



# Memorandum

**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli  
Director

**SUBJECT:** NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION  
ENGAGEMENT MODEL  
STATUS REPORT

**DATE:** March 19, 2024

Approved

Date

4/4/24

**COUNCIL DISTRICT: CITYWIDE**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- a) Accept the status report on the Neighborhood Association Engagement Model;
- b) Support the prioritization of funding in the 2024-2025 Proposed Operating Budget within the Parks, Neighborhood and Recreation Services Department for a new staffing resource that will be necessary to implement the foundational Neighborhood Association Engagement Model, subject to budgetary constraints and the need to fund other critical City Council and Administration priorities;
- c) Direct the City Manager or her designee to sunset the Neighborhoods Commission; and
- d) Cross-reference this action to the April 30, 2024, City Council meeting.

## **SUMMARY AND OUTCOME**

The Neighborhood Services and Education Committee's acceptance of the status report, feedback, and cross-reference to City Council will provide the opportunity to consider the proposed Neighborhood Association Engagement Model (Model) that seeks to reduce barriers to engaging with the City. If the proposed Model and resources are allocated in the 2024-2025 Operating Budget, staff will initiate implementation including:

- 1. The Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services Department (PRNS) will implement the foundational Model by establishing a quarterly Neighborhood Association Forum starting in the fall 2024, inclusive of the existing annual Neighborhoods Conference, to better support neighborhood association education, outreach, and engagement;

2. PRNS will assess growing the Model by developing a neighborhood services strategy to enhance and coordinate its existing neighborhood services programs to improve outcomes and more effectively utilize existing resources;
3. Staff will support, monitor, and evaluate the foundational Model from fall 2024 through spring 2026 and will subsequently determine the best form and function in the years following; and
4. Following evaluation, staff may come forward with future recommendations to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee and considerations for future budget actions to scale and sustain the foundational Model, subject to budgetary constraints and other critical City Council and Administration priorities. This may include implementing additional elements to grow to the expanded Model, which includes: 1) forming an equity-centered Neighborhood Services Advisory Group, and 2) establishing a Neighborhood Support Team comprised of PRNS staff dedicated to supporting neighborhood associations and the Neighborhood Services Advisory Group, and laying the foundation for future capacity to possibly reestablish a Neighborhood Development Center<sup>1</sup>.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City has a long-standing commitment to engage with and support neighborhood associations and neighborhood groups. The Neighborhoods Commission (Commission) was created as a two-year pilot in April 2008 to ensure that neighborhood leaders had an opportunity to collaborate with the City and to 1) advocate for the needs of neighborhood associations, 2) integrate the perspectives of neighborhood associations into the City of San José decision-making process, 3) study, review, and evaluate issues, courses of action, and policies/programs affecting San José neighborhood associations, and 4) make recommendations to the City Council and the former Redevelopment Agency. In August 2013, the City Council adopted an ordinance establishing the Neighborhoods Commission and expanding the Commission's purpose to advise the City Council regarding issues that impact San José neighborhood associations 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
- Recommendations to the City Council regarding annual budget priorities.

Since 2017, there have been ongoing challenges that have impacted the Commission's ability to meet on a consistent basis. In addition to the lack of quorum which prevented regular meetings, the bureaucratic structure of the Commission posed challenges, and the lack of dedicated staffing to support neighborhood associations left many issues unaddressed and participants feeling frustrated. Additional feedback from the community includes:

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<sup>1</sup> A Neighborhood Development Center is a model for building stronger neighborhoods through co-locating of resources, learning and development programs, outreach and engagement, partnerships, and technical support for emerging and established neighborhood associations.

