PORTLAND

In the mid-'70s, when the federal goverment demanded the maximum participation of the poor in determining the use of federal grants, Portland politics had already been dominated by anti-war protests, community activism, and Sol Alinsky tactics. The people had no patience for smoke-filled room decision making. Community opposition was defeating freeway projects with regularity.

The state created a comprehensive land use policy system, and mandated its use throughout the state. It's main goal was to increase citizen involvement in the development of community plans.

Neil Goldschmidt was Portland's 30-ish new wave mayor. He defeated the city's old middle-aged establishment. He later became the Secretary of Transportation under Carter, and then Governor of Oregon.

The Mayor decided to create and provide support to an Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA) in order to officially encourage neighborhood involvement. He was determined to make City Hall accessible.

It wasn't easy. The Council voted 3-2 to create the ONA. The two "no" votes were part of the old establishment. The other three saw the wave building and wanted to be on it for the ride. One of the no votes warned, "We've funded a revolution!"

ONA was comprised of a director and some assistants. Their job was to help the neighborhoods get organized. Specifically, they were to help and facilitate -- not to pressure.

Quickly it was evident that the success of the system depended upon the independence of the neighborhood associations. The first director, Mary Peterson, designed a plan, established guidelines, and wrote a handbook.

The ONA, and not the Council, recognized the neighborhoods. The ONA was an independent bureau. In Portland, each city agency is formally overseen by one of the five Councilmembers. However, the Mayor makes these assignments.

Ms. Peterson developed the guidelines by putting together a community group that included critics.

The ONA now includes 10 people downtown, including the director, 5 in the mediation center, and 5 in North Portland.

The ONA's budget is $2M, but half of that comes from money that the police department shifted to the ONA for crime prevention work. This happened in the mid-'80s when the city started community-based policing. Each of the 8 districts has 1-4 crime prevention specialists.

In hiring the ONA staff, people skills were most important. If the employees are to be city employees, ONA says, you will never be able to find the people you want through civil service lists.

Portland funds 8 districts, and under them are a total of 93 neighborhood associations.

BIRMINGHAM

The B'ham system grew out of an extremely tense racial atmosphere following a decade of racial strife.

In the early-'70s, the newly-created Community Development Department (CDD) designed an enhanced citizen participation plan in response to the federal government's demands. B'ham was one of several cities especially targeted by the federal government because of its history of racial discrimination. As the city started to implement its plan, black leaders protested that the plan depended too heavily on a private organization, Operation New Birmingham (a coalition of religious and business leaders), for its development. At a public hearing, 500 people showed up to voice their opposition to various aspects of the plan.

A workshop, attended by 130 people, produced a revised plan. Operation New Birmingham did not participate.

The city drew neighborhbood boundaries and began contacting leaders throughout the city. Having started with 70 neighborhoods, there are now 99. Median population size is 2,740. Range is 180 to 8,200.

The city ran the elections (called "selections" for legal reasons) using city polling places. Everyone was limited to a single one year term at first, but holding the elections became a big production, so now it's a two year term.

At the first election, 258 neighborhood positions were filled. The community was informed through flyers and posters at churches and schools; radio and TV announcements; and special events.

A typical citywide turnout is 7,500 to 8,500 voters, and has remained constant over the last four elections. Turnout in some neighborhoods runs as high as 70%. But typically, a heavily contested election will turnout 10-15% of the voting age (16 years old and over) population. Uncontested elections turnout 1-3%.

Their first major issue was how to spend the $5M CDBG money.

During the first year, half the time was spent identifying neighborhood boundaries. A team of CDD staff

literally started at one end of the city, knocked on doors, and asked people how they perceived their own neighborhood. Once a map was created in accordance with the citizens' recommendations, the community leaders said it was the key step in establishing a trust relationship and two-way communication between citizens and city officials.

There are no neighborhood offices. Ten Principle Community Resource Managers have split up the city, and they assist the neighborhoods from City Hall. Basically, they react to problems and questions brought to them by the neighborhoods.

They have experienced no problems neighborhoods that are served by two councilmembers. "If we can't get the attention of one of them, we just go to the other. We've also learned that we go to one for certain things, and to the other for other things," said one community leader.

The ability of the neighborhoods to determine how certain project money should be spent in each district is a major factor in making citizens willing to commit time and energy.

DAYTON

In the early-'70s, the city created a system to propose and discuss planned variations to Model Cities. They wanted lots of citizen input.

Through the City Manager, the idea expanded from increasing citizen participation in the Model Cities process, to expanding citizen participation citywide. The City Manager hired Ron Gatton who had been HUD's area representative. He worked with the City Manager and the Planning Department in developing the plan that was taken to HUD.

The city was one of a few cities to get a grant for this purpose. It was in the range of $5-8M.

So the city gave $50K to each of 6 Priority Boards. The city knew where to find existing organizations without much problem. Every part of the city, except downtown, had a Priority Board.

