



# PORTLAND'S NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

## PART I – HISTORY

League of Women Voters of Portland Education Fund

October 2005

Members of the League of Women Voters of Portland voted at the annual convention in May 2004 to restudy the issue of neighborhood associations in Portland. A similar study was conducted in 1975. The purpose of this study is to educate members, and later, through a process of discussion and consensus unique to the League, to revise our advocacy position on this subject. This history is Part I of member education; Part II is expected in 2006. It will discuss the questions currently being asked by city government and the public in charting a future course for the Neighborhood Association program.

### Neighborhood Voice in Portland

Neighborhoods of Portland emerged as participants in city planning between 1966 and 1980. Among the earliest was Lair Hill, where students, renters, and Jewish and Italian families displaced by the South Auditorium urban renewal project rose up against city plans for redevelopment. In 1966, Northeast Portland applied to participate in the Model Cities program; a citizens' planning board was appointed to guide the project. In Northwest Portland, proposals to expand Good Samaritan Hospital and to build a freeway spurred neighborhoods to organize and become negotiators for plans that saved older neighborhoods. In 1971, Southeast neighborhoods successfully challenged the building of the Mount Hood Freeway.

Forces behind the emergence of neighborhood voice were:

- Residents who reacted against city plans to urbanize older, inner city neighborhoods through increased densities, commercial uses, and transportation projects.
- New city leaders who were not tied to old planning practices.
- Increased requirements for citizen participation in federal and state programs, including Model Cities, Office of Economic Opportunity, Urban Renewal, Housing and Community Development, and in Oregon, SB 100 initiating the state's land use laws.

### Formation of the City's Office of Neighborhood Associations

In January 1972, the Portland City Council under the direction of Mayor Terry Schrunk convened the District Planning Organization Task Force to explore the idea of a city structure for neighborhood and district citizen participation. The City was acknowledging the current phenomena of increased citizen interest and participation in the planning and the delivery of government services,

as well as requirements on city, state and federal levels for defined citizen participation structures. At this time involvement of neighborhoods in city government was uneven and dependent on local initiative and the availability of federal funding.

The Task Force recommendations centered around three principles: that a two-tiered structure of neighborhood planning organizations (NPOs) and district planning organizations (DPOs) be established; that both tiers be involved in planning for both physical and social issues; and that this structure should have some genuine authority with the City Council.

In 1973, newly-elected Mayor Neil Goldschmidt supported these ideas for neighborhood participation in city government by proposing a Bureau of Neighborhood Organizations with a budget of \$104,000. The task of turning this proposal into a city ordinance was assigned to the new Commissioner of Public Affairs, Mildred Schwab, who hired Mary Pedersen, the Coordinator for Northwest District Association.

A first draft ordinance proposed a system of both NPOs and DPOs, with NPOs forming DPOs when issues emerged that affected livability in more than one neighborhood. Public review of this first draft raised many questions. DPOs were seen by some as another layer of bureaucracy that would dilute NPO influence at City Council. The centralized functions of the administering city bureau were seen as too strong.

A second draft ordinance addressed these concerns by changing the proposed Bureau to the Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA) with a major function of coordination rather than administration. Assurances were added for the right of all parties to participate, as well as the right that dissenting views be heard. In the final reading, a surprise proposal by Commissioner Frank

#### Guide to Acronyms

NPO	Neighborhood Planning Organization
DPO	District Planning Organization
ONA	Office of Neighborhood Associations
ONI	Office of Neighborhood Involvement
NA	Neighborhood Association
BAC	Budget Advisory Committee
DC	District Coalition
DCB	District Coalition Board

Ivancie deleted the entire section of DPOs. The revised ordinance passed by a vote of 4 – 1. As implementation of the ordinance got underway in April 1974, the city passed a plan to try out district field offices in three areas of the city where federal resources for this purpose were not available.

The ordinance was revised again in 1975 to replace the process of city-recognition for neighborhood associations (NAs) with a requirement that NAs meet minimum standards. These standards included banning discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, or national origin; that NAs adopt written procedures for dissent and grievances; and that NA bylaws be on file with ONA. NAs were responsible for general notice and public information on elections and planning efforts, holding open meetings, and having open access to information. In addition, NAs were to include affected city agencies in planning efforts, and to cooperate with city agencies in seeking outside funding. ONA was charged with information sharing, liaison services between NAs and city agencies, and educational and technical assistance to NAs.