- Lack of participation and a feedback loop from the Commission to neighborhood associations;
- Lack of interaction and problem-solving of immediate neighborhood issues due to the Commission's rigid meeting format to comply with state Brown Act noticing requirements;
- Inability of the Commission to meet the real-time needs of neighborhood associations;
- Overly broad purpose, mandate, and oversight functions of the Commission;
- Inability to meet quorum at meetings on an ongoing and consistent basis due to high turnover of Commissioners, often citing workplans too ambitious for a volunteer group; and
- Inequitable and inaccessible caucus processes used to select Commissioners, a process widely considered exclusionary by community members who reflect San José's diverse population.

Given these challenges, staff recommended that the City Council sunset the Neighborhood Commission in March 2023<sup>2</sup>. At that time, the City Council voted to suspend the Neighborhoods Commission to allow time for PRNS to further engage with residents to determine the best structure to address dynamic neighborhood issues. This work began in August 2023 and continued through the Annual Neighborhoods Conference held on October 14, 2023, to ensure that residents could provide feedback on the proposed model. To facilitate the community input process, staff worked with a consultant, Guidehouse (a state and local government consultancy), to conduct the three-month community engagement process and to align this work with the City's Customer Service Vision and Standards.

## **ANALYSIS**

### *Community Engagement Approach and Findings*

During the fall 2023, staff contracted with Guidehouse to work with PRNS and staff from the City Manager's Office (collectively, referred to as the project team) to engage approximately 238 stakeholders for input. The project team facilitated and collected Department, City Council, and community feedback through four engagement methods:

1. **City Council and Staff Interviews**, including 28 City touchpoints with six Council Offices, the Mayor's Office, and 13 City staff members through dedicated interviews and visioning workshops.
2. **Community Meetings**, including engaging with 48 community members through three in-person community meetings during the fall 2023. Participation included individuals from 20 neighborhood associations and nine Council Districts.

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<sup>2</sup> Neighborhood Commission Restructure, March 9, 2023:

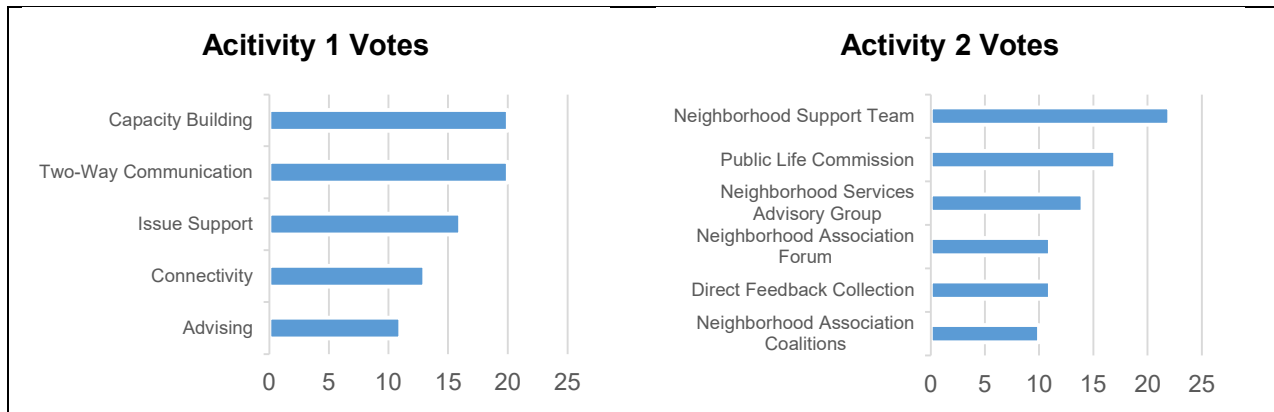
<https://sanjose.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=11689574&GUID=4751040C-C5C6-402E-B41F-AB184F947CE3>

3. **Community Survey**, including 122 survey responses administered virtually and by paper in four languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese). Survey responses came from approximately 47 neighborhood associations and all 10 Council Districts.
4. **Neighborhoods Conference**, on October 14, 2023, including 40-50 conference activity participants in which individuals completed two prioritization activities.

