



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Arjun Batra

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: April 18, 2023

Approved *Arjun Dev Batra*

Date April 18, 2023

SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION STATUS REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

Accept Councilmember Doan's memo with the following additions:

- 1) Reinstate the Neighborhoods Commission on the City's Boards and Commissions webpage, listing their current members and vacancies. Accept and process applications as usual.
- 2) As was done with the measure T Oversight Committee, base quorum for the neighborhoods commission on the number of filled seats.
- 3) Allow Council offices to appoint Commissioners to fill empty commission seats on an interim basis until their caucus appointment process begins.
- 4) Retain the Measure B Oversight Committee under the purview of the Neighborhoods Commission. As needed, in order to fill that committee, Staff is directed to reach out to other commissions to find interested members willing to sit on the committee, and to promote the vacancies as they do with open seats on other committees and commissions, allowing the public to apply for those seats.

BACKGROUND

Councilmember Doan's memo clearly outlines the value, importance, and uniqueness of the Neighborhoods Commission. It also raises some concerns. By late summer/early fall 2020, most if not all the other committees and commissions were using Zoom to conduct their meetings. By 2021 the City and the public were well versed in using Zoom, Teams, and other virtual meeting platforms. In many cases, virtual meetings had higher attendance from the community than they had in person prior to the pandemic. It is unclear why the caucus meetings weren't held as planned via Zoom.

The Neighborhoods Commission is the only remaining commission that still works on policy issues. They dig deep into the budget and into various policies, asking probing questions, and making suggestions for policy changes that will improve the quality of life for all in San Jose. They are also a useful place for Staff to vet good ideas as the Commissioners take those ideas to the various District leadership groups and the neighborhood associations to test these ideas and collect community feedback. Focused on a few key areas, such as budget, transportation, and public safety,

these dedicated volunteers can help inform Council offices of policy details that may get overlooked by their stretched-thin staff and can work with them to champion important policy changes.

The Neighborhood Association Engagement Model (NAEM) could also be a good idea. However, there are entities in place that have been serving in this space for some time. United Neighborhoods of Santa Clara County (UNSCC) has a long history of supporting neighborhood associations (NAs). Currently, they provide meeting insurance to member NAs and administer the BeautifySJ grants. However, in the past, they also held bi-annual mixers for NAs, hosted workshops where professionals were brought in to train on important topics such as succession planning, recruiting, and building a strong NA. Admittedly, with the passing of the UNSCC Executive Director, Ken Podgorsek, there are some challenges to overcome.

In addition, every Council District now has a leadership group, with District 7's being the newest to be formed as mentioned in Councilmember Doan's memo. The Chair and Vice Chair (or similarly titled counterparts) of each of these groups started meeting regularly a couple of years ago and have now formed the All District Leadership Group (ADLG). Staff has met with them a few times to explore how they might work together to help support NAs. In District 10, we work closely with our D10 Leadership Coalition to start and support NAs. One of the tools we use is the Neighborhood Association Tool Kit – a training manual for new NAs created by an ad-hoc committee of the Neighborhoods Commission. Together we have developed a successful and repeatable process for starting and growing new NAs.

Both the UNSCC and the ADLG are volunteer organizations. With 190 current NAs, the City would need to hire a number of FTE's to provide similar services. We should certainly consider re-filling the position once held by Ernest Guzman. He was a full-time employee who provided the support to the NC and performed many of the functions that Ken took as Ernest got closer to retiring. Supporting and strengthening all of these organizations is a valuable role and could be done with a considerably smaller number of FTEs on the City's payroll.

Direct staff to work with UNSCC and the ADLG to develop their Neighborhood Association Engagement Model, drawing on their experience with the Project Hope model to reach priority neighborhoods. Consider funding an Executive Director for UNSCC, as we do with the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, and have done in the past with the San Jose Parks Foundation, (and with UNSCC many years ago). This could be temporary support through this transition period.

Returning to the Neighborhoods Commission, in our briefing from Staff, there were several reasons provided for why they thought the NC should be sunsetted. They cited problems such as: it doesn't respond to real time needs in neighborhoods; commissioners are surprised at how much work there is to do on this commission; residents reach out to their commissioner instead of their Council office when they have a complaint about speeding, or potholes, or other neighborhood issues; and other similar concerns.

It seems most of the problems sited are related to a lack of adequate marketing and communication that could be easily remedied. This would be needed even with the creation of a new entity. Clearly informing residents of when they should use the 311 app, when they should contact the Council office, and what the roles of the NC, UNSCC, the ADLG, and/or the new NAEM entity is something

that Staff can develop and could be done in conjunction with any or all of these groups. These materials should be promoted by all parties as a means of providing better customer service to the community, and helping neighborhoods meet their needs.

Finally, moving the Measure B Oversight Committee to the Parks and Recreation Commission does not seem like an appropriate fit. The revenue generated by the quarter cent sales tax under Measure B feeds into the General Fund and is allocated to many different City services such as public safety, transportation, parks, environmental services, and the budget. The Commission best equipped to oversee those funds is the Neighborhoods Commission. They are similarly focused and aware of the broad scope of the allocation of those funds.