## **Early Years of ONA**

The city's neighborhood system was centered on neighborhood associations, with the purpose of both ONA and the various district offices to support and enhance the work of the NAs. Two important advocates were Mayor Neil Goldschmidt, who was elected on a platform of supporting neighborhoods, and Mary Pedersen, who was hired in 1973 to draft the ordinance initiating the City's neighborhood system. She became the Coordinator of ONA when the initiating ordinance passed in February 1974, serving until 1979.

Neighborhood Plans: The city's NA system was introduced in the same era as Oregon's land use law, SB100, which required citizen participation in community planning. The ordinance set the stage for a more formalized relationship between the Planning Bureau and NAs. Under the adopted plan, city agencies were responsible for notifying NAs 30 days prior to a decision affecting a neighborhood, including NAs in all planning efforts affecting neighborhood livability, assuring the plans recommended to the city by NAs have a public hearing, and that any changes be sent to the NA. NAs were responsible for notifying city agencies about any planning efforts, sharing information, and cooperating with city agencies.

Neighborhood Needs: One of several important achievements in these early years was getting the neighborhoods involved in the city's budget process. "One of the biggest beefs the neighborhoods had was that they could not get the Bureaus to listen to what their needs were," according to Pedersen.

ONA worked for a process to include NA requests in the city budget process in time for the bureaus to investigate them and consider neighborhood priorities. This was the beginning of the neighborhood needs process. However, neighborhood needs did not always appear in the list of capital improvements in the budget. But because Mayor Goldschmidt supported the neighborhoods, bureaus were asked to be accountable if neighborhood input did not appear in the bureaus' budgets. "This was the thing that made Portland, in my view, at that time so exciting – it was the convergence of good political leadership and active neighborhoods..." (Pedersen)

Budget Advisory Committees (BAC) were an outgrowth of this movement to have strong citizen input on the budget. There was a desire to follow what happened after the neighborhood needs were submitted. Advisory committees for each of the city bureaus were introduced by Mayor Goldschmidt in 1974, and were formally adopted by the City Council in 1980. By 1983, fifteen BACs existed. A larger steering committee, the Bureau Advisory Coordinating Committee, comprised of chairs of the BACs, was created to oversee the BAC process.

District Offices and Contracts for Services: While NAs are comprised of volunteers, support comes from the district coordinators whose job is to provide technical assistance to neighborhoods. As the system took form in the early 1970s, the boards of district coalitions, made up of neighborhood representatives, were the ones to interview and select the coordinator for their area. District offices were funded through a contractual arrangement with ONA. In a review of contractual agreements in the late 1970s, City Council reserved the right of final say in the approval of these agreements.

## **ONA's First Decade**

By 1979, there were 60 active neighborhood associations in Portland, and the city's planning process and neighborhood efforts were aligned with major accomplishments across the city in neighborhood revitalization. Frank Ivancie was elected Mayor in 1980 and ONA was under pressure to show the system functioned smoothly and efficiently. With the number of NAs growing, ONA needed to increase the administrative capacity of district offices to support the NAs. Each area of the city was different and no standard approach was possible. The second ONA director, Patty Jacobsen, emphasized training for bureau staff, especially in planning and transportation. In 1983, Mayor Ivancie, fearing loss of City Council authority, proposed cutting the district offices from the budget. He was deluged by neighborhood activists and reversed his position.

Crime Prevention, at first a federal program, came under ONA's umbrella in 1984. ONA's approach emphasized identification of public safety issues, NA training, safety

alerts, and block watches. Outreach workers were a bridge between neighborhoods and the Police Bureau. The Neighborhood Mediation Program was also offered through ONA and focused on resolving disputes between neighbors, especially landlord/tenant issues.

## **ONA Guidelines**

The next 10 years brought many questions concerning ONA's purpose and survival. The recession of the 1980s brought public expenditures under increased scrutiny. Annexation of East Portland became an issue, with residents in this area questioning ONA's agenda. By 1984, the dynamics within the North Portland Citizens Committee were becoming problematic. Sarah Newhall, the ONA director from 1985-89 (who served under Mayor Bud Clark) sought to fortify the program against such threats through the adoption of more uniform, commonly understood rules. She convened a Policies and Procedures Review Committee in December 1985; the outcome of this effort was the first Guidelines document to supplement the 1975 ONA ordinance. (District offices had never been included in the ONA ordinance and clarification of their function and other issues was needed.)

