

Neighborhoods 2020 Comments

Background

The following comments come from three sources:

- Participants in the Neighborhoods 2020 community conversations were encouraged to fill out “Final Thoughts” comments cards at the end of each event. 25 comments were provided through these comment cards.
- One comment was received via email.
- Online survey participants could provide open-ended answers in a Final Thoughts question. 25 of 31 respondents provided additional comments.

Comments from Final Thoughts cards

Services – quality early childcare, youth/afterschool programming, adult movement

Opportunities – authentic engagement

Information – multiple languages

Willing to participate

Teaching

Connecting ideas

Generation

Minneapolis was started the 1st half of 1800

What are the effective neighborhood org

Great event

Learned a lot about listening as you promised

Demand representation

Empower local control

Don't use info against N'hoods

Don't believe the City cares!

City take its own advice

Why is the question not what is the right relationship between the City & neighborhood organization

Continue funding to strengthen and maintain the neighborhood organizations, goal maintain quality of life

Find several means to let all residents know about N'O's and how they can get their concerns addressed and meet people.

Peace N Blessing

We didn't get a chance to discuss whether Neighborhood Boards made sense at all or if they fill a role that isn't filled in other ways. Questions presumed neighborhood groups are good or purposeful despite the experience of most people I've talked to. In my experience neighborhood organizations need to either be abolished or totally restructured to prioritize historically excluded people. Right now they're bad for Minneapolis.

To have another 1st 2 for people like myself who mist it & get more staff & board members to come. I really think it needs to be more trainings of multicultural & communicate w/the people in the community. Stop sitting behind close doors & take Power to build the neighborhoods w/ peace, kind love & joyful. Have heart & integrity & use thej money wisely to unite w/all.

These organizations need strict oversight to ensure they are meeting goals, are equitable, and actually represent the people who live in the neighborhood, including renters, people of color, the poor, and the introverts who can't stand the current state of neighborhood meetings and the toxic environment they foster.

Dialogues getting cut off by the table switches
Food was fantastic!!

Funding is a big topic. Neighborhood associations are needed because there's a authentic collective consensus gathered through willing love base ppl.

I've asked several people here tonight the following question and never got a great answer, so I'll leave it here...
why are the neighborhood orgs independent and not simply part of the City government?

Be interesting for the draft to be something council members must respond to come this fall!

Choosing top 3 ideas is narrow enough.
Choosing the "top one idea" falsely assumes that it is more important than the other ideas.

The process you describe going forward to a conclusion must be followed. Once the inputs are gathered and vetted and validated to draft findings.

We will be watching.

Especially of interest? – What do our City & County representatives do with it? How will they communicate what they agree and disagree with.

Final Comments

1. Event was a great example of how neighborhood Assoc. plan events, & build community.
 2. New opportunity to meet my extended neighbors.
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Final Comments

Neighborhood associations help Minneapolis to feel like a small town cooperative. It's a unique feature & so important for residents to have that identity & involvement. I love my neighborhood!

What are characteristics of an effective neighborhood organization? Able to recognize both weaknesses & strengths.

Direction & resources needed for the neighborhood or community

Great event loved the energy and the dialogue was amazing.
Also the food was great...

Better communication with police-stop racial profile

We need solid measurable performance measures as a pre-requisite for receiving City funding. There need to be uniform standards for certain parts of governance & participatin (e.g. it shouldn't be harder to vote for board members than president. Term limits!) If a neighborhood group is a defacto homeowners/prop. Owners association they should not be funded.

Info about who lives here. History. Who comes for what? How has phys changed? (Demo/construct.). Place to relax-meet people. Create jobs via talking about wealth – how to create wealth w/o \$.

It was only spoken aloud once but effective neighborhood organizations need staff, funding & a physical location. Look at diversity in hiring as well as volunteer engagement. The city should be sharing & promoting the best practices that some (or all) neighborhood organizations are already doing.

Survivorship bias-only people that already like neighborhood organizations showed up, didn't capture input from those that don't like Nos & don't participate, their input matters too.

Great meeting. To the City-do not micro manage the neighborhoods. Most have been operating on a great level.

Let's continue to build a strong relationship with our neighborhoods/and partner up Thank you

This was very inlighting (sic). I do hope the information was helpful. I do hope the organization stay in the neighborhood.

