

## History of Portland's Neighborhood System

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Beginning in 1966 Portland's neighborhoods emerged as participants in city planning. Some of the earliest issues to spur involvement included the expansion of Good Samaritan Hospital in northwest Portland, South Auditorium urban renewal redevelopment project in southeast and in southeast Portland, neighbors first became active to successfully challenge the building of the Mount Hood Freeway.

In general, there were three forces causing neighbors to first become active in Portland: city plans to urbanize and increase density in inner city neighborhoods; the emergence of city leaders open to new planning practices; and increased requirement for citizen participation in federal and state programs.

In 1972 the city convened the District Planning Organization Task Force to explore the possibility of creating a city structure for neighborhood participation. Based upon the Task Force's recommendations, Mayor Goldschmidt proposed an ordinance in 1973 to form the Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA) now the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI). After a few revisions, the ordinance was passed in 1974.

In 1975 the ordinance was revised yet again to replace the process for city recognition of neighborhood associations with a requirement to meet minimum standards for processes and procedures. These standards were updated in 2005, however they outlined similar standards to what is currently in place today including anti-discrimination statements, procedures for handling grievances and requirements for public notice and open meetings.

In the early years, ONA was charged with information sharing, liaison services between neighborhood associations and city agencies, and educational and technical assistance to neighborhood associations. Major elements of Portland's early neighborhood system included: neighborhood plans, which required citizen participation in community planning and formalized the relationship between Portland's Planning Bureau and the neighborhood associations; the neighborhood needs process to include neighborhood association requests in the city budget process; budget advisory committees to insure strong citizen input in the budget process; and the formation of district offices to provide technical assistance to neighborhood associations.

In 1979 there were sixty active, officially recognized neighborhood associations in the city. As the neighborhood system expanded, the Office of Neighborhood Associations came under pressure to be accountable and show that the system functioned smoothly and efficiently. Over the next decade, there were many questions about ONA's purpose and city funding. In 1985 ONA director, Sarah Newhall, convened a committee to draft the "Guidelines for Neighborhood Associations, District Coalition Boards, and the Office

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of Neighborhood Associations" to supplement the original 1975 ordinance. The document outlined the expected functions of each tier of the neighborhood system.

During the 1980's Portland's neighborhood system was part of a national study by Tufts University. As a result, Portland was selected as one of six exemplary programs out of 900 for its level of commitment to citizen involvement. However, at the same time, conflicts began to emerge between ONA and the six district coalitions, as there was suspicion that the Office of Neighborhood Associations was imposing a human services agenda on the neighborhood system.

*"It is said by neighborhood association activists that the SE Uplift Neighborhood Services was the model for the district coalition tier outlined in the 1987 Guidelines."*

Additionally, three of the six district coalitions were not operating in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in the Guidelines. As a result of increasing conflict and failure to follow established procedures, both the North Portland and East Portland district coalitions lost their contracts with ONA and were dissolved. Eventually, new district offices were formed, however each would be staffed by city employees rather than by independent nonprofit directors.

Over the past fifteen years there have been many efforts to evaluate the purpose and future direction of Portland's neighborhood program. Some of the larger efforts included Portland's Neighborhood Congress in 1993, the Task Force on Neighborhood Involvement in 1995 a series of Neighborhood Summits from 2000-2003 and the Bureau Innovation Project in 2005. The result of these efforts demonstrated the community's strong interest in sustaining and improving Portland's neighborhood involvement system.

Mayor Tom Potter began the city's Community Connect process in August 2005 to develop strategies to increase public participation in Portland. As a result, the *Five Year Plan to Increase Community Involvement* was created to serve as a comprehensive roadmap to strengthen and reinvigorate the neighborhood system. For more information, visit [www.portlandonline.com/mayor/index.cfm?c=43119](http://www.portlandonline.com/mayor/index.cfm?c=43119).

Today Portland's neighborhood system consists of 95 neighborhood associations, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, formerly the Office of Neighborhood Associations and seven district coalition offices, which support 90 of the neighborhoods through technical and organizational assistance.

Information from Portland's Neighborhood Associations Part1 -History, League of Women Voters of Portland Education Fund, October 2005.