

To: Greg  
From: Anne  
Re: Seattle Neighborhood Councils

---

7/21/05 (Thu)

I finally received written materials about Seattle's system of Neighborhood Councils. These materials include the various resolutions creating the different components within this structure, maps of the 13 District Councils, a semi-accurate flowchart depicting the different components, the City Neighborhood Council bylaws and 1995 Annual Report, and the bylaws for one of the 13 District Councils.

While these materials answered a lot of my questions concerning the technical aspects of this Neighborhood Council structure, I still had loads of other questions. So, I called Brent Crook, the Director of Neighborhood Service Centers and interrogated him. This is what he had to say:

Basically, Seattle has had a rich history in terms of forming neighborhood groups. In fact, some neighborhood groups date back to the 1920's. Many of these neighborhood groups were formed due to some issue that caused members of the neighborhood to meet and these members kept on meeting even after the issue was resolved. Although, these groups existed, the city had no formal structure that included and recognized them. The idea of creating a formal structure originated from one city council member (now retired).

There are 13 Neighborhood Districts (ND) which consist of 20 or so Neighborhood Groups (NG)(there are around 200 Neighborhood Groups in the City of Seattle). Each ND has its own District Council (DC) which develops its own bylaws determining how they function, how they're organized, who can join, and how they're elected. The Chair of each DC, or a designated appointee, represents the District in the City Neighborhood Council.

Each ND also has its own Neighborhood Service Center (NSC). These NSCs are in the midst of the shopping areas of each district and are basically storefront buildings that provide information to citizens and tourists. They usually contain literature about the city, tourist maps, and guides. Many of them also function as a meeting place for the DCs. Seven of them allow citizens to pay their public utility bills, parking tickets, and obtain animal licenses. Each NSC employs a coordinator, which is the only paid position within this

Neighborhood Council structure (except the agencies created to oversee everything). The coordinator is responsible for facilitating communication, and helping with outreach and agenda building. The NSC works with the NGs to help them with their individual needs. However, the NSC *does not* sanction or officially recognize any of the NGs. They do not determine which are the "right" groups.

Some of the *benefits* that he talked about emphasized the linkage between the city and the neighborhoods. The coordinator serves a vital role in communicating the needs of the ND and with conveying to the ND the decisions of the city. What Seattle has found is that cooperation is enhanced by the DC because it facilitates more effective communication since it is easier to talk to 13 District Councils than it is to 200 NGs. Other benefits he talked about include gaining a greater sense of legitimacy. More attention is paid to the concerns of the NGs. In a sense, people perceive that the city is "putting its money where its mouth is," since the already limited budget allocates money to help fund these councils. Some of the *problems* or concerns raised with this Neighborhood Council structure is that some people wonder just how representative these councils really are? Do they really represent the community members' needs or the needs of the leaders of these groups? Another problem concerns the minority population which tends to be under represented (Seattle has a large Asian-American population).

When I asked Brent whether or not there were problems in coordination and whether this system created another layer of government, he said that it functions outside of the government system.

I asked Brent if there were any articles written about this system and he said that he would look them up and send them to me. I am supposed to talk to him tomorrow at 10am (he had to attend a meeting) to talk about some of the tasks the groups have accomplished and to get a list of other people involved in this system that we can talk to.

As a side note, I also found some information on a few of the NGs on the Internet.

To: Greg  
From: Anne

7/21/05 (Thu)

Re: Addendum to Seattle Neighborhood Councils Memo

---

I spoke again with Brent Crook, Director of the Neighborhood Service Centers (NSC), in Seattle. While he suggested I speak with the District Council (DC) members to find out more specifically what these councils have accomplished, he mentioned a couple of accomplishments. First, he said that a lot of accomplishments are reactive. The community responds to particular issues that come up. These DCs work with the city in deciding what the appropriate conditions are necessary to put on projects that impact the city. Another accomplishment Brent mentioned was that the DCs work with the city on long-term planning for the city on issues such as traffic. Basically, it seems that the major accomplishment he sees is the cooperative between government and community.

