) program. This capacity-building program for community-based organizations was established in 2006 and aims to “enhance community involvement of under-engaged people, with a focus on communities of color, immigrants and refugees, in efforts to improve community livability and public safety, organizational capacity and self-empowerment at the community level.” In fiscal year 2014-15, each DCL organization received \$98,657.

A current Coalition director reported that this program stems from an identified need to supplement the work of the geographically-based Coalitions. “The DCL program is an acknowledgment that the system wasn’t reaching deeply enough into the community.” He observed that Coalitions are charged with reaching the entire community, so need to be open and supportive of other mechanisms besides the geographically-based neighborhood associations. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator said: “The idea is to let people organize, and support them to do engagement work with the people that they naturally want to organize with.”

Portland’s DCL organizations:

- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization
- Latino Network
- Native American Youth Family Center
- Center for Intercultural Organizing
- Urban League of Portland (focused on the African American community)
- The Momentum Alliance (focused on youth)

The city dedicates a staff person to coordinating the program; she manages the contracts between the organizations and the city, and works directly with the organizations. The DCL organizations receive leadership training, organizational support, and assistance in advocating for their interests. The DCLs themselves manage the leadership training provided to their members and broader community, so its content and presentation are self-determined and culturally appropriate.

There is no formal understanding as to how the DCL groups connect with city government. But, there is a definite focus on learning about city government and providing access to city buildings and local government leaders. The result is “hundreds of community leaders learning how city government works.” The members of the DCLs, and participants in their training programs, often go on to serve on city boards and commissions. Indeed, the city staff person who staffs the Public Involvement Advisory Council recruits directly from each of the DCL organizations. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator reported: “This is about giving access to people and serving them, not them serving city government.”



The DCL partners do have a scope of work, where expectations are expressed primarily in terms of programming, number of community members engaged, and networking with government officials. The DCL partner accomplishments include: campaigns addressing community-identified needs and issues; partnerships with city departments and other community organizations; trainings and workshops; participation on boards, commissions and advisory committees; community gatherings for constituent engagement; communications and outreach; and research and reports.

The Neighborhood Program Coordinator recognized that, while numbers are reported, narrative surveying where participants can describe how the program affected their lives is a better way to evaluate the program's success.

One Coalition director noted that the DCL program has helped develop new, deep connections that have strengthened her work with traditionally underrepresented communities. On the other hand, a coalition board chair urges that, although DCLs are a good start toward involving underrepresented voices, they should be integrated more formally into the Coalition structure to better take advantage of untapped potential for collaboration. She suggests that the DCLs be recognized as an additional Coalition, which would give them a seat at the table within the city, and at directors and chairs meetings, for example.

City staff recommended that this type of program happen incrementally, starting with a pilot. Portland's program started with \$70,000 for a Diversity and Civic Leadership Academy that supported underrepresented

Portland's DCL program helps community organizations develop:

- **Communication structures** to encourage dialog between community members and public agencies on community building, livability and policy issues.
- **Leadership skills** to be more effective advocates responding to City public involvement initiatives and advancing policies to achieve economic and social equity.
- Leadership opportunities to **increase representation** on City advisory committees, boards and commissions, neighborhood associations, and other public involvement opportunities.
- **Collaborations and partnerships** between underrepresented community organizations, neighborhood groups, and business associations, where there may be opportunities to work on common community and neighborhood livability issues.
- **Culturally appropriate models** for how these communities can safely and successfully interact in City processes in meaningful ways that add value to both their communities and the City.



community groups, along with additional resources to the District Coalitions: \$45,000 for cross-cultural organizing and \$30,000 for language interpretation and translation, child care, and ADA accommodations to make meetings and activities more accessible. When a larger budget was dedicated, organizations were invited to submit proposals to become DCLs, and four were funded originally. Since then, the city issued additional RFPs to reach the current six funded organizations.

### **The East Portland Action Plan**

The East Portland Action Plan is actually a project with a committee and staff, to which the City allocates over \$300,000 per year in addition to its regular funding of the East Portland District Coalition. East Portland was annexed as part of the city in the 1980s, and is home to a quarter of Portland's population, a significant number of them living in poverty, and a large percentage of people of color.

