

Minnetonka Neighborhood Identities

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INTRODUCTION

This document seeks to help the City of Minnetonka (1) understand how to promote neighborhood organizations and identities based on local and national case studies and (2) understand existing neighborhood entities. This is done through a review of three broad models of structuring local government and neighborhood organization relationships; four case studies of local governments in the United States working with community organizations; in depth descriptions of three existing Minnetonka community organizations; and recommendations on how Minnetonka can use this information.

The document begins with discussing three models of local government and neighborhood relationships: delegating planning responsibilities to neighborhoods; consulting with formalized neighborhood organizations; and working with both community and neighborhood organizations. It then looks at how the governments of Seattle, Philadelphia, St. Louis Park, and Brooklyn Park work with neighborhood and community organizations. Next, it provides information on the Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association, Senior Services at the Minnetonka Community Center, and the Intercongregation Communities Association (ICA). Finally, the document recommends that the City of Minnetonka support neighborhood identities through working with existing community organizations, creating a formal communication method with community organizations, improving an online forum for organizations, and developing a city registration system for community organizations.

MODELS OF NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT

The City of Minnetonka has expressed interest in creating more formal representation of neighborhood interests and concerns in small area planning. Fortunately, many other cities have worked to gain input from neighborhoods about planning decisions, which show there are many models for involving neighborhood organizations in planning decisions.

However, neighborhood organizations have varying levels of involvement with city government. Additionally, some cities have embraced formally recognized neighborhood associations, whereas other cities work with independent community organizations. In all models discussed, neighborhood and community organizations have some influence on governmental decisions and/or set priorities for their areas, but the government makes final decisions. The models are discussed in terms of the degree that neighborhoods are involved with planning decisions and whether or not they formally recognize neighborhoods to represent a certain geographic area. Applicability to Minnetonka is also discussed.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING: HIGH INVOLVEMENT

“Neighborhood planning” gives neighborhood organizations concrete planning responsibilities. It is not common because most cities make plans (i.e. for housing density) on a citywide level. The key benefit of neighborhood planning is that it can keep resident priorities consistent with city planning

priorities by involving residents on more consistent basis, not just on isolated issues¹. The downside of this model is that it takes significant staff time and resources to maintain participation on a continuous basis. Even for well-resourced neighborhood planning efforts, maintaining consistent participation is challenging. Formal neighborhood planning efforts in other cities take from eight months to one year and resident participation has not always been consistent throughout these efforts.

Examples of neighborhood planning include:

- Chicago New Communities Program, sponsored by Local Initiatives Support Corporation, neighborhood advisory committees create neighborhood improvement plans with small area vision.²
- Strong Neighborhoods Initiative, San Jose, CA: city officially adopts neighborhood plans and refers to them to when deciding on zoning cases.
- Community Involvement and Neighborhood Planning, Austin, TX: city leads a neighborhood planning process and individual geographic areas must develop neighborhoods plans that the city must refer to when making zoning or land use decisions.³
- The City of Minneapolis Neighborhood and Community Relations Department (NCR) administers Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) funds to officially recognized neighborhood organizations throughout the city. These organizations develop small area plans and must be consulted regarding land use applications in their area.



City planner in Chicago engages neighborhood residents in a neighborhood planning process⁴

¹ ULI Community Catalyst Report, Involving the Community in Neighborhood Planning, page vi. Available online at: <http://www.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Report-1-Involving-the-Community-in-Neighborhood-Planning.ashx.pdf>

² ULI Community Catalyst Report, Involving the Community in Neighborhood Planning, p. 9-11,

³ p. 15-16

⁴ <http://www.lisc-chicago.org/news/1680>

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA:

We feel this model is less applicable to Minnetonka. Therefore, we have provided no concrete case studies in the section below. If the city is interested in continual, high involvement of neighborhood residents in small area planning, this model is appropriate and the examples listed above can be used for further research. Giving neighborhoods concrete responsibilities ensures a greater possibility that they will participate. However, this strategy would take a lot of staff time and would require high levels of neighborhood participation to be meaningful. Minnetonka may consider starting a one-year small area planning process with a neighborhood group that is particularly active already (such as Sherwood Forest). If other neighborhoods express interest, the city could start similar processes in other areas.

CONSULTING FORMALIZED NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

Even without a long-term, high involvement neighborhood planning process, formalized neighborhood organizations can play an active role in planning decisions. They can have a strong relationship to the city government that includes funding or technical assistance. There are a variety of different models in this category:

- **Formal representation and advisory responsibilities:** St. Paul, MN and Detroit, MI support District Councils. District Councils are formal citizen participation structures where organizations provide “advice and feedback to city on development plans, land use issues, zoning.”⁵
- **Formal representation, but no formal advisory responsibilities to city:** the City of St. Louis Park, MN has 35 neighborhoods, and many have associations that formally represent their areas but do not have formal advisory responsibilities. However, neighborhood associations serve as a point of contact when city issues come up so that neighborhood residents can be involved in decisions relevant to their area. These associations can also receive grants from the city for neighborhood improvement projects (i.e. beautification plantings, events, park cleanups).

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA

The City of Minnetonka already has a history of gaining input on planning decisions and providing funds to neighborhood organizations to do community projects. This includes their work with Sherwood Forest to support native plant species. The city could expand such opportunities and resources to other organizations. If the city decides to formally recognize associations in Sherwood Forest and other areas, it would need to determine whether to give these organizations formal advisory responsibilities or adopt the St. Louis Park model in which these organizations are consulted but do not have a formal advisory role in planning decisions.

