

Organizing Neighborhoods.

ORGANIZING NEIGHBORHOODS.

The very first step to organizing a collection of homes, parks and streets that has the potential to be a neighborhood is that someone has to care. Someone has to care enough to talk with neighbors, to talk with city officials, to organize conversations and to have a personal vision of what the neighborhood could become.

Someone can be anyone but it is best if she or he is a resident. A long-time resident probably has more status than someone who just moved in, but long-term residents who have been living in a disorganized state may have trouble seeing a new path. So someone has to be someone special; a person with a vision and a person who commands respect from the existing residents. This someone can be a leader.

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERS.

A neighborhood leader with vision and status must also have the energy of an entrepreneur. The neighborhood leader must be able to present a positive face when many people will find a thousand reasons why the process will fail. Failure looms large in the minds of many, but a neighborhood leader with a few like-minded compatriots can start a process that can change the prospects of the neighborhood and its residents.

The host city or county may have community leadership programs. Orange County FL has such a program; the announcement of their annual conference follows. Community college programs in leadership are also valuable and generally available.

Many communities have “academies” sponsored by non-governmental organizations [NGOs] with this mission.

The neighborhood leaders must find like-minded people in the city. Be they elected or appointed, the town’s civic and governmental leaders must also be its social entrepreneurs who take responsible risks to advance the neighborhood’s agenda. Together, interested neighborhood and city leaders can organize and improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. They can establish a neighborhood organization with plans, programs, partnerships, funding sources and infrastructure improvements.

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS.

Commitment and energy are important social assets that blossom when focused through an effective organization. Neighborhood organizations with a vision aligned with the city’s vision are important contributors to the town’s well-being.

Neighborhood organizations with vision are also more likely to garner city and community support for their mission. Towns usually support organizations that contribute to the social value of the town.

A. Voluntary Neighborhood Associations.

Voluntary associations usually struggle to attract resident participation and to collect dues. Leadership and volunteerism go hand-in-hand. Voluntary associations depend heavily on city support. Without city support, there is little potential for positive action or change.

B. Mandatory Neighborhood Associations.

Mandatory associations are becoming more popular as public revenues for neighborhood improvements and protection are attacked and reduced. One answer for those who can afford it is private governments in the form of mandatory homeowners associations and condominium associations that self-fund improvement maintenance and operating expenses. Leadership is usually a sought-after position since association budgets and regulations are substantial and serious matters. All goes well with good management, transparent fees, strong property values and the homeowners' ability to pay; but leadership training may still be appropriate.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS.

A vision is the essential starting point but soon a specific plan of action is required. Funds from the city or the residents will be necessary to support a neighborhood planning program. The neighborhood plan can have many elements but essentially consists of seven parts:

1. Land Use and transportation plans.
2. Neighborhood aesthetics including plans for entrances, parks and streets.
3. Land Development Code [LDC] provisions including development standards and design guidelines.
4. Facility plans and budgets for the sources and uses of funds.
5. A public safety plan with links to the city's police, fire and rescue services.
6. A connection system to schools, parks, shopping and transit stops.
7. A communication system to keep residents informed and connected to external activities.

The city can provide or be helpful with many of these elements but residents have to engage in order for the planning program to be effective and implementable.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAMS.

The town has many programs in city hall and in the community. Since funding is never enough to support every worthwhile city program, priorities are set based on which programs create the most social capital for the town. The criteria for program selection favors programs that:

1. **Build trust in institutions.** Trust evolves through experiences based on the shared values of life, feelings of safety, support for the disadvantaged, security and freedom. Trust in neighborhood leaders is earned through years of working together. Continuity of leadership is important.
2. **Celebrate shared traditions.** Practices repeated often enough become ingrained in community folk lore, such as, celebratory parades, holiday picnics and fireworks, art shows and sporting events. Rituals, traditions and celebrations are the fiber of friendliness and neighborliness.
3. **Foster mutual expectations.** Successful neighborhoods have commonly held expectations. Most residents implicitly agree to behave in a similar manner in terms of sociability and civility, i.e., friendliness, consideration, supervision of children, maintenance of homes and tolerance of diversity. To align expectations, neighborhoods often and openly discuss visions and values.
4. **Encourage philanthropy and volunteerism.** Respect and celebrate contributors who support the neighborhood in small and grand ways.