The committee works to implement the East Portland Action Plan, which was developed by the community with city support to provide "leadership and guidance to public agencies and other entities on how to strategically address community-identified issues and allocate resources to improve livability for neighborhoods" in East Portland. It was initiated because of an identified need for increased infrastructure and other city services in this lower socioeconomic, traditionally underrepresented community.

The group only addresses strategies and actions that are specifically listed in the Action Plan, so they have a clarity of purpose and goals distinct from the District Coalition. There are 268 listed actions, which fall within categories such as Housing and Development Policy, Transportation, Public Infrastructure and Utilities, Natural Areas and Environment, Economic Development and Workforce Training, and Public Safety.

There is a full-time staff member who advocates for the implementation of the plan and staffs the committee. Membership is open to anyone who attends twice and agrees to attend regularly, but anyone who comes to a meeting can contribute. There currently are 85 residents on the roster as members, and usually 55-70 residents attend a meeting. There are 12 subcommittees, which function like work groups. At each committee meeting, each subcommittee gives a three-minute report on its work. At the end of every meeting, an orientation is provided to any interested resident about the Action Plan and committee process.

The committee operates on complete consensus. Last year, there were 27 resolutions that achieved consensus. In almost eight years, only three issues did not receive full consensus. At each committee meeting, interpretation, translation, child care, and healthful food are provided. The city also has provided coaching on facilitation skills and leadership training.

Largely due to the resources committed and cultural shift achieved, the East Portland Action Plan has enjoyed success in recruiting and retaining a very diverse and representative membership. Moreover, many of its committee members now serve on several city Budget Advisory Committees, influencing how and where Portland's money is spent. Members meet with elected officials from the city and county to advance their strategic planning items, and provide an annual report to the City Council on their work.

The project has enjoyed successes in advocating for city funding of projects that align with the Plan, including graffiti abatement, new lighting and hundreds of trees on a multi-use path, storefront improvement program for businesses, pedestrian and traffic safety projects, and the development of public spaces.

### The Small Grants Programs

Portland has a Neighborhood Small Grants Program that District Coalitions administer. The city invests about \$100,000 per year into the program. The program funds neighborhood-initiated projects – everything from murals to political advocacy training to yurts constructed for emergency response.

A Coalition director identified the small grants program as the “single most effective program” it has. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator lauded this investment as financially small but “hugely incentivizing at increasing engagement and encouraging partnering with other groups.” Similarly, a Coalition staff person said the program “invigorates community by getting people directly involved in projects” in their neighborhoods, and that one grant can “leverage 20,000 volunteer hours.”

The goals of Portland's Neighborhood Small Grants program:

- Increase the number and diversity of people who are involved and engaged in their communities and neighborhoods
- Strengthen neighborhood and community capacity to build community leadership, identity, skills, relationships and partnerships
- Increase community and neighborhood impact on public decisions and community life

The City provided a template to the Coalitions for the grant management process, but the Coalitions themselves decide how to solicit applications and select projects. To determine the grant amount available to each Coalition, the City applies a funding formula based on the total number of households living in poverty and the number of neighborhood associations a Coalition supports. One Coalition reports that it awards

between 13-17 grants a year of up to \$4,000 each; another awards eight grants a year of between \$200-\$2,000 each. Coalitions often dedicate staff specifically to manage the small grants program. Coalition staff members offer workshops for community members, with information and advice about the small grants program. Some Coalitions choose to provide micro-grants, with a simple process for grants of \$500 or less. The Coalitions often ask for qualitative reporting from grantees to get a full picture of the impact of the grant.

A Coalition staff member said the small grant program can successfully fill the gap for other community organizations – often culturally based or otherwise underrepresented – that are not formal neighborhood associations (which often receive small financial allotments). Indeed, 35 percent of the funds are supposed to be distributed to under-engaged organizations – a goal that has been met or exceeded each year.

One Coalition volunteer described a recruiting committee the Coalition established, consisting mostly of people of color, to foster grant applications from traditionally underrepresented groups. She said the funds can “spread further into the community” through outreach done by the Coalitions. Another Coalition staff person said the grant program “helps with making resources accessible to the broader community,” noting that the Coalition office specifically provides support to community and cultural

Examples of small grants awarded in Portland to benefit or recognize traditionally underrepresented groups:

- Native American beading classes
- Improving tech equity in schools through family training
- Multilingual neighborhood notice boards
- Neighborhood soccer program for Somali immigrants
- Cultural enrichment and reading classes for adults with special needs
- Health fair event for the Latino community
- Tile mural project to connect new immigrant communities

groups (beyond geographically based neighborhood associations) to apply for grants. That Coalition’s grant review criteria support underrepresented groups, and the committee deciding the grant awards consists of representatives from culturally specific organization and other diverse community members, along with neighborhood association delegates.