Specifically, the "Guidelines for Neighborhood Associations, District Coalition Boards (DCBs), and the Office of Neighborhood Associations" outlined in great detail the expected functions of each tier of the system and, "the procedures for the smooth functioning of this neighborhood program." Requirements for city-recognition of NAs and eligibility for ONA services included open membership, bylaws on file at ONA, clear boundaries, non-discrimination, voluntary dues (if any), provisions for grievances, meeting requirements for the membership, and abiding by Oregon statutes on open meetings and public records. In addition, the following provision was included:

*To have a voice in setting goals and priorities for a District Coalition Board, and to determine the allocation of that DCB's resources, a Neighborhood Association must participate as a member of its District Coalition Board.*  
(Guidelines, 1987, pg. 2)

The 1987 Guidelines also outlined roles and responsibilities of District Coalition Boards, which included developing an annual work program, and filing progress reports on accomplishments twice a year. It is said by NA activists that Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Services was the model for the district coalition tier outlined in the 1987 Guidelines.

The Guidelines were controversial; many saw the need to formalize the system, but districts that saw a change being imposed were opposed. In two areas, the rules for DCBs centralized the neighborhood system. DCBs were

required to develop a yearly work plan to be reviewed by ONA, and NAs, in order to receive funding, were being asked to work together at the district level.

Shortly after the Guidelines were adopted, City Code Chapter 3.96 was rewritten to reflect program changes. In accordance with the requirement that the Guidelines be reviewed every 2 years (changed to every 4 years after 1989), a revision process was initiated in 1989 (completed in 1991), 1997 (completed in 1998), and 2001 (completed in 2005).

It was during the mid to late 1980s that Portland's NA system was part of the Tufts University study, which later selected it as one of five exemplary programs out of 900 in the country for its unprecedented level of commitment to citizen involvement in comparison with other cities nationwide.

## **Conflict Between ONA and District Coalitions**

By 1986, there were six district coalitions (DCs) in the ONA system with great variety in political dynamics. Three of these were not operating within the roles and responsibilities of DCBs set forth in the Guidelines: North Portland hosted only 2 active NAs; Neighbors West/Northwest was an informal gathering of NAs, dominated by Northwest District Association; recently annexed East Portland was organized through Multnomah County's Community Planning Groups rather than smaller neighborhoods.

In 1989, a budgetary measure abolished the Portland Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) and redistributed three of its commissions to ONA: Portland-Multnomah Commission on Aging, the Metropolitan Human Rights Commission, and the Youth Commission. Rachel Jacky, ONA director from 1989-1993, was the former director of BHR.

During this period, and especially when ONA was under Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury, there was suspicion that ONA was asking the neighborhood system to adopt a human services agenda. Although ONA had met regularly with district coalition leaders since the late 1970s, animosity was growing between these two tiers of the system. ONA contract language became objectionable and sparring with Kafoury's office occurred. Kafoury, coming from a social service/housing background in her "Neighborhood Futures" campaign, tried to focus DC leaders around a social service agenda, which had not been developed by DCB leadership. Northwest formed an alliance with Southwest and East to thwart ONA.

(Another factor behind the lack of a human services role for Portland NAs was the passage in 1983 of Resolution A between the city of Portland and Multnomah County, assigning social service delivery to the county and land use functions to the city.)

## Dissolution of North and East Portland DCBs

Increasing conflict within both the North Portland and East Portland districts in the 1990s resulted in the cancellation of ONA contracts and the dissolution of both DCBs.

North Portland Citizens Committee (NPCC), which predated ONA, had a pre-1980 history of extensive revitalization efforts, much of which was funded federally. This organization convened general meetings 10 times a year and functioned as a forum for citizens to voice concerns about livability in the area. Following years of audit problems and infighting on the NPCC board, ONA, in 1989, required as a condition of contract renewal that NPCC undergo supervised board trainings. Within NPCC disagreements arose over control of monies, procedural issues, and new bylaws and a schism of the board resulted. Two NAs eventually took legal action against NPCC staff, the board of directors, Commissioner Kafoury and the ONA Director, charging conspiracy. The lawsuit was heard in 1994 and was finally dismissed by the Oregon Supreme Court in 1997. By 1994, a new district office had been formed, which departed from the model in other districts. The same office, North Portland Neighborhood Services, exists today. Instead of holding a contract with the city, it is led by a city staff person who works to boost the organizational capacity of NAs in the district and supports a loose network of NA leaders who no longer function as a District Coalition Board. The NA members set the policies for district operations.