Community café works very well because brings people to the table (cus theres food) Breaks the ice-then leads to conversations-Brings together other that normally wouldn't speak to each other or interact.

Comment received via email

I am from _____ Neighborhood. In the past, I was an alternate for my neighborhood and did not have to run for office--"Oh you want to be part of the meetings, come on we'll sign you up." Last year 2016, I expressed an interest with our paid coordinator after having been on the board for a year. I was told I had to come to the May meeting and be voted on. Well, I was leaving for a job out of town and couldn't and tried a couple times to reach the main person but they did not respond. This after not agreeing with the particulars of the Small Area Plan. Not all the alternates go to every meeting, in fact I think some rarely go.

So a month ago I found out a restaurant was coming in to my neighborhood and had some reservations about it and wanted to see what the Board had discussed about it and they told me it the board meeting notes were for Board Members only. Well, I pulled out the Bylaws and it says that anyone who asks should be able to look at them. I told them this and while our paid coordinator was delaying I got them from another board member.

But I find this group is not inclusive.

They are turning my neighborhood into Uptown by pushing the Arts.

AND they are not good stewards of our tax dollars. You know what a little library is, well you may have heard they developed little art boxes--cute idea. But not at \$500. per box. The two guys who put them together got \$5K for 10 boxes. This while the MTC can't fund both the bus runs at the same time as metro mobility. It's just not good use of our tax dollars.

I'm sure this group can raise money with fund raisers, but I think the city should stop funding these neighborhood groups. Last board meeting notes said we've spent \$18K-- 42K to go. Something like that.

That's my vote--please stop funding the neighborhoods groups--they are just looking for ways to waste money.

Thanks,

Comments received through online survey

my neighborhood's organization hasn't been active!

Neighborhoods are a unique type of non-profit. I believe that the potential for community members to engage and learn about issues such as social and environmental sustainability and more complex matters around land use provides a tremendous opportunity to grow future city leadership (and beyond). A neighborhood is a microcosm of the greater city - what better place to jump in as a beginner?

These questions seem extremely narrow in their scope and the limited room for response doesn't allow much nuance. It makes it seem as if the city is trying to limit critical responses in order to justify continuing to funnel large amounts of money to NOs. Why are we not discussing the fundamental purpose of, boundaries of, need for, structures of NOs? Why aren't we discussing what benefits they have, what their financial and social costs are, whether they improve or harm our city and its people, whether there are more equitable or efficient ways to achieve the same goals. In my experience in multiple neighborhoods over the past twenty years, NOs provide no value that cannot be achieved by other means. In fact, they magnify the worst tendencies and traits of our city, reinforcing racial and economic segregation and providing a city-sanctioned and city-funded Old Boys Club. They use funds and their political power not to redress inequity, but in ways that reinforce and worsen disparities. They are (geographically, structurally) set up such that the institutionally and historically powerful are given a platform and a convenient, paid organizing framework for agitating for their self-interests. Overall NOs serve to magnify the voices of the most privileged Minneapolitans, while marginalizing and undermining the voices of the majority of people in our city, particularly people of color and renters. To continue to support NOs, both structurally and financially, without seriously evaluating their historical and current consequences, is very alarming.

I'm on my neighborhood board, I've served on its executive committee, and I've been involved in previous neighborhood boards. At best, as a renter, there is little reason for me to continue to show up. At worst, I face (mostly subtle, sometimes not) pervasive classism and/or racism at virtually every NO meeting and event I attend. My current NO is full of people I quite like, but I am the only person of color, likely the only person who is on public assistance, and one of two residents living on one of our community corridors. Our work focuses almost exclusively on homeowners and quality of life issues for already-privileged residents who live in the lowest-density parts of the neighborhood. As far as I can tell, this has also historically been the focus and their successes in reducing vehicle traffic on their minor streets has directly and negatively impacted health and well-being of the much larger number of residents who live on the neighborhood "exterior," both within our technical "neighborhood" and across the main streets in multiple other neighborhoods. When I occasionally talk to others who live on the same community corridor I do, they have the same chronic concerns about actual problems we face, from speeding traffic, air and noise pollution, danger crossing the street, a hodgepodge of dump trucks down our streets, lack of municipal services, no notice about city meetings directly impacting our residences (since we don't own, we aren't

notified), etc. But my NO is by and large unmotivated to address these issues.

