

# **Inner Southeast Neighborhoods Constituent Meeting**

## **Public Involvement Task Force**

June 3, 2003, Southeast Uplift office

### **MEETING NOTES**

**Attendees:** Karen Southerland (HAND, secretary), Bob Fredericksen (South Tabor N.A., land use chair.), Susan Stoltenberg (Portland Impact); Sikiin Chan (Portland Impact and Asian groups), Floyd F. Landrath (neighborhood activist/Sunnyside area), Cece Noel (SEUL), Johan Mathiesen (Brooklyn N.A., chair), John Reiersgaard (East Moreland N.A., chair), Donna Forsberg (HAND. Vice chair), Brian Lockwood (Sunnyside N.A.). **Observers:** Tim Hall (Water Bureau); The One True b!X (Portland Communique website)

**Facilitator:** Carlotta Collette (chair, Ardenwald/Johnson Creek N.A.)

**Note Taker:** Paul Leistner (PSU Urban Studies Ph.D. program/Mt. Tabor N.A.)

**Hosts:** Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program

### **WELCOME**

Carlotta welcomed the group, reviewed the ground rules, and described the origin of ONI's Citizen Involvement Task Force. She then reviewed the following revised agenda, which the group members approved:

#### **AGENDA:**

1. Introductions/overview of goals, agenda, ground rules, etc.
2. What is public involvement—a working definition.
3. Discussion: What does it take?
  - What's worked for you?
  - What do you think could work?
  - What went wrong?
4. Prioritize with dots.
5. Next steps.

### **DEFINITION OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Carlotta reviewed the information on the purple sheet.

### **DISCUSSION**

**Come to neighborhood early in the process/involve neighborhood in problem definition**

Johan M. said that, in his experience in the Brooklyn N.A. (and other neighborhoods) the city

comes to the public after the decision is made. City bureaus just allow the public to tinker. He gave the example of Foster Powell, in which the city (PDOT) came to the neighborhood for comment on plans already developed by PDOT. The neighborhood association said, "How can you have a plan before we've talked about what the problem is?" The neighborhood was aware of many issues that formed the context for the proposed project. Johan said the city should come to the neighborhoods before they do the engineering.

Donna F. strongly agreed. She said that that is the neighborhood perspective. Neighborhoods want to be involved in the identification of problems. She said the city never consults the neighborhoods in defining the problem. This process needs to be fixed. When the city proposes a project, there may or may not even be a problem, but the city says there is. There may be many additional issues that the city did not consider.

Johan said Foster Powell is a good example of this. Donna said the Macadam Viaduct is as well. The neighborhood wants access to the river, but PDOT, ODOT, and the City Council say "too bad, you're just a neighborhood."

**Reinstate "Neighborhood Needs" process:** Cece noted that the city used to have a "neighborhood needs" program, in which neighborhoods took the lead in identifying needs particular to their neighborhood, and city bureaus responded. She said this program doesn't exist anymore.

**Consider neighborhoods the bedrock of the city:** Johan said "the city doesn't think of us as part of the city, but as outsiders." For the past few years, Johan's neighborhood has been trying to build a kiosk in a park. After three years they still haven't gotten the permits to proceed from the City. The project has grown to \$20,000. The City wants \$3,000 as a contingency deposit for the inspections.

Johan said the "city should start in the neighborhoods"... "neighborhoods should not have to fight for recognition"... "Neighborhoods are the bedrock of the city!"

Carlotta remarked that city government views the business community as the bedrock.

Karen S. said the business community also feels under-recognized and served. If both the businesses and neighborhoods are unhappy, on what basis is the City making decisions? "We're never at the same table." For example, PDC holds separate meetings with businesses groups and with neighborhoods. PDC staff don't want the groups to meet each other. Do they think that business owners don't live in neighborhoods?

Floyd L. asked by what process the task force would proceed and what would happen to the product. Carlotta explained the general goals of the task force and said that the City Council wants the task force product and plans to adopt it some form by next December.

**Hold evening city council meetings; acknowledge good public work:** Floyd L. said items #10 (increase neigh. asso. Role), #17 (evening council meetings), and #42 (acknowledge good public work) on the salmon sheet were significant.

- #17: evening City Council meetings: he said he (and many others) can't attend council hearings during the day because of work commitments. He said it is important for neighbors to meet "eyeball to eyeball" with the council members.
- #42: acknowledge good public work. Floyd said Mayor Bud Clark's held an annual party at City Hall to celebrate good work by citizens; it was not a serious affair or a council work session but fun and positive.

Bob F. commented on #17, that in addition to the need for evening meetings, it is too difficult to get on the City Council agenda to address the council members. Right now, you have to sign up a week in advance. This time needs to be shortened.

