Minnetonka Neighborhood Identities

**Research goals**

Neighborhood representation in the City of Minnetonka varies widely—from a few formal neighborhood organizations to numerous informal associations and, in many cases, no organizational representation at all.

A group of Urban Planning and Public Policy students worked to help the Minnetonka city government:

1. Increase understanding of existing neighborhood identities
2. Understand how to promote neighborhood organizations and identities based on local and national case studies

This research is intended to benefit Minnetonka residents in the following ways:

1. More formal representation of resident interests and concerns in future small area planning
2. A greater sense of place fostered by identification with geographic neighborhood
3. A stronger sense of community fostered by more frequent socializing and interaction with neighbors

**Approach to project**

The research team used the following approaches to reach project goals:

- Literature review and analysis of three neighborhood engagement frameworks
- Analysis of four neighborhood involvement case studies from local communities and throughout the U.S.
- Interviews with leaders of formal and informal neighborhood associations in Minnetonka

Final product included research report and formal presentation to city staff, council and community representatives.

- We included recommendations on how Minnetonka can use this information to move forward with a neighborhood and community participation program.

**Findings**

Neighborhood involvement models

1. Neighborhood Planning: neighborhood organizations create plans
   - Pros: empowers residents to create plans
   - Cons: time and resource intensive, controversial
   - Relevance: consider voluntary process for interested organizations

2. Formalized neighborhood organizations: provide feedback on development decisions, receive funding and technical assistance for projects.
   - Pros: improve outreach to community residents through formalized organizations
   - Cons: significant staff time required
   - Relevance: consider formalizing city relationships with existing organizations.

3. Consulting independent organizations: this approach involves working with existing organizations that may or may not be tied to geographically bounded neighborhoods.
   - Pros: greater variety of community groups can get involved with city affairs
   - Cons: lacks geographic focus
   - Relevance: Minnetonka already has many community organizations despite having only a few geographically-based associations.

**Case Studies**

1. Seattle Communities Online: example of independent organization model.
   - placed based interactive list (see below, left)
   - people and city can communicate about: grants, land use, community concerns.

2. Philadelphia Registered Community Organizations (RCOs): RCOs must be notified about development issues.
   - Pros: creates an official role for non-geographic organizations
   - Cons: not clear how to involve interest-based organizations with development decisions

   - City liaison works with associations.
   - Associations help city with outreach, can receive project grants (see photo and map to the right)

**Profiles of Minnetonka neighborhood and community organizations**

Sherwood Forest Neighborhood Association: works to "enhance livability and community cohesiveness of the Sherwood Forest Neighborhood." (see map to the right for location of neighborhood)

- President suggests Minnetonka provide guidance to new neighborhood groups
- Shared vision and relationships drive participation

Minnetonka Senior Services: facility that offers senior services and activities.
- Staff suggest that Minnetonka foster neighborhood participation through Minnetonka Memo
- Improve existing participation programs.

Intercongregation Communities Association (ICA): "to offer hope as we provide assistance to our neighbors in need."
- Suggests strong executive board and director
- Bring people together to work on a common goal

**Recommendations**

**Recommended Ideas**

(1) Minnetonka’s government should connect with neighborhoods through existing organizations neighborhood associations:
   - clubs
   - nonprofits
   - Schools

(2) Minnetonka’s city government should establish formal and informal pathways for communication and relationship building with organizations including:
   - Maintain the Minnetonka Memo
   - Develop relationships with residents
   - Develop grant program for community organizations

**Recommended Systems**

(1) Maintain interactive online list of community organizations:
   - Open this to both place-based and interest-based organizations
   - List makes city and organizations more accessible and visible residents

(2) Develop a list of Registered Community Organizations (RCOs)
   - City government would have knowledge of active RCOs
   - Could include and notify RCOs about development land use meetings and decisions.

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Seattle’s Communities Online maintains a place-based list of community organizations