The first task of the Priority Boards and their neighborhoods was to discuss how to spend the $50K. The next was to refine the boundaries.

Each area picked their leaders in their own way. The city administered the election. A person gets on the ballot by getting the signatures of 25 people in their precinct. Citywide there are now about 200 people on each ballot. Voting is now by mail. City staff picks up the ballots at the Post Office, sorts them into precincts, and tablulates them.

Turnout in contested elections ranges from 30% to 35%. Some precincts have reached 60%.

The neighborhoods don't want direct power. They want the elected councilmembers to do the voting. They believe that when all of the 7 Priority Boards (a downtown board was added later) get together on an issue, nobody in their right mind would say no.

City provides $1.4M in funding. Each board gets a coordinator, 2 professionals, and one clerical.

The downtown population is just 1,300, but the population of the other 6 boards is 15,000 to 72,000. Each board, except downtown, is divided into 7-17 neighborhoods, with populations ranging from 11 to 10,300. The median size is 1,830.

One Priority Board member said "We are not just little neighborhood committees any more. We have real power in the city. We drastically opposed a school levy tax that the city supported, and would only support it until the school system agreed to set up a similar citizen participation system. The boards are strong enough that the people of the city would have defeated the levy if the boards had opposed it."

ST. PAUL

I have been luckly enough to have several conversations with the former councilmember who proposed their system over 20 years ago.

When the federal government was demanding greater citizen involvement, one councilmember decided to "go the the next level," and propose a neighborhood council system.

In 1973, the Mayor formed a 14-member Committee on Citizen Participation. They represented all parts of the city. Fifteen months later they produced a detailed plan.

The communites came to the city when they were ready. The westside was first. The whole process took two years. One district seemed disinterested, so the city went into the area and recruited leadership.

The city knew that the communities had to be directly involved in development of the plan. The city sent meeting notices to all community groups. They expected 30 to turnout, and got 400.

Task forces were formed. The city was divided (this part took 6 months). The developed a process, not a structure. It would be up to each of the 17 neighborhood councils to develop their own structure, to develop their own by-laws, and elect their own leaders.. The city didn't impose its own system.

Some councils would hold an annual in the park, notify everyone in the area, and gather around and elect their leaders right then and there. Others would require candidates to get signatures from 25 people ih their area to be on the ballot.

SEATTLE

Although there has been a history of community activism through organizations since the turn of the century, it wasn't until about 9 years that they "went to" a system of empowered community organizations.

The city was rich with community organizations formed to plant trees, eliminate graffiti, build parks, do crime prevention, etc. The growth issue got hotter in some parts of town. Parking and streets were inadequate. Out-of-scale buildings were cropping up. Some community activists and a few councilmembers proposed a system of neighborhood planning committees. Some community organizations immediately embraced the idea, but other said that they had other concerns, such as crime, recreation, dispute mediation, the need for more development, poverty, etc.

An RFP was circulated to find a consultant to help put together a plan. Three individuals were selected, and asked to work together.

Mayor Royer created the Planning and Assistance Program under the Mayor's Office with 4 staff including a director. The 3 finalists for the director's position came down to an insider, a governmental outsider, and an IAF-trained community activist named Jim Biers who a couple of months earlier had staged a protest at Mayor's Office with a live chicken. A panel of city department heads and community organization leaders narrowed the list, and the Mayor picked Biers. To this day, Biers doesn't know why.

Biers and his small cadre of community activists didn't have to go into the community to organize. In keeping with the "build it and they will come" effect in the other cities, they just had to help the communities that came to them.

Seattle doesn't have a formal system of recognizing any of the community groups. Some of the neighborhoods overlap, but that doesn't matter. City government and it people truly believe in the independence of the neighborhoods, and thus provides them with no funding support for staff or equipment.

Instead, the whole system revolves around a system of matching grants that funds projects not groups. About $2M is made available each year to neighborhood organizations for projects. Interestingly, some neighborhoods have received grants to develop their own community plans. A guarantee that the entire neighborhood will be involved in the process is part of the grant application and agreement. Any group can apply. Individuals can apply.

One project dealt with the need to control polluting runoff into the local creeks and ocean. One creek is famous for its salmon. So at its headwaters, and at the spot where water from the street runs into the creek, the residents decorated a bus shelter with salmon, and created a trail of leaping salmon from the

bus bench to the storm drain.
The next mayor, Norm Rice, consolidated staff and functions from other departments in the neighborhoods office, so the staff is now 65. Rice was president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and is now running for Governor.

The city provides training in organizing meetings, multiculturalism, grant writing, fundraising, creating newsletters, planting trees, building parks, etc.

The have found that not that people enjoy coming to meetings, but many more get involved in actual projects in the community -- cleaning, building, improving. Through their system people have been helped to get together and work out their differences. And instead of coming to City Hall and demanding an end to the crime problem, the residents now take the attitude: "What can we do to deal with crime?" And City Hall gives them the answer.