

## Neighborhood Action Plan Scoping Vancouver WA Fieldtrip and Post-trip follow up

On February 11, 2009 Eugene City staff and neighborhood representatives visited Vancouver Washington to learn more about their Neighborhood Action Planning work.

### **1. Staff Meeting**

Carolyn Weiss, Metro & Community Planning Manager met with a group of Vancouver staff in the afternoon including:

City Manager, Pat McDonnell

Transportation Planner, Todd Boulanger

Long Range Planner

Budget Manager, Natasha Ramras

Neighborhood Program Manager, Judi Bailey

Community Resources Coordinator, Myk Heidt

### **NAPs Discussion Summary:**

Neighborhood Action Plans (NAPs) are valuable planning tools. They are not formal documents, but serve as informational guidance to staff. They also serve as wish lists for the neighborhoods and are implemented opportunistically. They are enacted by applying for grant funding, or through being incorporated into CIP projects. They also can be a tool for neighborhoods to organize around certain issues and initiate the appointment of an advocate to work on that issue. By and large, a majority of the projects that come out of NAPs are related to transportation and parks. Land Use issues can be identified, but NAPs are not regulatory. Land Use recommendations that are included in NAPs are recognized by staff and planning commission in discretionary decision-making. They are also provided to developers to better inform them of neighborhood concerns and priorities.

The primary funding source for NAP recommendations comes from 4 grant funds:

- Real Estate Excise Tax or transfer tax (Transportation related-at one time up to \$800,000 available)
- CDBG (larger projects in qualifying low income areas)
- Matching Grants (small projects \$5,000- \$10,000)
- Neighborhood Action Plan grants (small projects \$5,000)

Benefits of NAPs to Neighborhood Associations include:

- Identifies goals and priorities for a 5 year window
- Funding through grants (see above)
- Inclusion of priorities into Capital projects
- Provide for continuity when neighborhood leadership changes
- Provide a measure for success
- Education on issues

Benefits of NAPs to City Organization:

- NAPs create huge efficiencies by organizing neighborhood needs into a planning framework
- NAPs help citizens to be better educated on city-wide issues
- NAPs help commissions, boards, and staff to be better educated about neighborhood issues

The biggest weakness of the NAP program is that it is not a holistic planning tool. Because priorities are recognized on a neighborhood basis, it can be difficult to put issues into a city-wide context.

General recommendations from staff regarding NAPs:

- NAPs are good tools for identifying issues. It is not always productive to identify a solution to that issue in the document. Greater flexibility can be helpful in addressing that issue when the time comes.
- Staff help guide plan formation and review draft plans to ensure consistency with Departmental/program policies.
- Plans are accepted by Council (not adopted as that may imply that funding is available)
- Plans can address intra-neighborhood issues when they share a boundary along a transportation corridor or a park.
- A 5-year planning horizon is manageable, not too overwhelming
- Start the NAP process with a neighborhood that has lots of resources. The program will evolve over time.
- Cross-departmental liaison program may be critical first step in initiating a NAP program. This helps to ensure city-wide program support.

### **Liaison Program**

A great deal of the success of the NAPs program is because of the cross-department support of the neighborhoods program through liaisons. There are approximately 63 Neighborhood Associations in Vancouver, ranging in size from 200 to 2,000 households. Each active Neighborhood Association has a City liaison. The liaison is a formal appointment by the City Manager and could work in any of the City Departments. A benefit of having liaisons from departments that don't have much public contact such as HR or Finance is a better connection with constituents.

The liaison is provided with an in-service training and then attends NA meetings, provides a meeting summary, and follows up on any issues that come up at the meetings. Meeting summaries are compiled and sent to the Neighborhood Association Chair, City Manager, Execs, City Council, and the media. Liaisons are typically management staff and are not represented to keep from paying overtime. The liaison duties are added on top of the employees regular duties and can take up to 4 hours /week. The Police Department has four officers that are liaisons to larger areas, known as districts.

Benefits of Liaison Program to City Organization include:

- Upper management support for neighborhoods
- Cross-departmental involvement in neighborhood issues

- Public is better educated on city-wide issues
- Focus becomes less reactionary and more proactive, less emotional and more objective
- Good cross-departmental communication
- Community trust-building

Other items of note:

- Neighborhood land use reps are invited to observe all pre-application conferences.
- Developers are encouraged to meet with Neighborhood Associations, though not required.
- Vancouver has a population of 160,000 and 63 neighborhood associations
- In 1998, a large geographic area east of the City was annexed, doubling the size of Vancouver
- Approximately 10% of the City is not in a neighborhood association
- Clark County also has neighborhood associations
- City Council members are all at-large
- City Manager meets with neighborhood leaders quarterly
- The Vancouver Columbian newspaper provides weekly section on neighborhood news.