### **Additional City Staff and Resources**

Portland has adopted citywide racial equity goals and strategies. One of its key goals is to “strengthen outreach, public engagement, and access to city services for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, and support or change existing services using racial equity best practices.”

In line with this commitment, each city department has a Racial Equity Program Manager and a Racial Equity Plan.

The Office of Neighborhood Involvement has full-time city staff members supporting various programs including:

- **New Portlanders Program.** The staff member heading up this program is charged with integrating immigrants and refugees into city life. He ensures that quality city services are provided to immigrant and refugee communities, works with city staff members to connect them to cultural community groups, advocates for immigrants' interests (for example, by empowering Somali women to advocate for women-only swim time at city pools), and networks with immigrant leaders to identify their community's needs. One widely acclaimed project involved building relationships with Parks department staff, getting them to commit to provide mobile playgrounds in parks in the summer, and instituting a summer hiring program of immigrant and refugee youth to lead the program. He also staffs a newly formed New Portlanders commission charged with advising the city on "policies and practices to integrate immigrant and refugee communities' voices and needs into the provision of city services, city decision-making and civic engagement" and to "seek constructive relationships with each member of Council."
- **Disability Program.** Originally charged with advocating for the disability community (for example, by ensuring that building planning and community festivals were accessible), this staff person now focuses more on civic engagement with the disability community. She staffs a Commission on Disability, which guides the city "in ensuring that it is a more universally accessible city for all" by broadening outreach and inclusion of people with disabilities, representing a wide spectrum of disabilities in city decision-making, and facilitating increased collaboration between people with disabilities, city departments, and the City Council. The city also runs a Disability Leadership Academy, an intensive leadership course offering training and practical experience for people with disabilities who want to effect public policy and create social change within communities. Participants advance skills in project planning, event organizing, navigating political systems, and building community through training sessions and a community engagement project, where they collaborate on a policy impact or systems change project that the group designs and implements.
- **Youth Commission.** This advisory body has up to 42 members, meets twice a month, and has three subcommittees that meet

weekly: youth anti-violence, sustainability (transit equity), and education (chronic absenteeism). The Mayor recently called on the commission to help decide how to spend youth gang violence prevention funds. It is youth led; they recruit their own membership and strive for equitable representation of young people who care about the community and want to make change. As part of its goal of youth development, the commission's work begins each year with a three-day retreat focused on topics like social justice, power and privilege, and city policy. The staff member supports the commission, writes grants to fund their projects, provides consulting and training on getting youth on nonprofit boards, and is working on a manual for the city on how to engage youth more effectively.

**Community Engagement Liaisons** are city-trained civic activists, fluent in English, who assist city public involvement programs with interpretation and facilitation services. This program is grounded in the principle that everyone should have access to information on decisions that impact the community, plus the opportunity to engage in the City's public involvement efforts.

Community Engagement Liaisons are offered to City staff at City department cost. City staff are encouraged to avail themselves of these liaisons if public participation includes engaging minority-language-speaking neighbors. Many communities are represented in the liaison program. Examples include a Nepali-speaking Bhutanese elder, Karen-speaking activist, Arabic-speaking male and female community elders, and so on. Portland has 10 "safe harbor" languages that have more than 1,000 speakers in the city; efforts are made to make all city business accessible to individuals who speak these languages.

## Conclusion

Portland's well-funded system supporting both geographically-based organizations and non-geographic community groups does an exceptional job of facilitating civic engagement in the City.

## Conclusion

Faced with the challenge of effectively and equitably engaging their residents, each of these three cities has taken drastically different approaches.

Boston's heavy reliance upon volunteers yields uneven and inequitable engagement and results. Recent efforts to augment its patchwork of volunteer-run organizations with city initiatives have had narrow and limited success to date, especially where they lack intentional cooperation and communication with existing community-based organizations.