There is virtually no incentive for me to be involved in my NO, beyond a desire to keep it from making my neighborhood worse in the long-term. That is the same thing that motivates many many other people I know who are involved in their NOs, including other people in mine--we don't feel we can make positive change to our communities through them, but we're just trying to keep NOs from actively making things worse in Minneapolis, as they have done for decades. It's not that most of the people on them are particularly bad, but that the fundamental structure is flawed to such an extent that it favors/encourages the most selfish and anti-social leanings and provides the organizational framework to give these ideas political power.

Compared to other non-profits, organizations, and city institutions, my NO does not provide me with pleasant social interactions; it does not connect me to my neighbors; it does not advocate for my health or well-being or quality of life; it does not improve my community; it does not provide a resource I can turn to for information, assistance, or connection. This NO is much much better than the NOs in my last two neighborhoods--I have not been sworn at or threatened or seen explicit xenophobia or racism from its members within the meetings and my cohorts have all been kind to me and encouraging for me to get involved (even with the implicit bias that is still evident).

I think there are great things that could happen with city services or organizational frameworks roughly the size of precincts. But the counter-intuitive geographic divisions fatally undermine this goal. Imagine Special Service Districts and business organizations that split businesses in the middle of streets like Broadway and Hennepin. Imagine transit lines that ran down 25th instead of Franklin or Lake, or Pleasant instead of Lyndale or Nicollet. These geographies matter even more for neighborhood organizations; these are our primary city structures by which we are supposed to improve our collective communities, recognize problematic patterns, find empowerment to address them ourselves.

NOs as they currently exist geographically provide a recurring structure for wealthy homeowners (relative to renters in every neighborhood) to build social power and social influence. They do the opposite for renters living on different sides of Hennepin, for example; assuming a single NO had the chance to weigh in on the benefits of traffic calming for either Irving S or Hennepin Ave, the NO potentially casts a net to every single resident impacted by Irving, but only 1/2 of those impacted by Hennepin. And that's without considering the context leading up to that theoretical meeting and coming out of it--that Irving homeowners are less likely to move and have to re-establish themselves and when they are collectively agitated around Irving/Hennepin, for example, they are forming connections and building power that they can harness in the future. For the Hennepin renters, only half of them are there to start and they move with greater frequency (and even a move across the street puts them in a new NO) meaning that the social relationship building has to recommence more frequently.

And that ignores the costs and benefits to individuals to participate. Given the consistent racism and classism that comes out of these groups, people of color and poorer people face a cost that simply isn't there for others. While I hear white friends, particularly white men who own homes, talk about how pleasant they find their NOs (regardless of whether they see NOs as useful), the story is much different for the POC/renters I know. For those who have been excluded/marginalized, to participate in NOs is to choose to spend time in an exclusionary environment where well-intentioned people are casually racist and where one's recency of arrival or home size is a common derogatory term.

But this still presupposes there's a benefit to being involved in an NO. As far as I can tell, including having served on the executive committee of mine and being on its board as well as multiple subcommittees, there is little incentive for most people to participate, as well as a high and specific time commitment that limits who can participate. There is almost no outreach, and even less to renters and poorer residents (i.e. those not in single family homes or duplexes). The events and committees hosted by the group are limited in scope and utility for

most--I'm someone who's civically engaged and active, regularly seeking out local events and attending meetings for fun, and even I am hardpressed to continue my involvement.

The promises of better outreach and better engagement rarely happen because it's not a priority for the established residents who inherently view renters as less invested in the neighborhood and see POC as eternal newbs (a chronic issue in white-dominated spaces of Minneapolis and in Minneapolis' white culture on its own). They have their own traditions and spaces, their city-funded staff and plenty of city structures to reduce the work of their organizing efforts. There is little motivation for most of the NO participants to include more diverse people, let alone in ways more meaningful than inviting them to hours-long meetings where police talk about how to lock your house, a local group hands out a tree to plant in your yard, and people compare length of residency as if its a sign of merit.

neighborhoods over-represent the interests of homeowners and drivers, and under-represent the interests of renters and people who bike, walk, and take transit. it's making the city of Minneapolis sick.

While I think the neighborhood councils are good at encouraging dialogue, I do not think they should take the place of city council.

