BACKGROUND: Commissioner Charlie Hales, with the support of the Portland City Council, the Task Force on Neighborhood Involvement, was established in November of 1994 to conduct a thorough examination of the structure, effectiveness, funding needs and distribution of the citizen involvement system, and the identification of options for enhancing citizen participation and citizen/government communication.

FINDINGS: The Task Force found citizen participation through neighborhood involvement is working very well for many people. The findings were made after an extensive information-gathering process which included soliciting comment from a wide variety of sources. Portland is famous nationwide as a model for encouraging citizens to work together to improve their neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Changes recommended by the Task Force built on the strengths of the current system. Also, despite the successes of the past twenty years, the functioning and structure of Neighborhood Associations, District Coalitions, and the Office of Neighborhood Associations are not entirely effective and could, of course, accomplish more.

The Task Force analyzed all aspects of the system and determined that the present structure needs only a few but important reforms. Additional investment is required to produce a more effective system for neighborhood involvement. This investment should be directed to improving functioning and building structures which promote greater participation, of a wider diversity of neighbors, with increased citizen satisfaction and a higher success rate (measured by needs addressed, problems solved, community satisfaction, and cohesiveness).

The framework and value of citizen involvement were defined by the group as a prologue for the recommended changes to the system.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:
Policy recommendations involved eight areas. Highlights of the recommendations are as follows:

Structure for Neighborhood Involvement
To support individual community members’ involvement with their community and their government, the Task Force asserts that neighborhood associations should remain and be revitalized as the cornerstone of Portland’s structure for neighborhood involvement. It also affirms the proven value of the district coalition as a structure for serving the neighborhood associations.

However, the Task Force also recommends recognition of an alternative structure for linking and supporting neighborhood associations similar to the structure developed by the neighborhood associations in the North District. This option would provide for a group of neighborhood associations to receive the support and technical assistance...
otherwise provided through a district coalition through a neighborhood office staffed by City employees. In addition to these two current structures, the Task Force recommends that ONA consider other reasonable proposals submitted by groups of adjacent neighborhood associations for structures which will provide the support needed by those neighborhood associations.

Role of the Current Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA)
The role of the current Office of Neighborhood Associations should be expanded to include not only its current responsibilities as specified in the ONA Guidelines and the ordinance establishing the office, but also responsibility and authority for coordinating the efforts of the Bureau to reach out to citizens/neighbors to involve them in key planning and implementation efforts.

The name of the office should be changed to clearly convey the City’s role of promoting and supporting neighborhood involvement. The present name—the Office of Neighborhood Associations—has led in some cases to the misperception that the neighborhood associations are part of City government, reporting through ONA.

Collaborative Approach to Accountability
Neighborhood associations should be accountable for being inclusive and representing fairly the views of all participants. Neighborhood associations should hold DC's accountable for and DC's should hold themselves accountable for providing support for NA activities as described in DC contracts with ONA. Ona should enforce the terms of its contracts with DC's without interfering with each Coalition's right to set priorities and address community needs. The City should measure the public benefit being achieved through the investment of public dollars in neighborhood involvement.

NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT INITIATIVES:
Neighborhood Association and District Coalition Self-evaluations
All neighborhood associations and DC's should be asked to consider conducting a complete self-evaluation, including boundary issues, which assesses their strengths and weaknesses in meeting the needs of their communities within the criteria described in the Framework for Citizen Involvement included in the main body of the Report. Funding for this should be provided through ONA.

Neighborhood Association and District Coalition Boundaries
Permit overlapping boundaries when mutually acceptable to the neighborhood associations involved. When conflicts arise relating to continuing an overlapping boundary, ONA should provide assistance in conflicts resolution/meidation to assist the neighborhood associations with resolution. If the conflict is not resolved within 6 months, ONA may withdraw funding (i.e. withhold service provided by DC or District
Office). Each NA may continue to assert its own boundary definition. For administrative/statistical purposes, City bureaus may define neighborhoods without overlapping boundaries. The City should involve citizens in a community planning process to define non-overlapping boundaries for administrative/statistical purposes. However, City notices on land use matters should continue to be distributed based on all neighborhood associations’ self-defined boundaries.

Increase Linkages Among Neighborhood Associations, District Coalitions, ONA, and Neighborhood Business Districts and Other Civic Groups
All neighborhood associations and DC’s be encouraged to invite participation by and communication with community civic groups (including ethnic organizations) and the Neighborhood Business District Associations serving their communities.

Recognize and Support for Neighborhood Business District Associations in Neighborhood Associations and District Coalitions
ONA should facilitate the establishment of criteria and procedures to recognize Neighborhood Business District Associations (NBDA’s) which will involve the Alliance for Portland Neighborhood Business Associations and neighborhood activists. ONA should provide funding to the District Coalitions to provide support for communications costs (printing, mailing, etc.) to NBDA’s recognized by ONA.

Increase Outreach and Inclusiveness
ONA should request from the City additional resources to assist Neighborhood associations to increase and enhance their efforts to reach all members of their communities, particularly those segments of their communities which are presently under-represented in their activities.

Increase Support for Conflict Resolution within the Neighborhood Involvement System
The City and ONA should invest new resources to assist neighborhood associations and DC’s to develop conflict resolution skills and provide conflict resolution assistance when needed.

Increase Quality and Stability of Staff Resources for Neighborhood Involvement by
Reducing Salary Disparities Among District Coalition and Offices
Salary levels and funding for District Coalition positions funded through ONA contracts should be set at levels equivalent to City of Portland comparable positions. Provide funding to equalize benefit levels for these positions among the District Coalitions, but do not require benefit levels equivalent to City of Portland levels.

Also related to staffing the Task Force recommends that funding for a four-position core staff be provided for each DC and district office. Not less than one of the four positions should be specifically designated for crime prevention activities.
Increase Resources Available to Neighborhood Associations and Strengthen District Coalition Support for Neighborhood Association Efforts

Establish a new Neighborhood Grants Program to make additional funds available to the neighborhood associations. Encourage neighborhood associations to submit applications for neighborhood grants to directly assist them in carrying out their efforts. ONA or the DC's could assist neighborhood associations to prepare applications if needed.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS: The Task Force recommends adoption of seven key goals for a strong, inclusive neighborhood involvement system. The strategies presented under each goal are representative of steps which should be taken in support of achievement of each goal. The additional neighborhood association strategies and revisions are listed in Section F of the main body of the Report.

CONCLUSION: After the Task Force has adopted its final recommendations and they have been accepted by City Council, a sub-committee of the Task Force will join the ONA Bureau Advisory Committee to draft specific changes to current policies and procedures to provide consistent support for the structures, concepts, and initiatives included in the Task Force recommendations.

(The Report utilizes the following acronyms: NA=neighborhood association, DC=district coalition, ONA=Office of Neighborhood Associations, APNBA=Alliance of Portland Neighborhood Business Associations, and NBDA=neighborhood business district association.)