The slow defunding and disempowering of Seattle's district council system left it functioning similarly to Boston's; a reliance upon available volunteer energy has rendered it ineffective in achieving broad-based equity. The city's decision to ultimately break ties with the remaining geographically based organizations failed to honor the commitment, expertise, and sincerity of their volunteers. While Seattle is instituting some innovative programs in an attempt to engage more residents more consistently, many residents are skeptical of the city's ability to take on the task alone, and are frustrated by the lack of a plan for a new system.

In contrast, Portland's well-resourced system is grounded in a commitment to authentic community engagement. Faced with a geographically based system that admittedly was unable to fully engage underrepresented communities, Portland created programs to complement the work of its district coalitions. These programs directly support culturally based organizations and directly empower people of color, immigrants, youth, and members of other traditionally underrepresented groups.

The structure of Portland's system allows for robust resident volunteer support through the district coalitions, and develops highly functioning coalitions through substantial city investment—in both staffing and funding. This investment allows for effective partnerships among resident volunteers, coalitions, and city departments, and supports long-term community building in neighborhoods.

All three cities have programs and practices that might be implemented effectively elsewhere—either at a local organization or on city-wide level. Some key ideas that the City of Saint Paul and its district councils might consider include:

- **Abutters Meetings:** Boston tries to generate engagement on location-specific issues by literally bringing the meeting to the location, instead of requiring residents to attend a meeting at a

centralized meeting space. Like pop-up meetings in Saint Paul, the concept has the potential to engage residents who do not respond to traditional outreach, and to gather feedback from frequent users, neighbors, and others who are most directly affected by projects.

- **Coordinated issues database:** Seattle uses this tactic to track issues, organizations, and primary concerns of each neighborhood at a city-wide level, and shares this knowledge among city staff.
- **Diversity and Civic Leadership Program:** This is Portland's primary method of supplementing its geographically-based neighborhood coalitions with culturally-specific outreach. The city contracts with six independent, community-based organizations to enhance involvement of under-engaged residents, including immigrants and refugees, more-established communities of color, and youth. Portland also has a hybrid program—the East Portland Action Plan. This program focuses on empowering a specific low-income, minority neighborhood, but operates separately from the neighborhood coalition system.
- **Impact Advisory Groups:** Boston creates these groups for large development projects. They are seen as a way to gather and channel input from residents and other interested parties, and to negotiate conditions that minimize or offset the projects' impacts on neighborhoods. Because membership on IAGs is appointed, who is included and who is excluded can determine their effectiveness and perceived legitimacy. Saint Paul already employs a version of the approach through its community advisory committees and, to some degree, citizen-led boards and commissions.
- **New Resident / Disability / Youth Program staff:** Portland designates specific city staff who are charged with integrating immigrants, residents with disabilities, and youth fully into city decision-making.
- **Participatory Budgeting:** Seattle is experimenting with a program giving residents a direct say in how to allocate \$2 million in city funds. Based on an early pilot project, the goals and outreach differ significantly from how Saint Paul traditionally handles its Capital Investment Board process.
- **People's Academy for Community Engagement:** Seattle created this course for emerging leaders, especially from traditionally underrepresented groups. The course provides on-the-ground training in community organizing and advocacy, leadership development, and the workings of city government. It maximizes participation and effectiveness by being community-based, providing flexible scheduling for training sessions (which include



food and child care), and using both city staff and outside facilitators as instructors.

- **Public Involvement Principles:** In 2010, Portland adopted seven principles to constructively engage community members, allocate engagement resources, and increase understanding of and support for public policies and programs. The principles were created by the Public Involvement Advisory Council—a panel of residents and city staff. The PIAC continues to meet six times a year to evaluate and report on engagement practices, and how well they live up to the principles. The PIAC is outcome—not policy—driven. It makes specific recommendations and follows through on strategies, best practices, and training needs. Portland also has city staff dedicated specifically to propagating best practices for public involvement among city departments. Seattle is in the initial phases of replicating this approach through its Community Involvement Commission.
- **Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons:** Seattle hires individual contractors who have multilingual and multicultural skills to serve as “bridge builders” to underrepresented communities and to connect hard-to-reach residents to city information and resources. These liaisons tend to be hired by a specific city department for a specific project—primarily to facilitate meetings and provide translation and interpreter services. However, some have begun doing more in-depth organizing within their communities, hinting at the potential of this type of approach. Portland has a similar program of Community Engagement Liaisons.
- **Small Grants Programs:** Portland and Seattle infuse city funds directly into communities to support resident-initiated projects. On the surface, the funds make possible projects that otherwise would fly under the radar, or not be accomplished at all. But community members say the real impact is how the grants engage a more diverse mix of residents, and strengthen community capacity, leadership, and relationships. Portland’s Small Grants Program and Seattle’s Neighborhood Matching Fund have similarities to stewardship grant programs run in Saint Paul by the Capitol Region Watershed District and Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.