Despite being on a neighborhood board, I'm concerned that these organizations are a major impediment to the city reaching population, development, and sustainability goals. Generally they exist as a hurdle as opposed to an enabler of positive change.

I think they could be retained as a way to fund minor local projects, disseminate information, and help facilitate neighbors meeting each other. I think they need to lose their de-facto veto power over variances, zoning changes, and street reconfiguration. Merging them into larger organizations may help them see the needs of the city as a whole as being a priority over the minor inconvenience of their members.

Neighborhood orgs should primarily focus on building community among residents. They should have little to no formal input into city planning, zoning, etc. They should not have the ability to promote or discourage specific types of businesses, real estate developments, or public amenities. Individuals within neighborhoods should have opportunities to give input on those things, but the neighborhood org should be able to speak as an institution in support or against these things.

Neighborhood orgs should only be a tool for connecting and informing people. Not a forum for infrastructure and development review and guidance. The City already has these.

Organizing at the neighborhood level is incredibly important. However, mpls' current system benefits single family homeowners over renters and multifamily residents. The existing structure also gives a significant amount of city funding & decision making power to unelected officials with seemingly little oversight or accountability. I would like to see more of a systematic effort on the city's role to streamline the neighborhood org process, define their powers as it comes to city decision-making, make them easy to access (most do not have updated online presences), make them accountable. My largest concern is the role that NO's play in the small area plans of the city, impacting the Comprehensive Planning process without any of the oversight or participation of the larger city.

The meeting I attended felt overrepresented by current and former Mpls neighborhood board members. Many conversations felt stuck in frame that things are already great and what's really needed is more money and resources.

This survey is not great. 140 characters per answer strips any potential nuance from answers. But...

We know what's wrong with our neighborhood organizations. They are often:

- Not representative of the demographics of their actual neighborhoods (age, race, income, renter status, etc)
- Very low in attendance; even large meetings still only draw 1% of a neighborhood's population. As a result, they empower the loudest voices (who happen to generally be the ones who benefit from other structural advantages)
- Exclusionary based on requirements to participate and vote. It should not take more time and effort and ID verification to vote at a neighborhood org than to vote for a presidential election, but it often does. More fundamentally, neighborhood org meetings happen at very rigid times and places - making it difficult for some populations to participate. Heck, even though both myself and my spouse are office workers with predictable hours, it's still tough to participate given the fact that we have 2 kids. Meetings are not convenient, childcare is not provided, hours run long, and my kids were made to feel unwelcome the last meeting we attended.
- Exclusionary based on what activities they choose to prioritize. #NotAllNeighborhoodOrgs, but time and again the orgs in wealthiest parts of town focus on blocking development proposals, asking for re-zoning ("downzoning") that limits future development, suggests changes to development that make it more expensive, and crafting small area plans that guide CPED to further constrain zoning (and inform them on individual projects whether variances or CUPs are in line with city policy). If the neighborhood org is not doing this, prominent members are by filing appeals wherever they can.
- Self-serving; it's no surprise that neighborhood organizations dominated by homeowners frequently have loan programs and other funding for home improvements, sometimes with low/no-interest loans that are completely forgivable. Deeper than that, neighborhood organizations inherently focus on things that serve current residents rather than the potential needs of people who'd like to live there but don't currently. Parking barking, protecting incumbent sun access/views in new development, studying historic districts, etc.

Some believe that if only if we fix these issues at neighborhood orgs do they deserve to continue receiving public funding. I'm not so sure. It would take a massive shift in structure, involvement, priorities, and outcomes to make the millions given to these orgs better spent than in any other city department. And I'm not sure that can happen.

I am new to Mpls but I have never lived in a city that had anything like these NHOs. I don't understand why my tax dollars pay for what appears to be a hyperlocal "friend of the parks" group. Update the charter to better define the role of NHOs. Let them be self-funded as much as possible. Don't give them any role in zoning and planning because it's not helpful to give neighbors unrealistic expectations and encourage pitchforks.

Build more housing

Neighborhood organizations have a mixed record of success in being a positive force for the future of Minneapolis. Too many neighborhood groups represent a narrow view of what Minneapolis is and what it should become. Those groups are largely interested in protecting the land assets of white people.

Neighborhood groups can be a positive force for engaging people in civic politics and should see themselves as a conduit for civic participation and not an authority or enforcement body. Neighborhood groups should look like the people that they purport to represent. If they don't they should spend time and money figuring out how to be a better reflection of Minneapolis as a whole.