These engagement methods revealed five findings, which the project team summarized into model themes comprised of concepts important to stakeholders in a neighborhood association engagement model. The five findings are rooted in addressing real issues facing neighborhoods related to customer service, service delivery, communications, and community engagement. Engagement findings and model themes include:

- **Capacity Building.** Stakeholders expressed that neighborhood associations need more City resources, so they have the training, funds, and knowledge they need to lead their associations effectively;
- **Issue Support.** Stakeholders indicated that community members often struggle to navigate various City services to get their issues resolved in a timely manner;
- **Connectivity.** Stakeholders cited that neighborhood associations lack consistent avenues to connect with other neighborhood associations, and when opportunities to connect are created, neighborhood association leaders benefit greatly from shared knowledge and resources;
- **Two-Way Communication.** Stakeholders expressed that neighborhood associations lack formalized venues for information sharing and feedback with the City, and individuals expressed concern that they rarely hear updates or receive follow-up when they do engage with the City; and
- **Advising.** Stakeholders expressed that the mandate of the former Commission was confusing but felt that there should still be a forum or channel through which community perspectives can be elevated on key issues.

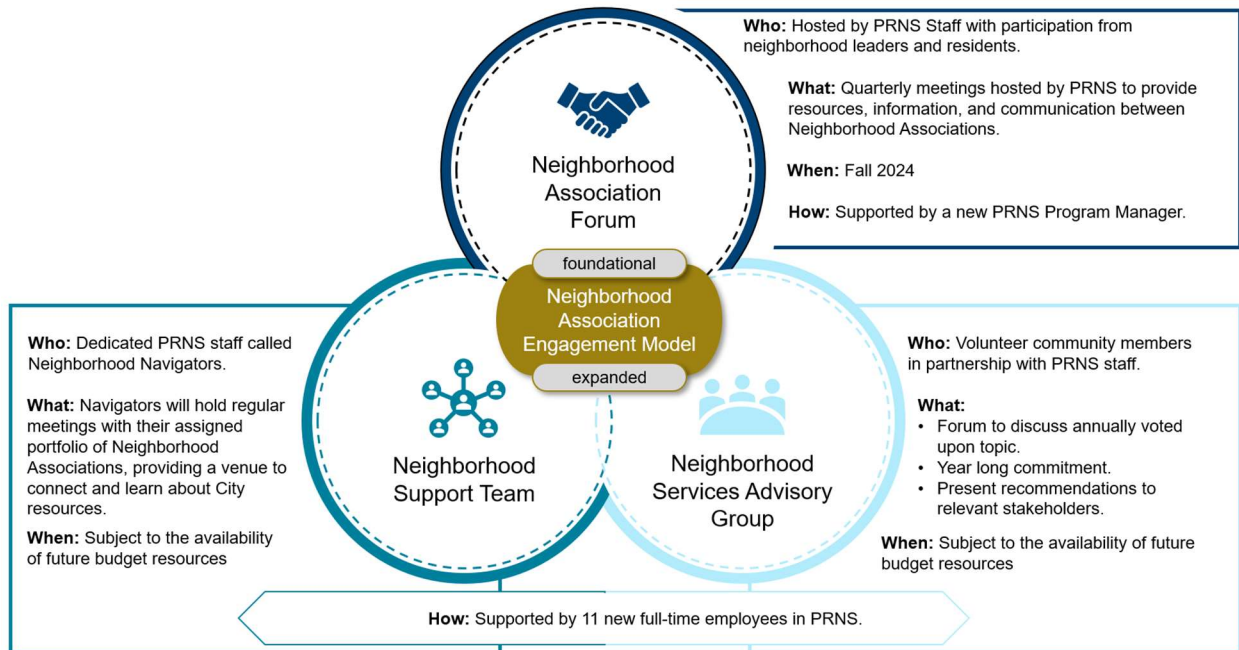
During the Neighborhoods Conference, staff facilitated two activities for participants to provide input. In the first activity, participants were given two dots and were asked to vote on which two key purposes are the most important to their neighborhood association. **Capacity Building**, **Two-Way Communication**, and **Issue Support** were the three most important purposes to neighborhood associations in this activity, with **Advising** scoring the lowest. In the second activity, participants were asked to dot-vote on which model they were most excited about participating in among several possible concepts. The full results from these activities are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Community Input Results from the Neighborhoods Conference.

