

Community Connect

A city for all of us - More voices, Better solutions

Fall 2007

Welcome to Community Connect

With the help of so many of you, Community Connect is becoming a reality. This project is focused on identifying the best practices that will help us create a true partnership between Portlanders and their government.

The need is obvious: As our beautiful city grows and changes, quality of life issues have become more complex. Our city is becoming increasingly diverse. We must make deeper investments in community involvement that will allow us to respond to our changing city.



A Message From the Mayor

Through my years as Police Chief and my time in office as your mayor, I've had the opportunity to meet and hear the ideas of thousands of Portlanders. There is skill, talent and wisdom in every sector of our city.

I invite you to take a few minutes to review the draft recommendations from Community Connect.

These draft recommendations are based on an extensive research process to secure the best ideas from Portlanders and from around the nation.

And then, please take another few minutes to fill in the simple feedback form. You will find it attached and online. I truly want your feedback about these recommendations so that they can be refined before coming before City Council in December 2007.

I appreciate your involvement in Community Connect. Your insights are important to me. I hope that as a result of this project, we will be able to truly put out a welcome mat to all community members to make the act of getting involved a little easier and a lot more satisfying.

Thank you,

Mayor Tom Potter

P.S. I hope to see you at one of the Connection Cafés this month.

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Other Languages

This information is available in Russian, Vietnamese and Spanish upon request.

Эта информация доступна на русском языке после запроса по телефону 503-823-4175.

Muốn biết tin tức này bằng tiếng Việt, xin gọi số 503-823-4175.

Esta información está disponible en español. Llámeme al numero telefónico (503) 823-3578.



Questions?

Want more information?

www.portlandonline.com/mayor/communityconnect

(503) 823-4092

communityconnect@ci.portland.or.us

Be sure to fill out the Community Feedback Form provided inside!



Printed on 100% post consumer recycled paper using soy-based inks

You're Invited, Save these Dates!

**Tuesday evening,
September 25th,
6:30-8:30pm**

Community Music Center,
3350 SE Francis

**Saturday afternoon,
September 29th,
1:30-3:30pm**

Providence Hospital
Social Room
4805 NE Glisan

You are invited to attend
Connection Cafés
2 dates, 2 locations, Many ideas

Check out our recommendations to improve community involvement. Tell us what you think. Your good ideas helped build these recommendations – now we need to hear your feedback. We are ready to listen.

Please RSVP: (503) 823-2108 or
communityconnect@ci.portland.or.us

For reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, please call (503) 823-4427 at least 3 business days before events. If you require translation or child care, please call (503) 823-2108 at least 5 business days before events.

A City For All Of Us – More Voices, Better Solutions

A FIVE YEAR PLAN TO INCREASE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PORTLAND

▼ Check out “Understanding the Recommendations” below for important background information

GOAL 1: Increase the number and diversity of people who are involved in their communities

RECOMMENDATION 1

Increase the power and voice of under-represented groups¹

■ **Broaden Portland’s community involvement system to include both neighborhood associations and other grassroots organizations** that represent the City’s diverse communities. Rename the Office of Neighborhood Involvement² (ONI) the Office of Community Involvement.

■ **Create and fund leadership training for members of under-represented groups using culturally appropriate models.** Continue and expand ONI’s Diversity Leadership Academy pilot project. Provide opportunities for under-represented groups to share their unique leadership and organizing models (e.g. popular education, etc.).

■ **Provide support to grassroots organizations that represent Portland’s diverse communities.** Support the community organizing and leadership development work being done by people of color, immigrants, and other under-represented groups.

■ **Contract with grassroots organizations that work with under-represented groups** to elicit their assistance in involving their constituents in the City’s community involvement system.



Every Portlander will have a voice and the opportunity to make a difference for their community.

