



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Bien Doan

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: 3/09/2023

Approved

Date 3/8/2023

SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION STATUS REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

1. Reject the staff memorandum
2. Direct staff to return to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee in Spring 2024 with a report on ways to improve the Neighborhood Commission, with specific recommendations on the following:
 - a. Commissioner participation and better training;
 - b. Addressing the number of seats on the commission and going from 20 to 11, with each district represented and a citywide seat;
 - c. Resource allocation and budgeting from staff;
 - d. What is the appropriate city department for the scope of the commission, including transitioning back to the City Manager's Office;
 - e. Standardizing the caucus process and partnering with a third-party partner like United Neighborhoods of Santa Clara County, so it is not "labor-intensive" on city resources;
 - f. Developing an alternative appointment process for when caucuses cannot be held, such as during COVID; and
 - g. Empowering, not hindering, the commission to accomplish its scope.

BACKGROUND

The Neighborhoods Commission addresses a key need in our city but unfortunately it has been over scrutinized, underutilized, and not given appropriate resources since its inception.

This is the only commission which has the ability to address quality of life issues in the city from a neighborhoods perspective. Public safety, transportation, code enforcement and the budget look very different to your average resident than they do to a city staff member or official. The voice of the community is important and this commission is designed to assist the Council Office with hearing the voice, and the perspective, of the community.

Staff has tried to shut down this commission in 2012, 2018, and again in 2023 without success and each time being met by strong opposition from our San Jose neighborhoods.

The Neighborhoods Commission is Underutilized.

This is the one commission that can address in its entirety the quality of life issues stemming homelessness, but it has been told not to do so by staff on many occasions.

As we know, quality of life issues stemming from homelessness are addressed by several city departments including, the City Manager's Office, Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, Department of Transportation, Public Works, San Jose Police Department and more. Additionally, we know the Neighborhoods Commission is the only commission which specifically addresses public safety, code enforcement, transportation, quality of life issues, and the overall budget. Therefore, the Neighborhoods Commission is the only commission which can address the number one issue in the city of San Jose because no other committee has the broad capability and scope to address these concerns.

Budget Oversight

The Neighborhoods Commission serves as the public oversight committee for the correct appropriation and usage of the 2016 Measure B funds. This is because it is the only commission chartered to make recommendations to the budget as a whole. The commission has been open to more opportunities for budget recommendations and oversight functions and we should take advantage of that resource.

Inability to Meet Quorum Was Artificially Created and Can Be Remedied

The Neighborhoods Commission is the only commission where members are recommended by the people of each city council district. These recommendations take place during a caucus election process comprised of neighborhood leaders for the district. Members are appointed for terms of four-years with caucuses taking place every two years and alternating between the even and odd districts.

When speaking with current and past commissioners of the Neighborhoods commission, they are in agreement that quorum could not be met since COVID started because staff interfered and halted the process. First, staff prohibited the commission from holding their caucus elections in 2019, prior to COVID restrictions, and again in 2021 during COVID restrictions. Second, there was no process in place to appoint commissioners to the Neighborhoods Commission when the caucus process could not take place. Because of this, every commissioner in the Neighborhoods Commission officially termed out and there are only four members currently on the roster because their terms were extended.

A body cannot make quorum when the city does not fill its positions.

The Neighborhoods Commission is the Perfect Vehicle for Community Engagement, Especially in Underserved and Underrepresented Communities

District 7 is a great example of how powerful this commission can be. Former and current commissioners like Robert Sandoval and Jonathan Velasquez went above and beyond to perform outreach to all Neighborhood Associations in our District, at times when that outreach did not exist, and worked to inform our underprivileged communities of ways to receive assistance when they needed it most.

Now that I am in office, I am continuing to work with our commissioners and our neighborhood leaders to create the District 7 Leadership Group and use it as a tool to facilitate open communication to and from our office to our community, and to bridge the Vietnamese, Hispanic, and all other communities in our district.

The Neighborhoods Commission Needs to Continue and be Better Supported

The work of the commission is vital to empowering San Jose neighborhoods and facilitating excellent communications with our neighborhoods.

Ken Podgorsek was a friend to many and worked tirelessly to support and enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods. Ken believed in the Neighborhoods Commission and its commissioners. He supported it, he helped found it, and if he were here today, I am sure he would want us to do everything in our power to keep it going and empower the commission to the work it was charted to do.

Let's work to support and enhance the Neighborhoods Commission, empower our commissioners with the tools to help council offices enhance our neighborhoods, embrace their recommendations, and use this additional resource to make San Jose neighborhoods safer and cleaner for us all.

The signer(s) of this memorandum have not had, and will not have, any private conversation with any other member of the City Council, or that member's staff, concerning any action discussed in the memorandum, and that each signer's staff members have not had, and have been instructed not to have, any such conversation with any other member of the City Council or that member's staff.