



Memorandum

TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FROM: Jon Cicirelli

SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION
RESTRUCTURE

DATE: February 13, 2023

Approved

Date

3/2/23

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the recommendation from the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department via the following actions:

- (a) Sunset the Neighborhoods Commission;
- (b) Transition the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee to a Standing Committee of the Parks and Recreation Commission;
- (c) Return to Neighborhood Services and Education Committee in Spring 2024 with a report on staff's Neighborhood Association Engagement Model; and
- (d) Cross reference this action to April 11, 2023, City Council Meeting.

SUMMARY AND OUTCOME

The Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services Department (Department) is recommending to sunset the Neighborhoods Commission. Staff will administratively form a Neighborhood Association Engagement Model comprised of a diverse cross-section of neighborhood leaders and City staff from departments that deliver quality of life neighborhood programs or services. There have been challenges to sustaining an effective Neighborhoods Commission for the past three years due to constraints with meeting the Commissions broad purpose, dynamic needs, and unique commission selection process. A neighborhood association engagement model better aligns City resources to provide a quality customer service experience to City residents. It is further recommended that the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC), which provides oversight of City spending facilitated by the Measure B quarter-cent sales tax measure approved in June 2016, be transferred to the Parks and Recreation Commission, with additional membership from the Senior Citizens Commission and the Youth Commission.

BACKGROUND

The Neighborhoods Commission was created as a two-year pilot in April 2008 to advocate for neighborhoods; integrate the voice of neighborhoods into the City of San José decision-making process; study, review, and evaluate issues, courses of action, and policies/programs affecting San José neighborhoods; and to make recommendations to the City Council and the former Redevelopment Agency. In August 2013, the City Council adopted an ordinance¹ establishing the Neighborhoods Commission and refining the Commission's purpose to advise the City Council regarding issues that impact San José neighborhoods and focus their efforts on:

- Issues, policies, and programs affecting the quality of life in San José neighborhoods focusing on neighborhood safety, transportation, and code enforcement, and
- Advise and make recommendations to the City Council regarding annual budget priorities.

During the initial launch of the Neighborhoods Commission, there were thirty (30) Commissioners; three representatives per Council District. Each representative was selected to serve up to two 4-year terms for a maximum of 8 years. This Commission size was eventually reduced to twenty (20) Commissioners, with two representatives selected per Council District. The selection process chosen to fill commissioner seats for the Neighborhoods Commission was the caucus process and not the Council nominated process that is used for most other City commission positions. Unlike members of the City boards and commissions who are appointed, Neighborhoods Commission members are elected by delegates from neighborhood groups through in-person caucuses in each of the 10 Council Districts. The caucus process is labor-intensive, creates barriers to entry due to its cultural and political nature, and requires both City staff and current Commissioners to support the process.

In October 2019, department support for the Neighborhoods Commission and the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC) transitioned from the City Manager's Office to the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department's BeautifySJ Program. The ICOC is comprised of members of the Neighborhoods Commission that provide public oversight of ballot measures approved by the voters that result in increased tax revenues in accordance with City Council Policy 1-18, *Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Program Policy* (Section 15). Currently, the ICOC provides oversight for Measure B, a one-quarter cent local sales tax approved by San José voters in June 2016 to fund City services.

Due to a high vacancy rate, the Neighborhoods Commission has not met quorum since June 2022. In Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Neighborhoods Commissioner terms were extended, due to the inability to hold a caucus during the COVID-19 public health restrictions. There are currently four members on the twenty-person Commission, leaving sixteen seats vacant. To move forward with meetings, the Commission needs a minimum of eleven members who will consistently attend meetings. Over the past three years, there have been ongoing challenges that have

¹ Neighborhoods Commission Ordinance:

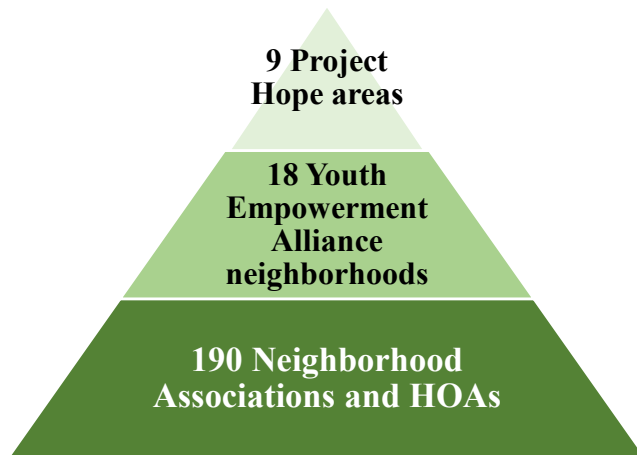
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12101/636665969743500000>

impacted the Commission’s ability to meet on a consistent basis. In addition to the lack of quorum, there have been challenges due to the Commission’s structure, which doesn’t adequately address issues from unrepresented and underrepresented neighborhoods. These challenges include:

- Lack of participation and feedback loop with neighborhood associations. Neighborhood association leaders cite the lack of interaction and problem solving of neighborhood issues due to the Commission meeting format;
- Commission does not meet the real-time needs of neighborhoods;
- The purpose of Commission and oversight functions are too broad and not well defined;
- Inability to meet quorum at meetings on an ongoing and consistent basis due to high turnover of Commissioners citing ambitious work plan for volunteer group; and
- The caucus process used to select Commissioners is not equitable and accessible. This process is not considered inclusive by many community members who reflect our diverse population.