Neighborhood Orgs are a bastion for stodgy old white homeowners to bully local elected with a voice co-opted from their neighbors. The people who show up to neighborhood meetings are those with the luxury to take on a second job without pay. As a renter my character is WITHOUT FAIL impugned everytime a proposal for a multi

family residence comes up. I'd list the idiotic arguments that always come up but you can probably recite them just as well as I can. Abolish neighborhood orgs.

stop allowing rich white homeowners to block new housing for selfish and frequently pretty transparently racist reasons

Neighborhood orgs should be able to identify pro-density/sustainability opportunities within their borders that they can support—their mission should advocate for potential future residents, and renters, not just current landowners. Corcoran is an example of an org doing things right.

If neighborhood organizations continue to devote their financial resources to programs not available to renters, the city should stop funding and official recognition of these organizations

Housing cost is linked to demand. Less units = higher prices. Additionally, you can't be a sanctuary city of immigrants/working poor can't afford to live there. Also, we will never keep to the Paris climate agreement unless we cut car use, don't incentivize driving. More biking

Neighborhood organizations have been given too much power to control city policy despite their inability to conceptualize at the city level, ultimately furthering policy that is bad for the city as a whole. This is not entirely problematic, as a neighborhood organization should represent their specific neighborhood's needs, except that neighborhood boards do not even proportionally represent their neighborhood demographics by tenure/age/race etc. If the boards are not representative of the residents, how can they represent the residents' interests? Neighborhood organizations in this city effectively function as homeowner associations, with sole goal of maintaining housing value, usually by limiting the supply of housing. In short, neighborhood organizations in their current state are bad.

Are neighborhood orgs the right tool? Seems that city council wards might be better form of hyper local government...

NCR is incompetent and Neighborhood Organizations are not representative of neighborhoods. NCR doesn't care and condones threats to residents, they exists to protect Neighborhood Organizations at the expense of residents safety. The city should stop funding neighborhood organizations and get rid of NCR. NCR is comprised of people who come from Neighborhood organizations and don't have any issue with the poor behavior of LHENA, Whittier, etc. Abolish NCR and Neighborhood Organizations.

I'm consistently distressed by a lack of attempts to reach out to community at large by most neighborhood organizations. If I ever talk to someone who thinks the org is doing well, this is ultimately because they are white, homeowners, and people with free time to involve themselves. Neighborhood orgs themselves aren't really doing the work to get them to show up, and decisions on whether the organization supports policies are made without the voices of renters, workers and people with children and other commitments that can't make it to evening meetings on arbitrary dates. Opinions, when voiced by neighborhood orgs, carry more weight because it is assumed they are doing a good job at this, when in fact most are not.

I can look around the city and find numerous examples of non-neighborhood and non-profit organizations that do a better job at this, and I think neighborhood orgs need to either step up their game or get out of it. The situation right now is that numerous orgs have been given tax dollars to concern themselves in municipal affairs and acting in the authority of a neighborhood of residents, who they barely manage to involve. In the city's stated goals of "One Minneapolis", we need to work to figure out why neighborhood orgs are leaving out marginalized groups,

and get them in, or find other ways to spend money to do this.

It is also my understanding that the present amount of city oversight for neighborhood organizations is very minimal: and numerous neighborhood boards are overrun by toxic board members who already have good relationships with NCR and are thus, unlikely to be deposed. Fixing this is of importance, because often these toxic board members are not there to bring in new people, especially those they work to marginalize.

If the city is going to take these groups seriously (and give them funding), there needs to be accountability for their actions and outreach. N'hood orgs tend to be dominated by older, wealthier homeowners that have 3 hours to spare on a weekday evening to attend these meetings. I've attended many different n'hood org meetings, and the agenda is comically predictable: new housing is proposed so the "neighborhood" must stop it (especially if it's rental housing), or a council member did something and a local crank wants to rant for 5 minutes about it. It's frustrating when "longtime residents" look down upon and chide renters (I was once told I could only have input when I lived in an area long enough), and after attending meetings with such a negative vibe, it's no surprise that newcomers to these meetings are never heard from again.

I think door knocking every resident twice a month with a biweekly newsletter in hand would engage hundreds more residents.