5. **Promote broad-based respect for commonly-accepted norms of behavior.**
The community implicitly agrees to abide by the local ordinances, standards, restrictive covenants, rules and other agreed-upon ideas for civic behavior. This is essential in order to protect civic and private assets, to support public management and to govern.
6. **Enlighten governance.** Homeowner and condominium associations occasionally become tyrannical. Efforts from leaders and residents are required to ensure that the governance of the neighborhood is and remains visionary, civil, inclusive, accountable and communicative.
7. **Enhance the neighborhood's capacity for self-reliance.** Successful neighborhoods have or develop the capacity to solve problems, to fund physical and social infrastructure and to help one another in times of emergency. This capacity creates self-confidence that usually leads to better decisions, reduced tensions and increased community and neighborhood pride.
8. **Construct ubiquitous connections.** Successful neighborhoods have meaningful connections between residents, businesses and civic leaders. They come together in neighborhood activities, events and volunteer organizations; in character neighborhoods, everyone knows everyone.
9. **Celebrate community values and pride.** Small cities, towns and neighborhoods have hearts and souls, humor and joy. Proud places have a softness that exudes good humor; serious places have the confidence to lighten up. Neighborhoods with character understand that beauty is a great socializer. Civic pride and spirit are shown with a smile as the virtues of the neighborhood are shared.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIPS.

Many opportunities or challenges are too big to be pursued alone. The neighborhood benefits from partnering with the city and other like-minded organizations. The potential for productive partnerships are plentiful.

1. **Internal working groups.** Creating a collaborative environment with city hall is the place to start. Partnering skills are learned. Partnering must be mutually beneficial to all parties in pursuit of the classic "win-win". Good partnering skills preclude one party from taking advantage of the other.
2. **Inter-local and third party vendor agreements.** Formal and informal agreements between the neighborhood and the city can benefit both parties. Agreements with third party vendors can be beneficial but need to be skillfully negotiated. Good partnering skills are essential to ensure a productive outcome. These skills can be developed through in-house working groups or available leadership training conferences.
3. **Community associations.** Many cities have associations of homeowners associations. Collaborations, joint training and entertainment events often happen. Look to participate with others in the community that offers mutual benefits.

NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDING SOURCES.

Neighborhood associations need money to operate even at a minimum level. A long-term, comprehensive sources and uses of funds analysis is always useful. The uses of funds are relatively straight-forward...operations and administration, maintenance for facilities the association might own and hopefully no debt service.

Determining the sources of funds is more interesting. Homeowners dues, voluntary or mandatory, are a common source but with limited capacity. Some cities have grant programs for neighborhoods.

Special funding for special events is a proven source of funds. Beyond these minimum programs, there are two approaches:

- First, off-load as many expenses as possible on the city or any special districts or public enterprises available. Maintenance of the neighborhood park by the city may be possible with the condition that the public can use the park...a decision point. Street maintenance should be a city responsibility if the street is a public street. Gated communities have more difficulty justifying city expenses on private roads.
- Second, a continuing, dedicated source of money is the prize. Special taxing districts and other self-funded mechanisms are available. External sources are tougher unless the neighborhood association has a cell tower or billboard location that is not too obnoxious to the residents. Creativity is at a premium when looking for sources of revenue and there is usually a trade-off needing discussion.

NEIGHBORHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMS.