Based on this community engagement process and findings, staff recommends transitioning to a Neighborhood Association Engagement Model that includes three pillars: a Neighborhood Association Forum, a Neighborhood Support Team, and a Neighborhood Services Advisory Group (Figure 22 below). The foundational Model recommended includes the Neighborhood Association Forum. The expanded Model includes the addition of the Neighborhood Support Team and Neighborhood Services Advisory Group. Given the need to strategically prioritize limited resources, the staff recommendation in this memorandum focuses on the foundational Model. Even so, the recommendation acknowledges the opportunity for future resourcing to scale to the expanded Model, which is the vision shaped through the community engagement process.

In total, the Model incorporates internal and external strategies for service delivery, such as internal cross-departmental collaboration and external programs including Project Hope and the Youth Empowerment Alliance. The first pillar within the foundational Model focuses on neighborhood association engagement through the Neighborhood Association Forum, which would prioritize capacity building, two-way communication, issue support, and better connecting neighbors to each other. The second pillar within the expanded Model would be focused on scaling to a Neighborhood Support Team with dedicated staff. The third pillar within the expanded Model would be focused on creating an advisory group to provide an advising component between the City and neighborhoods.



**Figure 2.** Foundational and Expanded Neighborhood Association Engagement Model.

The outcomes of the Model align with the Neighborhood Services City Service Area, which seeks to engage with the diverse mosaic of the San José community to reflect the rich cultural history and lived experiences of residents and to serve as conduits for people to connect with one another, to build community, and to provide pathways to opportunity, lifelong learning, and prosperity. The outcomes of the Model also align with recommendation 3.3 from the City’s Customer Service Vision and Standards adopted by the City Council in March 2023, which is to optimize outreach campaigns to engage and educate residents<sup>3</sup>.

The transition to this Model will enable a more equitable approach to delivering neighborhood services, broadening engagement across neighborhood associations, and reducing barriers to participation. Ultimately, the Model will enable the City to better support and strengthen neighborhood associations.

#### *Neighborhood Association Engagement Model Detail*

Leveraging the findings and perspectives identified through the community engagement process, the project team identified opportunities that are responsive to the needs expressed by stakeholders and extend the purpose of the Neighborhoods Commission to be more comprehensive and more accessible. The following provides additional detail for the proposed components of the Neighborhood Association Engagement Model: Neighborhood Association Forums (the foundational Model), and a Neighborhood Support Team and a Neighborhood Services Advisory Group (the expanded Model). Note that the components are designed to

<sup>3</sup> Customer Service Vision and Standards Initiative Report, March 7, 2023:

<https://sanjose.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6032807&GUID=D3D81D22-F87E-4DA9-A98C-D0FC0DDE7FC5&Options=&Search=>

augment existing strategies, including the annual Neighborhoods Conference and the BeautifySJ grant program, and are intended to provide enough structure to move forward while still leaving room for future co-creation with stakeholders.

*Neighborhood Association Forum (Foundational Model)*

This foundational Model component includes the creation of a quarterly Neighborhood Association Forum facilitated by a new position in PRNS. The Forum will provide neighborhood associations with a centralized venue to learn about City resources as well as seek support in accessing the resources they need. Additionally, neighborhood associations will have the opportunity to learn best practices from one another on delivering impact within their community. This component also serves as a tool for two-way communication to share information, solicit feedback, facilitate discussions, and provide follow-up. The Neighborhood Association Forum would launch in the fall of 2024 to complement the existing, annual Neighborhoods Conference held each year in the fall, subject to the appropriation of funds for a new position in the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget. The Administration is evaluating the inclusion of this new staffing resource in the 2024-2025 Proposed Operating Budget, subject to budgetary constraints and other critical City Council and Administration priorities.

