

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

AGENDA TITLE:	Discussion of Creating Community Opportunities within the Neighborhoods Program
DEPARTMENT:	Recreation, Cultural and Community Services
PRESENTED BY:	Constance Perenyi, Neighborhoods Coordinator Bethany Wolbrecht-Dunn, Community Services Manager
ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing

PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT:

In February 1996, Shoreline’s first City Council officially recognized the importance of engaged and informed residents by initiating the City’s Neighborhoods Program. Recognizing that Shoreline is an evolving city and that staff had never undertaken an evaluation of the Neighborhoods Program, staff began an assessment of the Program in 2022 as the community began to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to understand how the structures in place supported Neighborhood Associations, and how they serve the larger community and the principles of City Council Resolution No. 467, which declared the City’s commitment to building an Anti-Racist community.

To conduct this evaluation, staff engaged cross-cultural organizer Courtney Wooten of Suburbia Rising to research what a robust, welcoming and equitable neighborhoods program might look like for the City of Shoreline. Staff is now recommending proposed changes to the Neighborhoods Program regarding Neighborhood Association structure, the Neighborhood Mini-Grant Program, and the Council of Neighborhoods based on the findings of the evaluation. Tonight, staff will share the outcomes from this evaluation and these proposed program changes for Council’s feedback and consideration.

RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact of these proposed program changes. All of these changes can be accommodated within the approved Neighborhoods Program budget.

RECOMMENDATION

No action is required tonight. Staff will present the proposed Neighborhoods Program changes regarding Neighborhood Association structure, the Neighborhood Mini-Grant Program, and the Council of Neighborhoods. Staff recommends that the City move forward with these proposed changes and that Council provide feedback on these recommendations.

Approved By: City Manager **BE** City Attorney **MK**

BACKGROUND

In February 1996, Shoreline's first City Council officially recognized the importance of engaged and informed residents by initiating the City's Neighborhoods Program through [Resolution No. 54](#). Since that time, Neighborhood Associations (NAs) have played a significant role in Shoreline. With City support, they have created opportunities for engagement through events, activities, and neighborhood improvement projects. Although many NAs are known for their signature events with attendance limited to just their neighborhoods, others have invited more representative community participation in recent years. An example is the Ballinger Friendship Festival, an annual multicultural celebration with active participation from residents at nearby Ballinger Homes.

Also established under Resolution No. 54 was the Council of Neighborhoods (CON), which has historically served to connect NA representatives with the City and community partners. Monthly meetings have provided appointed representatives (2 per NA) with information to share with NA board members. Each January, CON representatives and other NA members have been offered a training covered by the Neighborhoods Program budget. Topics have focused on inclusion, from engagement of people living in multi-family housing to moving through conflict while building community.

Neighborhoods Program Assessment

Recognizing that Shoreline is an evolving city and that staff had never undertaken an evaluation of the Neighborhoods Program, staff began an assessment of the Program in 2022 as the community began to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to understand how the structures in place supported NAs, and how they serve the larger community and the principles of City Council [Resolution No. 467](#), which declared the City's commitment to building an Anti-Racist community.

Staff began with an assessment of NA structure. To be recognized officially by the City, NAs have been required to meet specific requirements, including registration as a nonprofit corporation with the State of Washington and maintenance of an IRS tax number. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many NAs struggled with maintaining boards and updating bylaws which are necessary to retain State incorporation status. During and since the pandemic, it has been even more of a challenge.

Program Assessment Survey

Staff also sent a survey to 64 NA leaders, who were asked to share the survey with others in their association. The intention of the survey was to get a snapshot of how Shoreline's Neighborhoods were doing as they began to emerge from two challenging years of the pandemic. To encourage candid responses, self- and neighborhood identification was optional.

Thirty-eight (38) surveys responses were received, with 18 individuals identifying themselves and 11 neighborhoods represented. Responses indicated that prior to the pandemic, in-person events and open meetings were key to developing and maintaining

relationship. During the pandemic, virtual meetings and social media helped maintain connections. NAs found that without in-person opportunities, it was difficult to keep residents engaged. Many NAs still struggle to maintain their boards. Even the most established NAs have had a difficult time meeting full criteria for formal standing with the State, IRS, and City. Most others met only partial organizational requirements.