In East Portland, citizen participation began when this area was unincorporated. Seven community planning groups covered the area and formed the Mid-County Coordinating Committee, a fiercely independent group working mostly on land-use planning. Annexation and later sewer connection fees were divisive issues, leaving many East Portlanders leery of city-sponsored efforts such as ONA. There was resistance to changing community planning groups into the city's NA model. Pro- and anti-annexation sentiments continued to split the East Portland District Coalition, which had formed in 1990. In a long tale of ego clashes, disagreements over district staff, and boundary disputes, ONI Director Diane Linn in 1996 told the DCB that without a vote of support from participating NAs, the district coalition contract would be dissolved. This occurred and eventually a district office like the North Portland office was formed. Staff are city employees through ONI, and NAs work together in a more loosely connected group than the non-profit organizations in the other five DCs of the city.

## ONA/ONI 1992 – Present

The last 13 years have been characterized by many efforts, mostly community-wide, to evaluate the purpose and future direction of Portland's NA program. They are

indications of the increasing difficulty in articulating ONI's identity and role. Questions include whether the NA system provides comprehensive citizen participation for the city and how the involvement of groups outside the NA system can be included.

- In 1992, Neighbors West/Northwest DCB initiated a strategy session of DCB activists to demonstrate to ONA the range of interests among DCs, and the unlikelihood of success with any ONA-initiated agenda.
- Portland's Neighborhood Congress in 1993 was a three-day meeting attended by over 400 activists who produced 39 resolutions to improve Portland's NA system. Although these resolutions were not enacted, the Congress demonstrated the fervent community interest in sustaining and improving the NA program.
- In 1995, the Task Force on Neighborhood Involvement (initiated by City Council resolution in 1994) was composed of 25 members from neighborhood, district, and other non-neighborhood interest groups. Its wide purpose was to examine the city's NA structure in relation to citizen involvement, encouraging participation from the full diversity of Portland's communities. Here a new concern was first voiced, not just over access to the table, but about who was sitting at the table. This task force was also charged with reviewing and revising the ONA Guidelines. It was this effort that changed the Office of Neighborhood Associations to the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI). Most of the Task Force recommendations were dependent on new revenues, which were not forthcoming.
- ONA conducted Neighborhood Summits from 2000 through 2003, which produced recommendations for NA program improvements. After 2003, the practice ended because of budget cuts.

More recent efforts to review the role and structure of the NA program, and the city's effort in citizen participation in general have included:

- Guidelines Review Empowerment and Assessment Task Force (GREAT Committee): Formed in 2001, this committee undertook the task of revising both the ONI Guidelines and City Code Chapter 3.96 (last revised in 1987). The resulting documents, adopted in August 2005, make minor changes, and the guidelines are renamed minimum standards.
- Public Involvement Task Force: This group was appointed by the City Council in 2002 to develop city-wide public involvement standards for all city bureaus. This was the result of acceptance by the City Council in 2001 of Administrative Services Review Process. This task force, comprised of 31 members representing a wide spectrum of communities in

Portland, produced a draft report with 30 recommendations dated March 24, 2004.

- **Bureau Innovation Project (BIP):** In May 2005, recently-elected Mayor Tom Potter released a list of 20 recommendations created by city employees to improve city government services to citizens. Two recommendations (8 and 9) pertain directly to Portland's citizen participation program:
  8. Redefine the Office of Neighborhood Involvement to revitalize citizen participation.
  9. Develop citywide public engagement standards to ensure a coordinated public outreach effort that reaches all citizens.Each of the 20 recommendations is assigned to a committee work group to develop an implementation strategy. Committees are to be composed of city staff and community members.

**ONI Budget:** The ONI budget for the NA program has been mostly flat for the last 10 years. Under Mayor Vera Katz, several programs were added under the ONI umbrella, including mediation, information and referral, graffiti control, liquor licenses, community residential siting, the downspout disconnect program, noise control, and neighborhood inspections. In 2005, ONI's total budget was approximately \$7 million, with about \$1.4 million for the NA system. A \$350,000 budget cut caused ONI to eliminate several positions at the central office. District coalition office budgets were not part of the budget cut, although their budgets have also remained mostly flat despite increases in operational expenses. District offices are currently operating under five-year contracts that expire in 2007. District budgets range from \$150,000 to \$280,000 and are supplemented by funding raised by the DC offices through grants and other fundraising. The size of budgets of the DCs is mostly historical, based on program size rather than demographics of the district. Within the DC budget is funding for NA efforts in communication with neighborhoods. The allocation is approximately \$1,000 per NA, although some DCs distribute this allocation directly to the NAs and others publish a district wide newsletter. NA's only city funding is this allocation. Any additional revenues are raised individually. The size of the NA budgets varies widely, ranging from zero, if the city communication allocation is pooled at the district level, to large budgets raised through projects such as home tours or rental of property owned by NAs.