*Neighborhood Support Team (Expanded Model)*

This engagement model component includes the creation of a new Neighborhood Support Team with dedicated PRNS staff called Neighborhood Navigators. The Neighborhood Navigators will hold regular meetings with their assigned portfolio of neighborhood associations, providing a smaller venue with more connection to learn about City resources as well as seek support from the City to address more complex issues. Resources will be focused on neighborhood associations with the most need. It is anticipated that approximately 11 staff will be needed for this component of the expanded Model to scale the program and to adequately support the program outcomes. It is anticipated that new resources will be needed to implement this model. As such, the expanded Model is subject to resource availability as part of future budget processes.

*Neighborhood Services Advisory Group (Expanded Model)*

This expanded Model component also includes the establishment of a new Neighborhood Services Advisory Group. This provides a venue for participants to weigh in on salient issues in the community and gives participants a shared purpose for driving action. The Neighborhood Services Advisory Group will be made up of community members that provide feedback to the City on annual program and services topics selected by the participants at the annual Neighborhoods Conference. The topic scope for the group includes Neighborhood Services City Service Area (CSA) core services and programs and expanding in the future to potential partners from other CSAs (such as Environment Services and Transportation).

The Advisory Group would represent the community perspective on selected, high-priority neighborhood issues, and provide service recommendations to relevant City stakeholders and leadership. Expected work product will include no cost, low cost, and high-cost service recommendations, vetted with Department staff for feasibility and prioritization. The report will

be presented to the appropriate Department leadership and will include community engagement findings generated by the Advisory Group and feedback from the Neighborhoods Conference. Members would be expected to attend meetings and the annual Neighborhoods Conference, and to conduct community engagement processes, supported by City staff, to collect community perspective.

*Implementation Timeline*

If funding is allocated in the FY 2024-2025 Operating Budget for a new staffing resource, the proposed foundational Model included in this memorandum would be implemented through the phased approach shown in Table 1. The timeline is structured to allow program capacity-building elements to initiate first while being strategic about staff resources needed to scale the Model effectively.

**Table 1. Neighborhood Association Engagement Model Implementation Phases**

	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Expected Outcomes and Activities</b>
Phase 1	Fall 2024 through spring 2025	<i>Outcome: Initiate the foundational Model to establish the structure for neighborhood association engagement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to the inclusion in the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget, hire a staffing resource to implement the foundational Neighborhood Association Engagement Model (August 2024)</li> <li>• Launch the quarterly Neighborhood Association Forum at the annual Neighborhoods Conference (October 2024) and continue quarterly Neighborhood Association Forum meetings (December 2024 – June 2025)</li> </ul>
Phase 2	Fall 2025 through spring 2026	<i>Outcome: Sustain and evaluate programs to increase Model impact</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain quarterly Neighborhood Association Forum meetings (on-going)</li> <li>• Hold the annual Neighborhoods Conference (October 2025)</li> <li>• Evaluate the foundational Model and identify needs and opportunities for scaling to the expanded Model, bringing recommendations as necessary to the City Council through the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee and/or through the budget process</li> </ul>

Following these two phases, staff will evaluate and identify policy, program, or resource adjustments and iterations needed to improve, sustain, and scale the Model in the future, including the possibility of launching as a Neighborhood Development Center, and subject to budgetary constraints and other important City Council and Administration priorities. As part of this implementation timeline, the Administration intends to work with the City Clerk’s Office to connect past Neighborhood Commissioners that have time remaining on their terms to other open commission opportunities. Past Neighborhood Commissioners will be eligible to apply for membership on the Neighborhood Services Advisory Group, if implemented.