Program Assessment Consultant Research

Following the survey, staff engaged cross-cultural organizer Courtney Wooten of Suburbia Rising to research what a robustly welcoming, equitable neighborhoods program might look like for the City of Shoreline. Ms. Wooten facilitated a series of Welcoming Workshops for the Council of Neighborhoods (CON) in January 2022, and worked with the Ridgecrest Neighborhood Association Board in 2021.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2022, Ms. Wooten conducted one on one interviews or focus groups with over 30 individuals. She had content-specific email or phone conversations, focus groups and interviews with over 35 people for roughly 50 data collection points.

She was also able to observe and interact with CON meetings in real time, including an informal CON Executive Committee workshop, and to observe recordings of CON meetings and other public City of Shoreline events that allowed her to gather data from roughly 70 unique perspectives. With the exception of The Highlands, all Shoreline Neighborhoods were represented in individual interviews and/or focus groups, and through observation at CON meetings.

Although Ms. Wooten did not track comprehensive demographic data, the majority of these participants were:

- Long time residents of Shoreline (grew up here, had owned homes for 5-40 years in the area);
- Active in the community (with their NA, and/or other community organizations such as USOAR, PTA, faith communities, environmental advocacy, and general volunteering); and
- White, 40 or older, and homeowners.

While Ms. Wooten's information gathering process was not a fully representational, as it was weighted toward NA members and identified community leaders, she did interview people of color, some younger adults, and some self-identified LGTBQIA community members (but likely not in proportions that match Shoreline's demographics.).

Ms. Wooten's research summary findings are attached as Attachment A to this staff report. Her findings and suggestions are reflected in the staff recommendations noted below.

DISCUSSION

Recommended Changes in NA Structure

In conducting interviews and focus groups, Courtney Wooten from Suburbia Rising noted that the strengths of NAs include informed, participatory citizenry and community bonding at events. She also heard that individual NAs have been struggling with relevance: low membership and event attendance, member burnout and little sense of direction or purpose. She has recommended building on the inherent benefits of community building by simplifying program structure to make participation easier.

Based on these findings, staff is recommending that the City provide NAs a choice of structure that fits their purpose and is more responsive to the needs of their neighborhood. Staff proposed two options for NA structure:

- 1) Incorporation with State, IRS, and City; or
- 2) Unincorporated standing, which will allow neighborhoods to work within the community without having to maintain standing with the State or IRS.

Incorporated NAs will continue to engage in the structural benefits of how the Neighborhood Program is currently established. This includes:

- Being able to apply for one Partnership Mini-Grant each year;
- Receiving up to \$750 per NA for pre-approved expenses for events, activities, projects;
- Requesting one all-neighborhood mailing per NA and have events information included in special editions of Currents;
- Requesting printing and lamination at City Hall;
- Receiving information about City functions for distribution through NA communications networks; and
- Scheduling space at City Hall and other City facilities for NA meetings or events and receiving waived fees for events in Parks.

Unincorporated NAs will have the option of working towards full incorporation should they choose, and they will receive City staff support in that process. They will also be supported in organizing activities and they will be able to:

- Apply for one Love Your Community Grant each year as long as proposed activities benefit the community;
- Request printing and lamination at City Hall;
- Receive information about City functions for distribution through NA communications networks;
- Schedule space at City Hall and other City facilities for NA meetings or events.

Recommended Changes in the Neighborhood Mini-Grant Program

Historically, Council approves an annual allocation of \$20,000 to fund Neighborhood Mini-Grants. Typically, only NAs with high capacity apply for and receive these grants. This means that the same four to five NAs receive funding every year. There has been

little or no collaboration between NAs or other community groups using Mini-Grant funds.

In her recommendations, Ms. Wooten suggests increasing diversity and representation in event planning and participation. The City can facilitate this by prioritizing funding for collaborative events. For example, NAs can work with other community groups to plan and offer events at apartment complexes, or within faith and ethnic communities.

Staff proposes moving to a new Mini-Grant model based on collaboration. Incorporated NAs can apply for Partnership Grants up to \$5,000 per year when they propose a project or event involving another NA or a community group.

The goal of this proposed change is twofold: to encourage NAs to create more connections within the community with the additional benefit of enhancing their sustainability, and to create more equitable funding opportunities (i.e., broader access and participation) for groups that have not previously been represented in the NA structure.

Recommended Changes to CON

CON is made up of a small number of NA representatives who meet monthly. Historically, attendance at meetings is limited to two elected representatives from each neighborhood.