# City of Portland Public Involvement Principles

*Adopted by the City of Portland, Oregon on August 4, 2010*



## ***Preamble***

Portland City government works best when community members and government work as partners. Effective public involvement is essential to achieve and sustain this partnership and the civic health of our city. This:

- ❖ Ensures better City decisions that more effectively respond to the needs and priorities of the community.
- ❖ Engages community members and community resources as part of the solution.
- ❖ Engages the broader diversity of the community—especially people who have not been engaged in the past.
- ❖ Increases public understanding of and support for public policies and programs.
- ❖ Increases the legitimacy and accountability of government actions.

The following principles represent a road map to guide government officials and staff in establishing consistent, effective and high quality public involvement across Portland's City government.

These principles are intended to set out what the public can expect from city government, while retaining flexibility in the way individual city bureaus carry out their work.

## City of Portland Public Involvement Principles

### ❖ **Partnership**

Community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Participants can influence decision-making and receive feedback on how their input was used. The public has the opportunity to recommend projects and issues for government consideration.

### ❖ **Early Involvement**

Public involvement is an early and integral part of issue and opportunity identification, concept development, design, and implementation of city policies, programs, and projects.

### ❖ **Building Relationships and Community Capacity**

Public involvement processes invest in and develop long-term, collaborative working relationships and learning opportunities with community partners and stakeholders.

### ❖ **Inclusiveness and Equity**

Public dialogue and decision-making processes identify, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Processes respect a range of values and interests and the knowledge of those involved. Historically excluded individuals and groups are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision and policy making. Impacts, including costs and benefits, are identified and distributed fairly.

### ❖ **Good Quality Process Design and Implementation**

Public involvement processes and techniques are well-designed to appropriately fit the scope, character, and impact of a policy or project. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.

### ❖ **Transparency**

Public decision-making processes are accessible, open, honest, and understandable. Members of the public receive the information they need, and with enough lead time, to participate effectively.

### ❖ **Accountability**

City leaders and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public involvement in the work of city government.

**City of Portland**  
**Public Involvement Principles, Indicators and Outcomes**

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<b>Principles</b> Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.	<b>Indicators</b> Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.	<b>Outcomes</b> High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.
<p><b>Partnership</b></p> <p>Community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Participants can influence decision-making and receive feedback on how their input was used. The public has the opportunity to recommend projects and issues for government consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members are kept informed of issues and processes.</li> <li>• Community members know how to be involved and decide the degree of their involvement.</li> <li>• Community members are advised how their input will affect the decision, and are followed up with contact from the lead agency throughout the decision-making process. (feedback loop)</li> <li>• Process constraints are clarified and understood by community members.</li> <li>• The decision making process and decision makers and their power are explained and understood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A better project or policy will result from community participation.</li> <li>• Government will have a better understanding of the community and its concerns.</li> <li>• The policy or project will have greater community acceptance.</li> </ul>

<b>Principles</b> Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.	<b>Indicators</b> Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.	<b>Outcomes</b> High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.
<b>Early Involvement</b>  Public involvement is an early and integral part of issue and opportunity identification, concept development, design, and implementation of city policies, programs, and projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members help set priorities and shape policies, programs, and projects.</li> <li>• Key stakeholders are involved as early as possible.</li> <li>• Key stakeholders help define the problem, issues, and project parameters.</li> <li>• Community members help define the process for outreach and decision making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better project scoping, more predictable processes, and more realistic and defensible assessments of process time and resource needs.</li> <li>• Early and broad community support for the project or policy.</li> <li>• Identification of potential problem areas before they become an issue.</li> </ul>

<b>Principles</b> Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.	<b>Indicators</b> Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.	<b>Outcomes</b> High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.
<p><b>Building Relationships and Community Capacity</b></p> <p>Public involvement processes invest in and develop long-term, collaborative working relationships and learning opportunities with community partners and stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members feel heard and feel that their input is valued and used by city staff.</li> <li>• Community members trust the process and city staff.</li> <li>• City staff have consistent and reliable connections with stakeholders and community groups that facilitate effective two-way communications.</li> <li>• City staff engage in ongoing monitoring of relationships.</li> <li>• City staff continually assess which communities and populations are missing key information, or are not involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processes leave neighborhoods and communities stronger, better informed, increase their capacity to participate in the future, and develop new leaders.</li> </ul>

