

MEMO

To: Debbie Tarry, City Manager; and John Norris, Assistant City Manager

From: Constance Perenyi, Neighborhoods Coordinator

Date: January 25, 2022

Subject: Neighborhoods Program – Looking Forward

Background

Shoreline's first City Council officially recognized the importance of engaged and informed residents by officially initiating the City's Neighborhoods Program Through Resolution 54. Since incorporation in 1995, the program has included staff support and project funding for 14 distinct neighborhoods.

In recent years, change has accelerated in Shoreline. In November 2020, the Shoreline City Council adopted Resolution No. 467, declaring the City's Commitment to Building an Anti-Racist Community. The Resolution states the City will address and undo all the ways racism is maintained in individual, institutional, and structural levels by changing policies, behaviors, and beliefs.

With the neighborhoods structure the same as it has been for the last 27 years, and in some cases even longer, it is time to re-evaluate how this program serves the larger community and the principles of the Resolution. We see 2022 as a year of thoughtful, collaborative evaluation. We have no intention of ending support for neighborhood associations. Instead, we want to explore how we might be able to change some of the structures that have been in place for almost three decades so all associations can thrive and other groups can have a chance to benefit from City support and resources.

Main Goals

During COVID, even our most established associations have been struggling. They have not been able to offer signature events, and many have lost board members during this time. Others have not even been able to hold small meetings. While there is an organic ebb and flow to these organizations, this is a different trend. The timing is perfect to discuss what changes would benefit established neighborhoods.

Our goals in 2020 are as follows.

Goal #1: working with guidance from the CON board, we will ask what challenges neighborhood leaders are facing, and what changes could make it easier for them to be effective.

Goal #2: learn from other cities how they structure their neighborhoods programs so we can look at other models. Review how neighborhoods have been funded since 1995 and consider if the funding process is still relevant. Work with City staff (City Attorney's Office and ASD) to determine what, if any changes, can be made to the requirements

for neighborhoods to be recognized entities, and how else we might be able to support other community groups.

Goal #3: Invite input from the community outside neighborhood associations about how the City could support other groups with common interests.

Goal #4: Review what we have learned to determine what kind of changes we can make to broaden and deepen our community engagement.

Timeline

January (completed): Offered a two-part training in January focused on building welcoming organizations. All Council of Neighborhood members and other neighborhood leaders were invited, and for the first time, we required participation from neighborhood associations planning to request City support of any kind in 2022.

January – March (begun): learn from other regional cities how their neighborhood groups are defined and funded.

February: invite neighborhood leaders (present and past) to share information about what they see as the challenges and opportunities for neighborhood associations. Initially, we thought of hosting a summit to gather this information. After the January trainings, it is clear that a few voices continue to dominate. Instead of a summit, we will use an online survey to allow respondents to be more candid, not be talked-over, and have the option of remaining anonymous if they choose. The CON Board will be asked to help with this survey, both in reviewing and suggesting questions, and in promoting to current and past members.

In the first section of the survey, participants will be asked a series of questions about challenges facing their neighborhood associations. These questions will be broken down so respondents can address pre-COVID as well as COVID times. For example: has the neighborhood association been able to maintain required structures (functional board, filing of paperwork, bylaws, elections)? What are the benefits of the structures in place? How are those structures hindrances?

Has the association been able to bring in new members? What means of communications are used to engage neighbors? How has the association maintained connections during COVID? How does the Mini-Grant process work for the association? Does representation at Council of Neighborhood meetings benefit the association as a whole?

The second section will focus on aspirations: how does the neighborhood association grow and remain relevant? What does the neighborhood look like in 5 years? What possible changes in structure would support forward movement? How can neighborhood associations support City initiatives such as the Climate Action Plan, Emergency Planning, and the move towards becoming an anti-racist community?

March: Review survey results and group themes. Reviewers will include City staff

(Neighborhoods Coordinator, Equity and Social Justice Coordinator, Community Services Manager and other members of the ESJ Team), CON Board members, and possibly other neighborhood leaders who express a commitment to the process.

April - May: In collaboration with Suni and interested community consultants, host three listening sessions. There is already interest in this topic among the consultants who helped shape the first listening sessions. Two of them have served as facilitators in Council of Neighborhoods trainings (2021 and 2022). The first two sessions will focus on input from neighborhood leaders, and discussions will further develop the survey themes. A third session will be for other community members not involved in their neighborhood associations but who want to start or continue developing connections. We will look to the community consultants to do outreach in their communities for participation in this session.

Spring into summer: consider whether there are changes that we can make to the Neighborhoods program given what we have learned from neighborhood leaders and community representatives. If there are financial implications, consider how those could be reflected in the 2023-24 budget. Request for a budget increase is not anticipated. However, there may be compelling reasons for reallocation.

August: In conjunction with the Public Art and City Event Coordinators along with interested community members, plan “Stitching Shoreline Together”, a collaborative quilt art project about community connections in the City. Launch the project as part of National Night Out, and put it together at Celebrate Shoreline.

October: With the finished project as a backdrop, share publicly what we have learned about how the City can better support community connections and how we intend to move forward.

Our goal in 2022 is to collaboratively assess the Neighborhoods program as it has existed for nearly three decades. With input from established association leaders, and after a thorough review of what changes can be made to the structures that have been in place, we can determine a way forward to help our neighborhoods adapt and thrive. Just as importantly, we will invite participation from communities left out of the neighborhoods model. We should have ample information by summer to guide our budget and program planning for the next two years.