*Policy Alternatives Considered*

The research performed examined concepts that peer jurisdictions use for engaging and supporting neighborhood associations or equivalent groups. Jurisdictions were identified based on those that have similar neighborhood engagement goals to the City of San José, including: City of Boston, City of Seattle, City of Kansas City, City of Portland, and City of Los Angeles.

Of the peer jurisdictions, various concepts were identified and summarized. The Model that staff has proposed draws on elements and themes from these alternatives, based on near-term goals, long-term opportunities, and consideration for resources. Details from the peer jurisdiction case studies are shown in detail in Attachment AA and include the concepts shown in Table 23

**Table 2. Neighborhood Engagement Case Studies Considered**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Summary</b>
City of Los Angeles, Department of Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood Council program</li> <li>• Board of Neighborhood Commissioners</li> <li>• Neighborhood District Coordinators</li> </ul>	Allows multiple avenues to access active participation in city government, some with high barriers, some with low barriers. Extremely resource intensive program, requiring over 20 full-time staff to operate.
City of Seattle, Department of Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Engagement Coordinators</li> <li>• Community Navigators</li> <li>• Community Involvement Commission</li> </ul>	Components are recognized as an integral part of the community feedback loop and have considerations, including financial compensation, to lower barriers. Active participation and turnout have a correlation for groups that are better funded.
City of Boston, Office of Neighborhood Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Navigators</li> </ul>	Facilitated community engagement allows projects across departments to get more participation.
City of Portland, Office of Community and Civic Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satellite Offices for Specific Neighborhoods</li> <li>• Advisory Bodies Program</li> <li>• Immigrant and Refugee Program</li> </ul>	Allows for direct engagement and support to neighborhood associations. Even so, barriers exist for residents that may lack the time and resources to participate.
City of Kansas City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Engagement University</li> </ul>	Expands access to more audiences, though in a more education-based, one-way program versus two-way engagement.

## **CONCLUSION**

The City of San José remains committed to supporting neighborhood associations as a critical linkage for how it reaches and connects with this part of the San José community. This memorandum highlights immediate actions necessary to better meet the needs of neighborhood associations. This memorandum also acknowledges the need to expand the concepts of the proposed Neighborhood Association Engagement Model to neighborhoods more broadly, including those that do not have robust or diverse community participation in neighborhood associations. As identified in the memorandum there is a need for new staffing resources to lead and implement the deliverables outlined in the program timeline.

If no new funding is appropriated in the FY 2024-2025 Operating Budget for the new staffing resource to implement the foundational Model, the Neighborhoods Commission would sunset as of June 30, 2024. Additionally, no major actions related to neighborhood engagement would move forward in PRNS with exception of community-building and organizing efforts in designated Project Hope neighborhoods.

This memorandum is informed by and aligns with several City Council and Administration strategies and policies, including *Customer Service Vision and Standards*, *ActivateSJ*, *Children and Youth Services Master Plan*, *the City Manager's One Team Leadership Values and Expectations of Delivering Excellent Customer Service*, *the City's Racial Equity Framework*, and *the Community Engagement Framework*.

## **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

PRNS will move forward a budget proposal as part of the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget process for City Council's consideration of the resources needed to begin implementation of the proposed Neighborhood Association Engagement Model outlined in this memorandum. Staff will provide regular Neighborhood Association Engagement Model program status updates to partner Departments through the Neighborhood Services CSA.

## **CLIMATE SMART SAN JOSÉ**

The recommendation in this memo has no effect on Climate Smart San José energy, water, or mobility goals.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This memorandum will be posted on the City's Neighborhood Services and Education Committee Agenda website for the April 11, 2024, meeting, with a cross-reference to the April

30, 2024, City Council meeting. The recommendations in this memorandum were informed by community engagement from approximately 238 stakeholders for perspective and input.

### **COORDINATION**

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

### **CEQA**

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

/s/  
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Director of Parks,  
Recreation, and Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Andrea Flores Shelton, [Andrea.FloresShelton@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:Andrea.FloresShelton@sanjoseca.gov), Deputy Director, Community Services Division of Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services.

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