■ **Provide formal access to City government.** Create formal recognition and a “seat at the table” for organizations that represent people of color, immigrants, and other under-represented groups. (This could happen within the existing neighborhood system, through an expansion of the system, or through a new system. See Question 7 in the accompanying feedback form.)³

Summary: Significant portions of Portland’s increasingly diverse population do not participate in the City’s neighborhood system because they don’t define their communities in geographic terms. Many of these “under-represented groups” have created effective grassroots organizations to engage their members in civic life and give them a voice in public decision-making, but these organizations currently have no formal status within Portland’s community involvement system and receive little support from the City. This recommendation will more effectively engage the city’s diverse communities.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Engage the full diversity of our community by addressing common barriers to participation

Identify best practices and provide training and support to enable organizations to implement appropriate strategies to:

■ **Make opportunities for participation more worthwhile, rewarding, and effective.** Use clear agendas and effective facilitation; incorporate time for fun and relationship-building; focus on issues that are relevant and important to the community; achieve meaningful outcomes.

■ **Make meetings and events welcoming and accessible to all.** Use inclusive methods of dialogue and decision-making; enable under-represented groups to share their own unique ways of community-building and decision-making; use culturally sensitive facilitation methods.

■ **Overcome logistical barriers to participation.** Provide child care, food, translation, and transportation at key meetings; hold meetings and events at times that work for people and in locations that are easily accessible and comfortable; address barriers that prevent the disability community from physically accessing and fully participating in meetings.

Summary: Many Portlanders told us that they would like to be involved in their communities, but there are too many barriers. Getting to meetings is hard for people with young children, demanding work schedules, or no transportation. Once people get to the meeting, if they feel like their time wasn’t well spent or their input wasn’t valued, they aren’t likely to come back. This recommendation will increase community involvement by making participation easier and more rewarding.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Promote effective communication to keep the community informed about issues, opportunities for involvement, and ways to plug in

■ **Facilitate communication and information sharing** within and among neighborhood associations, business associations, and other community organizations through print newsletters, flyers, list-serves, e-newsletters, and web communications. Explore the creation of a central website for neighborhood and business association newsletters, calendars, and websites.

■ **Promote dialogue and communication through new technologies.** Identify the most effective tools, fund them, and create a marketing strategy to publicize them. Possibilities include: eVolve and Back Fence, small business and neighborhood blogs, issue specific news forums, 24/7 Town Hall, youth-oriented technologies, N-11 number for non-emergency government services, cable and radio strategies, and community kiosks.

■ **Promote culturally appropriate direct outreach and communication strategies** including door-to-door and one-on-one relationship building, reaching out to different populations where they naturally gather, building on existing networks, using customized approaches for different communities, and providing translated materials as well as alternative communication methods (theater, popular education, etc.)

Summary: Many Portlanders don’t know about what’s happening in their communities or how to get involved. Meanwhile, neighborhood associations and local organizations struggle to get information out to the community with limited resources and with strategies that often don’t reach every member of the community. This recommendation will provide additional support for traditional communication mechanisms like newsletters and person-to-person outreach, and it will use new technologies to enable Portlanders to communicate more easily with each other and with local government.

Understanding the Recommendations...

These recommendations are divided into 3 goal areas identified by the Community Connect Workgroup based on what we heard from Portlanders about their community involvement priorities. Following each of the 8 recommendations, there is a set of strategies and a summary that helps to explain each recommendation. Definitions for some terms are provided in footnotes on the back page.

Within this document is a proposed 5 year plan to increase community involvement. This set of recommendations proposes to enhance the City’s main method of community involvement, a neighborhood-based system, by developing a more comprehensive community involvement system that would include groups beyond geographic boundaries. Implementation of the recommendations will need to be phased in over this period and will require new resources above existing budget allocations. Our intent is not to divert resources from existing programs to fund these recommendations.

Many of Community Connect’s recommendations aim to strengthen and give voice to grassroots, community-based organizations, including neighborhood and business associations and other community groups. We are also interested in ensuring accountability and fairness among all organizations. This could be accomplished by establishing certain common criteria for organizations to qualify for resources, providing resources through a competitive process, and holding organizations accountable to specific performance and outcome measures.

One of the central ways that Portland supports community involvement is through a neighborhood system. Officially recognized by the City of Portland, neighborhood associations are volunteer-run organizations that represent neighborhood interests, communicate activities and ideas to their members and organize community-building events. There are currently 95 neighborhood associations throughout the city. Seven District Coalitions receive funding from the City to provide direct support and services to neighborhood associations, business associations, other community organizations, and individuals within their geographic boundaries.

