



NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

Neighborhood groups/organizations act as a stabilizing force in a neighborhood by bringing people together to address needs, problems or issues. Neighborhood organizations can become a partner with the city in addressing problems or needs and can provide a forum where pressing issues can be discussed.

Neighborhood organizations can be organized in a variety of ways, usually to fit the particular needs of a neighborhood. The organization may be formed to address a particular issue or problem or to maintain common areas within a subdivision. The following will summarize some different types of organizations.

Property Owners or Homeowners Associations

Property or homeowners associations are usually legally established within the bills of assurance of a subdivision. These associations frequently obtain non-profit status by forming a non-profit corporation. Often the role of a property or homeowners association is to maintain common space within the subdivision, such as a park, swimming pool, and/or tennis court. The members usually assess themselves for dues, which go toward maintenance of the common spaces. This type of association is limited to subdivision property owners and is governed by a board of directors and officers. The boundaries of the association are the legal boundary of the subdivision.

Crime Watch Groups

Crime Watch groups are formed specifically to address crime problems within a neighborhood. These associations usually encompass a smaller (several block) area which is defined and on record with the Police Department. Some Crime Watch groups have officers and some do not. The specific role of this type of organization, however, is to deal with crime through awareness.

Neighborhood Associations

“Neighborhood Association” is used for those organizations which may look at one or more issues both internally and externally to the area. These associations frequently form around an issue such as a zoning case, a development proposal, a neighborhood condition (dilapidated housing, traffic problems), or a similar issue. Usually the membership feels that they need a better “voice” at City Hall. Some Neighborhood Associations obtain non-profit status, and some do not. It usually depends on the wishes of the membership. Most have a defined boundary, officers, and/or a board of directors. On some occasions, a property owners association or a crime watch group will expand their areas of concern to city issues and/or broader neighborhood issues.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZING A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

1. The City believes that forming a neighborhood organization can make a big difference in the quality of life in your neighborhood. If you are interested, talk to your neighbors and set up a planning meeting to discuss issues and concerns. A Staff member from the Planning and Development Department will meet with you if you wish.
2. Identify a core group who might be interested in establishing a neighborhood association. If the neighborhood includes a crime watch or similar group, members might be helpful in your core group. Also include any elected officials (city, county or state) who live in your neighborhood. It is also helpful to contact an officer in a successful neighborhood association elsewhere in the city, to be an advisor.
3. Call a neighborhood meeting to see if there is any interest. This should be held in a public place such as a nearby school, church, public library, community center or neighborhood resource center. The meeting should be publicized by delivering flyers door to door, posting flyers in neighborhood businesses and/or via social media. The meeting should be well organized and not too long. Focus on establishing an association.

One might use the following program:

INITIAL MEETING

(Issues, definitions and structure)

The goal for the first meeting will be to explain the concept of a Neighborhood Association and how they work, the benefits of having one, the time commitment of officers and members, etc. **Always Have An Agenda and Follow It!** Make sure everyone signs in with address, phone number and e-mail address. This will be your initial mailing (contact) list.

Bringing people together for a common cause is one role of neighborhood associations. A shared common interest might be in the growth and development of the neighborhood in which they live or own property. The group should show a unified front in speaking out, organizing and promoting the best interest of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood associations must be allowed to structure themselves as they wish, and operate independently of government, while establishing partnerships with the city and other governmental units. They should be involved in the affairs of the people. They should be committed to excellence. Above all, associations should want to exist, and should understand the ultimate goal.

At the first meeting, try to discern the following five things:

- 1) **What are the issues that would warrant forming the association?**
 - Do 'we' have neighborhood issue(s) that require a group effort? For example, a rezoning, a new public facility, new businesses or lack thereof, crime,

beautification, etc. (You just want to see if there is enough interest to have a neighborhood association; you are not going to solve them at the first meeting)

- Can we, as a group, help improve our neighborhood (enhance the quality of life)?

2) What resources are out there to assist a Neighborhood Association? [Identify available resources and contacts related to the prioritized issue(s)]

- Each neighborhood association member has something to offer. Utilize the internal resources that you have. Never overlook anyone. The premise is to work together. Find out the strengths and expertise in each and utilize them.
- Associations should also develop a list of external resources. Identifying key contacts within each agency or department that will be able to assist you with your group's needs, i.e., City Manager's Office, Department of Housing and Neighborhood Programs, Neighborhood Alert Centers, Department of Planning and Development, Police Department, Public Works, Media, Churches, Institutions, Local agencies, etc.

3) Defining Your Association (Name, location, etc.)

- Discuss potential Association names. It might be a subdivision name, an area of town, or something else.
- Identify the neighborhood boundary. This might be a difficult part. The boundary would be the part of town that you and your neighbors most identify with. Include the commercial areas where you shop. Be careful not to make the area too large. Some of the most successful neighborhood associations are relatively small in area. If necessary the boundaries can be changed at a later date. (Contact Planning Staff after this meeting to discuss your proposed boundaries and if they overlap other neighborhood association boundaries, etc.) You may want to have maps on hand to point to and draw the proposed boundaries.