⁵ Robert Chaskin and Ali Abunimah (1999). *A View from the City: Local Government Perspectives on Neighborhood-Based Governance in Community-Building Initiatives*. p. 63



St. Louis Park neighborhood groups are eligible to receive grants from the city to put on events (see left) or do community improvement projects, like the Arbor Day/Earth Day tree planting project shows above.

Photos courtesy of the City of St. Louis Park, MN

CONSULTING INDEPENDENT NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Some cities have not established formalized neighborhood associations, but have chosen to work with independent neighborhood and community-based organizations that take on the roles that formalized neighborhood organizations have in other cities. Potential roles of these types of organizations include:

- **Reaching out to residents to consult with on planning decisions.** City planning departments often have ongoing relationships with certain community organizations that are interested in land use planning, community development, community building or other areas of interest to city government. The cities of Philadelphia and Seattle both maintain lists of community organizations that they contact about particular issues. In addition, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Roxbury, MA and Community Building in Partnerships, Inc. in Baltimore, MD are both independent nonprofit organizations that partner with city government for planning, outreach and project implementation.⁶
- **Community based organizations might also be called onto community improvement projects or plan community events.** A number of cities provide funding to neighborhood-based or community-based organizations to do plan events, or implement physical and/or

⁶ Robert Chaskin and Ali Abunimah (1999).

economic development projects⁷. For example, some city planning departments receive federal Community Development Block Grant funds and use these to provide funding to community organizations for projects.

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA

In Minnetonka, the City could work with independent community organizations as points of contact in making planning decisions. The city could maintain a list of community organizations that are interested in particular planning issues and contact those organizations when issues come up. In addition, the city could grant funds to community organizations throughout the City. For example, the city currently receives Livable Communities grant funds from the Metropolitan Council. The city could set aside a small amount of these funds to provide grants to community organizations or neighborhood organizations that are independent from the city. The funds could be used for community building initiatives (i.e. a neighborhood hayride, neighborhood Frisbee or golf tournament) or physical projects that would benefit from resident involvement (such as beautification gardens on boulevards).

CASE STUDIES OF NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT

This section provides case studies of how the municipal governments in Seattle, WA; Philadelphia, PA; St. Louis Park, MN; and Brooklyn Park, MN work with neighborhood organizations. Seattle provides an example of using an online forum for communication. Philadelphia provides an example of using a registered list of community organizations. St. Louis Park provides an example of how governments can help create neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations. Brooklyn Park provides another local example of government supporting new and existing organizations through a tool-kit.

SEATTLE COMMUNITIES ONLINE PROJECT

SEATTLE COMMUNITIES ONLINE



The Seattle Communities Online Project provides an example of how local government can support and foster a relationship with neighborhood organizations. This is a city-run website that provides resources and contact information for the city's neighborhood organizations.

⁷ Robert Chaskin and Ali Abunimah (1999) p. 63-66.

Parameters: The Seattle Neighborhoods Department⁸ developed an online database for all neighborhood associations, clubs, groups and nonprofits. Seattle Neighborhood Online Project developed the idea of “Neighborhoods on the Net”⁹. The mission for this project is to actively engage the City of Seattle with communities through the use of online tools. An area on the main web page is provided for links to helpful steps for setting up different types of community pages. This section is a how-to area that clarifies and creates a better understanding of online services. The Department of Neighborhood organizes all of the information and maintains the relationship between neighborhoods and the city. The department works on the following neighborhood-related programs and issues: Historic Preservation, Neighborhood District Coordinators, Neighborhoods on the Net, Neighborhood Service Centers, Neighborhood Matching Fund, Neighborhood Plan Update Outreach, Neighborhood Appreciation Day, and P-Patch Community Gardens.

Reasons for developing neighborhoods and fostering these goals: As part of the Seattle Communities Online initiative the Neighborhood Department wants to help community and neighborhood groups to enhance their connection to the city and to the public. There are three main goals:

1. Increase awareness of community issues;
2. Increase community participations in problem solving; and
3. Increase interaction with government.

How to set up neighborhood connections: Neighborhood on the Net is an interactive list of online communities managed by the Department of Neighborhoods. Every organization has a web link, which ranges from professional web pages, Wikipages, Blogs, Facebook and Twitter. The organizations are able to list or update their link and add neighborhood data to the site as well. The Department of Neighborhoods provides direct links of the information the city provides, which is available to all organizations. Some examples of the types of organizations that are included on the interactive list are: neighborhood associations, business associations, “mom groups” of a particular area, cultural art centers, and blogs of people who live in a certain area.

The interactive list of online community webpages can be sorted in many different ways. There is a section called “Districts On the Net,” which shows the different geographical areas in Seattle. Clicking on an area will show all the different organizations that are associated with that district. The Neighborhood On the Net’s main list can be sorted by alphabetical order by organization name, geographical neighborhood and/or district, type of organization and community or commercial organization. Sorting through the list will show direct links to that organizations webpage.

Funding models: Neighborhoods on the Net is supported the Neighborhood Department of Seattle. The department has several community funding and technical assistance opportunities. The online Boost Project is easily accessible from the Neighborhood on the Net webpage. The

⁸ Seattle Communities Online
<http://www.cityofseattle.net/communitiesonline>

⁹ Neighborhood On the Net
<http://www.cityofseattle.net/communitiesonline/neighborhoods.htm>

project works to enhance skills and proficiency on the use of online resources for community groups through workshops, mentorship and seed funding to implement and/or increase organization's web presence.