CON faces many of the same issues NAs do, with limited participation and membership that is not representative of Shoreline's current demographics. Prior to the pandemic, meeting attendance averaged 12 people per month. During the pandemic when meetings moved to a Zoom platform, numbers rose to between 16 to 18 attendees per month. Even if a maximum number participated, and if information from CON meetings is shared at NA meetings, the number of people who benefit is very small.

The main goal of CON is to support an informed, participatory group of residents, and to facilitate active two-way communication with the City. Ms. Wooten noted that this process has not been inclusive of many communities in Shoreline. She recommends creating opportunities so more community members have a chance to learn about the City, develop relationships with presenting Council members and staff, and have their voices heard.

Staff therefore proposes shifting from monthly CON meetings to a new format called CityLearn, to start in September 2023. Rather than content-rich meetings for just a few neighborhood representatives, CityLearn will be widely promoted to all residents as an opportunity to connect with the City and to learn about how the City works. Following the format of current CON meetings, CityLearn meetings will start with a Council update and feature a timely presentation from City staff or partner organizations. They will not have a specific neighborhood focus, although all neighborhood association members will be encouraged to attend. This will also be an opportunity for the 137 graduates of CityWise to continue to engage and learn about Shoreline.

With the proposed change above, the current structure of CON will be discontinued. In its place, staff propose hosting an annual CON summit. Members of all NAs will be invited to gather and discuss challenges and opportunities in their neighborhoods and to discuss ideas for the year ahead. Staff will work with a steering committee of neighborhood representatives to plan and host the CON Summit. Staff will also continue to offer at least one training each year focused on equity and inclusion for members of NAs.

Staff presented these proposed changes at the April 5, 2023, CON meeting. While seeing the need for CON to be more inclusive, CON representatives emphasized the need for leaders to continue to meet together. In line with Neighborhood Program guidelines, the City will provide space to CON representatives as requested.

SUMMARY

To support NAs in being more sustainable and relevant to their neighborhoods, staff recommends offering two options for structure. To encourage inclusivity and partnership building, staff recommends Partnership Mini-Grants be available to incorporated NAs. To expand access to the City for all members of our community, staff recommends shifting from CON meetings to CityLearn, with ongoing support to CON through trainings and an annual Neighborhoods summit. All of these proposed changes are in alignment with the findings of the Suburbia Rising Neighborhoods Program evaluation conducted by Ms. Wooten on behalf of the City, and they are also in alignment with the foundational Resolution ([Resolution No. 54](#)) that established the Neighborhoods Program.

RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPACT

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RECOMMENDATION

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Suburbia Rising Neighborhoods Program Research Summary Findings



Summary

The City of Shoreline's Neighborhoods Program has a history that predates the incorporation of the City itself. Supporting community belonging and relationship-building, the 14 Neighborhood Associations (NAs) and Council of Neighborhoods (CON) support citizen participation to build strong neighborhoods and a vibrant, interconnected community with active two-way communication with the City. This assessment and analysis included a web-based survey for NA members, individual qualitative interviews with community stakeholders, and two focus groups using affirmative inquiry to dream and design a system that might better support belonging, inclusion and equity in the City of Shoreline.

The Urgency

Individual NAs are struggling with relevance: low membership and event attendance, member burnout and little sense of direction or purpose. From the outside, NAs have a poor community reputation (e.g., as exclusionary, in/out group, predetermined goals).

The Strengths

Benefits of the NAs include: informed, participatory citizenry; community bonding at events; and neighborhood beautification and safety projects. From the outside, NA benefits primarily include: community bonding at events; the potential/hope for belonging.

Recommendations

For **sustainability**:

- Simplify program structure to make citizen participation easier (e.g., loosening bylaws and legal requirements) and align NAs across the City
- Reimagine Mission, Vision and Values to modernize and clarify the purpose of NAs and aid in communicating potential value of membership and participation

For **inclusivity**:

- Required Training and Skill Building on inclusive facilitation, cultural responsiveness and humility to promote citizen leadership and create a more welcoming culture
- Creative, Targeted Communication that engages multiethnic, youth, and immigrant communities

For **diversity**:

- Prioritize Funding for Collaborative Events (e.g., NAs in conjunction with PTA, USOAR, hosted at apartment complexes, or faith and ethnic communities)
- Targeted Recruitment from Partnerships, including City Wise, Diversity & Inclusion Dept.

For **belonging**:

- Broaden Input Channels to hear more community members' voices (e.g., open CON meetings so more citizens can develop relationships with City Staff)