Brent suggested names of other people we might want to speak with. Here is a list:

- 1) **Jay Estle**, Chair of the City Neighborhood Council  
-- (206) 782-2164  
-- 8709 23rd Avenue, N.W.  
Seattle, WA 98117
- 2) **Ted Divina**, Supervising Coordinator (also provides staff support for the DCs)  
-- (206) 684-4767
- 3) **Beth Pflug**, Supervising Coordinator (also provides staff support for the DCs)  
-- (206) 684-4096
- 4) **Jim Biers**, Director of the Department of Neighborhoods (DON)  
-- (206) 684-0465

I called Jay Estle this morning and he gave me further insight into the matter as a community member and more specifically, as the Chair of the CNC. Jay spoke of his experience in a particular area. He is from the Ballard Neighborhood in the Northwest DC. It consists of about 42,000 people and there are about 25 organizations in this DC. There are various types of organizations within these DC. They include Neighborhood Associations, PTAs, Business Groups (Chambers of Commerce and Industrial Organizations), Boat Community

residents (Live-Aboards), and Miscellaneous groups such as senior citizen centers and neighborhood programs. Each of these groups sends delegates to represent them at the District Council. Ballard's only requirements are that the groups be democratic, meet at least annually, and have bylaws.

As I mentioned earlier, Jay gave me a better idea of what exactly the CNC does. The resolutions delineated 3 main duties of the CNC:

- 1) Neighborhood planning over the whole city
- 2) Overseeing the Neighborhood Matching Fund
  - Basically, the city allots \$1 Million to give to organizations for projects. The organizations must be able to match their allotted funds dollar to dollar or with the equivalent in volunteer labor.
  - The CNC makes recommendations on the projects and the City Council approves them
- 3) Makes recommendations on the city budget
  - The DCs get a list of projects and they vote on the projects (allocating a certain amount of points to each project). In essence, they prioritize what the city spends its money on. Often there are projects that the city does not come up with but the DCs feel are important. So, the DCs suggest some projects and allocate points toward those projects. About 90% of the projects that the DCs recommend are approved.

In addition to these 3 main tasks, the CNC also makes recommendations on bond issues, etc.

In terms of participation by community members, Ballard gets about 30-50 people at their meetings. Most are delegates from the different neighborhood organizations but any interested community member is allowed to come as well. Some of the smaller DCs get around a dozen or so people at their meetings.

As much as possible, Ballard tries to get City Council members, the Chief of Police, the Superintendent of Schools, and other officials to attend their meetings. They try to get a representative amount of people from the various communities in terms of race, age, socio-economic status etc., but that doesn't always happen.

When I asked about their means of communication, Jay said that the NSCs have mailings that they send out to organizations and

community leaders. The CNC usually goes through these NSCs, but they also have a mailing list of 800 or so interested people. Sixty percent of the neighborhood organizations have faxes so a lot of information is communicated that way. Through the Seattle Public Access Network (PAN) on the Internet, they are currently setting up a home page for the CNC. Each DC will also be allowed to have a home page at no cost. In addition, the city is in the process of providing each NSC and the public libraries with Internet access so that these home pages will be accessible to everyone. This Internet system is not available yet but will be soon. For more information, please contact **Brent Crook** at (206) 684-0270.

Some of the benefits that Jay mentioned had a lot to do with citizen input in terms of deciding the City budget, allocating funds to worthwhile projects via the Neighborhood Matching Fund, and working on neighborhood planning. In addition, they are also able to deal with local problems such as if a student is killed in the local high schools, what measures should be implemented, etc.

He didn't cite any major problems, except that at times it is difficult to reach agreement among the members. Generally, this neighborhood council system is received well in the communities.

Jay also suggested that we speak with **Rob Mattson**, the Coordinator of the Ballard/Northwest NSC at (206) 684-4060. It seems like the NSC Coordinators play a huge role in this process, especially since they're paid for what they do.