Pros: Developing a city-maintained online database allows clubs, groups, associations, nonprofits, and organizations involved in the community to be easily accessible for the city, each other, and the public. Allowing different types of organizations invites diverse groups of citizens to have close access to the city, along with more opportunities to become more involved and knowledgeable about city actions. There is also a place where community organizations can go to learn how to set up and develop their web sources, including a place for organizations to learn about grants through to city. This case study shows a great example of how an online database can enable greater public connection to the city.

Cons: Seattle has a large department dedicated to developing relationships with community organizations, which Minnetonka does not have. Having an interactive list would take time and resources to maintain. It would also be difficult to place some organizations that would not be geographically based into categories. The city would need to understand the mission or the goal of the community organization before adding it to a database so it is clear to the public what this group does and why it is important. There are many technicalities to developing this database, but creating one could give the city of Minnetonka a unique way to connect with citizens and organizations.

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA

The Seattle Communities Online Project can be applied on a smaller scale to the city of Minnetonka. The city could do this by creating an online connection database for community organizations. The city of Minnetonka already lists several community organizations on its website.¹⁰ Expanding this list and developing interactive features would create opportunities for the city to connect with local organizations and provide opportunities organizations to connect with each other. It would develop an easily accessible list to facilitate communication between organizations and the city on notifications in development decisions, land use meetings. Organizations could also access the city with needs such as pursuing community improvement projects (i.e. natural plantings and community barbecues etc.). Since Minnetonka does not have many place-based organizations the City could focus on relationships with issue-based organizations such as the Historical Society, schools, and social service organizations, such as the ICA Food Shelf. Becoming a community organization would be completely voluntary. If the city chooses not to create an interactive list, an alternative would be to maintain a list of the known organizations with the contact information.

PHILADELPHIA REGISTERED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS (RCOS)

Philadelphia uses a community organization registration system. Once registered with the city, organizations in this system are then notified of and consulted on planning issues that may affect

¹⁰ http://www.eminnetonka.com/about_minnetonka/community_resources/community_organizations.cfm

them. This case study is an example of a city government consulting with independent community organizations to do community outreach and make planning decisions.



The Philadelphia Parks Alliance and the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia are Issue-Based RCOs and are notified about development and planning issues based on their interests.

Source: <http://www.philaparks.org/> and <http://www.bicyclecoalition.org/>



The East Kensington Neighbors Association is a “local RCO” and participates in planning decisions that development within its geographic boundaries (<http://ekna.org/>).

Although each one of these organizations has very different types of activities and goals, they are all notified about development and zoning decisions in the city through the RCO process.

Parameters: The City of Philadelphia encourages independent nonprofit civic and community organizations to join a list of Registered Community Organizations (RCOs)¹¹. These organizations can become “Local RCOs” or “Issue Based RCOs.” Local RCOs must specify a geographic area of concern larger than 5 square blocks but smaller than 7 square miles. Issue-based RCOs can have a geographic area of concern larger than 7 square miles but must have a mission related to land use,

¹¹ Philadelphia Registered Community Organizations (RCOs)
<http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/Pages/RegisteredCommunityOrganizations.aspx>

zoning or development.¹² Philadelphia requires all RCOs to have a mission related to land use or development. Some of these organizations include neighborhood based nonprofits, community development corporations, social welfare organizations, and civic groups. These organizations also receive notices on when a development issues comes up within their geographic boundaries. Development applicants are required to meet with RCOs regarding zoning decisions.

Reasons for developing RCO system: The RCO system is designed to improve community notification of proposed developments, while also make community involvement more predictable across the city.¹³ Civic organizations and community development corporations play an influential role in determining neighborhood boundaries,¹⁴ since residents do not always agree on the boundaries for neighborhoods in the city, and the city does not have an official map of neighborhoods. The RCO system functions to manage the involvement of different citizen groups with city planning. Philadelphia adopted this new system on August 22, 2012.

How the city formed RCOs: RCOs perform community outreach to their constituents about development decisions and organizations that want to receive notifications about planning and zoning issues must be RCOs. The system is still new at this point, however organizations are expected to voluntarily register so they can stay up to date and stay included in city planning decisions. Organizations have an opportunity to register with the city twice per year by filling out a registration form, which includes the following information: primary and alternate contacts, a person who will serve as a design review representative, a mission statement, a geographic boundary description, bylaws, names of board members, and information about a recent meeting. The registration form for RCOs is available here:
http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/PDF/Registered%20Community%20Organization%20Application_September%202012.pdf

Funding models: Each RCO is independent from the city and may receive funding from a variety of sources. No city funding opportunities for RCOs have been identified online.

Pros: Philadelphia's RCO model enables community and civic organizations, as well as neighborhood organizations, to be involved with city government. In Philadelphia the system resolves the challenge of overlapping and contested neighborhood boundaries. This case study provides a model in which city government can officially recognize community organizations without having to make a top-down decision about where to draw neighborhood boundaries.

Cons: One potential downside of this approach is that it may be difficult to decide when to notify community organizations about development issues without geographic boundaries. The City of Philadelphia requires all organizations to specify geographic boundaries, and many of the organizations it works with are geographically bounded in an area less than seven square miles. A

¹² RCO Best Practices:

http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/PDF/ZAM_Best%20Practices%20for%20RCOs.pdf

¹³ Philadelphia Registered Community Organizations (RCOs)

<http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/Pages/RegisteredCommunityOrganizations.aspx>

¹⁴ Philadelphia Neighborhoods Wikipedia Page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Philadelphia_neighborhoods

potential challenge is that issue based RCOs might specify a very large geographic area of interest and would then receive notifications about every single development decision in that large area. If these organizations are not interested in a large number of these decisions, they may stop paying close attention to these notifications.