<b>Principles</b> Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.	<b>Indicators</b> Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.	<b>Outcomes</b> High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.
<p><b>Inclusiveness and Equity</b></p> <p>Public dialogue and decision-making processes identify, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Processes respect a range of values and interests and the knowledge of those involved. Historically excluded individuals and groups are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision and policy making. Impacts, including costs and benefits, are identified and distributed fairly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong effort is made to accommodate diverse needs, backgrounds values and challenges.</li> <li>• Participation in the process reflects the diversity of the community affected by the outcome.</li> <li>• Culturally appropriate and effective strategies and techniques are used to involve diverse constituencies.</li> <li>• City staff follow-up with under-engaged groups to see how the process worked for their community members.</li> <li>• An assessment is made to identify communities impacted by a project or policy. The active participation of these communities is made a high priority.</li> <li>• The demographics, values, and desires of and impacts on affected communities are identified early on, influence the process design, and are reaffirmed throughout the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City policies, projects, and programs respond to the full range of needs and priorities in the community.</li> <li>• Trust and respect for government increases among community members.</li> <li>• City staff and members of more traditionally-engaged communities understand the value of including under-engaged communities.</li> <li>• Equity is increased by actively involving communities that historically have been excluded from decision making processes.</li> <li>• Members of under-engaged communities increase their participation in civic life.</li> <li>• New policies do not further reinforce the disadvantaged position of historically disadvantaged people or groups.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Good Quality Process Design and Implementation</b></p> <p>Public involvement processes and techniques are well-designed to appropriately fit the scope, character, and impact of a policy or project. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The public is allowed an opportunity to give meaningful input regarding what the community needs from government.</li> <li>• Process facilitators have the skills, experience, and resources needed to be effective.</li> <li>• Careful planning of project timelines take into account the length of time community media, neighborhoods and organizations require for effective public involvement.</li> <li>• Information is sent out in a timely manner so people and organizations can respond.</li> <li>• Input is sought from participants periodically on how the process is working for them.</li> <li>• Community partners have input into whether processes should change and how they should be modified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People understand the purpose of the project and why it's being done.</li> <li>• Conflict is reduced as are challenges to the process.</li> <li>• Communication is more efficient and effective.</li> <li>• Outcomes are more sustainable.</li> <li>• Public confidence and trust built through good processes can carry on to future processes.</li> </ul>

<b>Principles</b> Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.	<b>Indicators</b> Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.	<b>Outcomes</b> High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.
<p><b>Transparency</b></p> <p>Public decision-making processes are accessible, open, honest, and understandable. Members of the public receive the information they need, and with enough lead time, to participate effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified, understood and accepted.</li> <li>• All meetings are open to the public and held in venues that are accessible and welcoming to community members.</li> <li>• Relevant documents and materials are readily available to the public.</li> <li>• Materials are available prior to the meeting so people are informed and ready to participate fully.</li> <li>• Materials that are lengthy or complex are made available with additional lead time to ensure community members can review and understand the materials, clarify with bureau staff, and check back with the communities they represent as needed.</li> <li>• Adequate time and resources are given for translation of materials and interpretation services and accommodations at meetings and forums as necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members have a better understanding of the project or policy and are better able to participate effectively.</li> <li>• Government understanding of community opinions and needs is enhanced.</li> </ul>



<b>Principles</b> Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.	<b>Indicators</b> Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.	<b>Outcomes</b> High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.
<b>Accountability</b>  City leaders and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public involvement in the work of city government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources are applied appropriately to public engagement activities.</li> <li>• Community members' time and resources are respected and used effectively.</li> <li>• Public involvement processes are evaluated on a regular basis to foster ongoing learning and improvement.</li> <li>• Evaluation methods are tailored to different audiences to ensure meaningful feedback from all parties involved in a process, including community members, stakeholder groups, staff and management.</li> <li>• Best practices are identified and shared.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved strategies and tools for outreach and decision-making.</li> <li>• Increased sense of trust in government from community members.</li> </ul>