**Reinstate "open door" program for mayor and city commissioners :** Bob also noted that it is very difficult to get in to speak to the mayor or a city commissioner. Most people are diverted to a staff member. Mayor Katz used to have an open door program on Friday's. The mayor set aside 1.5 hours or so, and people could sign up to talk to the mayor for up to 15 minutes. Bob asked, "when did this end." He suggested that the mayor and the city commissioners reinstate this open door program.

Tim H. asked Floyd to go back to #10 and explain what this means to him. Tim said this information would be helpful to the bureaus.

**Give neighborhoods bigger role:** Carlotta described how the City of Milwaukie interacts with neighborhood associations. She said her neighborhood Ardenwald/Johnson Creek overlaps Portland and Milwaukie. Leaders of Milwaukie's seven neighborhoods get together regularly for neighborhood leadership meetings. City departments come to the neighborhood associations first on projects and land use issues. The neighborhood associations clear all major issues. The City of Milwaukie instituted this process after the recall of the mayor and some council members in response to Metro's light rail proposal. Neighborhood associations also get \$8000 of discretionary funding from the city each year. Someone asked how many people come to the neighborhood association meetings in Milwaukie. Carlotta said it varies. Her neighborhood usually gets 15 to 25. Some neighborhood associations get fewer people. Ardenwald/Johnson Creek does a good job of outreach.

**Institute greater community representation:** Floyd said scale plays a role in Portland. People live close together, neighborhoods are densely populated, and four or five people cannot adequately represent/administer all the details of what happens in their community. Floyd said a good system exists with which neighborhood people review liquor licenses and identify problems to address. Floyd said we need better, more diverse, representation of neighborhoods. He referred to the recent Robert Ball initiative to change Portland's form of government. The initiative would have created council positions that represent different parts of the city. Floyd said anything that improves representation of neighborhoods in Portland would be good.

Bob F. asked whether neighborhood association boards and officers really represent the neighborhoods. Johan said the same argument could be made about the city commissioners.

**Give neighborhoods more time to respond:** Karen S. said it's hard for neighborhood associations to do effective outreach when they only have 19 days to respond to a land use issue. Her neighborhood association is appealing a land use decision because neighbors wanted to appeal, even though the neighborhood association is likely to lose. The neighborhood association didn't have enough time to schedule a community meeting on the issue. Neighbors are angry because they weren't involved in the decision.

Sikyin C. asked Carlotta "what do you mean by public involvement?" who should organizations talk with in the community? Should they talk with everyone on every issue? He didn't think so. He said there needs to be more effort by the City to reach out to neighborhoods.

Cece N. said that city bureaus have a hard time identifying who to talk to.

Sikyin C. said the neighborhood associations were originally designed to be the hub , the best place to access neighborhoods.

**Access tax revenue to fund neighborhoods :** Johan M. shared some ideas he got when he lived in Eugene. He suggested that a certain percent of the revenue from the tax base should go to neighborhood associations. Neighborhood associations could then hire an ombudsman to help them answer questions and figure out where to go in the system. Every neighborhood should have someone to talk to to help them pursue projects important to the community. Neighborhoods need cash and power over real things.

**Control over money gives power:** Carlotta described her experience in Minneapolis. Neighborhood associations were formal distributors of CDBG money to do projects—\$2 million in the case of her neighborhood, which had many low-income residents. Because they had real power and money, 100 to 200 people regularly attended the neighborhood meetings. Each city handled this program differently.

Brian L. reported that Sunnyside was developing a neighborhood survey. He said they don't even have the money to mail it out to the residents.

Johan said that proposed new ONI Guidelines talk all about ONI's role but only mention a role for neighborhood associations in relation to neighborhood newsletters.

Donna said that under the previous "neighborhood needs" process, neighborhoods had money to do direct mailings and much more. Group members shared various opinions on how much money went to ONA, coalitions and neighborhood associations in the past compared to now.

**REQUEST:** Group members asked that the Task Force track down information and document the budgets for ONA/ONI, coalitions and neighborhood associations starting in the early 1990s. This information will help show how the structure of the system and the relative power and resources have changed over time.

Johan M. said he has talked with Elizabeth Kennedy (SEUL director) and others about giving coalitions the opportunity to go to the voters to get approval for a tax increase that would go directly to neighborhoods.

Floyd L. said “it always comes down to money and power.” He asked what neighborhood associations would look like if they had more power. City Hall would be more responsive to the community.