Overcoming cons: A potential way for Minnetonka to navigate this issue would be to require that issue based organizations specify the type of land use and planning issues they are interested in on their RCO application. The city could have several choices of issues (housing, historic preservation, open space and parks, community building, community events, grant funding, etc.) on the RCO application. Issue based organizations could then elect to be notified regarding land use, development, and planning matters that are related to these specific issues.

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA

This option would be particularly suited to the city of Minnetonka since it does not involve creating neighborhood boundaries and emphasizes connections between existing independent organizations and the city. The city of Minnetonka already has a number of organizations that may be interested in planning, development, and community improvement issues, however most of them are not concerned with specific geographic boundaries. In addition, according to research by a Design Thinking course at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minnetonka's citizens do not identify with geographically bounded neighborhood areas and are more likely to identify with issue or activity-based groups, such as schools or book clubs.

The City of Minnetonka could consider developing a list of RCOs that it notifies about development decisions and land use meetings; these organizations could also have other roles, such as pursuing community improvement projects (i.e. natural plantings and community barbecues, as discussed elsewhere). Minnetonka could engage both place-based community organizations and issue-based organizations. Place based organizations would include neighborhood organizations (Sherwood Forest is the only one we have identified) as well as block clubs, homeowners associations, condo associations, etc. that are interested in becoming RCOs. Since Minnetonka residents tend to identify with activities and non-place based groups, the city could also focus on relationships with issue-based organizations such as the Historical Society, schools, and social service organizations such as the ICA Food Shelf. Becoming an RCO would be strictly voluntary.

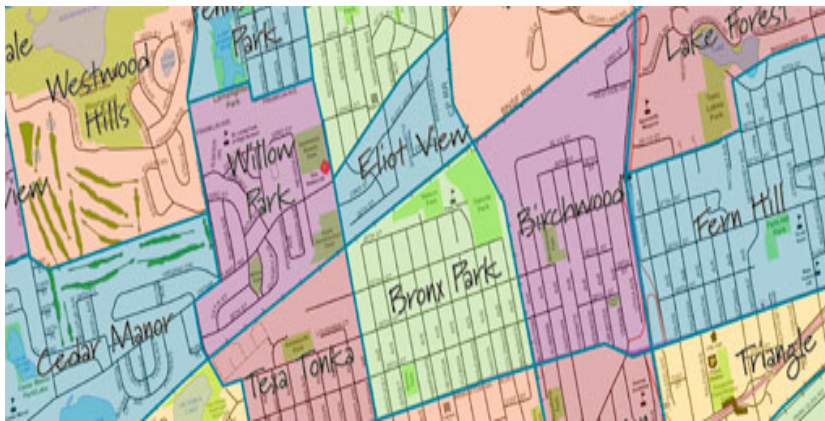
ST. LOUIS PARK NEIGHBORHOODS

St. Louis Park, MN provides an example of city government establishing formalized neighborhood organizations to strengthen connections between city government and residents. St. Louis Park uses neighborhood organizations as channels in order to get resident input on development decisions. The city can also fund organizations at-will through grants.

Parameters: St. Louis Park Community Development works with neighborhood organizations to involve residents in land use, transportation, and development decisions. Neighborhood organizations in St. Louis Park do not have neighborhood planning responsibilities, unlike organizations in Minneapolis and several other cities mentioned above. Instead of creating small

area plans, the city works with neighborhood organizations to increase citizen participation in public development review processes. Through working with neighborhoods to do community outreach, the city can ensure that residents are kept up to date about major development issues that may affect them. For example, there are two freight rail lines under consideration that go through St. Louis Park. The city government works through neighborhood organizations to ensure that residents affected by this development attend public meetings about this issue. Since neighborhoods are the first channel of communication for city about area-specific projects, they play an important role in public participation in the city planning processes.

Reasons for creating neighborhoods and ways to foster these goals: The City of St. Louis Park decided to create formalized neighborhood organizations to promote community development; livability; identification with geographic areas, increase use and involvement with public parks and facilities; and to increase input and communication with city residents.



Map of St. Louis Park neighborhoods. Many neighborhoods have neighborhood associations that are formally recognized by the city, which are a vital point of contact when the city calls a public hearing regarding development within a neighborhood's boundaries.

How the city set up neighborhoods: In the 1990s, the city of St. Louis Park uses a multi-departmental effort to create geographically defined neighborhoods. The Police; Parks and Recreation; Community Development; and Planning departments were all involved. Neighborhood areas and boundaries were created by (1) looking at existing built and natural boundaries such as railroad tracks or creeks and (2) consulting with existing neighborhood organizations and homeowners associations. After deciding on boundaries, the city government held public meetings in each neighborhood area to give residents the opportunity to decide on a name for their neighborhood. Following the creation of neighborhood boundaries, the city hired a community liaison to engage existing neighborhood organizations and assist residents in creating new neighborhood organizations. Today, Community Liaison, Marney Olson, is housed within the police department where she works closely with neighborhood block captains, who organize resident events and involvement. The St. Louis Park website includes a "Neighborhoods" section that includes information about neighborhood boundaries and associations; contact information for

associations; and states that neighborhood residents can create an association if one does not already exist¹⁵

Administrative structure for neighborhood associations: Each neighborhood association is required to have a board of directors (including a president, secretary and treasurer) and bylaws. Association boards are also required by the city to meet at least once per year, where the Community Liaison either attends the meeting or communications with the board president regarding the discussion. Some associations also maintain committees based on community interest (i.e. safety committees).