These recommendations propose to broaden this neighborhood-based system to enable the City to more fully engage the diversity of our communities. Community Connect recognizes that people also identify with community groups which are not always geographically-based (i.e. traditional neighborhoods). For many Portlanders, the “community” most important to them is based on their shared identity or shared interest with others.

Be sure to fill out the Feedback Form provided!

GOAL 2: Strengthen Community Capacity

RECOMMENDATION 4

Foster social ties and a sense of community identity

Identify best practices and provide training and support to implement appropriate strategies, such as:

- **Community gatherings:** block parties, community and multi-cultural fairs and festivals.
- **Welcome kits for new residents** informing them about who lives in their community, its assets and amenities, and their local associations and community organizations.
- **Face-to-face relationship building:** build one-on-one relationships to foster understanding of one another's cultures and backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Strengthen the community's capacity to take action to move forward its priorities

- **Build and sustain community members' leadership and advocacy skills by providing ongoing citywide leadership training.** For example, create a Community Learning Center with training on how the City works, advocacy and organizing skills, and cultural competency.
- **Create a technical assistance program** delivered by District Coalitions⁴ that includes training and support with grant writing, communications, community organizing and asset mapping, outreach and facilitation, and democratic decision-making methods. Provide District Coalitions with necessary training and resources and hold them accountable to specific performance measures.
- **Provide small grants** to community organizations to enable them to determine community needs and desires through inclusive processes such as asset mapping and community organizing, to develop and implement community action plans, and to organize community-building projects and events.
- **Provide targeted staff support to communities experiencing a high degree of development pressure or other major changes** to keep community members informed, to manage conflict, and to allow the community to take advantage of opportunities that arise.
- **Provide evaluation and best practices information by creating a Strategic Community Involvement think tank** that is based in the community (and facilitated by ONI and/or PSU) to create a detailed picture of what effective community involvement looks like, identify best practices, and evaluate and document existing efforts. Findings will be shared through the Community Learning Center and district level technical assistance programs.
- **Reform the neighborhood District Coalition system to provide equitable support throughout the city.** Equalize the resources and services provided to each District Coalition and neighborhood throughout the city (e.g. provide funding according to an equitable formula taking into account geographic size, population, and other variables.) Develop a consistent structure for District Coalitions (e.g. all non-profit).

Summary: Portland has a long history of community action. Many of the city's most important achievements have come from the efforts of communities working on their own behalf. The promotion of just policies and practices throughout the city requires that communities have the resources to advocate for their priorities. This recommendation strengthens the ability of local communities to take action by providing them with skills, resources, and staff support.

- **Publicizing neighborhood identities and assets:** e.g. street sign caps with neighborhood names.
- **Creating and preserving physical spaces and design features** that provide a focus for the community and a welcoming, inclusive place where people can gather, such as markets, gardens, intersections, community centers, parks, benches, and schools as community centers.

Summary: People across the city value the role that their local neighborhood associations and community organizations play in bringing community members together and building a sense of community. This recommendation will support strong and vibrant communities by encouraging relationship building, gatherings, and community building projects.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Foster networking and collaboration between neighborhood and business associations and other local organizations and interest groups

- **Promote opportunities for community members and stakeholders to come together citywide.** Hold an annual citywide Community Assembly that brings together a wide range of people and organizations to network, share information and best practices, discuss issues, identify common concerns and desires, and deliberate over citywide policy and planning priorities.
- **Reinforce the role of District Coalitions as conveners of a wide range of interests and organizations:** Provide training, skill development, and resources to enable District Coalitions to effectively reach out to different groups within their districts, build networks among them, and create linkages between the community and relevant City agencies. ONI plays a similar role citywide.



Portlanders will be able to work across differences to make positive change.

- **Promote collaboration between organizations.** Foster formal partnerships as well as issue- and project-based collaborations among neighborhood and business associations and other community organizations (e.g. by providing grants to partnerships rather than individual groups).
- **Bring together different communities and interests to build shared understanding.** Foster local and citywide dialogue on controversial and divisive issues; facilitate study circles and listening sessions to build shared understanding; provide mediation and conflict resolution as needed.

Summary: One of the most consistent ideas we heard from our interviews was the desire to bring people and organizations together across differences, both to learn from one another and to build a more unified community voice. This recommendation promotes dialogue and information sharing across different communities, but it also emphasizes the importance of bringing a wide range of interest groups to the table for problem-solving and decision-making.