**Neighborhoods need greater staff capability:** Cece N. said that Commissioner Randy Leonard has proposed moving some city staff out to the coalition offices. She said that the problem is that they would still be “city employees” and their allegiance would be to city government and not the community. Coalition offices need to have staff with an allegiance to the neighborhoods. Johan M. agreed and said it’s important to have control.

Carlotta reported that Commissioner Leonard has proposed changing the name of ONI to the Office of Neighborhood Services. She expressed concern that this would further shift the focus of ONI and the neighborhood system to serving the needs of city government rather than the community.

**Example of requiring compliance with public involvement standards to get funding:** Susan Stoltenberg described a model public involvement process in which she represented the Cascade AIDS Project (CAP). The process was the Ryan White Regional Planning Council, which Susan co-chaired on behalf of CAP. Susan said the federal government offered a \$6 million grant (through the Ryan White CARE Act). The language of the Act set out very specific community involvement requirements. One was that before any money would be released, the board had to be organized to include at least 50 percent representation from people who would receive the services. CAP had to do a huge campaign to educate people about the disease, related issues, and the organization. Because of the large amount of money, lots of people wanted to get involved. The original organizers had to step back a little and let the consumer representatives take a more prominent role. Susan said this was good for the process. The group engaged in a constant effort to reach out to the community. This included people with alcohol and drug problems, gay and bisexual men, and people of color. The board held regular meetings in the community. For instance, they met quarterly at the Urban League office. They scheduled meetings during the day and the evening to accommodate different needs. (Susan said that some people with AIDS begin to lose their eyesight and need to meet during the day.) They also met in shelters.

CAP also headed up a model community involvement process to develop housing for people with AIDS (over 120 units over two years). In designing their facility, they extensively involved people likely to use the facility in conversations about what they wanted in the design of the building and the rooms. They had their architect attend these meetings before he did any drawings. (Susan said the architect said he’d never been involved a process with this kind of input before the design.) CAP went to neighborhood associations early in the process to talk about neighborhood fears and concerns. Project representatives with AIDS participated in meetings with neighborhood associations. Neighbors needed to speak directly to these representatives about their concerns. This approach requires lots of training, both for the people at the table and for the people in the community.

**REQUEST:** Group members agreed that this was an exemplary process. They suggested that a description of this process would be good to include in the Task Force report.

Cece N. said that city bureaus usually give neighborhood associations only a token role. Susan S. said community engagement needs to be an ongoing process. Too often, the City comes to the community and says, “here’s what we’re going to do, what do you think?”

Donna F. suggested that no funds should be released to implement a city project without good public involvement. Susan said that the federal government set the standards for public involvement that Cascade AIDS Project had to meet before getting any money.

**Create public involvement “checklist”:** Carlotta suggested that a public involvement checklist be developed, and that bureaus would not get funding to move forward on projects until they meet the public involvement requirements.

**Have business groups and neighborhood groups meet together:** Karen S. said that city staff have “too much to do” and say they can’t do public process. Cece N. said that when bureau’s meet separately with businesses and neighborhoods, they find that the groups often have goals and interests that are at cross-purposes. Because bureau staff don’t have the groups meet together, the groups don’t get to inform each other and work out their differences. Bureau staff, for example PDC, then take the lead in trying to resolve the issues independent of the groups.

**Give neighborhoods the resources they need to respond (e.g. legal representation):** Cece N. said the City asks for neighborhoods to respond but doesn’t give them the resources they need to do so effectively and in a timely manner. Johan M. agreed. He said neighborhoods should have access to a lawyer and the resources to engage in the process.

**Criticism of Commissioner Leonard:** Karen S. said that Commissioner Leonard came to SEUL. She asked him what neighborhoods can do to rectify the lack of influence they have with the City. She said that Leonard replied in a very inadequate way: “compromise, solve problems, [have a] can do attitude.” Karen said Leonard had not replied when she followed up on email trying to try to get a more meaningful response. Donna F. added that Leonard only answered the questions he wanted to. She noted that he appeared very defensive when he first arrived at the meeting but relaxed a little over the course of the meeting.

**Neighborhood Congress/charter review:** Johan M. said he has been talking with the Green Party and Elizabeth Kennedy about bringing together neighborhood representatives in a “neighborhood congress.” He suggested that the congress could look at the city charter and how to ensure better representation of community concerns in the process and to look at how to better fund neighborhood association activities. The congress would allow neighborhoods to have more clout by speaking as a block.

Floyd L. said he was very impressed by how neighbors got together around the creation of the piazza at 33<sup>rd</sup> and Yamhill. He said he didn’t think it would work out and recognized that some people opposed it, but that neighbors persisted and got it through. This project was a good

example of not being a government project, but of working with government; of not being a neighborhood association project, but working with the neighborhood.