4) Organizational Structure. (Each association needs good leadership.)

- What Officers do you need? Often association officers include the following: President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.
- What Committees and Committee Chairs do we need? Committees might consist of: Development (Land Use and Zoning); Housing; Public Relations; Membership; Finance; Social; and Helping Hand.
- A sample Bylaws should be distributed to review and adopt at a later meeting.

5) Wrap-up

- Does your group need and want a neighborhood association? Do you want to call a second meeting to further discuss and decide if the neighborhood wants a neighborhood association?
- Set your next meeting date.
- Assign someone to develop a flyer and who will distribute it. Who will post to social media? Who will email others that should be at the next meeting? Ask all

- that attended to talk to their neighbors and people they know in the proposed area to attend the next meeting.
- Appoint a steering committee or nominating committee to select a slate of officers to be formally elected at the next meeting.
 - If needed, ask for volunteers to review and present bylaws at the next meeting.
 - Have a volunteer donate snacks for each meeting.

MEETING TWO

Call a second meeting using the same method of passing out flyers and contacting neighbors through phone, email, and social media. Invite a city official or elected official to speak on how a Neighborhood Association can be a benefit to the area. Start a discussion with the group on whether or not a neighborhood association is desired. Remember, you are discussing whether or not to have an organization, not solving the issues in that meeting.

In the second meeting, try to discern the following things:

Is there is the desire to have a neighborhood association?

What are the boundaries?

What are the bylaws?

Who are the officers?

Are there committees and if so, what are they? Committees might consist of: Development, Land Use and Zoning, Crime, Housing, Public Relations, Membership, Finance, and Constitution and By-Laws.

How is Internal Communication handled? How is information received from the City or others and how is it disseminated to the membership? Does a committee come up with a recommendation or does it go the general membership? How do you announce regular meetings or special called meetings?

Membership, single person or family membership – who can be a member and who can vote? Can only people that are current on their dues vote?

Dues – do you charge dues and how would the money be spent?

If, after the discussion, it is decided that there is not enough interest in a formal organization, thank everyone and remember there are still Staff resources you can tap in the future.

If the group wants to create a neighborhood association and is comfortable with the process at the second meeting: finalize physical boundaries, adopt bylaws, and elect officers. This election of officers and bylaws may take place at a subsequent meeting if need be. Sample bylaws can be obtained from the Planning and Development Department.

If you decide that you do want to move forward, then the Department of Planning and Development will provide information and assist to help make your group effort a success. At this point you are ready to register your association. You have a core membership, bylaws, officers, boundaries, and a name. The association might want to

incorporate, but this is not absolutely necessary. The key is to establish an organized voice to speak as one, for your neighborhood.

Please fill out the “**New Neighborhood Association Information**” form that is included in this packet. Return the form to: Walter Malone, Planning and Development Department, 723 West Markham, Little Rock, AR 72201 and your neighborhood group will begin receiving notification of development proposals, zoning cases and other city related information that will be of interest to your group. It is very important to resubmit this form every time a new officer is elected, your email or mailing address changes, or something on the form is different.

MEETING THREE AND SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

Call your subsequent meetings and conduct your meetings by the way listed in the bylaws.

Consider the following topics when you meet at your neighborhood association meetings:

- Define the issues in your neighborhood. Brainstorm alternative solutions to the issues that are at hand. Learn the city codes, policies and processes concerning your issues. Invite a city official or elected official to speak on that specific topic. These presentations will provide an informational and educational aspect to your Neighborhood Association meeting. Develop a list of those contacts with phone, email and mailing addresses, i.e. City Manager’s Office, Department of Housing and Neighborhood Programs, Neighborhood Resource Centers, Department of Planning and Development, Police Department, Public Works, , etc. Your contact list should not just be city officials, include state or county government, local non-profits, media, churches, institutions, agencies, or even yourselves.
- Stay Focused And Positive. Do not let your meeting become gripe sessions. Work toward a solution.
- You have empowered yourself and the neighborhood to act as a partner to solve neighborhood issues. Empower your leadership team through available training to learn how to facilitate internal and external meetings where decision-making, problem solving, team building, brainstorming, action planning, and more are skillfully accomplished. One such program is available through UALR at <http://ualr.edu/publicaffairs/apac/apac-group-facilitator/>
- How will you communicate with your membership and with City Hall? What is the frequency of that communication? How does that fit within the City’s public hearing calendar? How do you report back to the membership on completed tasks or positions? Do you have a newsletter published and how do you distribute it (social media, US Mail, email, etc.)?

- How does your association participate in local government? Do you assign or ask for volunteers to attend advisory boards and committees, city board meetings, other boards and commissions, and to communicate with your elected officials?
- You may find that it would be beneficial to legally incorporate your neighborhood association. Contact your legal representation for advice on this.
- Develop ways to keep your group active when there is not a ‘pressing’ issue at City Hall that needs your attention. This could be any number of ways through yard of the month contests, social events to strengthen neighborhood ties, helping hand to neighbors that need assistance, crime watch, clean up campaigns, etc. The primary objective is to be about the business of serving the best interest of the community.