Funding structure for associations: Neighborhood organizations are eligible to apply for project-based grants (i.e. for community events, beautification gardens, etc.). Some associations supplement their funding by selling advertising space in their neighborhood newsletters.

Pros: Police Lieutenant, Lori Dreier, stated that the city’s neighborhood association program enhances neighborhood pride and enables greater input from neighborhoods on development decisions. As Dreier remarked in an interview: “even if an association doesn’t agree with what the city is doing we still have an opportunity to incorporate input from people at the neighborhood level.”

Cons: Police Lieutenant Dreier also stated that the city of St. Louis Park is satisfied with their neighborhood association program. However, one thing to consider is that the city has devoted significant staff time to this program (the Community Liaison is responsible for engaging neighborhoods).

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA

If the city decides to create neighborhoods and support associations, we recommend the city of Minnetonka to do community outreach through associations to gain input on planning decisions. Our discussion with City of Minnetonka Planner, Jeffrey Thompson, suggests that this sort of a relationship with neighborhood associations would be more appropriate than neighborhood planning, which gives neighborhood associations an official advisory role in development decisions.

However there are other aspects of the case study that are less applicable to the City of Minnetonka. First, drawing neighborhood boundaries and creating a neighborhood association program requires strong existing neighborhood organizations as well as substantial staff time. Prior to the creation of the neighborhood association program in St. Louis Park, at least two neighborhood associations already existed (compared with only one in Minnetonka), both dating back to the 1950s.¹⁶ In addition, St. Louis Park created the Community Liaison position to run the neighborhood association program and help neighborhood organizations get off the ground. Our research, coupled with the Design Thinking team’s research does not indicate strong resident support for creating a city-supported neighborhood association program. We do not recommend creating a staff position or devoting significant staff time to creating geographic-area based

¹⁵ http://www.stlouispark.org/neighborhoods.html?zoom_highlight=neighborhoods

¹⁶ <http://www.stlouispark.org/minikahda-oaks.html>; <http://www.stlouispark.org/lake-forest.html>

neighborhood associations at this time, since there is not enough demonstrated community support for the idea. However, the city may choose to revisit this case study in the future if further support for a neighborhood association program develops.

BROOKLYN PARK NEIGHBORHOOD FORMATION TOOLKIT

The Brooklyn Park, MN Neighborhood Toolkit provides an example of how local government can support the development of neighborhood organizations. The toolkit does not recommend any formal planning responsibilities to these organizations. The toolkit is available at the following location:

http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/123488/1/Anderson_The_Brooklyn_Park_Neighborhood_Formation_Toolkit.pdf

Parameters: the toolkit provides information on how to form voluntary neighborhood organizations. These organizations are formed by residents interested in creating neighborhood organizations. Organizations do not have formal planning responsibilities but may be able to receive assistance or grants from the city.

Reasons for creating neighborhoods and ways to foster these goals: Brooklyn Park want to develop neighborhoods to improve these three ideals: identity (i.e. create neighborhood signage), livability (i.e. neighborhood clean ups, car pools) and, sociability (i.e. starting neighborhood walking groups, helping your neighbors shovel the driveway).¹⁷

How to set up neighborhoods: The toolkit recommends that residents start the process of neighborhood formation by talking with neighbors face to face and discussing neighborhood formation with their Crime Watch Captains. Next steps include developing a core group and asking to city for support. Some city staff support includes the Community Engagement Coordinator and Planning and Community Development coordinators. After consulting with the city, the group of neighbors should develop goals; choose an organizational structure (potentially based on an existing Homeowners Association structure); identify leaders; recruit participants in person and online; and create a participant database. Finally, established neighborhood groups should choose a name and work with the city to develop boundaries.

Pros: This approach is voluntary, neighborhood-driven, and will works for geographic areas that already have strong bonds.

Cons: If neighborhoods do not already have strong neighborhood group or have incentives to organize (i.e. small grants for projects) residents may not organize on their own.

¹⁷ Brooklyn Park Neighborhood Formation Toolkit, p. 8-13.

Applicability for Minnetonka:

The Brooklyn Park model is potentially applicable for the City of Minnetonka if the city wants to foster the formation of neighborhood organizations and help existing groups, but does not want to force neighborhood creation or give groups planning responsibilities. This model will work for places like Sherwood Forest that already have a core group of people to organize. However, since not many residents identify with neighborhoods at the time being, it is possible that neighbors may never volunteer to form neighborhood associations.

MINNETONKA NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

This section provides in-depth descriptions of three Minnetonka community organizations. Information was gathered through member interviews and online research. It begins with one of the most established neighborhood organizations in Minnetonka, the Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association. Followed by the Senior Services in the Minnetonka Community Center, which provides an identity for members. Finally, it describes the Intercongregation Communities Association.