GOAL 3: Increase Community Impact on Public Decisions

RECOMMENDATION 7

Make public decision-making more responsive and accountable to community input

- **Establish new guidelines and training for Bureau Advisory Committees⁵** so they have policy authority into programming and budgetary decisions. Require advisory committees to review and provide recommendations on budgets, key policies, and annual work plans for all City bureaus. Recruit committee members from a broad cross-section of the community and provide consistent training and best practices information to support their work.
- **Create a broad and open City budgeting process.** Hold budget workshops in the community long before decisions are made and with thorough, easy to understand explanations. Create clear guidelines for incorporating community input into the decision-making process. Consider switching to a two-year budget cycle to facilitate more effective community involvement.
- **Create an ongoing Community Needs Process.** Provide communities with an opportunity to define their priorities as an integral part of City budgeting and planning processes. Create clear guidelines for incorporating community input into the decision-making process, including a report back to the community about how their input was used. Build on the previous Neighborhood Needs model, with modifications to increase effectiveness.
- **Create formal liaisons between the community and government.** Provide designated liaisons from the City to attend community meetings and serve as a communication link between the community and City government. Possible models include expanding the Bureau of Planning's District Liaison model to

other bureaus or exploring Vancouver, Washington's model for assigning a City staff person to each neighborhood association.

- **Make information about government decisions easily accessible and transparent.** Require all boards, commissions, and advisory committees to post online meeting notices, agendas, and minutes. Provide adequate notification in advance of meetings. Develop clear criteria for putting items on the City Council's consent agenda and provide a summary explanation of consent agenda items for the public.
- **Close the loop.** Circle back to the community to explain the decision that was made, the rationale for the decision, and how community input was used. If input was not used, require decision-makers to provide written explanations as to why community input was not followed. Continue to inform and involve the community in the implementation phase.
- **Give the community direct control over certain decisions.** Convene a workgroup to develop a detailed policy proposal to bring to City Council that delegates control over certain policy, planning, and budgeting decisions to local communities. Consider including a provision to give communities direct control over a designated revenue pool for locally-specific functions and for implementing community plans.

Summary: In our research, one of the themes we heard most frequently was that the community needs an opportunity to proactively shape public decisions, not just respond to proposals; and government needs to be responsive to community input. This recommendation aims to build clear guidelines and processes for incorporating communities' priorities into public decision-making.

What is Community Connect?



“Good citizens are the riches of a city.” This quote is inscribed at the base of Skidmore Fountain. If the people who live here in our city are our wealth, how well is the City investing in and supporting all Portlanders?

Portland is nationally known for its system of 95 neighborhood associations. This system is an important way to foster community involvement at the local level. However, over 30 years have passed since it was developed – and a lot has happened in this city since then. The city’s population has grown and it has become more ethnically diverse. Meanwhile, a smaller proportion of residents are involved in civic affairs now than they were a decade ago, and monetary resources to support the neighborhood system have stagnated.



Mayor Tom Potter initiated Community Connect to update and sustain Portland’s tradition of community involvement and better meet the needs of our changing city.



Towards this end, Community Connect began with a listening process and engaged nearly 1,400 Portlanders to get their ideas about how the City can better support its communities.

Here’s what we heard:

- Neighborhood associations play an important role in building community and advocating for necessary services, but they also struggle with limited capacity, declining membership, and leader burn-out.
- Many Portlanders are not aware of how to get involved in their neighborhood associations. Others say they don’t feel welcome or that the neighborhood association doesn’t represent their interests.
- Portland’s increasing diversity brings new vibrancy and energy to the city, but many of the city’s diverse populations do not define their communities in geographic (i.e. neighborhood-based) terms. Instead, they tend to identify with communities based on their race, ethnicity, faith or other social identities.
- Many Portlanders don’t know their neighbors or feel connected to their communities. They are interested in becoming better connected to people and organizations both within their local communities and citywide.
- Community activists and volunteers don’t feel they’re having enough of an impact on public decision-making. They would like assurance that their input is being heard, and they would like the City to be more accountable to the community.