Cece N. said that Jenny Leis, the SEUL staff person who helped organize the project, is documenting the process and plans to prepare a guidebook on the process.

**Build use of the news media:** Sikyin C. said neighborhoods need to do something with the media to get them to celebrate community successes rather than just doing stories on whom killed whom. We media need to make this a priority. Cece N. said the City needs to look differently at how they announce public meetings—they are not very media savvy. The City also needs to close the loop. Too often a meeting or process is announced but a follow-up effort is needed to get out the story of the results—what happened.

**City needs to come clean with information and agendas:** John R. said he thought the Westermoreland Park Master Plan Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) process was good. He criticized the City for concealing information about the Bybee Bridge over the railroad tracks. He said the CAC looked at the bridge during the process. John said community representatives had to pull information out of the City on what it was doing. The City didn't want to say that the railroad had already approached the City about changes to the bridge needed to accommodate an additional spur. The neighborhood association found out about the discussions. The City did not involve the neighborhood in this discussion, which would have a significant impact on the community. The railroad has also started using remote controlled (unmanned) engines to move rail cars. The railroad never talked with neighbors about this new practice, which can pose a danger to community members.. The City should have identified this as an issue that would be important to neighbors. John also reported that the neighborhood association found out that the railroad had a court degree against it from 1956 related to its use of the area that it had never complied with. The neighborhood association found that the original law firm that won the case still exists. The law firm has agreed to help the neighborhood on this issue again for a small fee. The law firm may also take on the City because the City owns some of the affected land and has allowed the railroad to ignore the degree. John said because the railroad is powerful and has a lot of resources, the City chose to let them do what they want. John said neighborhoods need access to legal representation and need more than a neighborhood newsletter to reach out to community members and let them know about an issue like this.

Johan M. noted that if neighborhoods had money to spend, people would come.

## **PRIORITIZATION**

Carlotta distributed dots. Group members identified their top three priorities among the issues Carlotta had written down on the flip chart sheets and posted along the wall.

After the dots, Carlotta then reviewed which items received the most votes.

### Five Votes:

- City needs to “come clean” with all the information and hidden agendas.

- Meet public involvement standards before spending \$ in our neighborhoods.

#### Four Votes:

- Neighborhoods need to be involved in problem definition.

#### Three Votes:

- Need to hear from neighborhoods what the problems are.
- Need a percent of tax base for neighborhood associations.
- Constituent representation.

#### Two Votes:

- Inform Public—but “ask before you design.”

#### One Vote:

- Use neighborhood associations as hubs for people.
- Meet on their/our turf.
- We’re never at the same table with other constituencies (business, etc.)
- #10 on pink sheet: Neighborhood association role: questions of scale—4 or 5 people may not be enough to administrate a [neighborhood]...and diversity—does neighborhood association board represent the neighborhood?
- #17 on pink sheet: Hold City Council meetings at night.
- Did the process build on a relationship?
- Allocate a percent of budget to neighborhoods for public involvement.
- Need legal advice and support for neighborhoods.

Carlotta summarized some of the group’s priorities:

- the city should meet public involvement standards;
- the city needs to come clean with information and agendas; too often city bureaus view public involvement primarily as “information management”—share as little information as possible or only information needed to get the project through; “public involvement” is not a hybrid of “public information” or “public affairs”; the public needs to be able to influence the outcomes
- neighborhoods need to define problems
- neighborhoods should get financing
- constituents need to be represented (similar to Cascade AIDS Project example)
- community members should be informed and involved before policy or project design takes place

Brian L. affirmed that neighborhoods need resources to effectively reach out.

Johan M. suggested sitting down with Wade Nkrumah from the *Oregonian* to talk about what neighborhoods do. Cece N. said neighborhoods need to talk with the media about what isn’t working to put pressure on the city council. Carlotta noted that the City Council approved the OHSU Tram project even though the affected neighborhoods were completely opposed to it but the *Oregonian* didn’t criticize the council for this. “The *Oregonian* is not our friend. We have some work to do.”

**Institutionalize Changes:** Paul L. said changes in public involvement processes need to be institutionalized. City bureaus, that usually take the lead on policy changes and projects, often have a narrow focus that is dominated by the policy focus of the agency and the professional focus of agency staff. The narrow focus of the bureau and individual staff members often does not identify or consider the broader range of community concerns that may be involved. Currently, even if neighborhoods are able to get bureau staff, bureau directors, or individual city commissioners to grasp the importance, value, and processes of effectively involving the community, this progress is usually quickly lost when staff are reassigned or when agency directors or city commissioners turnover. Good public involvement policies needs to be made part of the structure of city government in Portland.

Carlotta thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.