SHERWOOD FOREST NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

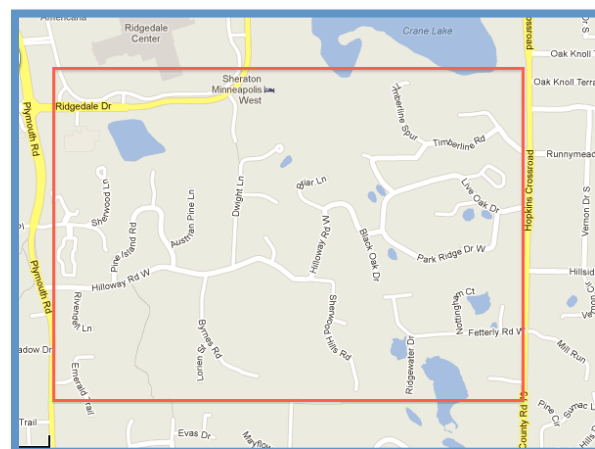
HISTORY

The Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association (SFNA) began in 1959. It was formed out of the dissolution of a previous association for residents of the neighborhood. From the 1960s to the 1970s the organization was active within the community and hosted annual dinner/dance parties. In the 1990s the organization fell into dormancy. It wasn't until the monument at the East entrance of the neighborhood was damaged in a vehicle accident that the organization was spurred back into action. The organization launched a website in 2006, which contains a more detailed history. The website is as follows:

<http://www.sherwoodforestneighborhood.org>

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Sherwood Forest is located close to the Ridgedale shopping mall in Minnetonka MN. It is bordered by the mall to the north, Plymouth Road to the West, Hopkins Crossroad to the East, and the Southern border is defined by the residences accessible to the neighborhood's main roads (Hilloway Road West, Live Oak Drive, Timberline Road) rather than by any definite boundary.



The neighborhood, physically, is comprised of approximately 256 single-family homes connected by small, curving streets. The residents have worked to maintain a sense of quiet remoteness in the neighborhood. The area is heavily wooded and the curbs on the street are shorter than is typical, which the people work with the city on keeping these designs.

Residents also describe the neighborhood as unique in that many of the people who grew up in Sherwood Forest return to eventually raise their own families. This intergenerational consistency is more pronounced in Sherwood Forest than in other suburban neighborhoods according to the President of Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association (SFNA) is a voluntary association, funded by membership dues. Dues are minimal, around \$20 a year. In 2011, approximately 34% of the houses in Sherwood Forest paid membership dues. The organization has one annual meeting per year, although the board of directors holds more frequent meetings. The organization makes decisions through the votes of members. Patrick Nolan is the current president of the organization, and has been since 2010. Much of the information in this section of the paper is based on an interview with Mr. Nolan. Jim Cooling, who helped revitalize the organization during the 1990s, and Jennifer Finlay preceded him as presidents. SFNA's current treasurer and website manager is Wayne Bren.

ACTIVITIES

The organization is involved in a variety of activities, ranging from neighborhood social events to issue advocacy.

NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL EVENTS

- **“Chilly” Cook-Off:** People in the neighborhood cook chili and enjoy it together in the winter.
- **Minnetonka Neighborhood Night Out:** SNFA helps organize as part of the National Neighborhood Night Out events. They help coordinate with the city about events that will be held and who will bring what for supplies.
- **An annual garage sale:** SFNA organizes a neighborhood wide garage sale, which included over 25 homes last year.
- **Progressive Parties:** SFNA helps organize parties in which a group of people gather together and move from one house to the next house staying within the neighborhood.

ISSUE ADVOCACY OR “RALLY AROUND” EVENTS

- **Entrance Monument Reconstruction:** This event provided the impetus for Sherwood Forest to reform. In 2004 SFNA rebuilt an entrance monument that had been destroyed by a drunk driver.

- **Road Construction:** SFNA advocated for the community to make sure that when a 2009 road construction project occurred in Sherwood Forest, it developed the roads in a way that was fitting with the neighborhood's identity. This included not putting in street lighting and lowering the height of the curbs to make the area feel more rural or secluded.
- **Natural Planting Initiative:** Beginning in 2009 the City of Minnetonka worked with SFNA on a three-year initiative to restore native plants the Sherwood Forest and remove invasive species.
- **New Home Development:** SFNA works to make sure that any new housing developments in the neighborhood fit with the neighborhood's character and are not too high density.

THE ORGANIZATION'S ROLE

SFNA's mission is to "enhance the livability and community cohesiveness of the Sherwood Forest neighborhood." Mr. Nolan sees SFNA as a group that encourages neighborhood involvement and accountability within the community. Rather than viewing the group as an authoritative enforcement mechanism, as he believes some neighborhood groups are, Mr. Nolan sees SFNA as an organization that provides the space for community building and encourages people to invest in the community. Fittingly, SFNA tends to measure success not by what they do, but by how many neighbors they involve.

SFNA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY OF MINNETONKA

Mr. Nolan describes SFNA's relationship with the City of Minnetonka as both successful and productive. He describes an open line of communication and good city focus on the neighborhood. Mr. Nolan speaks very highly of their city council member, Tony Wagner. Mr. Nolan sees SFNA's advocacy with the city as a conversation rather than a speech, where he can reach out to individuals in an informal manner when there is an issue of concern for the neighborhood.

TIPS FOR OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Nolan has the following advice for the City of Minnetonka in supporting neighborhood groups and for other neighborhood groups within Minnetonka:

- **Minnetonka can provide general guidance for groups in how to function:** The City can provide general information on how to best run a neighborhood association. Also the city can connect newly developing groups with established organizations that can guide them.
- **Find need and build around it:** In Mr. Nolan's experience, neighborhood associations will come together when there is a concrete objective in the neighborhood that requires such a group. An example of this is SFNA's reformation to rebuild the monument. Important in this is creating an ongoing shared vision of the community.
- **Issues other groups may be interested in:** Mr. Nolan knows that certain issues are of concern for other neighborhood groups. These include coordinating trash services to reduce the number of garbage trucks in the neighborhood and monitoring the placement of group homes or care facilities in the neighborhood.