Neighborhood buildings, public places and open spaces provide venues for engaging and expanding the neighborhood's social capital. The social infrastructure system is responsible for ensuring that all neighborhood facilities and related assets are designed and managed to maximize their contributions to community socialization. The challenge is:

- **To understand that public spaces and buildings matter.** Parks, public places, sidewalks, post offices, libraries and cafés all contribute to random, casual encounters that solidify neighborhood connections. Whether in the neighborhood or nearby, places where people congregate are important places to nurture and protect. "Third places" fall well within this category.
- **To insist upon extensive utilization and respect of civic assets.** Neighborhood buildings, places and spaces can be designed and maintained for extensive use by residents and their visitors.
- **To believe that while private buildings must serve their primary function, they must also contribute some value to the community.** Private homes and yards constitute the bulk of the neighborhood's property. They make a strong visual impression of residents and visitors. Maintenance, compassionate code enforcement and beautification activities are meaningful.
- **To fund specific facilities from specific sources.** Street, park and drainage system maintenance can be funded by the city if they are properly dedicated to the public. Public access is usually required. A city community center, a school playground or a nearby public park can be "adopted" by the neighborhood to create a close connection between residents and the facilities. Partnering is a valuable skill and attitude.

CONCLUSIONS.

One can almost feel what creates successful culture, history, ritual and social capital. The assignment for neighborhood designers and managers is to listen and observe; then to utilize the lessons learned.

If the prize is to find and exploit the source of civic pride and community spirit, the place to look is in the social, economic and physical fabric of the neighborhood. The fabric is made up of the people committed to the well-being of their own residence and to the enhancement of the entire community.

Social scientists, economists, city planners and public administrators worth their salt are all striving to discover the essence of “community”.

The search should recognize:

- 1. Social capital is a valuable public good; social capital, community spirit and hometown pride benefit from properly designed buildings and spaces.**
- 2. Social infrastructure such as plazas, parks, kiosks, public bulletin boards, sidewalks, cafés, libraries and school grounds support community civility, sociability and the strengthening of social capital.**
- 3. The built environment matters; it is socially important.**
- 4. Community leaders are the city’s social entrepreneurs.**
- 5. Love, fun and beauty are fundamental virtues in character towns.**



Attachment to Neighborhood Organizing.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TRAINING happens many ways. In Orange County FL an annual conference is held to give neighborhood leaders access to information and people with experience leading neighborhood organizations. Their program follows.

You are here: [Neighbors & Housing](#) | [Community Conference](#)



Community Conference

Get hands-on, make your neighborhood a better place

OVERVIEW

The annual Orange County Community Conference is a means for you to learn about new and exciting ways to improve your neighborhood. Here are some of the conference features:

- A day of fun and informative workshops with exciting door prizes
- Community Organization Awards
- Exhibitors with all types of programs and services
- And much more

WHEN & WHERE

- Saturday, October 5, 2019 from 7:30am to 2:00pm
- Orange County Convention Center, North Concourse
9400 Universal Boulevard
Orlando, FL
32819

COMMUNITY

ORGANIZATION AWARDS

There are 4 Different Community Award Categories:

- **Monica Harris Spires Excellence in Leadership** (exclusive to presidents of community/neighborhood organizations)
- **Excellence in Community Building Projects** (examples include but are not limited to landscaping, signage, park improvements, youth programs, clean-up campaigns, and volunteer services)
- **Excellence in Neighborly Service** (individuals or groups nominated for this award demonstrates the importance of lending a helping hand and providing volunteer services within their neighborhood)

HOW TO NOMINATE

If you would like to nominate an Orange County Citizen or Organization for one of the above awards, you can do one of the following:

- You can request a nomination application via email to Marthaly Irizarry at Marthaly Irizarry at Marthaly.Irizarry@ocfl.net.
- You can hand deliver the completed nomination application to the Neighborhood Services Division by September 6, 2019 at:

Neighborhood Services Division
450 E. South Street, 3rd Floor, Suite 332
Orlando, Florida
32801

- You can also mail the nomination application to Neighborhood Services Division by September 6, 2019 at:

Neighborhood Services Division
450 E. South Street, 3rd Floor, Suite 332
Orlando, Florida
32801

SPONSORSHIP

If your organization or company would like to sponsor or exhibit at our annual Orange County Community Conference, please contact Lynnsey Hicks at Lynnsey.Hicks@ocfl.net or (407) 836-0917.

CONTACT US

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