## **2. Project Tour**

Vancouver Neighborhood staff, Judi and Myk led Eugene staff, Carolyn Weiss and Rene Kane and Eugene neighbors on a tour. Eugene neighborhood representatives included:

Carolyn Jacobs, *South University Neighborhood Association*

David Kolb, *Crest Drive Citizens*

Randy Prince, *Amazon Neighbors*

Carlos Barrera, *Friendly Area Neighbors*

Jerry Finigan, *Santa Clara Community Organization*

Jan Spencer, *River Road Community Organization*

Rene Kane, *Jefferson Westside Neighbors*

The tour consisted of 5 projects that were initiated through the NAP process:

- Sidewalk infill (CDBG funding)
- Park Development (CDBG, Matching Grants, Volunteers)
- Road Diet (Capital project initiated with input from NAP)
- City cemetery fencing (NAPs grant- 2 cycles)
- Intersection Repair- street mural and kiosk (Matching Grant)

## **3. Neighbors Meeting**

Later that evening, Vancouver neighborhood representatives joined the group for a roundtable discussion about the NAP process.

Judi gave a brief program overview. The primary steps in developing a NAP include:

1. Form a committee
2. Prepare and distribute a survey
3. Draft the plan based on input
4. Provide ongoing outreach to the neighborhood
5. Neighborhood Association approval process
6. City Council acceptance process
7. Repeat every 5 years/ celebrate accomplishments

Approximately 10 Vancouver neighbors shared their perspective. There is overwhelming support and satisfaction with the NAP program. Benefits to the neighborhoods were identified as:

- An opportunity to proactively plan for future goals and issues
- Ability to apply for grant funding
- Clout/ credibility amongst decision-makers
- Direct communication with staff and dialogue about upcoming issues
- Build partnerships
- A structure for getting things done
- Opportunity for inter- and intra-neighborhood connection/community-building

When asked how the program could be improved, or what the challenges of the NAP process are, the following were offered:

- Understaffed neighborhoods program causes delay in staff turn around of NAPs
- NAPs that are too general don't provide much direction
- The process must be transparent and equitable
- The process shouldn't be too complicated
- Neighborhoods need a stable organizational structure to undertake NAPs

Other comments:

- Neighborhood liaison program is great, staff is very responsive
- Recommendations regarding land use issues are taken under consideration. Although they are only advisory, it is considered the voice of the neighborhood
- NAP committee members must be stable and willing to dedicate time
- Disagreements of the NAP committee go to the larger neighborhood association body
- Get examples of surveys from other groups to start
- No ongoing city funds are provided to neighborhood associations
- City sponsors annual neighborhood clean-ups- very popular
- Neighborhood newsletters are written by neighbors, printed by city, distributed by neighbors
- Most NAP committees are made up of NA boards and additional neighborhood residents. One NA had a NAP committee that was entirely separate from its board.

March 25 Post-trip Debrief Meeting comments:

- The liaison program is very important for an effective NAP process. It shows that staff is committed to neighborhoods. This includes staff from across the City organization which helps neighborhoods network and make more connections. It also helps form cooperative relationships to help ease that tension between the City and neighborhoods.
- The NAP process is kind of like our Matching Grant program, but better because it is more grassroots and a neighborhood has to have lots of discussion and must prioritize needs.
- The NAP process is not a grant process, they are separate. Grants can be an implementation tool.
- The size of neighborhoods in Vancouver are much smaller, less than 2000 households. This makes it easier to create a neighborhood vision and have discussions about neighborhood needs (Cal Young for example). A negative aspect to smaller neighborhoods is that there may be more competition for resources. Care needs to be taken that there are not inequalities in the way resources are applied.
- Within a neighborhood, NAP efforts can be more localized to address a specific need and/or can expand to include an issue shared by an adjacent neighborhood.
- People on the NAP planning committees and the NA Boards are not synonymous and this may be helpful. However, there is definitely alignment and overlap.
- One of the first NAP steps, a neighborhood visioning process, could be used to attract more neighborhood people.
- It is a goal for Eugene to be inclusive regarding the identification of neighborhood needs and participation in the NAP process.
- The NAP visioning and goal setting process may take longer than it did in Vancouver. These would remain consistent for a certain period of time but strategies to address needs might change more frequently. Goal setting would need to reflect the broad neighborhood not individuals. Santa Clara has some goals identified that came about from the transition process.
- The idea was revisited about having some general topics and then doing a broader community survey about neighborhood assets and needs. The City could develop the survey tool and neighborhood folks could help implement it. Canvassing community spots such as grocery stores, and events during the summer were talked about. The City could then compile the data. This could give neighborhood entering the NAP process some baseline data. Much thought/work would need to go into having an appropriately designed survey tool. What are we really trying to get at? Things would need to be ranked somehow.
- In Vancouver, the city government takes NAPs very seriously and has lots of respect for them. Can this happen in Eugene? There is some distrust in this area. Will there be help from the City to collaborate to implement goals? NAPs would have to be substantive, not just window dressing. Eugene city staff role would be to get City-wide buy-in. Using NAPs city-wide can allow for more proactive vs. reactive work to be done, it saves resources/be more efficient by cataloguing neighborhood needs and would assist city groups with public input for project on the front end.

- The general tone in Vancouver seemed to be very cooperative between the City and neighborhoods. In Eugene, neighborhoods are sometimes on the defensive or working against the City. A NAP program could help the City and neighborhoods be more cooperative. Change is needed in this direction.
- The climate in Eugene could facilitate doing more with the NAP process than Vancouver has...it could be more substantive and collaborative. We could be more creative around implementation.