- **Neighborhood leaders should “tend the garden” of their relationships:** Mr. Nolan has found that building relationships is more effective in SFNA’s advocacy than is agitation. He refers to this relationship building to tending a garden.

ISSUES SFNA FACES

Mr. Nolan identified two issues that SFNA faces:

- **Organizational continuity in the future:** Mr. Nolan describes his presidency as “for life.” He has held the role for a significant period of time, but hopes to sort of “pass the baton” onto a younger generation. Patrick sees the neighborhood as in its third generation, and hopes the younger families will take up leadership roles to keep the group alive.
- **Including the whole neighborhood:** Mr. Nolan says that the older part of the neighborhood has a greater level of participation in SFNA than does the newer part of the neighborhood.
-

SENIOR SERVICES AND THE MINNETONKA COMMUNITY CENTER

HISTORY

The Minnetonka Community Center, located at 14600 Minnetonka Boulevard, serves over 4,000 participants. It is a hub of social activity and provides services to community members of all ages. These services include: classes, senior services, special interest groups, events, and trips. There are also many activities for senior community members with the local school systems.

STRUCTURE

Steve Pieh is the Director of the Senior Services at the Minnetonka Community Center. He works with senior community members and manages the center’s activities.

ACTIVITIES

The Minnetonka Community Center coordinates the following events and activities for seniors:

- **Readers Theater:** Where community center members go into the area elementary schools and read stories to children.
- **Pen Pals:** Senior services writes letters to current students during the school year and at the end of the year host a party for pen pals to meet.
- **Local Food Shelf:** The Community Center coordinates with the food shelf to deliver food to those who are unable to utilize a car.
- **Neighborhood Night Out:** Senior Services also coordinates and helps organize with the local for this event.

- **Citizen Academic Class:** These classes help senior members learn and perform the needed activities everyday life and participation in the community.

ROLE OF SENIOR SERVICES

Working with senior community members, the Minnetonka Community Center recognizes a sense of city rather than a sense of neighborhood. Most members associate themselves most with school districts; apartments or buildings; or the activities they are involved in. They tend not to associate with a neighborhood.

Mr. Pieh sees other ways that the City of Minnetonka could improve the community, rather than providing formalized neighborhood organizations. These include:

- **Minnetonka Memo:** This monthly newsletter is a highly read resource that should be continually revised to keep residents up to date on current events.
- **Encourage more citizen participation:** Classes and workshops have been a useful tool for new members to the area, these include providing a tour of the city, along with information on staff and the layout of the city organization.
- **Improve Programming:** Work on building a stronger city through improvement of both programs and activities provided in the area.

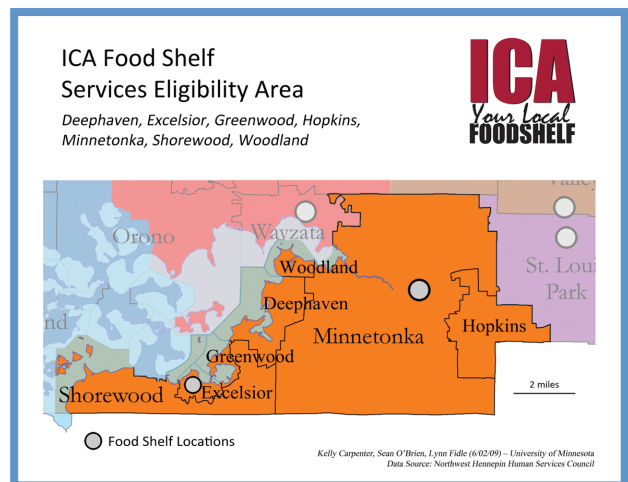
SENIOR SERVICES' RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY

Senior Citizens of the City of Minnetonka are relatively happy with the quality of life in the city, as seen through the yearly survey. Members of the Community Center associate this quality of life through the sense of the City of Minnetonka as a whole rather than individual neighborhood in the community.

INTERCONGREGATION COMMUNITIES ASSOCIATION

HISTORY

The Intercongregation Communities Association (ICA) was formed in 1971 as a coalition of churches from the Minnetonka and Hopkins area to help out their neighbors. ICA began with ten congregations working to feed ten families a month. As community members saw the growing need for the families who are out of work and need food, congregation members began to formalize. They began to generate grants and seed money to “uphold the dignity of our neighbors in need as they strive for self-sufficiency.” Community members have



generously supported ICA to fulfill its mission. Its mission is: “to offer hope as we provide assistance to our neighbors in need.”¹⁸ Today ICA is made up of the seven western Hennepin county communities: Hopkins, Minnetonka, Excelsior, Deephaven, Greenwood, Shorewood, and Woodland. Food shelves are currently serving over 860 families of four a month.

ORGANIZATION STRUCUTRE

The organization runs like a business. There is a 12 member Board of Directors and an Executive Director. The BOD is the main decision making body. The Executive Director oversees day-to-day functions of the organization and manages programs. Along with a formalized board, today ICA is partnered with over 100 businesses, civic organizations, schools, and community partners.

Originally, donations from the ten local congregations were the only source of funding. Today, funding is provided through grants, fundraising, businesses, individual donations, and the congregations. These donations and fundraising support the annual expenses broken down into 90 percent for program services, four percent for fundraising efforts, and five percent for management and general operations. ICA is proud to show that \$9 of \$10 is spent directly on its programs.