**Bureau Advisory Committees and Neighborhood Needs:** The BAC system, at its height in the late 1980s, has fallen out of use today. This occurred around 1992 when, under Mayor Vera Katz, a biennial budgeting process was instituted. This stretched volunteer commitment as well as ONA's staffing obligations, and the BAC program faded away. (One exception is the ONI BAC, which was

reinstated by ONI Director David Lane in 1999.) The neighborhood needs process is also no longer used, and NAs are invited into the budget process with other citizens after proposed budgets have been released to the public.

**Crime Prevention:** Both the City Police Bureau and ONI have administered crime prevention programs, although each has used its own process. At ONI, crime prevention staff worked out of DC offices. In the 1980s, when concern grew over gang-related activity, there were 17 crime prevention officers at the DCs. With budget constraints after Measure 5, many crime prevention staff worked on livability issues as well. At this time there was a proposal to pull all DC crime prevention staff into the Police Bureau. The NAs were not supportive. The compromise was to centralize the DC crime prevention staff at the ONI central office where it remains today, with designated assignments to district offices.

## NA Program Today

The NA program today consists of 95 Neighborhood Associations covering the entire city. These NAs vary widely in number of board and general meetings each year, projects undertaken, issues addressed, communication efforts, and attendance. Their accomplishments in neighborhood revitalization and livability are by far too numerous to catalogue. Neighborhood activists observe that the extent to which citizens participate in NAs is dependent on emerging issues and the quality of the NA organizers, but that each neighborhood of the city has the organization in place to mobilize citizen involvement when needed. Moshe Lenske, long-time neighborhood activist, comments that the NA structure has been in place long enough that the population has a subconscious understanding that NAs exist and citizens can act and will act. This consciousness improves the responsibility of government services.

Today, seven district offices support 90 of the NAs through technical and organizational assistance. Two, North Portland Neighborhood Services and East Portland Neighborhood Office, are city-staffed and services are shared by a loose network of NAs. Four district offices are nonprofit, incorporated coalitions of NAs run under the leadership of a board of directors consisting of a majority of NA representatives and other at-large members. In these four offices staff are hired through the corporate body. These coalitions are Southwest Neighborhoods Inc., Neighbors West/Northwest, Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, and Central Northeast Neighbors. One district office is a hybrid of these two models: Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods has a city staff director (in a holdover from the staffing structure of the Model Cities Program) with other staff and overall operations under the auspices of the nonprofit corporate board.

Three NAs, South West Hills Residential League, Healy Heights, and Lloyd District, are recognized but unaffiliated with a district coalition. Two, Downtown and Old Town/Chinatown, receive services through city contracts with the Portland Business Alliance (formerly the Association for Portland Progress.)

## League 2005 Observation of NAs

To observe how neighborhood associations are functioning in 2005, LWV members attended NA meetings to report on attendance, demographics, and whether or not they felt welcome to participate. The study group received reports on 30 neighborhood meetings. Mean attendance was 19, with the median 15.5. The range was five to 60, with eight meetings having attendance of less than 10 people, and 10 attracting 25 or more participants. (Note: a SouthWest Hills Residential League meeting that was especially controversial and attended by over 80 members was not one of the study reports.)

Almost all observers, 27, reported they felt welcome at the meeting – three did not. Eighteen meetings were attended only by Caucasians, with 12 having some minority participants. Most had attendees covering a broad range of ages, with six mostly under age 50 and two mostly over age 50. Twenty had balanced gender attendance, six more males than females, and four more women than men. Fourteen seemed mostly homeowners, one mostly renters, five both renters and homeowners, and the remainder unable to determine home ownership status from the conversations. Several LWV observers noted they were impressed with the participants, agenda, and/or meeting structure, and commented they plan to attend their NA meetings again. One indicated intent to seek election to the Board.

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