

# Executive Summary

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Proceeding significant staffing and organizational changes in its neighborhood services office, the City of Eugene determined that the timing and opportunity was right for change and improvement with regard to its neighborhood programs. In October 2007, the City of Eugene issued a Request for Proposals to conduct best practices research, an *in-depth assessment of Neighborhood Services* and provide recommendations for appropriate programmatic framework and staffing resources to better support the goals and objectives of the Neighborhood Empowerment Initiative. The focus of the Neighborhood Empowerment Initiative is to create and sustain *Strong Neighborhoods*, with an emphasis on building partnerships motivated to collaboratively problem-solve and develop solutions that benefit a broad representation of the community.

In March 2008, The City announced its decision to contract with JLA Public Involvement (JLA). The City chose JLA based on the team's depth of knowledge about neighborhood programs and associations, personal knowledge of Eugene and professional experience working within a Council/Manager form of government. Key team members are or had been recently involved with their local neighborhood association either personally or professionally.

JLA kicked off its comprehensive assessment process in May 2008, guided by a Steering Committee convened by Neighborhood Services and comprised of both neighborhood leaders and city staff. The intent of the assessment process was to uncover and identify the strengths, challenges, needs and expectations of the community at large, neighborhood association leaders and City staff in relation to Neighborhood Services. To conduct the assessment process, JLA used eight different tools ranging from community sidewalk and online surveys to telephone interviews with more than 30 individuals. These assessment tools helped JLA identify strengths and challenges for the City of Eugene, Neighborhood Services and neighborhood associations. Larger themes included:

- Participation in neighborhood associations appears to be low in comparison to population statistics and a pervasive lack of communication and collaboration among community organizations may be contributing to lower involvement by the broader community.
- Being under the umbrella of Planning may be narrowing the scope of Neighborhood Services' role and reinforcing the public's perception that Neighborhood Services is a planning department resource, rather than a "city" resource for the broader community to tap into.
- Neighborhood Services staff, the location and accessibility of the office, neighborhood newsletters and the neighborhood matching grant program are considered strengths.

As part of the assessment and research process, JLA, identified a number of model programs in other U.S. cities with demographics and form of government similar to the City of Eugene. These case studies presented a number of best practices that correlated well with the needs identified by Eugene community members and city staff.

Collectively, the best practices research, assessment findings, and the priorities raised in the Neighborhood Empowerment Initiative Action Plan led to the recommendations detailed in this report.

To address challenges and build on identified strengths, recommendations include:

- Neighborhood Services should establish a three-pronged approach to community organizing to serve three customer groups: Neighborhood Associations, City departments, and the community at large. This approach will create awareness and a shared understanding amongst the broader community and City departments with regard to the purpose and role of neighborhood associations; resulting in more people participating in their local neighborhood associations and serving on city advisory committees and project teams.
- Neighborhood Services should be under the purview of the City Manager's Office and function as part of the newly created division that includes Human Rights, Diversity and Sustainability. This shift will reinforce Neighborhood Services' role as a resource for all city departments and Eugene residents and will also create efficiencies by initiating collaborative efforts with other community-service oriented programs in the City Manager's Office.
- The City of Eugene should continue funding the neighborhood matching grant program and improve outreach and promote increased collaboration among the various community and business organizations. Continuing the program acknowledges the program's overall success in building community and promoting collaboration between community partners and the City of Eugene.

The 24 recommendations in this report provide the City of Eugene with "best practices" to address identified needs in staffing, operating structure, and programs and services provided by Neighborhood Services. JLA believes that ongoing collaboration with the community, neighborhood associations and city departments will be essential to implement these recommendations successfully.

During the course of this project, the City of Eugene hired a new City Manager. The new City Manager offers a fresh perspective on community engagement and a keen interest in integrating community service-oriented programs into all city departments. This comes at a time of constrained financial public resources that have, in turn, created increased efficiencies and creative thinking on behalf of staff and decision-makers. That said, the City will have to strike a balance between expectations and available resources with regard to implementation of the recommendations in this report. Some recommendations and opportunities may be achieved by creating efficiencies and streamlining operations through co-location of programs with similar missions, functions and customers. Other recommendations require time, energy and significant financial investment, and therefore, may need to be phased-in as resources become available. Recommended phasing and prioritization is outlined in Chapter 6.