ACTIVITES

ICA believes that through its interaction and presence in the community, neighborhoods will be more stable and secure. This will be done through ongoing work of assisting neighbors in partnerships with congregations, organizations, businesses and individuals throughout the community. Along with the two food shelf locations, ICA offers additional employee assistance programs. These include:

- Developing resumes, cover letters, reference pages, thank you letters, etc.
- Practicing interview skills
- Identifying employment interests, skills, experience and work history
- Developing networking strategies
- Exploring career paths and build skills
- Providing employment resources

ICA’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY

ICA is currently working with the City of Minnetonka in the form of operating permits, community events, grants, and developing new programs in the community. ICA meets with the City of Minnetonka monthly to discuss current and future events, along with any needs they may have for the city. This support and relationship with the City of Minnetonka has helped ICA succeed in its efforts to make a difference in the community.

¹⁸ ICA Food Shelf: <http://www.icafoodshelf.org/index.html>

TIPS FOR OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

Tips for the formation of other neighborhood organizations from current board members of ICA include:

- Form a strong executive board of directors with the skill sets needed to help the needs of the organization
- Find a strong Executive Director and support staff to run program operations and meet daily challenges that may arise

APPLICABILITY FOR MINNETONKA

The creation of the ICA food shelf is a great example community groups working together to solve an issue in the community. Once congregations became aware of a common desire to help provide residents with assistance and food, they were able to work together and form a strong community presence to meet these needs. A large, strong group working together can make a greater impact over numerous small groups working individually. As Minnetonka becomes aware of community groups with common interests, these groups can then begin to work together to make a lasting impression on the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on national models of neighborhood involvement, case studies of these models in action, and interviews with Minnetonka community organizations, we recommend the following strategies for the City of Minnetonka.

1. Minnetonka should coordinate with neighborhoods through existing organizations.

Established structures for coordinating with existing organizations are included in the “Consulting independent neighborhood and community groups” section (page 5) of our paper. Organizations the city could work with include:

- Established neighborhood associations: Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association, Block Clubs (i.e. neighborhood Watch)
- Clubs (i.e. book clubs, church groups, biking clubs, garden club, softball leagues)
- Nonprofit organizations: Rotary Club, Historical Society, Senior Center, ICA Food Shelf, Community Center
- Schools/school districts

2. Minnetonka should establish communication pathways and build stronger formal and informal relationships between the city and community organizations.

- The Minnetonka Planning Department and other city departments should work to establish formalized communication with community organizations. This can be done by developing a city wide memo and developing relationships with people involved in different community organizations.

- The City should work directly with these organizations on place-based or issue-based community improvement projects, either by providing funding or technical assistance to these organizations or working with directly with them on projects. An example would be the Native Planting Initiative with the Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association.
 - The city should further enable community improvement partnerships by creating a grant or assistance program for community organization projects that would improve a specific geographic area (i.e. beautification gardens or other area improvement projects).
3. **Minnetonka should maintain an interactive list of community organizations.** Although Minnetonka currently has an online contact list for a few of the area’s organizations, we recommend enhancing this webpage. Like the Seattle Communities Online Project, this list should be categorized by geographic location and/or type of organization. Part of this website may also include an online platform for communication between community organizations. For more information see: <http://www.cityofseattle.net/communitiesonline/neighborhoods.htm>
 4. **Minnetonka should develop a list of Registered Community Organizations (RCOs).** This recommendation stems from the Philadelphia Planning Department’s model. RCOs can be notified about development decisions and land use meetings, in addition to inclusion in community improvement projects. Since Minnetonka does not have many place-based organizations, it could focus on relationships with issue-based organizations as specified above. For more information see:

Main page for RCOs

<http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/Pages/RegisteredCommunityOrganization.s.aspx>

Best practices for registered community organizations:

http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/PDF/ZAM_Best%20Practices%20for%20RCOs.pdf

CONCLUSION

This document has sought to help the City of Minnetonka (1) understand how to promote neighborhood organizations and identities based on local and national case studies and (2) understand existing neighborhood entities. It reviewed national and local models of government involvement with neighborhood organizations, four case studies of specific governments working with neighborhoods, and three in-depth descriptions of existing Minnetonka community organizations. Finally, it recommended that Minnetonka work with existing neighborhood and community organizations to promote neighborhood identity and suggested ways to do this.

APPENDIX: DESIGN THINKING CONNECTION

Maggie Sattler's research suggests that the City of Minnetonka should focus on the creation of neighborhood identities and through bottom-up community engagement. She suggests that this "organic" creation of neighborhood identities can be done through an online platform and other online engagement activities between residents.

Relationship of the Design Thinking project to our Minnetonka neighborhood identities report:

Our research is consistent with Ms. Sattler's, in that we all agree that neighborhood and community engagement should happen from the bottom-up. As both Ms. Sattler's and our research suggests, Minnetonka residents do not currently identify with neighborhood areas, with the exception of the Sherwood Forest neighborhood. Instead of creating formalized neighborhood associations, which may not be successful in developing resident involvement with the city, both projects recommend encouraging resident engagement in other ways. Ms. Sattler recommends an online forum and blog platform to engage residents. Since our research demonstrates that Minnetonka residents already identify with community organizations and activities, the City government can work through these existing organizations to increase resident engagement. This leads towards Ms. Sattler's recommendations, since it will develop new ways of communicating with residents and work to organically increase resident engagement with the city.