ANALYSIS

The City of San José has a variety of different types of neighborhoods in need of various degrees of support. The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services works with a variety of residents and locations in over 200 neighborhoods across three spectrums (as illustrated in the pyramid). The type of support requested by neighborhood associations ranges from forming new neighborhood associations, strengthening current associations, educating on access to City resources, partner services, providing direct services for safe, clean neighborhoods and, commonly, addressing complex neighborhood issues. Neighborhood associations are often seeking information on how to address specific issues that are impacting their neighborhoods, including blight, code enforcement issues, traffic safety, abandoned vehicles, and homeless encampments. These issues are not able to be addressed in a Commission meeting setting.



The current structure of the Neighborhoods Commission does not allow for engagement at a level that addresses and responds to dynamic neighborhood issues. To better address these types of issues, the Department will develop a Neighborhood Association Engagement Model in collaboration with neighborhood leaders to allow for increased engagement with a larger portion of the City’s neighborhood associations and better align with key neighborhood-serving departments in the delivery of services.

To facilitate the transition from a Neighborhoods Commission to a Neighborhood Association Engagement Model, staff will form a Work Group comprised of a diverse cross-section of neighborhood leaders and City staff from departments that deliver quality of life programs and services. This Work Group will focus on designing an engagement model that better responds to and understands the needs of neighborhoods and aligns current resources to provide better customer service for neighborhood associations, with limited budget implications for the upcoming fiscal year.

The Neighborhood Association Engagement Model will also be aligned with the City’s prioritized focus on customer service. The Neighborhood Services City Service Area (CSA) is currently developing a customer service strategy to advance this City priority. While the efforts of the Work Group are taking place, the Department will continue to engage with the variety of neighborhood groups to address neighborhood issues. In fall 2023, the Annual Neighborhoods Conference will serve as a platform to both update residents on the progress of the Work Group and present the strategy to better serve and engage with neighborhood associations.

Next Steps: Neighborhoods Commission Restructure and ICOC Transition

BeautifySJ staff will form a Work Group consisting of neighborhood leaders and City staff to develop a new Neighborhood Association Engagement Model through summer 2023. This group will inform City staff on priority neighborhood association issues, discuss how best to engage with neighborhood associations, and propose strategies to both strengthen neighborhood associations and their collaboration with the City.

The ICOC will transition to a Standing Committee consisting of Commission members from various City Commissions including but not limited to the Parks and Recreation Commission, Senior Citizens Commission, and Youth Commission. While the administrative support for ICOC meetings will be managed by the Department, the City Manager’s Budget Office will continue to provide the materials and programmatic support necessary for the ICOC to fulfill its oversight role of Measure B. Section 15 of City Council Policy 1-18 will need to be updated accordingly as part of a separate City Council action.

The following table provides an overview of the Neighborhoods Commission restructure timeline.

Table 1 - Neighborhoods Commission Restructure Timeline

Description	Timeline
Form Neighborhood Association Engagement Model Work Group	April 2023
Hold Work Group meetings	May - August 2023
Update San José Municipal Code	Summer 2023
Transition ICOC to the Parks and Recreation Commission	Summer 2023
Updates to City Council Policy 1-18	Summer 2023

Report to Neighborhood Services and Education Committee on status of Neighborhoods Commission Restructure as part of the BeautifySJ Neighborhoods Annual Report	Spring 2024
---	-------------

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services will provide key updates via the Neighborhood Services CSA on the status of the Neighborhoods Commission restructure and provide a status report to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee in the fall 2023.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney’s Office, City Manager’s Budget Office, and the City Manager’s Office.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee Agenda website for the March 9, 2023, meeting.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT

No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-008, General Procedure & Policy Making resulting in no changes to the physical environment.

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 13, 2023

Subject: Neighborhoods Commission Restructure

Page 6

PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING

This item does not include a public subsidy.

/s/

JON CICIRELLI

Director, Parks, Recreation, and
Neighborhood Services

The principal author of this memorandum is Olympia Williams, Division Manager. For questions, please contact olympia.williams@sanjoseca.gov or (408) 793-5559.