Based on this extensive input and national research, the Community Connect Workgroup has developed eight draft recommendations to:

- Increase the number and diversity of people who are involved in their communities
- Strengthen community capacity
- Increase community impact on public decisions

What We Heard

We invite you to review the Executive Summary from the research phase of Community Connect.

You will also find the longer Summary of Research as well as individual summaries of what we heard from our 19 different information sources. These sources include interviews or surveys with nearly 1,400 community members and stakeholders and a national scan of best practices.

You can find a link to our research at:

www.portlandonline.com/mayor/communityconnect.

Click on *What We’re Hearing*.

After input is gathered from diverse communities citywide, the Community Connect Workgroup will further refine the recommendations in fall 2007 to reflect your feedback and the input from several other current efforts related to improving community involvement.* These final recommendations will be presented to City Council at a public hearing in December 2007.

You are encouraged to attend this hearing and share why you

What’s Next?

believe community involvement is worth the investment.

If you would like to be involved in helping to make Portland a more engaging and inclusive city, please contact Community Connect at (503) 823-4092 or communityconnect@ci.portland.or.us. Or visit our web site at www.portlandonline.com/mayor/communityconnect.

* Includes recommendations from the Immigrant and Refugee Taskforce, the Community Experience Partnership (focused on older adults), the Voice Committee of the Children’s Bill of Rights, and ONI’s Civics 101 curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS Continued from inside pages

RECOMMENDATION 8

Institutionalize the City’s commitment to public involvement in decision-making

■ **Foster an internal culture within City government that supports a commitment to public involvement.** Hire people who are committed to public involvement, especially at upper management levels. Provide staff training and capacity building, and include quantifiable public involvement measurements in performance evaluations. Involve community members in evaluating the public involvement process for projects that they have participated in.

■ **Create comprehensive public involvement standards and guidelines:** Support the implementation of recommendations from Bureau Innovation Project #9⁶ and the Public Involvement Task Force, including the formation of a Public Involvement Standards Commission. Charge the Commission with developing recommendations to:

- Amend the City Charter to include a “bill of rights” section that defines the City’s commitment to community governance⁷ and establishes a community governance structure for Portland.
- Have the City Council adopt community governance principles by ordinance to set the standard for all City bureaus and staff.
- Require written public involvement plans for all major capital, policy, and planning projects and budget decisions.

Summary: We heard concerns from many people that the City isn’t consistent or comprehensive enough in its efforts to involve the community. Community involvement is a two-way street, but many Portlanders worry that the City isn’t committed to listening to the community. This recommendation aims to create a culture of public involvement that guarantees a right to input for the community and builds a genuine partnership between the community and government.

Footnotes to Recommendations

¹ “Under-represented groups” refers to individuals and organizations who are less likely to participate in mainstream forums for civic participation (such as neighborhood associations), and who therefore tend to not be well represented in these forums. This includes (but is not limited to) people of color, immigrants and refugees, low-income and homeless residents, youth, persons with disabilities, and seniors.

² The Office of Neighborhood Involvement coordinates Portland’s current neighborhood-based community involvement system, which is currently made up of 95 recognized neighborhood associations and seven District Coalitions. For more information, see <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/>.

³ How this strategy is implemented will depend on the responses to Question 7 in the accompanying feedback form.

⁴ District Coalitions contract with ONI to provide direct support and services to neighborhood associations, business associations, community organizations and other groups and individuals within their boundaries. The specific details of how this recommendation is implemented will depend on responses to Question 7 in the accompanying feedback form.

⁵ Bureau Advisory Committees are groups of community representatives appointed by each bureau to serve as the community’s “voice” for decision-making within City bureaus.

⁶ BIP #9 was convened by Mayor Potter to develop consistent public involvement procedures for the City. Their recommendations, which included an endorsement of proposals from the 2003 Public Involvement Task Force, are currently being piloted by several City agencies. A Public Involvement Standards Commission will soon be formed to oversee implementation. For more information on BIP #9, go to <http://www.portlandonline.com/mayor/index.cfm?c=39099>.

⁷ Community Governance recognizes that ownership of community problems, solutions and opportunities rests with the entire community. Effective progress on these issues requires cooperation and collaboration between government, the community, and the private and not-for-profit sectors.