Neighborhoods 2020 Lunch Conversation

October 30th, 2017
City Departments

BACKGROUND

As part of NCR's robust engagement surrounding the Neighborhoods 2020 project, there were two lunch conversations held in City Hall in October. The first conversation was on October 17th with City Council and Mayor staff. The second conversation was on October 30th from various City staff who work with Neighborhood Organizations on a regular basis. This is a summary of the October 30th Conversations.

How do you interact with neighborhood organizations?

- Manage email lists for block clubs. Track subscribers, block leaders. Ask for help from neighborhood organizations in recruiting block club leaders.
- Take advantage of neighborhood organization venues to promote projects and efforts. Send neighborhood organizations info for their newsletters.
- Trying to establish relationships. Learning what funds neighborhood organizations have available for needed home improvements.
- Help neighborhood organizations with long range planning, small area plans, and (every 10 years) the comp plan. Help connect to colleagues in Development Services with neighborhood organizations. Increase awareness of projects in pipelines and how to provide input. Encourage developers to work with neighborhood groups.
- Work with neighborhood groups on implementing NRP plans. Help CPED get notices out to neighborhood groups.
- Collaborate with neighborhood groups on getting info out about public safety. Field questions. Assist with Court Watch and impact statements. Work on problem issues – such as homeless encampments.
- Support planning efforts in East and Southwest sector neighborhoods. Support art and public places efforts, and get feedback from neighborhood organizations on these projects.
- Connect homeowners to needed resources.
- Problem-solve solid waste and recycling issues with neighborhood groups and with individuals.
- Remind neighborhood groups about City permit process and rules, such as parties at parks.
- Some interactions are two-way. Others are one-way.

How do neighborhood organizations add value to your work?

- Extend reach of City.

- Provide a network that's useful to the City. (This is especially true where there's a language divide).
- Share knowledge of where problem properties are. Provide eyes on the street.
- Put together a volunteer group that helped a resident in need.
- Offer a deep history, knowledge of city that goes beyond four years (can be good or bad).
- Create / facilitate community. (For example - new immigrants sometimes aren't comfortable with government. Neighborhood organizations can - but don't always – help residents feel welcome, know that they're valued, and connect them to resources).
- Seek developers to come and build projects in their neighborhood.
- Voice both sides (pros and cons) regarding development. Provided good support / a buffer to City staff as discussions about development take place.
- Bring new people into fold to help solve problems, e.g. Hmong clan leaders to help with block club creation.
- Provide an environment to help nurture, train and identify tomorrow's City leaders and City employees.
- Help facilitate discussions/democratic process. Sometimes see other city staff, council members, CPSs, etc., at neighborhood meetings.
- Provide a forum for people to discuss city issues, and more ways to bring issues to attention of City officials.

What would you change to improve the value of your relationship and / or the current neighborhood system?
- Neighborhood boundaries make work difficult. Maps showing neighborhood boundaries were created 50-60 years ago to show the walking shed for children walking to school. At the time, 90% of kids walked to school; today about 10% do. Lake and Lyndale is the intersection of four neighborhoods.
- There are too many neighborhoods / neighborhood organizations for the number of City staff who are available to work with them.
- Some neighborhood organizations are too focused on themselves vs. the city. A "buddy program" that teams neighborhood organizations with other neighborhood organizations in a different part of the city and offers perspective may be useful.
- Sometimes seem competitive. Neighborhood organizations could work better with each other.
- The pride that has been created via neighborhood logos and shirts sometimes makes collaboration tough.
- Benefits to starting local. Takes people time to learn.
- Many residents are hyper–local focused. That's all they can comprehend - and that's why they get involved.
  - Inspections and MPD tend to think hyper-local too.
  - Some neighborhoods have greater needs, but some neighborhoods with less needs demand more – and we should focus resources on neighborhoods with most need.
- Grateful that we have organized groups – as not all cities do. Some neighborhood groups could be more/better organized.
- There is the issue of neighborhood organization boards not reflecting the demographics of the neighborhood. The new program needs to look at this. Cultural groups need funding too.
- Income isn't necessarily as indicator of involvement.

- There are cycles of involvement and lack or involvement. New people have often no idea of what was done / decided before.
- A survey to city departments on where staff are seeing a lack of engagement with neighborhood groups might be useful.
- Some neighborhood organizations continue to focus on the same handful of issues because that is where money is pooled, even when times and demographics have changed.
- Sometimes one new cultural group dominates. Staff have gotten in trouble for confronting this.
- There's a point of diminishing returns. Neighborhood organizations should be required to talk everyone / a true range of residents.
- Some groups well connected with business, others not. Should we require that there be business representative on each neighborhood organization board?
- Training for boards – for example on how to talk about renters - is important.
- It'd be nice if there was a data point that identified people who are from an area vs. people who deliberately choose a given place or who came and didn't get to choose the place. These groups may have different perspectives. Maybe this could be covered in the Resident Survey?
- The City as whole should have clearer rules about when we want to hear from neighborhood groups and how we want to hear from them.
    - People of privilege make their voices heard in disproportionate ways.
- We used to spend a lot of time reviewing house plans. We should be clear about how to provide meaningful input.
    - Difference between personal feelings and a neighborhood voice.
    - Some reviews give neighborhoods a bad name.
- The City at one point said, "These houses are too good for poor people".
    - This should not be a zero sum game.
- We should think about how to help neighborhood groups be constructive.
- Council members hear the voices of those who saying "no" (that they don't like something).